



Lotus Expeditions

Specialists in Custom Adventure Travel

Tibet—Cultural and Trekking Tour

Join Lotus Expeditions on a journey into the cultural and historical heart of Tibetan Buddhism in Central Tibet. This fifteen day adventure travels from the busy markets and remarkable temples of Lhasa to the remote corners of the Himalaya where nomadic Tibetans still pursue their traditional subsistence lifestyle.

Your journey will take you to Beijing, China where preparations for the 2008 Summer Olympics are transforming this fascinating and ancient city. An overnight layover will allow for an afternoon, guided tour of Tiananmen Square and the Forbidden City before you fly into the high altitude capital of Lhasa, Tibet.

A few days in Lhasa will allow your heart and lungs to adjust to the thin air while your mind adjusts to present-day Tibet with its beauty and tragedies. The Jokhang Temple is a beacon for Tibetan pilgrims who come here to pray and circumambulate the temple, gaining karmic merit with each kora. The Potala Palace, former home of the Dalai Lama, speaks volumes of the greatness once held by the upper echelons of Tibetan Buddhist society.

From the commercial center of Tibet you will travel seven days by vehicle and foot, venturing further and further into remote valleys surrounded by giant Himalayan peaks. You will walk among Tibetan nomads and pilgrims. You will join them on their religious koras. You will visit beautiful monasteries and nunneries. For it is only here, in these remote corners, on the “rooftop of the world” that one can truly grasp a sense of the true Tibet.

- Six nights hotel, six nights camping
- Visit Tiananmen Square and the Forbidden City in Beijing, China
- Visit important Tibetan Buddhist temples, monasteries and nunneries
- Trek among Tibetan nomads and pilgrims
- Explore remote valleys and trek beneath Himalayan peaks

Itinerary

Key: B, L, D—breakfast, lunch, and/or dinner included; O/N—overnight in hotel or camping

Day One, Depart Home

Day Two, En route to Beijing

Flights to Beijing from LAX depart just after midnight.

Day Three, Arrive Beijing

A Lotus Expeditions representative will meet you at the airport, in the Arrivals Lounge, and transfer you to your hotel. After a few hours rest there is an optional, guided, afternoon sightseeing tour to Tiananmen Square and the Forbidden City. The evening is free to relax or sample local Chinese cuisine.

O/N, Beijing Capital Airport Hotel

Day Four, Morning flight to Lhasa, Explore Barkhor Market

A Lotus Expeditions representative will meet you at the Gongkar Airport, outside the customs and baggage area, and transfer you (*one hour*) to your hotel in Lhasa (*Elevation 11,880 feet*). After settling in and some refreshment, we will head off to explore the ancient Barkhor market. The market, which surrounds the Jokhang Temple, sprang up sometime around the 8th century and is one of the oldest continually running markets in the world! You can find everything from prayer flags and jewelry to yak butter for sale here! *B, O/N, Dekang Hotel*

Day Five, Visit the Jokhang Temple and Drepung Monastery

After breakfast, explore the Jokhang Temple and Drepung Monastery; Two of the most historically and culturally significant sites in Tibet. The Jokhang temple is the heart of Tibetan Buddhism. Established in the 7th century by King Songsten Gampo, it is said to have pinned down the heart of the mythological demoness that plagued Tibet in pre-Buddhist times. We will wander through the warren of temples surrounded by Tibetan pilgrims making yak butter offerings to the deities inside. After lunch we will visit Drepung Monastery, the largest of all Gelukpa sect monasteries. The second, third and fourth Dalai Lamas are entombed here.

B; O/N, Dekang Hotel

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Day Six, Visit The Potala Palace and Sera Monastery

The Potala Palace was built in 1645 and completed in 1694. Constructed on a high hill in the center of Lhasa, it is an architectural marvel, and was once the traditional winter home of the Dalai Lamas. It is a must-see stop for every traveler to Tibet. In the afternoon, we will visit Sera Monastery to view the monks debating. The monks have been debating philosophical and political subjects here since 1419, when Tsongkhapa began teaching students after several years in meditation at Sera Utse, the hill just above the monastery. *B; O/N, Dekang Hotel*

Day Seven, Travel to Drigung Valley via Ganden Monastery

Today we leave Lhasa and begin our driving and trekking exploration of the more remote parts of Tibet. We will visit the Ganden Monastery, one of the “big three” (*with Sera and Drepung*) Gelug monasteries in the Lhasa area. Formerly home to more than 5000 monks, this is the resting place of the famous Lama Tsongkhapa. We will tour the temples, and perhaps receive a blessing from the lama by being struck lightly on the head and shoulders with the 13th Dalai Lama’s slippers. We will join local Tibetan pilgrims on the high kora (holy walk or circumambulation) with amazing views of the Lhasa valley. After a picnic lunch, we will drive back down the windy road and head to the picturesque Drigung Valley (*Elevation 13,530 feet*) where we will set up camp for the next two days. *Two hours driving; B,L,D; O/N, camping*

Day Eight, Explore Drigung Valley and Tidrum Nunnery

The oldest seat of the Kagyupa sect of Tibetan Buddhism, Drigung Til’s gold-roofed temples perch precariously on a steep hillside overlooking the Drigung Chu River. It is one of the most preferred sites for sky burial in Tibet, and we often see huge Griffon vultures circling the area. After exploring and enjoying a picnic lunch, we will drive to Tidrum Nunnery. Nestled amongst steep, rocky crags adorned with prayer flags and blessed with natural hot springs, Tidrum was founded in 772 by Queen Yeshe Tsogyal, a tantric practitioner who so offended her husband’s (*King Trisong Detsen*) ministers that she was forced to flee Lhasa. She lived in a small cave above the hot springs for many years, meditating and practicing tantric yoga. *B,L,D; O/N, same camp*

Day Nine, Drive to Reting Monastery

Reting Monastery lies nestled in an ancient juniper forest said to have sprung up from a Saint’s fallen strands of hair. It is one of the few remaining old growth

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juniper forests in central Tibet. The gnarled trunks of the ancient trees are home to nesting Kites, whose cries may be heard echoing down the valley. Reting was almost completely destroyed by internal conflicts before the Cultural Revolution, but is now being rebuilt. The Dalai Lama's regent is from Reting, and it is here, the Dalai Lama says, he would live if permitted to return to Tibet (*Elevation 13,860 feet*). *Three hours driving; B,L,D; O/N, camping*

Day Ten, Day hike to Samtenling nunnery

After breakfast, we will hike to the Samtenling Nunnery, also known as Ani Gompa. Three miles from Reting Monastery, this quaint and beautiful nunnery is perched high on the cliffs. The tranquil and scenic setting is a lovely goal for our day's walk, and perfect for photography enthusiasts. You may even be invited to share butter tea with the nuns. *B,L,D; O/N, same camp*

Day Eleven, Drive to Drolma Valley

Today we will drive to the stunning Drolma Valley ("*Goddess Valley*"), home to a newly restored and historically significant Kagyu monastery and nunnery, surrounded by soaring snow capped peaks, friendly nomads, and herds of Yak. We will stop at the nunnery, tour the newly re-opened temple, then embark on a leisurely kora on the beautifully cobbled path around the site (*one hour*), enjoying the stunning mountain views and local nomadic culture. (*Elevation 15,180 feet*). *Three-Four hours driving; B,L,D; O/N, camping*

Day Twelve, Day hike to Yum Tso Lake, Drive to Lake Namtso

After an early breakfast, we will begin hiking up the valley past the nunnery. Two-three hours of moderate hiking with amazing views of the holy mountain Sumtang Kangshar will get us to Yum Tso, a small glacier-fed lake completely encircled by snow-capped mountains and glaciers. (*If you're not up for the hike or not acclimatizing well you may rent a horse for the day*)

After lunch, we'll return to the nunnery and drive to Lake Namtso, the second largest salt lake in Tibet (*Elevation 15,510 feet*). It is also called "heavenly lake" for its crystal blue waters which attract large flocks of migratory birds. We will camp away from the settlement to ensure a peaceful night's sleep in one of the most spectacular places on earth. *Four Hours Driving; B,L,D; O/N, camping*

Day Thirteen, Hike Tashi Dor Kora and return to Lhasa

Our final day will be spent among pilgrims at the Tashi Do hermitage. Few

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hermitages can rival the power and divine beauty of the unusual twin towers of rock dotted with cave temples and grottos in the red limestone cliffs. An attendant nun has lived in one of the deep cave temples for more than 13 years. Her job is to placate the dragons which live in the lake! We will join Tibetan pilgrims on their sacred kora around Tashi Do Chung, a leisurely 1.5 hour lakeside walk. On a clear day we will gain views of Mt. Nyenchen Thanglha (*Elevation 23,300 feet*). After our morning's explorations, and before the first of the tourist buses pulls in, we will be on our way back to Lhasa for well deserved showers and soft beds! *Four hours driving; B,L; O/N, Dekang Hotel*

Day Fourteen, Free Day in Lhasa

Today you may rest, explore Lhasa or take advantage of some last-minute shopping in the Barkhor Market as you prepare for your journey home. *B; O/N, Dekang Hotel*

Some members will depart today; AM transfer to Gonkar Airport and fly Lhasa-Beijing-Home

Day Fifteen, Fly Lhasa-Beijing-Home