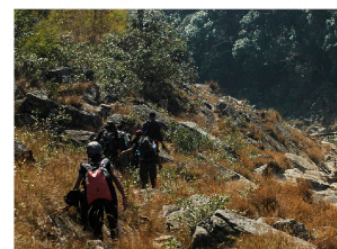




A pensive JwM traveller at the confluence of the Indus and Zaskar rivers



Clockwise from bottom: A JwM group on a trek through Ladakh; a JwM group on a safari at the Kaziranga National Park in Assam; a Gumpa at Leh; trekkers roughing it out on a JwM trip in Ladakh; and the group with Sreedhar (centre) at Pangong Lake



A JOURNEY WITH MEANING

- An informal and friendly group atmosphere
- Fun activities like cycling, sightseeing and trekking through spectacular landscapes
- Inspiring face-to-face interactions with people and organisations, working on local culture and issues
- Learning more about the 'web of life' and the positive roles we can play within it
- Film screenings and stimulating discussions
- Great local food, music and culture
- Hands-on photography lessons while watching wildlife in the heart of nature

"To me, nothing exemplifies a connection more than ecology – the study of the relationships between the elements in a system and their relationship with the system itself," he says, adding that to

understand these essential interconnections and to work out sustainable solutions using this understanding, forms the core of what JwM aims to do.

While people across the world have for long been embarking on travels with a heightened sense of awareness, Sreedhar foresees that India's youth will soon increasingly opt for conscious travel experiences. He believes that travel is a deeply transformative experience if one goes beyond the desire to simply see the sights and capture them using a camera.

ers and houseboat owners, lawyers, policemen, the army, and politicians.

"Bringing about social change requires the ability to jettison whatever's not working – be they our habits and practices, attitudes and beliefs, ways of seeing, or opinions. The standoff in Kashmir is the result of an unyielding attachment to certain beliefs and attitudes in all the stakeholders that should ideally have been dropped ages ago," explains Sreedhar, who continues to host workshops on these issues.

Three years later, Sreedhar started a social enterprise called Journeys with Meaning (JwM) that offers meticulously planned trips – approximately once every two months – to destinations like Ladakh, Kashmir, Arunachal Pradesh, Meghalaya and Nagaland. Sreedhar leads groups of 10-12 travellers on a journey filled with both fun and meaningful activities (see box). "We combine travel with interactions and activities that add tremendous value to one's understanding of the world and that help us reconnect with sources of wisdom and knowledge that still exist in parts of India," he explains.

More recently, he introduced trips to Kashmir. "Apart from enjoying the natural beauty of the region, we primarily spend time understanding how and why violence erupted in the late 80s and how it is impacting peoples' lives even today," says Sreedhar. This is done, he says, by talking with the local people – the students at Kashmir University, shopkeep-

ers across the world who were already working on these issues. "That's when I realised how important the context was. Talking about melting glaciers was alright, but seeing them firsthand and hearing elderly Ladakhi villagers talk about how the climate had changed across their lifetimes, added several layers of information and a far greater frame of reference to the dialogue than a classroom conversation in the city could ever offer," explains the 38-year-old Sreedhar.

TRAVELLING FOR CHANGE

A social start-up, Journeys with Meaning, offers trips that encourage sustainable travel. By Beverly Pereira

Travelling has always been a means of learning for Vinod Sreedhar. He's been passionate about it since the age of 21. Creating awareness about social and ecological issues also figure largely in his life. Over the years, the music composer hosted a series of workshops, but realised that armchair activism didn't quite create much of an impact.

At about this time, in 2004, Sreedhar had just returned to Mumbai after attending a conference in Ladakh, where he had met like-minded people from