



BEST OF TIBET

(FLY IN ~ FLY OUT)
(7 Nights / 8 Days)

Introduction:

Tibet was opened to tourism in 1985. Before this, it avoided influence from the West and this country developed its unique culture and religion independently. Since the spiritual leaders governed Tibet, monasteries and religious institutions were the backbone of power so the importance and prestige were shown by the size and magnificent architecture of these buildings. Tibetan Buddhism contains many elements of their older religion, "Bon Po" which worshipped the sky, moon, sun, fire, soil and even evil spirits and this is why a monastery such as Tashilhunpo contains thousands of unique statues, paintings (Thangka), religious and historical books that to visit in detail would take weeks. Pilgrims who often travel long distances to fulfill their vows crowd monasteries and their emotions show that religion still holds a very important place in their daily lives.

Itinerary

DAY 01: Fly to Lhasa

After breakfast, transfer to the airport for Kathmandu / Lhasa Flight by **China South West Airlines** and arriving at Lhasa. Upon arrival at the **Gonggar airport**, met by the Tibetan counterpart of Sacred Summits (P) Ltd. and escorted for the one and a half hour drive along the Brahmaputra River and through Tibetan countryside and villages to Lhasa. Upon arrival at Lhasa, check in at the Lhasa Hotel. The afternoon is free for complete rest to allow the process of acclimatization at such an extreme altitude.

Dinner and overnight at the Hotel.

Day 02: In Lhasa

After breakfast visit **Potala Palace**: This legendary palace built atop a single hill is synonymous with Tibet. The first foremost king, Songtsen Gampo expanded to its Present structure during the 17th century by the 5th Dalai Lama. This 13 storey, 1000 room citadel served as the headquarters of the former "church-state" of Tibet and was home to successive Dalai Lama who, from the latter half of the 18th century, used it as their Winter Palace.

Jokhang Temple: Situated in the heart of old Lhasa houses Tibet's most precious religious relic, a golden Shakyamuni Buddha which was brought as a gift by the Chinese Princess Wen Cheng on her wedding to the Tibetan King, Songtsen Gampo. Devout pilgrims prostrate themselves at the temple entrance and make the inner holy circuit of the temple to give yak butter offerings to the gods and pay homage to the golden statue of Sakyamuni. Surrounding the Jokhang Temple is the busy bustling **Barkhor Bazaar** – a market place which is the religious and social focus of Lhasa. This is the spiritual center of Tibet and is also the heart of Lhasa.

Dinner and overnight at the Hotel.



Day 03: Full Day Trip To Samye Monastery

Lhasa day trip to **Samye Monastery** with lunch box. Samye is deservedly the most popular destination for travelers. Samye, in the middle of the sandy Samye valley and approached via a beautiful river crossing, has a magic about it that makes many travelers stay longer than they intend to.

Samye Monastery is designed to represent the Buddhist universe and many of the buildings in the courtyard are cosmological symbols. The square in front of the monastery guesthouse has some interesting bits and pieces. The stubby isolated building to the north remains of nine storey tower used to display thangka.

The Utse the central building of Samye comprises of a synthesis of architectural styles. The ground floor and 1st floors were originally Tibetan in style, the 2nd floor was Chinese and the 3rd floor Indian. There is much scholarly debate on this issue and without a trained eye there is little way of telling anyway. After the day long excursion to Samye Monastery, return back to Lhasa

Dinner overnight at the Hotel.

Day 04: Drive from Lhasa to Gyantse

From Lhasa drive to **Gyantse** via **Yamdruk Tso** or Turquoise Lake: A lake of a glaring blue that radiates a near mystical charm. It is about 240 kms in circumference and is more like an Island sea. There are Yak herders around and the lake itself supports a population of scale-less fish in its non-saline waters. It is about 124 kms from Lhasa. You will be provided with packed lunch boxes, which we could have on the way.

Gyantse: is a pastoral town between Lhasa and Shigatse. It is 264 km Southwest of Lhasa (total 8 hours drive). It still retains the charm of a traditional Tibetan town untouched by modern expansion. It made world headlines in 1904 when Colonel Young Husband, who led British Expedition to Tibet, defeated the Tibetan army there. As a cross-road on the principle trade route to India, it used to be renowned for the excellence of its carpets. The compound, encircled by an impressive wall, once contained 19 Monasteries, presided over by the still intact fortress perched atop a nearby mountain.

Drive across the two passes the **Kamba La (4749 m)** and **Karo La (5010 m)**. Lake Yamdrok lies between the two passes, known to the Tibetians as the Turquoise Lake.

Dinner and overnight at the Hotel.

Day 05: Drive from Gyantse to Shigatse

After breakfast visit the 14th century **Gyantse Dzong**, or fort. It is worth the stiff 20 minutes climb to its upper limits, though more for the amazing views of Gyantse, the monastery compound at the end of town and the surrounding Nyang Chu valley, than for what is left of the Dzong itself – not much, though renovations proceed apace. Some of the Dzong's buildings can be entered and explored, sometimes to upper floors by means of rickety wooden ladders.



However, there is generally very little to see. About midway up through the fort complex is an Anti-British Imperialists Museum featuring fabulously warped version of the 1904 British invasion. The displays start off with the predictable 'Tibet in an inalienable part of the motherland..' Some of the more spurious facts quoted include the '10,000 British troops' (the British claim a thousand), the death of the reporter Edmund Chandler (he actually returned home to write a best seller) and the claim that Tibetan troops were 'fighting to safeguard the (Chinese) motherland'.

Gyantse Kumbum: Commissioned by one of the early Gyantse princes in 1440 A.D., the Gyantse Kumbum is rated by many as Gyantse's foremost attraction. The chorten rises like a crown over four sets of eyes that gaze serenely out in the cardinal directions of the compass. There are excellent views of the Kumbum from the hills behind the monastery. A clockwise route spirals up through all six floors of the Kumbum taking in the chapels that line the walls of the chorten. There are two sets of four central chapels, which extend to the floor above from the 1st and 3rd floors, and each of these are surrounded by smaller chapels in diminishing order. The Gyantse Kumbum is a famous three dimensional 112 room Mandala Structure and the Palkhor Chode Monastery compound. Stroll through the traditional Tibetan village of Gyantse which is truly a photographers dream!

Also visit the **Pelkhor Chode Monastery**. Located near the Khumbum, it was founded in the 15th century. It has been remarkably well preserved and many of the statues and paintings inside it date back to the time of its founding. Lunch at the Gyantse hotel and then drive to **Shigatse** in the afternoon check in at **Shigatse Hotel**.

In the late afternoon there will be a sightseeing tour of the **Panchen Lama's Tashilhunpo Monastery** founded in 1447 AD by Gendun Drup, the first Dalai Lama. It is the seat of the Panchen Lama who is second to the Dalai Lama in Tibetan Buddhist Hierarchy. The 5th Dalai Lama in declared that his teacher, then the Abbot of Tashilhunpo, who a manifestation of the Buddha Amitabha and the Pancen Rinpoche. Tashilhunpo has one of the world's largest status - a 9 storeyed gilded bronze statue of Maitriya, the future Buddha.

Dinner and stay Overnight at the Hotel.

Day 06: Drive back to Lhasa

After breakfast, drive along the Tsangpo River with its combination of steep gorges, rushing waters, picturesque villages and the beautiful scenery. Drive with lunch boxes. In the late afternoon if time permits and if you are interested, you may visit **The Norbulingkha**:

The 'Jewel Park' as it is known in Tibetan, was built in the 18th century and served as the Summer Palace of the Dalai Lamas. This colourful garden landscape was the site of picnic and public gatherings. The place is richly decorated, creating an atmosphere of peaceful repose.

Dinner and stay overnight at the Hotel.

Day 07: Day trip to Ganden Monastery



After breakfast commence on a day trip to **Ganden Monastery** with packed lunch boxes. Ganden is just 40 kms northeast of Lhasa. Ganden (4,500 m) was the first Gelugpa Monastery and has remained the main seat of this major Buddhist order ever since. It was founded in 1417 AD by Tsongkhapa, the revered reformer of the Gelugpa order, and images of him and his first two disciples are found throughout the Monastery.

When he died two years later, the Abbotship of the Monastery passed on to these disciples, Gyatsab Je and Kedrub Je. The post King to be known as the Gyanden Tripa and was earned through scholarly merits. It is the Gyanden Tripa, not as one might expect, the Dalai Lama who is the head of the Gelugpa Order. Gyanden means "Joyous" in Tibetan and is the name of the western paradise also known as "Tushita". That is home of "Maitreya" (Tibetan: Jampa) the "Future Buddha".

In the afternoon visit **SERA Monastery**: 5 Km (3 miles) north of Lhasa. Sera's setting is one of the most prettiest. Once a community of more than 5,000 monks, it was virtually extinguished by the Chinese invasion. The restored monastery sits below the brow of the hill on which Tsongkhapa built a hermitage and spent several years meditating. One of the monks disciple started building Sera in 1419 completing in a few years later.

EVE: Tibetan farewell dinner with "**Sing and Dance Show**" and stay overnight at the **Hotel**.

Day 08: Fly back to Kathmandu

Very early morning wake up call and transfer to Gonggar Airport for the Kathmandu bound flight by **CSWA** and arriving in Kathmandu.

On arrival at Kathmandu airport, meet, assist and transfer to the **Hotel**.

****End of Arrangements****