



Hiddenchina.net

Tibet Highlights and Saga Dawa Festival

- Classic Tibet trip and Saga Dawa Festival in Lhasa
- Starts in Kunming including city sightseeing tour
- Lhasa, Tsedang, Gyantse, Shigatse, Chengdu
- Exclusive visit to the Chengdu Research Base of Giant Panda Breeding



CLASSIC TIBET TOUR WITH SAGA DAWA FESTIVAL IN LHASA

This tour will lead you from Kunming to Tibet and is specially designed for people, who want to get to know Tibet and gain an insight into the fascinating culture of this mysterious people under the guidance of an experienced tour guide.

This trip lasts 15 days so you might want to opt to take advantage of one of our optional extensions. This tour is not a physically demanding journey, but as we will go up to over 5'000 meters, high altitude experience is helpful.

- Travel date: 3rd - 17th June 2009
- Destinations: Kunming, Lhasa, Tsedang, Gyantse, Shigatse, Damxung, Chengdu
- Duration: 15 days
- Starting in: Kunming
- Ending in: Chengdu
- Group size: min 8., max. 14
- Hotels:

Kunming:	Green Lake (5*)
Lhasa:	Kyichu (3*)
Tsedang:	Tsedang (4*)
Gyantse:	Gyantse (3*)
Shigatse:	Shigatse (3*)
Damxung:	guesthouse
Chengdu:	Sofitel (5*)

QUICK TOUR INTRODUCTION

This classic Tibet trip takes you from Kunming to Lhasa - the provincial capital of the Tibet Autonomous Region. There you will partake in the Saga Dawa Festival, which marks the birth, transcendence and death of Buddha Sakyamuni. Believers from the whole region gather in Lhasa to commemorate this special occasion.

From Lhasa we take you to Tsedang to visit Samye Monastery - the first Lama temple in Tibet - and Yumbu Lhakang - the earliest palace. Then we continue our journey over the 4'794 meters high Khampa-La pass to the picturesque Yamdrok-Tso Lake and on to Gyantse over the 5'045 meters high Karo-La mountain pass. On the next day we travel to Shigatse to visit Tashilhunpo, the traditional seat of successive Panchen Lamas. Via Nam-Tso Lake and Damxung Town we return to Lhasa and take a flight to Chengdu, Sichuan province.

At the end of this trip another highlight awaits you as you will visit the Chengdu Research Base of Giant Panda Breeding, where you get the unique opportunity to enter the enclosures and feed the pandas under the guidance of an experienced keeper.

DAY 1 KUNMING (D)

Upon arrival, you will be picked up at the airport by our guide and transferred to a first-class hotel, which is conveniently located in the center of Kunming. 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 an excellent local restaurant.

DAY 2 KUNMING (B/L/D)

After breakfast 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 KUNMING - LHASA (3600 METERS) (B/L/D)**

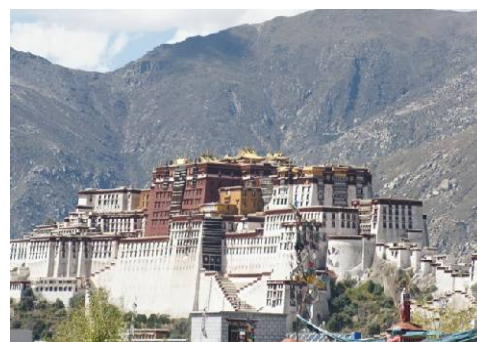
In the morning we fly over the mountain ridges of the Eastern Himalaya with its peaks being above 8'000 meters high to the legendary Tibetan capital: Lhasa. After check-in at an upscale hotel in the old town we will visit Barkhor - a kind of Tibetan bazaar along the pilgrims' path leading to Jokhang Temple, which constitutes one of the most important sanctuaries in Tibet, especially because of its magnificent Buddha statue "Jo". Lhasa-style cuisine dinner.

DAY 4 LHASA (B/L)

On our first morning in Lhasa we will pay a visit to the Drepung Monastery - one of the four most important monasteries of Gelugpa („Yellow Hat School“) of Tibetan Buddhism. Nechung - the state oracle of Tibet - used to live here as well. In the afternoon we will enjoy ourselves at Norbulinka, the Dalai Lama's cozy summer palace. Evening at your disposal.

DAY 5 LHASA SAGA DAWA FESTIVAL (B/L)

Today we visit the most famous and mystic building in Tibet: the Potala Palace, winter residence of the Dalai Lama. This fabulous palace harbours countless treasures such as stupas containing relics of the Buddha and three-dimensional mandalas bejewelled with ancient turquoise, coral and other precious objects. In the afternoon we will attend the disputation held by the monks at Sera Monastery. The rest of the day is at your disposal. Note: as an uncountable number of believers will gather in Lhasa to take part in the Saga Dawa Festival and to commemorate the birth, transcendence and death of Buddha Sakyamuni, we might have to make alterations to the itinerary during the festivities.



DAY 6 LHASA - TSEDANG (3590 METERS) (B/L/D)

We will continue our journey to Tsedang, also referred to as the cradle of Tibetan culture. Samye - the first Lama Temple in Tibet - and the Yumbu Lhakang - the palace of the first Tibetan kings, built on rocks overlooking the fertile plains - are located here. Overnight at an upscale hotel in the city center.

DAY 7 TSEDANG - YAMDROK TSO - GYANTSE (3950 (METERS) (B/L/D)

Today we drive through the broad Yarlung-Tsangpo Valley over the two mountain passes Khampa-La (4'794m), offering a breathtaking view over the turquoise Yamdrok-Tso Lake, and Karo-La (5'045m), which glaciers come close to the road, to finally reach Gyantse. We will visit Palkhor Chode located within the old walled monastery section of the town, which used to contain 16 monasteries and Kumbum. Commissioned in 1440, this structure contains 108 chapels in its four floors, and is illustrated with over 10,000 murals. Overnight at an upscale hotel.

**DAY 8 GYANTSE - SHIGATSE (3900 METERS) (B/L/D)**

Gyantse's Dzong fortress overlooks the town from a nearby crag and offers a stunning view over the old town and the town's monastery section. Afterwards we travel on to Shigatse, the second largest city in Tibet. We will pay a visit to Tashilhunpo Monastery, former seat of the Panchen Lama, the second highest ranking lama after the Dalai Lama in the Gelugpa sect of Tibetan Buddhism. Overnight at a very nice hotel in the city center.

DAY 9 SHIGATSE - DAMXUNG (4100 METERS) (B/L/D)

From Shigatse we continue our trip to Changtang - the world's highest plateau, which stretches from the border with Pakistan to the gorges of Eastern Tibet. The world's highest saltwater lake Nam-Tso is located south of this plateau at an altitude of 4'718 meters above sea level. Overnight at a basic, but clean guesthouse in Damxung.

DAY 10 NAMTZO (5100 METERS) (B/L/D)

In the morning we drive over a 5'100 meters high mountain pass to reach today's destination: the crystal-clear turquoise Nam-Tso Lake, surrounded by the Nyenchen Tanglha Massif (7'000 m), the range crossed by Heinrich Harrer and Peter Aufschnaiter when they made their incredible journey to Lhasa. We go on an extensive hike along the lakeside and make our way back to Damxung in the afternoon.



DAY 11 DAMXUNG - LHASA (B/L/D)

We drive along the Qinghai-Tibet highways and the newly built railroad to Lhasa. The rest of the day after lunch is at your disposal. Dinner in an excellent restaurant offering Nepalese and Indian food.

DAY 12 LHASA (B)

Today is at your disposal to reflect on the experiences of the past few days and to once more enjoy the special ambience of the Tibetan capital.

DAY 13 LHASA - CHENGDU (500 METERS) (B/L/D)

Transfer to Lhasa Gongkar airport and flight to Chengdu - the fifth most populous city in China and also one of the country's most important transportation and communication hubs. After check-in at an excellent hotel in the city center we go on a sightseeing tour and have dinner in a nice restaurant serving Sichuan-style food.

**DAY 14 CHENGDU (500 METERS) (B/L/D)**

After breakfast we transfer to the Chengdu Research Base of Giant Panda Breeding. HiddenChina.net works in close cooperation with the Panda Base where we provide the opportunity to get to know the pandas under the guidance of an experienced keeper, feed the animals, and help perform a keeper's daily tasks (optional excursion). With your visit you can contribute to the survival of this endangered species. Farewell dinner in an exquisite restaurant offering Chinese delicacies where we will enjoy the world-famous specialty Beijing duck.

DAY 15 CHENGDU (B)

Transfer to the airport for your flight home. End of trip.

For inquiries and bookings please contact Mr. Roman Lange:

Mobile: +86 13681292401
Phone: +86 (0)10 58570190 (China)
+41 (0)44 5866635 (Switzerland)
Fax: +86 (0)10 58570190
Email: rlange@hiddenchina.net
MSN: rlange@hiddenchina.net
Skype: rl.hiddenchina
Yahoo: rl.hiddenchina
AIM: rl hiddenchina
GoogleTalk: roman.lange
ICQ: 121-904-061

RATES

Rates in standard twin rooms, single supplement on request

Participants	Price Per Person	Price Per Person	Price Per Person	Price Per Person
	CNY	EURO	USD	CHF
8-14	22400	2490	3290	3770

Prices subject to change due to exchange rate fluctuations.

Prices are based on the value of the Chinese Yuan CNY.

**INCLUDED**

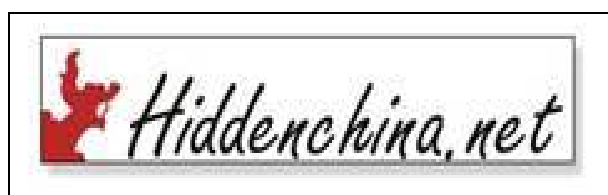
- experienced local tour guide, English/Chinese-speaking
- flights Kunming - Lhasa and Lhasa - Chengdu in economy class including airport taxes in China
- accommodation in selected 3* to 5* hotels in double rooms as mentioned in the itinerary
- outside the cities accommodation in basic, but clean guest houses in double rooms
- full board inclusive soft drinks except on free days (described as B=breakfast, L=lunch, D=dinner)
- all highway fees as mentioned in the itinerary
- entrance fees to sightseeing spots mentioned in the itinerary
- all transfers in a comfortable coach as mentioned in the itinerary

NOT INCLUDED

- personal expenses such as laundry, tips etc.
- transports not mentioned in the itinerary (such as taxis in the evening, etc.)
- 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.