

## **CHINA**

### **Suggested Itinerary - Beijing to Lhasa by Train**

Starting in Beijing, this journey spans the length of the Middle Kingdom and finishes high in the Himalayas. While service began on the line in 2006, with a fleet of new, high-tech trains, number of luxury trains run by the Kempinski hotel group and befitting a five-star hotel now plies the rails.

#### **Day 1 – Beijing**

VIP arrival in Beijing and a limousine taking you to one of the city's sumptuous five-star hotels, have a massage or spa treatment, followed by a marvelous dinner in the hotel.

#### **Day 2 – Beijing**

Visit the remarkable Tiananmen Square and the Gate of Heavenly Peace, the 15th Century gate that guards entry into the Imperial Grounds and the Forbidden City. In the afternoon, visit the Temple of Heaven, a 15th Century architectural masterpiece of the Ming Dynasty, built without a single nail, and used by Middle Kingdom emperors for elaborate harvest rituals.

Have a traditional Chinese dinner in the home of an important local family together with some of their friends, and members of Beijing's intelligentsia.

#### **Day 3 – Great Wall, Beijing**

Your private car, driver, and guide take you to the Great Wall, the 2200-year-old world wonder built in the Qin Dynasty as a fortification to keep out unruly northern tribes. As Chairman Mao once remarked, "he who has not climbed the Great Wall is not a true man."

In the evening, return to Beijing in time to catch the brand new Tangula Express luxury train, the world's highest railway, for a two day journey to Tibet, the "rooftop of the world."

#### **Day 4 – Xian to Golmud**

Morning arrival in Xian, eastern terminus of the famed Silk Road, and site of the Army of Terracotta Warriors.

The train continues across the plains of Gansu and Qinghai Provinces, home to the headwaters of the Mekong, Yangtze, and Yellow Rivers. You reach the city of Xining at the base of the Tibetan Plateau in the evening, and continue across the Qaidam Basin salt flats throughout the night.

#### **Day 5 – Golmud to Lhasa**

Arrive in Golmud at 6 am, the last outpost of civilization before Tibet, where you change trains and embark at 7 am on the Lhasa Express. It is a 15-hour journey through the Tanggula Shan Mountains, most of the time at elevations over 13,000 feet and oxygen is available in all the sleeper cabins to help deal with the high elevations.

Arrive in Lhasa in the late evening, where your Tibetan guide meets you and escorts you to the one of the best hotels in town. Both properties are comfortable and clean, but by no means 5-star accommodations - and it is definitely worth it to be in such a special and far-flung place.



### **Day 6 – Lhasa**

Explore Lhasa, beginning with a visit to the phenomenal Potala Palace, the former winter residence of the Dalai Lama. After the Potala, make a pilgrimage to the Jokhang, Tibet's holiest temple. Thousands of Tibetan pilgrims coming from all over Tibet and China walk a clockwise *kora* (perambulation) around the periphery of the Jokhang Temple, some prostrating themselves the entire way.

Barkhor, a circular street at the center of Old Lhasa, is the home of a great bazaar where one can wander around for hours and haggle for Tibetan handicrafts with friendly merchants. In the evening have dinner with the family of a local intellectual in their home and learn about their lives and their culture.

### **Day 7 – Lhasa**

Spend the day at Drepung, the 15th Century monastery formerly home to over 10,000 monks. Considered the Oxford of the Middle Ages, this was the largest monastic institution of any religion in the world. Drepung's Ganden Palace was home to the Dalai Lama before the construction of the Potala in Lhasa.

The monastery offers the visitor a perfect opportunity to participate in local temple life, with debate sessions, prayer incantations, and yak butter tea and *tsampa* (roast barley) breaks going on throughout the day.

### **Day 8 – Lhasa**

Wander through the streets of Lhasa and explore the sights and sounds of the city. After lunch drive to Sera Monastery, north of Lhasa. Sera is a 15th-century Monastery and former home to 5000 Gelugpa monks. Return to Lhasa for dinner preceded by a cooking demonstration

### **Day 9 – Gyantse**

After breakfast, bid adieu to Lhasa and make your way over several high passes to reach Gyantse, one of the most original and least Chinese-influenced towns in Tibet. En route, you will cross several 15,000-foot passes, the Kamba and Karo La, each with astonishing views and adorned in prayer flags.

Stopover at Lake Yamdrok Tso, also known as the Scorpion Lake due to its snaking shape and one of the four holy lakes of Tibet. It has pilgrimage routes along its shores that you will follow for most of the route to Gyantse. Gyantse sits in the fertile Nyang-chu Valley and is home to an impressive fort, the Gyantse Dzong that sits on a hilltop towering over the valley and town, offering amazing views.

Check into the quite basic Gyantse Hotel and then spend the afternoon exploring the Pelkhor Chode Monastery, formerly home to huge populations of Gelugpa and Sakya monks. Have tea or dinner with a few of the pilgrims and hear from them about their very powerful and spiritual journey.

### **Day 10 – Shigatse**

Follow the fertile fields of the Nyang-chu Valley to Shigatse, capital of the central Tsang region, and Tibet's second largest city, where you stay at the modern Shigatse Hotel.

Visit the very important Tashilunpo Monastery, home to the Panchen Lama, the second most important reincarnated spiritual figure in Tibetan Buddhism after the Dalai Lama. The monastery founded in 1447, is extremely large and complex, full of chapels, courtyards, and byways. There is a 75-foot gold gilded statue of Maitreya inside Tashilunpo, and the monastery has an active resident monk population.

### **Day 11 – Shigatse**

Hike around the hills of the Ngor Monastery outside of Shigatse, on a popular pilgrim and trekkers trail between the Ngor and Nartang monastic complexes. Founded in 1429, Ngor is a lovely small monastery with beautiful surroundings. In the afternoon, explore Shigatse, visit the bazaars and the remains of the old *dzong* (fortress), or returning to Tashilunpo for a final visit. Have tea or dinner in a local home with the extremely warm and friendly people.

### **Day 12 – Beijing**

Depart from Gongkar Airport and fly to Chengdu, in Sichuan Province, for a connecting flight to Beijing.

Check back into the Peninsula Palace, Shangri La, St. Regis or Raffles. Have a massage and a delicious dinner.

### **Day 13**

Fly home.

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