

# LETTING GO IN LADAKH

“**N**o way I’m getting on a horse!” I stated vehemently, stomach churning. I enjoy riding normally, but we were in Ladakh, on the mountainous Tibetan Plateau. Trails are narrow dusty threads along steep cliffs and slopes, or rocky traverses of landslides and glacial torrents. We had already watched in horror as an over-laden pony-sized pack horse slipped while struggling up a loose steep winding trail, tumbling backwards over the edge, screaming in pain from fatal injuries.

I was still muttering “no way” next morning as menacing clouds dumped rain and bits of hail on our camp. At 4,700 metres altitude, we needed to cross another 5,200 metre pass that day. My handicap was a nasty antibiotic-defying chest infection, making breathing feel like glass shards stabbing my chest. Waiting for me left everyone exposed for longer.

The fear of being on a horse over that terrain, up those scary slopes and tumbling down with it was strong. So was my ego insisting I should trek, not ride like an

invalid. Such was my self-talk as I adjusted my hiking pole, pulled my rain jacket closer and strode off. An excruciating 30 minutes later, in tears, I made myself ask to ride.

Mounted, I put my mindset training in action taking the focus off my scary stories, and on to helping my horse keep moving up. Feeling part of a team, I actually started enjoying the experience. After all, how special is horse riding in the mountains? Adventure is what I love, what I’d come for, and this was certainly adventure!

A herd of wild deer darted across the ridge top, and a huge bone-eating vulture soared overhead. The view on the pass was literally breath-taking – a dramatic drop, soaring up to snow-capped jagged peaks of a much higher range. My precious mount was exhausted. I found her a couple of mouthfuls of cloud-kissed moist vegetation, then she napped in the sun while I soaked it all in.

We have choices, even when we tell ourselves otherwise ... sometimes we just have to put our fears and ego aside, and find a different way forward.

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