THE LOST KINGDOM OF LO

It's been called The Last Forbidden Kingdom - and soon it will be lost forever.

It's the Tibetan Kingdom of Lo in a remote region of Nepal called Mustang right on the border with Chinese-Occupied Tibet. It was closed to all foreigners until recently, and even then only trekkers could get there, walking on yak trails at 12,000 feet for two weeks.

Tibet under Chinese control has been converted into a military garrison and a theme park for Chinese tourists, obliterating Tibetan culture. The Tibetans of Lo-Mustang allowed themselves to be incorporated into Nepal to protect themselves from that fate. As such, they retain the last vestiges of traditional Tibetan life on earth, unchanged for centuries. But not for long.

Nepal's government has submitted to Chinese pressure for a road to be built through Lo-Mustang connecting Chinese Tibet with Nepal and on to India. Once that road is complete, change will come with the same Chinese tourist invasion that has ruined Tibet in China.

The road will be done by next year. Right now, there is *a narrow window of opportunity - to take a four-wheel drive jeep dirt track just built in preparation for the Chinese road avoiding the lengthy trek, and still see Lo-Mustang before it's gone.*

This can only be done this coming summer of 2015. For most of Nepal, summer is Indian Monsoon season with rain and muddy tracks - the off-season for most anyone visiting. But not for us. Lo-Mustang, you see, is in the "rain shadow" of the Himalayas, to the north of the Himalayan giants of Annapurna (26,545 ft) and Dhaulagiri (26,795 ft) blocking the monsoon - see map below.

In the winter, however, it is far too cold and icy to venture to Lo-Mustang. Which is why, at the end

of this coming August and early September when the weather for the Kingdom of Lo is best, I'll be there. Perhaps you'd like to come with me.

There's no climbing, no trekking, no camping (we stay in comfortable guesthouses). Yet there's no doubt this is a real adventure. The 4WD track is safe but rough in parts, and we're at altitude - 12,000 feet - for much of the way.

Reaching and experiencing the Kingdom of Lo is an ultimate for adventurers. If you have ever dreamed of seeing the real Tibet, this is only place left, and it will shortly be lost. The opportunity to do so without two weeks of mountain trekking and before ruination is now. I can only take 10 people. If you want to be one of them, let me know quickly.

THE LOST KINGDOM OF LO
The Last Opportunity to Experience the Last Pure Culture of Tibet
A Jack Wheeler Adventure
Sunday August 30 - Thursday September 10, 2015
$5950

Day 1, Sunday, August 30

Arrival day. We meet in Kathmandu, capital of Nepal. There are direct flights to Kathmandu Airport from most all major cities in Asia. *Please note: everyone is responsible for arriving in Kathmandu by this day*. Transfer to the city's most famous hotel, the 5-star Yak and Yeti. Day at leisure. Welcome reception and dinner.

Day 2, Monday, August 31

We'll have a morning tour of the city's main sights, such as the Bodhanath Stupa, Swayambhunath Temple, and Hanuman Dhoka Square. After lunch, we drive (3+ hours) to Pokhara, Nepal's Gurkha capital. It's a very pretty place on a lake with the 23,000 ft peak of Machapuchare looming above. Be prepared, however, it's very likely to be raining. We're in monsoon, and Pokhara is Nepal's rainiest city.

We check in to the Waterfront Resort on the lake. We'll tour the city if it's not pouring too bad, or just relax at the hotel spa before dinner.

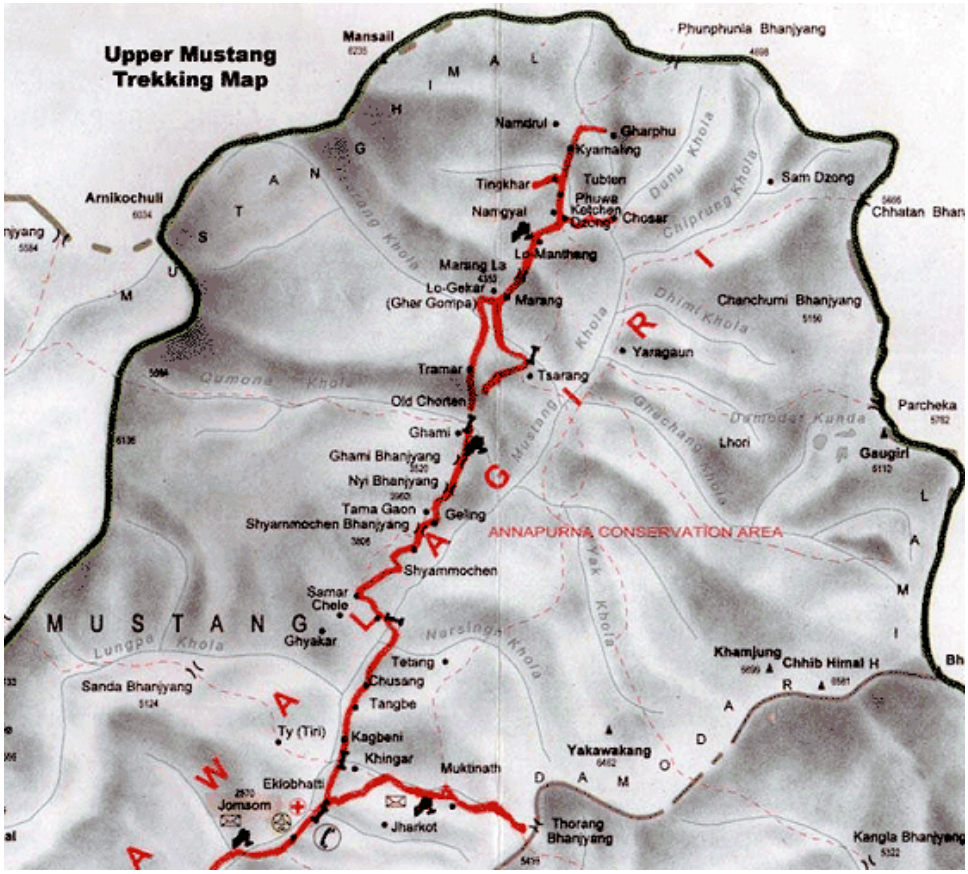
Day 3, Tuesday, September 01

Here we go. We board an early morning flight from Pokhara to Jomsom. It's a short flight but truly spectacular, for we fly through the Kali Gandaki Gorge, the world's deepest, with Annapurna on our right and Daulagiri on our left. Dozens of Himalayan giants poke their peaks into the sky as far as you can see.

We land at Jomsom where Kali Gandaki widens to over a quarter mile. The river is older than the Himalayas - 80 million years old - flowing from the Tibetan Plateau through the Himalayas to the Plains of India. Towering directly above us at Jomson is 23,000 ft Nilgiri...

To Nilgiri's right on the other side of the gorge is the 7th highest mountain in the world, Dhaulagiri in the morning light.

We check in to the Jomsom Mountain Retreat - but our day has just begun. Here's the trekking map of Mustang. The 4WD track follows it:



Jomsom is at the bottom - and note the side track going to the right just above it. We're in Lower Mustang here - the Kingdom of Lo is to the north in Upper Mustang - where Hindu and Buddhist cultures mesh. Thus we're going to the sacred Buddhist-Hindu shrines of Muktinath.

There is a temple dedicated to the Hindu god Vishnu, and Fire Temple (Jwala Mai, Flame Mother) that's a holy pilgrimage site for both religions. The images of Tibetan and Hindu deities are dramatic.

The Kali Gandaki river valley was the salt caravan route from Tibet to India for millennia, and was

used by the Indian saint Padmasambhava (*ca*. 750-810 AD) to reach Tibet. We'll see images and wall paintings of Padmasambhava in every temple or *gompa* in Mustang. Here's one:

Revered as the founder of Tibetan Buddhism, he created a fusion of Buddhism with the original shamanistic religion of Tibet called *Bon* -- the original shamanistic religion of Tibet, whose influence upon Indian Buddhism makes Tibetan Buddhism so fascinating.

On our way back to Jomsom, we visit a unique *Bon* monastery, the only one in all Mustang. The Lubra Bon-po Gompa on a cliff above the Kali Gandaki valley with its statues of tantric deities is a thousand years old.

Day 4, Wednesday, September 02

Today we proceed up the Kali Gandaki valley into Upper Mustang. We'll see our first dramatic *chortens* - Tibetan monuments in spiritual places....

There's an especially spectacular chorten complex at the village of Tangbe...

Our goal is the Tibetan village of Chhusang at the base of gigantic multi-colored cliffs riddled with caves for meditating lamas.

We arrive by early afternoon to explore the village, the cliffs, and get to know the friendly kids...

We spend the night in a comfortable Chhusang teahouse hosted by a Tibetan family.

Day 5, Thursday, September 03

Today our drive is even more memorable. Our first stop is Tetang...

Then we cross the Kali Gandaki with this amazing view looking back at Chhusang with Nilgiri in the distance...

We arrive at Tsarang, and we'll be awestruck...

We want to arrive while the young acolytes are blowing their *toonchens* calling lamas to prayer...

We'll be ushered into the gompa's holiest prayer hall, then explore the village...

We spend the night at Maya's Inn, run by a friendly local lady named Maya Didi and her three sisters.

Day 6, Friday, September 04

Today we drive past a landscape of multi-color hoodoos that rival Bryce Canyon in Utah...

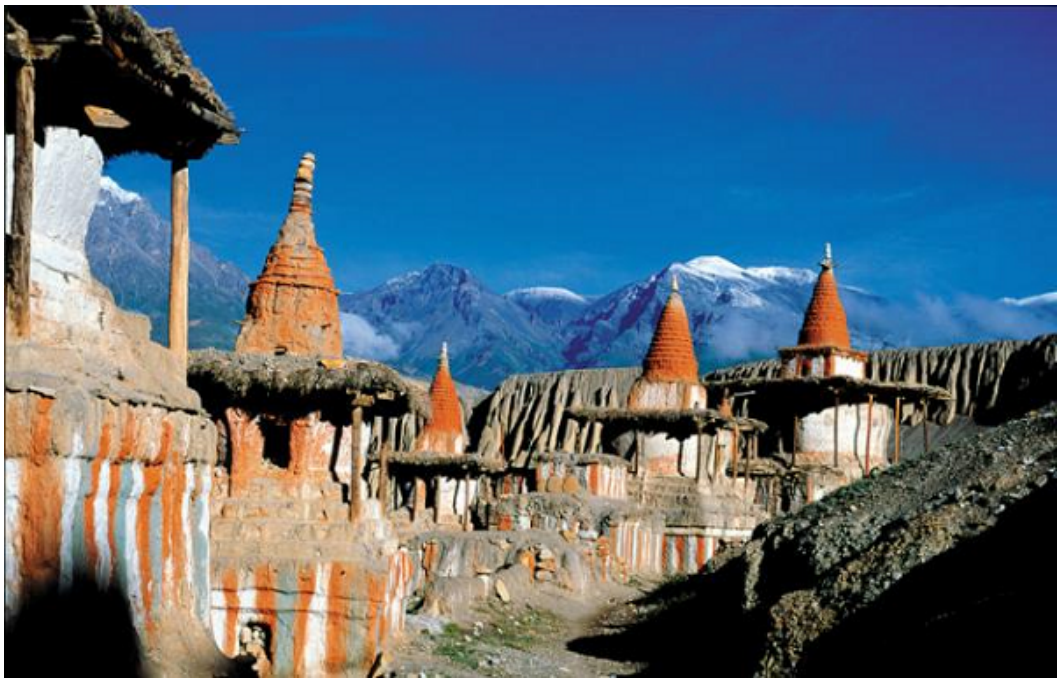
where we find the oldest Tibetan monastery in the world, Ghar Gompa built in the 8th century...

Then on to the largest monastery in Mustang, perched on a high rock at the entrance to the Kingdom of Lo, the massive Namgyal Choede Thupten Dhargyeling, built in the 13th

century. That's the Annapurna range of the Himalayas in the background.

Namgyal's shrine of Sakyamuni (the historical Buddha) is the most sacred in the Kingdom of Lo...

At the top of a pass, we go through a beautiful chorten complex...



And there it is... the walled city of Lo Manthang, capital of the Kingdom of Lo.

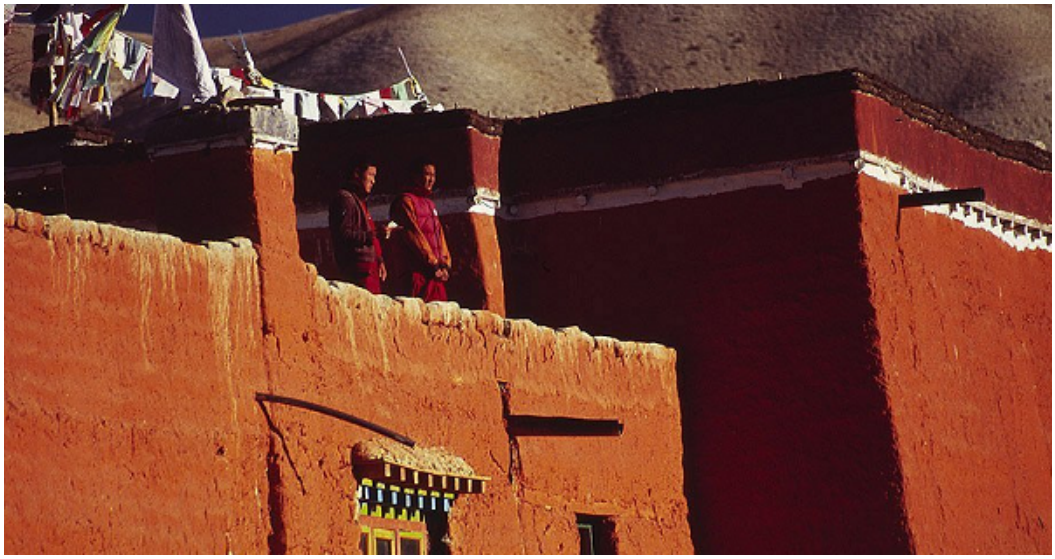
Soon we'll stand before the legendary Walls of Lo:

Founded in 1380 by the first King of Lo, Amne Pal, this is considered to be the best preserved medieval walled city in the world. Many of its still-standing structures date from the late 1300s-early 1400s, including the King's Palace...

King Jigme Dorje Palbar Bista, born in 1933, is the 25th direct descendant of Amne Pal to rule Lo. (Note that in 2008 there was a Communist coup in Nepal which deposed the Nepalese monarchy and declared an end to the Lo kingship. The Communists no longer are in power, and the people of Lo - called *Lo-pa* - consider themselves just as independent as ever.)

Now 82, his son, Crown Prince Jigme Singi Palbar Bista, has assumed most of his duties. Here they are:

The Jhampa Gompa was built in 1387 and is still very much a functioning monastery...



It's famous for its mandalas, which are painstakingly maintained:

And its vividly colored murals:

We stay at the comfortable Lotus Holiday Inn hotel - no connection with the US hotel chain, but it is owned by the royal family.

Day 7, Saturday, September 05

We spend a relaxing day in Lo Manthang, to see the Tibetan way of life preserved like nowhere else, to make friends with its Lo-pa inhabitants. We'll meet Nyigmapa (Red Hat) lamas, of course, and nice ladies. The kids, of course, will charm us. With luck, we may get a Lopa warrior in full regalia to pose for us.

Day 8, Sunday, September 06

Today we venture north of Lo Manthang, close to the border with Chinese Tibet. There we will find the stunning Nyphu Cave Gompa built into the side of a soaring cliff...

The lamas will welcome us inside...

From there, we visit the remotest village in the Kingdom of Lo, Chosar, with the Jhong Sky Caves. It's a network of over 40 rooms where ancient Tibetans lived thousands of years ago. We can easily climb up within to explore them. Can you see the young Lo-pa boy in one of them?

We are now in the land of the Drokpa nomads, and we'll be on the lookout for their encampments on our return to Lo Manthang - we'll see them if we're lucky...

But we'll want to return to Lo Manthang in time to attend a chant in the Jhampa main prayer hall...

Day 7, Monday, September 07

We bid goodbye to our new friends in Lo Manthang to head back down the Kali Gandaki - but by a different route. We have lunch under the surrealistic Red Cliffs of Drakmar...

The cliffs are riddled with caves - some over 3,000 years old, first used as burial chambers, then homes, then lama hermit retreats - and to call the cliffs surrealistic is no exaggeration:

There are an estimated 10,000 of more of these sky caves carved out of the cliffs of Lo Mustang, with only a handful explored.

When we reach our destination of Gheling, we see the entire Annapurna range in front of us....

Behind us is the Gheling Gompa complex...

The wall paintings are fantastic...

We'll spend the night in the basic but comfortable Darjeeling Guesthouse.

Day 8, Tuesday, September 08

We have our last views of Upper Mustang this morning...

then drive down the Kali Gandaki overlooking the river as it passes through Chele Canyon..

We'll walk down a ravine to the legendary Chungsi Rhanchung Cave Gompa on the side of the vertical canyon wall:

This is where Padmasambava meditated for years until he had the vision to bring Buddhism to Tibet.

We have lunch in a poplar grove in the pretty village of Samar...

Then before we know it, there's Kagbeni below us with Nilgiri above...

A short while later, we are back at the bar at the Jomsom Mountain Retreat, celebrating the truly extraordinary adventure we've had. From now on, Mustang and the Kingdom of Lo will always be a part of our lives.

Day 9, Wednesday, September 09

We board the morning flight from Jomsom to Kathmandu. As most international flights depart Kathamandu in the morning, most of us will stay at the Yak and Yeti for the night, and spend the day at leisure exploring Nepal's capital. We'll have our Farewell Dinner, celebrating again and of course, planning our next adventure.

Day 10, Thursday, September 10

Departure day, with transfers to the airport.

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LOST KINGDOM OF LO DETAILS

Dates: Sunday August 30 to Thursday September 10, 2015

Cost per person: $5,950

Deposit, Payment, Cancellation and Refund

*Non-refundable deposit of $890 per person due upon application for participation.
*Balance in full - $5,060 - due by May 30, 2015.
*Refund of balance in full on the condition of a fully-paid acceptable replacement for you.

Important Note: When applying for participation, you must affirm that you are in sufficient good health to be at altitudes of around 12,000 feet for several days.

Cost includes: All domestic flights: Pokhara-Jomsom-Kathmandu. All ground transportation, transfers, government fees/permits, and activities as specified in the itinerary with local English-speaking medically-trained guides in private vehicles. All meals (breakfast/lunch/dinner including properly boiled water, tea, coffee) with group from dinner Sunday August 30 to breakfast Thursday September 10. All accommodation from the night of Sunday August 30 through the night of Wednesday September 09.

Cost does not include: International airfare to/from Nepal; visa fees; single occupancy accommodation. Single supplement surcharge is $460. Meals, services, and activities not with group or in itinerary; personal expenditures, such as laundry, camera fees, communications, gratuities, etc.; beer, wine, or alcoholic drinks. Note on single supplement: single room may not be available in some teahouses in Lo Mustang.

Important caveat: Every effort will be made to adhere to the itinerary above. Due to the vagaries of travel in this region and of adventure travel in general, the itinerary may be altered in any way necessary. Participants are expected to accept this, and to maintain a cheerful attitude on an adventure such as this.

Contact:

Only 10 adventurers can join Jack to The Lost Kingdom of Lo. To be one of them, please contact us immediately. Life is short - the time for a Great Adventure is now. Phone: 202-656-3008 Email: info@tothepointnews.com or jwexpeditions@gmail.com

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