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## 4WD Overland Tour from Tibet to Sichuan

- Drive a land cruiser to discover the beauty of nature in Tibet, Kham and Sichuan
- Get in touch with the local Menba, Luoba and Den minorities
- Explore the world's largest canyon Yarlung Zangbo
- Visit remote and unspoiled areas only accessible with a special permit
- Stay overnight at a local family's house and gain a deep insight into the culture, religion and folk customs of the various tribes and minorities along the Tibet - Sichuan Highway



**EASTERN TIBET, KHAM AND SICHUAN OFF-ROAD LAND CRUISER ADVENTURE**

This tour will lead you from the capital of the Tibet Autonomous Region TAR - Lhasa - to remote, unspoiled and breath-taking places like the world's largest canyon of Yarlung Zangbo, the mighty Mt. Namche Barwa and Mt. Genie, Lhagu Glacier and Litang along the Tibet - Sichuan Highway and is specially designed for people, who want to explore Eastern Tibet, Kham and Sichuan on this self-drive adventure. Alternatively the trip can be done with a local driver.

- Travel date: April - October; recommended travel date: May, June, September; (rainy saison in July and August)
- Destinations: Lhasa, Nyingchi, Namche Barwa, Pome, Ranwu, Zalyu, Baso, Markham, Litang, Kangding, Chengdu
- Duration: 14 days
- Starting in: Lhasa
- Ending in: Chengdu
- Group size: min. 3 pax, max. 12 pax

**QUICK INTRODUCTION**

On this trip you can choose to either drive a land cruiser or be driven by a local driver to stunning, unspoiled areas like Namche Barwa, Yarlung Zangpo Canyon and Zalyu district, which is usually difficult to access for foreign travelers because you need a special permit. You will get in close contact with the local people and gain an insight in their culture, religion and folk customs.

We offer two different types of vehicles: a Mitsubishi land cruiser and the slightly more spacious Toyota 4500 land cruiser. Both vehicles can take 4 passengers including the driver.



You can also start the trip in Chengdu and drive the same route to Lhasa or fly from Chengdu to Nyingchi where a new airport has been opened September 2006. Please contact us if you want to shorten the itinerary or combine this tour with a visit to Mount Everest, Mt. Kailash, a train trip to Xining or an overland tour to Kathmandu, Nepal.

## The Sichuan - Tibet Highway

The 2,413-kilometer-long Sichuan-Tibet Highway starts from Chengdu, Sichuan province, and ends at Lhasa in Tibet. The construction of the highway began in April 1950, and on December 25, 1954, it was opened. The road stretches into Lhasa passing Ya'an, Garze and Chamdo traversing 14 high mountains which average 4,000-5000 meters (Mt. Erlang, Mt. Zheduo and Mt. Hengduan), spans dozens of famous rivers (Daduhe River, Jinshajiang River, Lantsang River, Nujiang River) and crosses primeval forests amid spectacular scenery.

<b>DAY 1</b>	<b>ARRIVAL LHASA</b>	<b>(L/D)</b>
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Upon arrival at Lhasa Gongkar Airport, you will be picked up by our guide and transferred to the "Gorkha Hotel". As a welcome present, you will receive a Tibetan "Hada" - a white silk scarf symbolizing respect and blessing. The rest of the day is free to rest and for acclimatization.



Lhasa is the traditional capital of Tibet and the capital of Tibet Autonomous Region of the People's Republic of China. It is also the traditional seat of the Dalai Lama. Lhasa literally means "place of the gods", although ancient Tibetan documents and inscriptions demonstrate that the place was first called Rasa, which means "courtyard place" or "goat place". Its altitude is about 3,650 m, making it one of the highest cities in the world, and its population about 200,000.

<b>DAY 2</b>	<b>LHASA</b>	<b>(B/L/D)</b>
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Today we visit the world-famous Potala Palace, Jokhang Monastery and Barkhor Bazaar. Your English-speaking Tibetan guide will answer all your questions about the splendid world of Buddhism.

The Potala Palace was the chief residence of the Dalai Lama until the 14th Dalai Lama fled to Dharamsala, India after a failed uprising in 1959. The site was used as a meditation retreat by King Songtsen Gampo, who in 637 built the first palace there, which was incorporated into later buildings. The construction of the present palace began in 1645 under the fifth Dalai Lama Lozang Gyatso. In 1648, the Potrang Karpo (White Palace) was completed, and the Potala was used as a winter palace by the Dalai Lama from that time. The Potrang Marpo (Red Palace) was added between 1690 and 1694.

Jokhang temple was constructed by King Songtsen Gampo starting in the year 639. This temple has remained a center of Buddhist pilgrimage for centuries. In the past several centuries the temple complex was expanded and now covers an area of about 25,000 sq. meters. Jokhang temple complex has several decorated shrines and rooms. The main hall of the temple houses the Jowo Shakyamuni Buddha statue, perhaps the single most venerated object in Tibetan Buddhism. There are also statues

of King Songtsan Gambo and his two famous foreign brides, Princess Wen Cheng (daughter of Emperor Taizong of Tang China) and Princess Bhrikuti of Nepal.

After lunch we will go shopping. The Barkhor Street around the Jokhang Temple has a variety of Tibetan goods. You should also make your way to Chongsaikang Market just around the corner, which is the busiest local market in the old town where you find a lot of fancy goods and handcrafts sold by very interesting people.

Overnight at "Gorkha Hotel".

<b>DAY 3</b>	<b>LHASA</b>	<b>(B/L/D)</b>
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In the morning we visit Norbulingka Park, a masterpiece of Tibetan art situated in the western suburbs of Lhasa. It was built in the middle of the 18th century during the reign of the 7th Dalai Lama and served as the Summer Palace of successive Dalai Lamas where they handled political affairs, practiced religious activities and spent holidays. Traditionally the Dalai Lamas would leave the Potala Palace every spring and spend the summer in Norbulingka. The park covers an area of 360,000 square meters and has 374 rooms.



Lingka in Tibetan means a beautiful place with trees and lawns, and Norbu means treasure. In 2001 Norbulingka was listed by UNESCO as a World Cultural Heritage Site as an extension of Potala Palace.

In the afternoon, we will drive to the Sera Monastery, which is one of the "great three" Gelukpa university monasteries of Tibet. The other two are Ganden Monastery and Drepung Monastery. It was founded in 1414, by Jamchen Choje (Sakya Yeshe), a disciple of Tsong Khapa. Visit the sutra printing room and watch the monks practice debating.

Overnight at "Gorkha Hotel".

<b>DAY 4</b>	<b>LHASA - NYINGCHI</b>	<b>(B/L/D)</b>
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After breakfast, we leave Lhasa and drive to Nyingchi via Datse, Metrok Gongga passing by Milha Mountain (5'013 m). Situated in the lower reaches of the Yaluzhangbu River, the Nyingchi Prefecture has an average altitude of approximately 3'000 meters. The area is known for its mild wet weather and stunning landscape and is inhabited by the Menba and Luoba people who have preserved many of their ancient customs and rituals. They have their own totems and various life styles and some of them remain in patriarch clan communes. In the isolated Yarlung Zangbo Great Canyon they live by gathering, hunting and slash-and-burn cultivation. You will stay overnight at the "Jialong Hotel".



**DAY 5 NYINGCHI - NAMCHE BARWA (B/L/D)**

In the morning we leave Nyingchi and drive southward along Nyang River. At Gangga we turn east and follow the Yarlung Zangbo. Originating from the Gyaimanezong glacier on the northern Himalayas, it is the highest river on earth with an average altitude of 4'000 meters. Tibetans refer to it as the "Cradle of Tibet" or the "Mother River". Our destination is Zhibai near Mt. Namjaqbarwa (Namche Barwa, 7'782 m) - a noble giant with 49 maritime glaciers, various icefalls and crevasses. Namche Barwa's steep summit climbs from the gorges of the Yarlung Zangbo River, which curls round the base of the mountain on three sides as it is blocked directly by the Himalayas in Mainling and therefore forced to run northward. The turn is so sharp that a spectacular canyon has formed. The Yarlung Zangbo Great Canyon starts at Dadukha Village and ends at Bashikha, stretches 496 km in length and reaches 5'382 meters in depth. It is the world's largest canyon



(confirmed by the American Geography Committee and Guinness Book of World Records in 1994), covering 17'000 square kilometers with 17 snow-clad peaks above 6'000 meters. Because of its complex geographic and climate conditions, the canyon has a rich variety and abundance of wildlife with rare and unique plants and animals only existing in the vast expanse of the region's virgin forests.

After arrival at Zhibai we will go for a hike through this fascinating canyon with the Namche Barwa Peak standing proud on the horizon and the river rushing down the valley below you with thunderous noise. This hike lasts approximately eight hours and is moderately physically demanding as we will be walking at an average altitude of 3'500 meters.

On the way from Nyingchi to Zhibai, we will also visit the Burqug Lamaling Monastery of the Red Sect, located on the left bank of the lower reaches of the Nyang River. It is surrounded by mountains on three sides and faces the delta at the mouth of the Nyang River. The monastery was built with wood, with curving eaves and brilliantly painted beams, combining the different artistic styles of the Han and Tibetan peoples. You will stay overnight at a local Menba (also called Monba) family's house.

**DAY 6 NAMCHE BARWA - POME (B/L/D)**

From Zhibai we return to Nyingchi and drive on the Sichuan-Tibet Highway (road 318) over Serkhyim La Pass (4'565 m), pass through Tongmai, and then arrive at the attractive market town of Pome (also called Bomi or Powo). The highway leads through spectacular landscape and although large portions of the road are now paved, the dirt road parts are still challenging, especially during the rainy season. Stay overnight at the "Snowland Hotel".

**DAY 7 POME - RANWU TOWN (B/L/D)**

After breakfast we continue our journey to Ranwu (also known as Rawu or Raog) Lake, the largest in Southeast Tibet at 3'850 meters above sea level. It contains an area of 22 square kilometers and many of the surrounding peaks are over 5'000 meters high and thus permanently covered by glaciers.

After arrival and a short rest at the “Ranwu Hotel” we either drive or hike approximately 10 km to Lhagu. This beautiful village is located on the lake’s northern shore east of the terminal moraine of Lhagu Glacier. From there we will hike a few hours to enjoy the view on the several glaciers and ice lakes. Afterwards we return to Ranwu either by car or on foot. Overnight at the “Ranwu Hotel”.

Important note: the road to Lhagu might be blocked by water, especially during the rainy season. In this case we will have to cancel the excursion to Lhagu Village and the hike to the glaciers.



### **DAY 8      RANWU TOWN - ZALYU      (B/L/D)**

We recommend you to get up early in the morning to capture the peaceful atmosphere. After breakfast we drive southward to Lower Zalyu via Lhamu, Guyu and Zalyu. Gain insight into the traditional way of life of the Den people, a Tibetan tribe that exclusively lives in Zalyu. On the way you will have the opportunity to appreciate the beauty of nature at an altitude between 4’000 and 1’400 meters with the majestic Meili Snow Mountain and Indian border villages in the background. We will stay overnight at a guesthouse in Zalyu.

Zalyu County is one of the most remote but most important towns at the boundary between China and India. Zalyu literally means “human’s habitat” in Tibetan. The climate here is moderate, subtropical and sunny with long winters and a lot of rain. The local Den people’s language belongs to the China-Tibetan and Myanmar Austronesian language family. Having no script of their own they use the method of rope knotting or wood-carving. Men traditionally wear sleeveless gowns, while women wear belly tops and skirts.

### **DAY 9      ZALYU - BASO      (B/L/D)**

In the morning we leave Zalyu, drive northwards on the National Highway 318 and then eastward to Baso via Zhongsha (or Dzongsar in Tibetan) and Tashi. We will be driving through spectacular canyons and amidst impressive scenery and see the remnants of the big avalanche of Zhongsha.

Zhongsha is a large complex of temples and monks' quarters perched on a steep cliff. It overlooks the entire valley with its rich farmland.

You will stay overnight at the “Yinbing Hotel”.

### **DAY 10      BASO - MARKHAM      (B/L/D)**

Today we drive eastward along the Nujiang River. It has its source on the southern slope of the Tanggula Mountain Range in Tibet with a total length of 2’816 kilometers. The name of the river is changed into the Salween River after flowing into Burma from China, and it finally empties into the Andaman Sea. The Nujiang road follows close beside the river linking the Lisu, Nu, and Tibetan communities along the Nu River for 300 miles of gorgeous scenery.



We cross the river at Nujiang Bridge, drive over the Nujiang and East Grand Mountains and across the Bamda Grassland, and arrive at Markham via Lancangjiang River - the sixth longest river in the world and the largest in Southeast Asia with a total length of 4'880 kilometers. It has its source at the Gangguori Peak at the north of Tanggula Mountain on the Qinghai-Tibet Plateau and flows through Qinghai, Sichuan and Yunnan provinces in China. At the border areas of Laos and Burma, its name is changed to Mekong River and flows through Laos, Burma, Thailand, Cambodia and Vietnam to empty into the South Pacific.

After arrival at Markham we will stay overnight at the "Shenkang Hotel".

<b>DAY 11</b>	<b>MARKHAM - LITANG</b>	<b>(B/L/D)</b>
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In the morning we leave Markham, drive eastward and cross Jinshajiang Bridge, the border bridge between Tibet and Sichuan, and arrive at Litang via Batang. Enjoy the scenery in the spectacular Yitang Canyon with its virgin forests and hot springs. We take a rest at Batang, famous for its traditional Tibetan songs and dances and Mount Genie standing proud on the horizon.

Mount Genie (or Genyen), standing at 6,204 meters above sea level, is the third highest peak in Sichuan Province. Ranking 13th among the 24 divine mountains in Tibetan Buddhism and one of the three places for ascetic practices, the mountain attracts numerous Tibetan pilgrims. Quietly lying on the Kangnan plateau, Mount Genie is rarely known to outsiders.



Litang is located in Sichuan Province in south-west China, has a population of approximately 50'000 and is also part of the ancient Tibetan province of Kham. The town is a major center of Tibetan culture in Kham and at an elevation of 4'100 meters one of the highest in the world. Several Dalai Lamas were born here and lived in the local monastery. Litang is a bustling little town with colorful street life thanks to the nomadic shepherds and Tibetan people coming to sell and buy their products. The older parts are situated on the hill slopes to the east, while busy construction works are extending the place into the surrounding grassy plains. Every year a 10 days horse racing festival takes place in Litang.

We stay overnight at the "Genie Hotel".

<b>DAY 12</b>	<b>LITANG - KANGDING</b>	<b>(B/L/D)</b>
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After breakfast we visit the Litang Monastery (also known as Ganden Thubchen Choekhorling Monastery), the biggest monastery of the Yellow-Hat-Sect of Tibetan Buddhists in the Kham area. The monastery was founded in 1580 by the third Dalai Lama Sonam Gyatso on the site of an older Bön monastery. There are three main temples in the compound. You can view several chambers and a bedroom in which the 7th Dalai Lama is said to have resided. Many famous and influential personal figures were born here, including the 7th and 10th Dalai Lama.

Afterwards we drive across the Litang grassland, descend to the Yarlung Valley and cross Gao'ershi Mountain (4'678m). After having driven across the Xingduqiao Grassland and Zheduo Mountain, we arrive at Kangding, the capital city of Garze (also known as Gantze) Autonomous Prefecture. Kangding, once capital of Chakla, one of the 5 independent kingdoms of Kham (the other ones being Dege, Lhato, Lingsang and Nangchen) - has long been an important trading center, particularly for tea and herbal medicines. The nomadic Tibetans nowadays come here to trade animals or animal products.

The route to Kangding is referred to as a photographer's paradise where you will have the opportunity to capture the beauty of nature around Maoyaba Grassland at Litang and Xingduqiao Grassland as well as of the majestic Gongga Mountain (Minya Konka Mountain), the third highest mountain outside of the Himalaya proper, located on the southeastern margin of the Qinghai-Xizang (Tibet) Plateau with 74 glaciers. In May 1929 the famous Austrian-American explorer Joseph Rock became the first westerner to get a clear view of the mighty 7,596-metre Gongga Shan. The local people believe that all natural life in the area around their "Holy Mountain" is sacred and must be preserved and that one night spent on the mountain is equivalent to ten years spent sitting in meditation and prayer.

Overnight at "Love Song Hotel".

<b>DAY 13</b>	<b>KANGDING - CHENGDU</b>	<b>(B/L/D)</b>
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In the morning we visit Muge Tso Lake, about 35km away from Kangding. Muge Tso Lake covers an area of 500 square km. At an altitude of approximately 3'800m. it is the biggest alpine lake in northwest Sichuan. After lunch we leave Kangding and drive eastward along Dadu River - a tributary of the Yangtze, also known as the Tatu River. The river is noted for being crossed by the Luding Bridge, a historically important bridge. Then we get over the natural barrier of Erlang Mountain and drive by the city of Ya'An, situated in the mountainous western border of the Sichuan Basin. It is a communications centre near the crossing of the two main routes - one running west to Kangding and to Tibet and another running north-south from Chengdu to the southwest. The city is first mentioned during the Zhou Dynasty (1122-255 BCE). It served as a county seat during the Qin and Han Dynasties, but was subsequently ruled by the Mongols. After being reintegrated into the Chinese Empire in the late 5th century, it was made the seat of the Ya Prefecture in 604. The modern Ya'An County was established in 1912.



The capital of Sichuan - Chengdu - is located in southwest China. It is the fifth most populous city in China and also one of the country's most important transportation and communication hubs. More than four thousand years ago, the prehistorical Bronze Age culture of Jinsha established itself in this region.

The fertile Chengdu Plain, on which Chengdu is located, is called "Tianfu Zhi Guo" in Chinese, which means "the Heavenly Country". In the late afternoon we arrive at Chengdu and stay overnight at the "Sichuan Hotel (4\*)".



**DAY 14      CHENGDU      (B)**

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

[Contact us](#) per mail for a tailor-made itinerary.

Our other 4WD and motorbike tours in China:

[20 days sidecar tour through Xinjiang, Gansu and Shaanxi](#)

[11 days 250cc motorbike tour West China](#)

Recommended optional extension: **Chengdu Research Base of Giant Panda Breeding**

HiddenChina.net works in close cooperation with the Chengdu Research Base for Giant Panda Breeding. With your visit you can contribute to the survival of this endangered species. 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. Furthermore we provide access to the laboratories under the guidance of experienced scientists. During one day you will gain an insight into current research, for example, an understanding of breeding and artificial insemination (AI) and its problems and successes.



<b>RATES PER PERSON FOR SELF DRIVE TOUR</b>
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<b>Group Size</b>	<b>Mitsubishi Land Cruiser</b>	<b>Toyota 4500 Land Cruiser</b>
<b>6 pax</b>	<b>1,980 Euro</b>	<b>2,090 Euro</b>

**(3 PASSENGERS PER VEHICLE)**

**INCLUDED SERVICES:**

- experienced tour leader and local tour guides for all days, English/Chinese-speaking
- temporary driving license for Tibet and China
- third party liability insurance
- accommodation in selected hotels in double rooms as mentioned in the itinerary
- outside the cities accommodation in basic, but clean guest houses in double rooms
- full board except on free afternoons/evenings (described as B=breakfast, L=lunch, D=dinner)
- entrance fees to sightseeing spots mentioned in the itinerary
- all transfers mentioned in the itinerary
- Tibet travel permits and all necessary permits for restricted areas and special regions
- steel-made oxygen bottle, first-aid bag and medicine bag
- car phone and walkie-talkies for communication during the trip (for groups of more than one vehicle)
- 19 seater Coaster tour bus from day 1 to day 3 and on day 14 (for groups of more than one vehicle)
- Mitsubishi land cruiser or Toyota 4500 land cruiser from day 4 to day 13 (for groups of more than one vehicle)

**Note: for groups of 3 persons we provide a land cruiser throughout the trip.**

**NOT INCLUDED:**

- international flights
- 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!**

<b>RATES PER PERSON FOR TOUR WITH DRIVER</b>
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<b>Group Size</b>	<b>Mitsubishi Land Cruiser</b>	<b>Toyota 4500 Land Cruiser</b>
<b>3 pax</b>	<b>1,810 Euro</b>	<b>1,910 Euro</b>
<b>6 pax</b>	<b>1,660 Euro</b>	<b>1,755 Euro</b>
<b>9 pax</b>	<b>1,595 Euro</b>	<b>1,700 Euro</b>
<b>12 pax</b>	<b>1,565 Euro</b>	<b>1,665 Euro</b>

**(3 PASSENGERS PER VEHICLE)**

**INCLUDED SERVICES:**

- experienced tour leader and local tour guides for all days, English/Chinese-speaking
- accommodation in selected hotels in double rooms as mentioned in the itinerary
- outside the cities accommodation in basic, but clean guest houses in double rooms
- full board except on free afternoons/evenings (described as B=breakfast, L=lunch, D=dinner)
- entrance fees to sightseeing spots mentioned in the itinerary
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- steel-made oxygen bottle, first-aid bag and medicine bag
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**INSURANCE IS RESPONSIBILITY OF THE PARTICIPANT!**

**IMPORTANT NOTE**

Traveling in China, especially off the beaten tracks and in rural areas, can be adventurous and carries also a certain amount of surprises and risks. Hiddenchina.net ensures that in every situation we and our guides are trying to get out a maximum of comfort for our clients. All our guides are carefully chosen and selected by their abilities and experience. Nevertheless, there might be surprises. We hereby express that a voyage in China needs patience, adaptation and tolerance. In addition due to lack of infrastructure, in rural areas in China there is often a lack of western sanitary standards. Clients of hiddenchina.net accept - upon signing a contract - to be aware of these circumstances, and accept changes which may occur in order to keep security and comfort of the clients according to the circumstances to a maximum during the trip.

**ADDITIONAL INFORMATION FOR CHINA TRAVELERS**

Traveling in China is always an adventure. Quality of service can range from “top” in selected 5\* Hotels in the big cities to “very poor”. While traveling in China, even with an organized tour, the clients have to be ready for unexpected changes (e.g. due to natural disasters such as landslides or flooding) or other surprises. In hotels by 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 consider 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 as 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. You will achieve your goal much faster. Also try to react calmly in stress situations and stay friendly. For every problem in China there is a solution. It's up to you how effective you will get to this solution. Being angry and aggressive is contra productive in the most cases.

**SECURITY**

Especially large cities in China are extremely safe. Chinese people have to fear severe punishment when being caught by the authorities in illegal matters 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, China's large cities are much safer than practically all European cities. A single woman has nothing to fear when walking in a dark alley even at 4 o'clock in the morning.



## HEALTH

It is also recommended to visit your house doctor before you go on a China trip and make all the necessary vaccinations. Your doctor will inform you what you will need. For travelers going to south China, it is also recommended to carry a supply of Malaria remedies. As the avian influenza is getting more and more a serious issue in Asia and a pandemic outbreak will happen sooner or later, the traveler should also consider buying a box of “Tamiflu” before the trip begins.

When traveling in China and especially when eating a lot of local food, a supply of remedies for stomach problems is highly recommended. We will always take care of taking you to clean restaurants with high quality standards. However, your body will have to deal with a wide range of unknown food, spices and other ingredients in China and also with different bacteria and viruses than in Europe’s clean environment. When being on a 3 week China trip, you have to reckon with stomach problems at least once. To cure them it is recommended to take pharmaceuticals, which are rich in salt and minerals and give you back the elements you will lose during a diarrhea. 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 like e.g. Imodium. Always take toilet paper with you, as you won’t 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. Please get advice from your doctor.

## CLIMATE

China has several different climatic zones. From high-altitude to sub-tropic and desert climate, there is everything. Depending on your date of arrival in China, you might be traveling in the rainy season. E.g. in southern China, this time mostly starts late May / early June and lasts until August. This year, in the provinces of Guangxi and Guizhou heavy flooding took the life of several hundred local people. However, we will adapt the trip according to your travel time and avoid the areas with heavy rain.

## LUGGAGE

Most airlines allow you to check-in 20 kg of luggage (economy class). It is not allowed to take nutrition products (cheese, meat) as well as pornographic material. Please ensure that your “Swiss army knife” and other “dangerous products” are checked in with your luggage and not in the hand luggage.

China offers you a wide range of shopping possibilities. So if you plan to go for extensive shopping, take a minimum of luggage to China. However, whenever you forgot something, don’t worry, more or less everything you need in daily life, can be bought much cheaper in China (see chapter below). Be aware that many customs authorities like the ones in Paris and Milan can fine you heavily when finding out that you try to import faked products from China such as Yves St Laurent bags, Gucci items or Prada clothes.

## **SHOPPING**

Except for imported luxury goods and high-end electrical equipment such as beamers or imported laptops, more or less everything is cheaper in China than in Western Europe. Especially clothes can be bought at a very low price. Many shopping areas offer faked products (sometimes in extremely good quality). However, in many places where no prices are indicated you have to bargain about the price (see chapter below). Please note that when buying a faked product, especially at the airport in Paris, you can get into trouble. The fight against faked products is now at a point, that authorities can or will take away your purchase and will heavily fine you. For the golf lovers, there is a wide range of possibilities to buy whole golf sets at a ridiculously low price. Have your suits tailor-made, buy ties, silk products, pearls etc. at a very low price. For most Europeans, DVD's are of special interest. For a DVD you pay between 8 and 10 RMB (about 1 EURO) and most of the movies are available even before they are shown in European cinemas. The advantage is that DVD's take away only little space and weight. But be aware that in many cases you are buying illegally copied and distributed products.

Credit cards are only accepted in major stores, 3\* hotels and upwards and western restaurants. Money can be withdrawn at ATM's at the Bank of China. Please note that these are hard to find in remote areas. Money can be changed at major branches of the Bank of China or in western hotels. Please note that you 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 looked at as "big dollar signs" and accordingly the price will be set 400 – 500% above the price the vendor is ready to sell his or her merchandise. The first rule is to go below the first offered price. So when the vendor asks for 100 RMB, you can set your offer to 20-25 RMB. Then it depends on your bargaining skills at what price you will get it. A simple trick is, when it seems too expensive for you, to walk away from the vendor. If he or she doesn't follow you, you know that your bid was too low. Please also note, always stay friendly and smile when bargaining. Once you agreed for a price, you have to buy the product. Otherwise you and the vendor will lose face.

## **LANGUAGE AND BEHAVIOR**

Even in big cities like Beijing and Shanghai, it is most unlikely that you find English speaking taxi drivers or personnel in the shops. Therefore it is recommended to take a phrase book with you, where you can show what you need. Chinese people are mostly friendly and curious towards foreigners. However, Chinese are also very proud of their country and culture and some 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 terrible place. You also often see Chinese people spitting accompanied by strange noises. The best way to get around it is to ignore it and live with it. For the smoker on the other hand China is a paradise, as it is more or less everywhere allowed to smoke and cigarettes are extremely cheap, although some foreign brands might be faked. Please also note that you might be invited to test your drinking skills. The easiest way to avoid it without losing face is to tell your hosts that due to liver 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 the 5\* surroundings of the big cities. In restaurants or taxis and hotels (except 5\* hotels) tipping is a no-no. However, tour guides and drivers of organized tours should be tipped. Most guides and drivers are roughly paid with 10 Euro per day and rely on additional income. With Chinese tour groups (which often go shopping) the guides always get a commission in the shops, where they make most of their salary. As European groups usually do not visit as many shops as Chinese tourists, 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 souvenirs with you, like for example watches or picture postcards from your home country.

## **SMALL TALK AND CONVERSATION**

Small talk in China is a bit different than in Europe, but there are also 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 and about family. The Chinese are very family oriented, so don't feel embarrassed when people ask you rather private questions, it's 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 (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 explain how expensive the life in Europe is.

Topics which should be avoided at all costs are all political related such as the Cultural Revolution, critics against the system or chairman Mao, the Tibet and Taiwan question, human rights or how to treat 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. Tactically it is wise to hide these questions in some compliments and be as subtle as possible (see also the chapter about “face”). Please note that young Chinese (below 30) are more open to discuss critical topics than people above 30.

Please also note that Chinese people tend to touch you, which is not 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 elegant means. Mostly a hearty fit of coughing does the trick (SARS is still in Chinese people's mind).

## **TRAFFIC AND TAXI**

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.

In the cities, the most convenient public transport is the taxi. You can, compared to Europe, basically take a taxi anytime and everywhere at a very low price. Be careful that on major tourist sites there are also drivers trying to make extra money. When a taxi has no taximeter (make sure that the driver in taxis with a taximeter always puts it on), negotiate the rate before you get into the vehicle. However, some drivers will still try to make you pay an extra fee at the end. 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 take a bilingual map, a taxi card or a guidebook with you. Tell the reception in the hotel to write down the addresses for you so you can show it to the driver. Please note that highway 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 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 (films can be bought and developed on 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.

For ladies: tampons are rarely available in China.