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## **Cultural Trip to the Tibetan New Year Festival in Zhongdian (Shangri La), Northern Yunnan**

- next Losar Festival: 5<sup>th</sup> March 2011
- visit Songtsanlin Monastery during the Tibetan New Year Festival Losar
- 2 weeks trip through Northern Yunnan focusing on the cultural diversity in Southern China, the Tibetan New Year Festival Losar, the Tibetan people as well as the matrilineal Naxi minority
- Destinations: Kunming, Shangri-La, Lijiang, Dali
- Ideal trip to get to know Yunnan and for people interested in Tibetan Buddhism
- Partake in the festivities of Losar Festival: a true insider's tip
- The area is easy to access so you can enjoy the Tibetan New Year Festival Losar without having to travel great distances, while avoiding mass tourism
- Daytime temperatures should be around freezing and might drop to  $-15^{\circ}$  C at night.
- As this festival is held during off-season you will encounter very few other tourists.



## **TIBETAN NEW YEAR FESTIVAL IN NORTHERN YUNNAN**

This tour will lead you to the Tibetan New Year Festival in Shangri-La (Zhongdian) in Yunnan. Every year, thousands of believers and pilgrims gather at the biggest Buddhist monastery of the region to pray for good fortune.

You will get to know Yunnan and partake in the Losar Festival. Starting in Kunming, you will explore the Tibetan Northern regions of Yunnan and the famous destinations Dali, Shangri-La and Lijiang. All hikes are rather easy, although we will reach an altitude of 3'500 meters and above. This trip is specially designed for people, who want to gain an insight into Northern Yunnan and Tibetan Buddhism as well as to get to know the matrilineal Naxi minority. With your visit to the Losar Festival you will have the unique opportunity to learn more about the local population's culture.

You will logde at the best hotels available to ensure you have a pleasant stay during this cold time of the year. Temperatures may drop to -15° C on occasion.

- Travel date: 1<sup>st</sup> March 2011 - 13<sup>th</sup> March 2011
- Destinations: Kunming, Shangri-La (Zhongdian), Lijiang, Dali
- Duration: 13 days
- Starting in: Kunming
- Ending in: Kunming
- Group size: min. 12 participants, max 16 participants
- Hotels:

Kunming:	Green Lake (5*)
Shangri-La:	Paradise (5*)
Lijiang:	Grand Lijiang (3*)
Dali:	Regent (5*)

## **QUICK TOUR INTRODUCTION**

After arrival and two days of sightseeing in the „spring city“ Kunming - the provincial capital of Yunnan - this tour will lead you into the province's mountainous Northern part to Shangri-La (also known as Zhongdian or Gyalthang in Tibetan). On February, 21<sup>st</sup> 2008 you will partake in the Tibetan New Year Festival "Losar". As this festival is held during off-season you will encounter very few other tourists.

From Shangri-La we head southwards to Lijiang via the "Tiger Leaping Gorge", one of the earth's deepest gorges. Lijiang's old town is inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List, where we will come in contact with the matrilineal Naxi society and its Dongba Shamans.

Then we travel on to Dali, the former capital of the Nanzhao Kingdom. The town is famous for its three towers, the Erhai Lake and the nearby temples. Dali also attracts a lot of martial arts enthusiasts from all over the world.

**DAY 1, 1ST MARCH 2011****ARRIVAL IN KUNMING (D)**

Upon arrival, you will be picked up at the airport by our guide and transferred to an excellent hotel in the city center. After a first short sightseeing tour of the city and a visit to one of the lively local markets, you will enjoy a welcome dinner in a very nice restaurant.

**DAY 2, 2ND MARCH 2011****KUNMING (B/L/D)**

After breakfast we visit the Green Lake Park and the nearby Yuan Tong Monastery, a unique Buddhist site which unites all 3 great schools of Buddhism. We will eat Korean food for lunch in one of the many restaurants near Yunnan University offering various Asian specialties. In the afternoon we transfer to Shilin Stone Forest to explore the picturesque karst formation. We will have dinner in an upscale Chinese restaurant.

**DAY 3, 3RD MARCH 2011****KUNMING (B/L)**

In the morning we make an excursion to the Golden Temple "Jindian", one of the most famous Taoist shrines in Yunnan Province also known as the Taihe Palace (Hall of Supreme Harmony), which is the



largest copper temple in China. Among the interesting artifacts of the Golden Temple is a double-edged sword. Legend has it that this sword, which weighs more than 20 kilograms, is the magic sword of Zhen Wu, a Taoist deity, who guards Mingfeng Hill, on which the temple is located.

In the afternoon we transfer to the Western Hills, site of a great system of temples and alleyways carved into the towering rocks by a Taoist monk. Weather permitting, you will have wonderful views over Dian Chi Lake and Kunming City and its environs. Evening at your disposal.

**DAY 4, 4TH MARCH 2011****KUNMING - SHANGRILA (B/L/D)**

In the morning we fly to Shangri-La, located at the south-western margin of the Tibetan plateau. At an altitude of 3'300 meters it is also the highest county in Yunnan Province. We will explore the city and hike on the hills near the town. Overnight in an upscale hotel in the city center and a special hot-pot-dinner in a fine restaurant in the old town.

**DAY 5, 5TH MARCH 2011****SHANGRILA LOSAR NEW YEAR FESTIVAL (B/L/D)**

Early in the morning we go to Songtsanlin Monastery of the Gelugpa (Yellow Hat) School, one of the most important Buddhist centers in Yunnan, inhabited by approximately 700 monks. The Tibetan New Year Festival will take place today. Countless believers gather at the monastery to pray for good fortune. Afterwards the statue of Maitreya (Buddha of the future) will be carried in procession around

the monastery. Have dinner in a restaurant serving excellent Tibetan food. This day is the centerpiece of the trip - a real insider's tip not many people know about so you will meet very few other tourists.



Furthermore you gain an insight into the unique and fascinating culture of Tibetan Buddhism in Northern Yunnan as your guide will explain the festivities to you and describe the actual situation of Buddhism in China.

**DAY 6, 6TH MARCH 2011**

**SHANGRILA (B/L)**

We will hike to a nearby temple, beautifully located in the middle of several Tibetan villages, have lunch back at the hotel in Shangri-La, stroll through the town in the afternoon and visit a few lively local markets. Evening at your disposal.

**DAY 7, 7TH MARCH 2011**

**SHANGRILA - LIJIANG (B/L/D)**

Today we leave Shangri-La and travel to Lijiang. En route, visit the Tiger Leaping Gorge, one of the deepest gorges in the world. During the millenniums, the Yangtze River carved a gorge into the massifs of the Haba and Jade Dragon Snow Mountains, both over 5'000 m high with their glacier peaks towering over the rice terraces on the Yangtze banks. After arrival and check-in at the hotel, we will stroll through the nearby old town which is enlisted on the UNESCO List of World Heritage Sites and attracts visitors from all over the world. In the small and winding alleyways you will find many cozy restaurants, bars and countless shops selling local handicraft and antiques. Traditional Naxi-style dinner.

**DAY 8, 8TH MARCH 2011**

**LIJIANG (B)**

In the morning, we make an excursion up onto Lion Hill, with its beautiful views over the tiled roofs of the old town of Lijiang and its quiet surrounding park. The rest of the day is free. Take a stroll through the ancient town, go shopping or just relax near the little streams that flow through picturesque Lijiang.

**DAY 9, 9TH MARCH 2011**

**LIJIANG (B/L/D)**

After breakfast transfer to Yuhu, home to Austrian-American explorer Joseph Rock, who lived there from 1922 until 1949, pioneering in exploring the indigenous flora and various peoples in the Sino-Tibetan border area. From his home, we go to the Yufeng Temple and further to Baisha Village, the former capital of the Naxi Kingdom, located on the Lijiang plains, through which the Mongols led by Kublai Khan invaded the Nanzhao Kingdom and conquered the Chinese Imperial armies in the 13th century. Baisha's old Taoist/Buddhist frescoes are some of the last of their kind in China and show a gathering of immortals and deities of both religions.



**DAY 10, 10TH MARCH 2011**

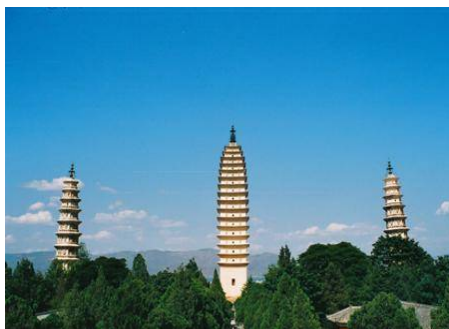
**LIJIANG - DALI (B/L/D)**

We drive approximately 4 hours through beautiful scenery to Dali, the former capital of the Nanzhao Kingdom, an empire that stretched from Burma to Canton and Vietnam between the 7th and 13th century. After check-in at the hotel we explore the picturesque ancient town and have traditional Bai-style dinner (the Bai are famous all over South-West China for their culinary skills).

**DAY 11, 11TH MARCH 2011**

**DALI (B/L)**

In the morning we go for a boat trip on Erhai Lake and taste local seafood on the "Golden Island" with its almost Mediterranean flair. The rest of the day is free for strolling through the old town and relaxing in one of Dali's famous cafes.



**DAY 12, 12TH MARCH 2011**

**DALI (B/L/D)**

In the morning excursion to the Zhonghe Temple by cable car, beautifully located on Cangshan Mountain about 500 m above Dali Old Town. Have lunch at the "Higherland Inn", only a short but steep hike away from the cable car station. Possibility for some hiking in the forests of Cangshan. Then we visit the Temple of Guanyin, the Goddess of Mercy in Chinese Buddhism, who is said to have saved the Dali Kingdom in the disguise of an old woman. Farewell dinner in an excellent Chinese restaurant.

**DAY 13, 13TH MARCH 2011**

**DALI - KUNMING (B)**

Transfer to the airport for your flight to Kunming for your connecting flight. End of trip.

**RATES**

Rates in standard twin rooms, single supplement on request

Number of Persons	Rate per Person
	RMB
1	on request

Prices subject to change due to exchange rate fluctuations.

Prices based on the value of the Chinese Yuan CNY.

**INCLUDED**

- experienced tour leader and local tour guides for all days, English/Chinese-speaking
- flight tickets Kunming - Shangri La, Dali - Kunming in economy class
- all transfers, highway fees and airport taxes in China
- in Kunming, Shangri La and Dali accommodation in 5\* hotels in double rooms as mentioned in the itinerary
- in Lijiang accommodation in 3\* hotel in double rooms as mentioned in the itinerary
- full board except on free afternoons/evenings (described as B=breakfast, L=lunch, D=dinner)
- entrance fees to sightseeing spots mentioned in the itinerary
- boat and cable car tickets in Dali

**NOT INCLUDED**

- international flights
- personal expenses such as laundry, tips etc.
- transports not mentioned in the itinerary (such as taxis in the evening, etc.)
- alcoholic drinks and all meals not mentioned in the itinerary
- expenses for medical care
- insurances (travel insurance, travel cancellation insurance)
- repatriation flights in case of emergencies

**INSURANCE IS RESPONSIBILITY OF THE PARTICIPANT**

**HIDDENCHINA.NET GMBH RECOMMENDS THAT YOU PURCHASE TRAVEL CANCELLATION INSURANCE**

### **IMPORTANT NOTICE**

Traveling in China, especially off the beaten tracks and in rural areas, can be adventurous and also carries a certain amount of surprises and risks. HiddenChina.net ensures that in every situation we and our guides arrange for a maximum of comfort for our clients. All HiddenChina.net guides are carefully chosen and selected for their real-world abilities and experience; this allows us to manage the unexpected that is encountered along our tours. We hereby state that a voyage in China requires a degree of patience, adaptation and tolerance. Additionally, due to lack of infrastructure in the rural areas there is often a lack of western sanitary standards. Clients of HiddenChina.net accept – upon contract signing - that they are aware of these circumstances in China, and accept that in order to keep the client(s) security and comfort at a maximum during the trip, incidental changes may occur.

### **ADDITIONAL INFORMATION FOR CHINA TRAVELERS**

Traveling in vastness of China is always an adventure. Quality of service can range from the international standards of 5-star hotels in the big cities, to “very poor” in remote villages. While traveling in China, even with an organized tour, clients have to be ready for the unexpected (e.g. due to natural disasters such as landslides, flooding, and weather) or other surprises. In hotels for example, it can happen that you will get phone calls in the middle of the night, offering you a “special massage service“. The following chapters will tell you more about what you should be aware of when traveling in China.

### **FACE**

You may have heard it before and for the experienced China traveler it's a “must know”: in China, everything is about “giving and losing face”. Chinese people are very proud of their culture, food and traditions. Respect this fact and try not to bring a Chinese into an embarrassing situation, as he or she might lose his face in front of coworkers, friends, family members or even the authorities. Try to be polite, smile and - especially to English speaking Chinese - always praise their language skills. Chinese can be considered a reactive people. If you treat Chinese people in an arrogant and harsh way, you will be treated the same way. When you feel cheated, try to solve the situation in a gentle and charming way and you will achieve your goal much faster. Also try to react calmly in stress situations and stay friendly. Be reassured that for every problem in China there is a solution, it is up to you how effective you will get to this solution. Being angry and aggressive is counterproductive, in most cases.

### **SECURITY**

Large cities in China are extremely safe! Chinese people have to fear severe punishment when being caught by the authorities in illegal matters especially when foreigners are involved. However, be aware that pick-pocketing happens everywhere, so keep an eye on your belongings and never leave your luggage unattended. When going out at night, you will find that China's large cities are much safer than practically all European and North American cities. A single woman has nothing to fear when walking even at 4 o'clock in the morning.

## **HEALTH**

It is also recommended to visit your house doctor or general practitioner before you go on a China trip and take the necessary vaccinations. Your doctor will inform you what you will need; you may also want to consult your country's national health authority. For travelers going to south China, it is also recommended to carry a supply of malaria remedies. The avian influenza is a serious issue in Asia and has been the focus of the World Health Organization (WHO) for several years. As a traveler should also consider taking appropriate medicines under the advice of their physician and buy some common incidental remedies (e.g. Tamiflu, appropriate cold medicines) before the trip begins.

We at HiddenChina.net will always take particular care to introduce you to clean restaurants with high quality standards. However, when traveling in China and especially when eating a lot of local food, carrying a supply of remedies for stomach problems is highly recommended. Your body will have to deal with a wide range of new foods, spices and other ingredients in China and also adjust to different bacteria (micro flora) than found in Europe's and North America's clean environments. When going on a China trip of a few weeks, you may have to reckon with stomach problems at least once. It is recommended that you take appropriate pharmaceuticals which are rich in salt and minerals and give you back the elements you may lose during a bout of diarrhea or intestinal discomfort. From our longtime China experience, one of the best remedies is to eat well-boiled Chinese mushrooms and bananas as well as to drink tomato juice. On many of our private trips, this helped much better than the Western medication, e.g. Imodium, Pepto-Bismol. Always carry convenient packets of tissues and toilet paper with you, as you will not find any in public toilets!

Travelers going to high altitude areas such as Tibet are also recommended to take a supply of Diamox in case of altitude sickness. In all instances of traveling to China, we recommend getting specific, up-to-date advice from your doctor on appropriate vaccinations and medications.

## **CLIMATE**

China has several different climatic zones. From high altitude, to sub-tropic, and desert, China has every environment. Depending on your date of arrival in China, you might be traveling in the rainy season. In southern China this season usually begins late May or early June and lasts into August. This is a serious problem in China and this year alone in the provinces of Guangxi and Guizhou heavy flooding took the life of several hundred local people. However, we will adapt your tour according to the season and avoid the areas with heavy rain, or other such weather related problems.

## **LUGGAGE**

Most airlines allow you to check baggage of 20 kg (economy class); please refer to your airline for specific allowances. The Chinese Border Control does not allow certain food products such as cheeses, meats, pornographic, or political material. Please ensure that your "Swiss army knife" and other "dangerous products" are checked with your luggage and not in your hand luggage/carry-on luggage.

China offers you a wide range of shopping possibilities. If you plan to go for extensive shopping, take a minimum of belongings. However, do not worry if you forget something, almost everything you need for daily life, can be bought much cheaper in China (see chapter below). Please be aware that many customs authorities, like the ones in Paris and Milan, can fine you heavily if they discover fake, brand name products from China in your luggage. Copied brand name products such as Yves St Laurent, Gucci, Prada, etc. are openly available in most major cities.

### **SHOPPING**

Except for imported luxury goods more or less everything is cheaper in China than in Europe and North America; clothes especially can be bought at very low prices. Many shopping areas offer fake/copy products (sometimes of extremely good quality), however, prices are not always indicated and you will have to bargain about the price (see chapter below). Please note that when buying a fake/copy product, you can get into trouble in Customs especially at major airports such as Paris, London, or Milan. The campaign against fake/copy products is now at a point which authorities can or will take away your purchase and possibly fine you heavily. For golf lovers, there is a wide range of possibilities to buy high-quality whole golf sets at a ridiculously low price. Similarly, you can have your suits tailor-made, buy ties, silk products, pearls, etc. all at very low prices. For most Europeans and North Americans, DVD's are of special interest. For a DVD in China you pay between ¥8-10 (about 1 EURO) and ironically most of the movies are available here even before they are shown in European and American cinemas. The advantage of DVD's is that they take only a little space and weight in your luggage, but be aware that in most cases you are buying illegally copied and distributed products.

Credit cards in China are only accepted in major stores, 3-star hotels and upwards, and western restaurants. Cash can be withdrawn conveniently at ATM's at the Bank of China. Please note that these are hard to find in remote areas. Money can be changed most reliably at major branches of the Bank of China or in western hotels; you will need to show your passport for changing money.

### **BARGAINING**

As mentioned in the "shopping" chapter, in many places you have to bargain for your price. Western tourists are mostly viewed as "big dollar signs" and accordingly the first price given by many shop keepers will be set 400–500% above the final price they will sell his or her merchandise. So when the vendor asks for ¥100, you can set your offer to ¥20-25. Then it depends on your bargaining skills as to what price you will finally pay. A simple trick is, when an item seems too expensive for you, walk away from the vendor. If he or she doesn't follow you, you know that your bid was too low. Please also keep in mind that staying friendly and smiling when bargaining is the best approach. Once you have agreed for a price, you have to buy the product, otherwise you and the vendor will lose face. Note: the Chinese Yuan (¥), is also called RMB within China.

### **LANGUAGE AND SOCIAL BEHAVIOR**

Even in big cities like Beijing and Shanghai, it is most unlikely that you find English-speaking taxi drivers or shop assistants. We recommended that you take a phrase book with you, so that you can

show what you need to express. Chinese people are mostly friendly and curious towards foreigners and they are also very proud of their country and culture. However, some of their behavior will be strange for travelers who come to China for the first time. In many places (even sometimes in public buses) people smoke a lot and for the non-smoker, China can be a difficult place. You also often see Chinese people spitting accompanied by rather obvious throat-clearing noises. The best way to get around these differences in social graces is to ignore them and accept it as part of the culture; for even in China they also say “Ru Xiang Sui Su!”, when in Rome, do as the Romans do. On the other hand for the smoker, China is a paradise, as it is more or less acceptable everywhere to smoke and cigarettes are extremely cheap. Social drinking in China is also noteworthy as you might be invited to test your skills. Even modest social contact can include unexpected rounds of drinks, as the Chinese find this is an opportunity to be more indulgent than most European or North Americans. The easiest way to avoid unwanted drinking without losing face is to tell your hosts that due to “health” problems you’re not allowed to drink.

### **TIPPING**

Although China is - especially away from the big cities - a very poor country, tipping only exists in 5-star surroundings of the big cities. In restaurants, taxis, and smaller inns and hotels tipping is a “no-no” (except in 5-star hotels). However, the other exception is for tour guides and drivers of organized tours, these individuals should be tipped. Most guides and drivers are roughly paid 10 Euro per day and rely on the additional tip income. This is acceptable because with Chinese tour groups (which often go shopping) the guides and drivers usually get a commission from the shops. European tour groups usually do not visit as many shops as Chinese tourists, for European tour groups then the guides and drivers have to rely on tips.

Generally a tip of RMB 30 per person and day is reasonable. When you are in a tour group it is recommended that the group collects the tips and hands it to the guides and drivers in an envelope. It is also very helpful to take some inexpensive souvenirs with you from your home country, for example watches or picture postcards.

### **SMALL TALK AND CONVERSATION**

Small talk in China is a bit different than in Europe and North America, but similarly there are topics which should be avoided, and topics which are perfect for small talk.

One of the most common greetings in China is “Ni chi fan le ma?” which literally means “Have you eaten yet?” This emphasizes the importance of eating in China, and it is much more a social event than in the West, therefore food is always a welcomed topic. In some cases you also might be confronted with rather private questions such as about your marital status, job, and about family. The Chinese are very family oriented, so don’t feel embarrassed when people ask you rather private questions, it is just small talk. Sometimes, especially in business surroundings, people also might ask you about your salary, which is quite normal in China. Here you can escape an awkward direct question (if you don’t want to tell the truth) by telling some fictional figure, or when telling the truth and your counterpart’s eyebrows rise, you can explain how expensive life in Europe is.

Topics which should be avoided at all costs are all political-related discussions such as the Cultural Revolution, criticism of the system or Chairman Mao, the “Tibet” and “Taiwan” questions, human rights, and the treatment of animals. If you want to have answers to these questions you might do it through your guide. Do not overload your guide with too many hard questions in the beginning though. For the sake of social tact, it is wise to hide these questions in compliments and be as subtle as possible (see also the chapter about “Face”). Please note that young Chinese (below 30) are much more open to discuss critical and inflammatory topics than people above 30.

Please also note that Chinese people may tend to physically touch you, which should not be taken as a sign of homosexuality but just a sign of sympathy. In such a situation, when you feel uncomfortable, don’t react in a rude or harsh way; just try to escape the contact by polite means –to feign a hearty fit of coughing does the trick (SARS is still in Chinese people’s mind).

### **TRAFFIC, TAXI AND SUBWAY**

The public transport system in China is basically quite convenient. Every major city has an airport; there are many train routes (even though there is mostly only one train per day between two destinations) and public buses. Public buses are very cheap although the comfort is sometimes a bit poor. Subways are the most convenient way to get around town as you will not get stuck in traffic jams. In Beijing, tickets for lines 1 and 2 cost 2 Yuan for however far you are going. All signs and announcements in the subway system are in Chinese and English.

In the cities, taxis are quite convenient as well. You can, compared to Europe, basically take a taxi anytime and everywhere at a very low price. Be wary of taxis found at major tourist sites as there are also unofficial drivers trying to make extra money. We at HiddenChina.net recommend that you always take a licensed taxi, however, if you take a taxi that has no meter (make sure that the driver in taxis with a taximeter always puts it on), be sure to negotiate the rate before you get into the vehicle. Even in taking this precaution, some drivers will still try to make you pay an extra fee at the end of your ride. Just tell him that you pay the negotiated price, nothing more, and nothing less. Please also note that most drivers don’t speak English. So it is a good habit to take a bilingual map, a taxi card, or a guidebook with you. A convenient method is to tell the reception staff in the hotel to write down the addresses for you so you can show it to the driver. Please note that highway toll fees/fares have to be paid by the customer and not the driver (for example, in Beijing the fee for the airport expressway is 10 Yuan (RMB) for passenger cars). This fee will be added to the amount shown on the taximeter.

### **USEFUL THINGS TO TAKE ON A CHINA TRIP**

Several Swiss army knives, a compass, pharmaceuticals (see health chapter), a first-aid kit, tape, watches (not too expensive), money clip, camera (rolls of film can be bought and developed on the spot for a very reasonable price), deodorant (rarely available in China), sunglasses, altimeter (for Tibet and Himalaya tours), GPS, safety belt for money, literature, guidebooks, credit/bank card, and a lot of patience. Ladies please note: tampons and similar hygiene products are rarely available in China outside of the major cities.