



TIBET
“A HISTORIC JOURNEY”
(Duration: 10 nights / 11 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: Kathmandu (1,300 m) – Zhangmu (2,500 m) 123 Km.
Early morning scenic drive to Kodari Nepal/Tibet Border) through the beautiful Nepalese countryside and start a short walk across the Chinese border. Meet the waiting vehicle and transfer to Zhangmu Immigration.

Zhangmu : Known to Nepali as Khasa, hangs on a cliff face, its boom town architecture having a temporary look: even the monastery roofs are sheathed in corrugated iron sheets.

Overnight at the Hotel.

Day 02: Zhangmu to Shegar (4,350m): 244 Km.
Day drive uphill to the highest plateau of the world with typical view of the Tibetan landscape offering sheer feeling of standing on the roof of the world crossing over Nyalam Pass (3,800m) and Lalung La (5,050m), weather permitting breathtaking panorama of beautiful Himalayan ranges including Mt. Everest (8,848m) but dwarfed by the vastness of the Tibetan plateau.

Shegar : Also called New Tingri, surrounded by Mountains, is another town that lies in the shadow of a great fortress. Even in ruins it is majestic. Seeming to grow out of the craggy brown rock, its sinuous wall bristles with watchtowers like stegosaurus spines. Isolated in 1855 by marauding Nepalese in search of booty, the Gurkhas cut off the dzong’s water supply and settled in for a long siege. Shegar proper has little to recommend it except the highest post office in China.

Overnight at Hotel.

Day 03: Shegar-Shigatse (3,900m): 244 Km.



Continue scenic drive crossing over Gyatchu La (5,220m), the highest pass en-route to Lhasa from where a road to Mt. Kailash bifurcates to the west. **Shigatse:** Shigatse is the second largest town in Tibet and the capital of Tsang, lying 354km west of Lhasa at an altitude of 3810 m.

On the enroute drive visit the famous **Sakya Monastery** : Sakya lies 143 km to the south-west of Xigatse. Sakya Monastery, the centre of the sakya order of Tibetan Buddhism, was founded in 1073 by Konchok Gyalpo during the rule of Sakyapas the priest patron relationship between Tibet and China was established. Sakyapa rulers reigned over Tibet for nearly a hundred years from 13-14th century. Many of its priceless images, fresco statues, holy scriptures remaining today date back to the time of its founding.

Overnight at the Hotel.

Day 04 : Shigatse-Gyantse (3,950m) 90 Km.

Morning sightseeing to the Panchen Lama's In Xigatse, visit the **Tashilhunpo Monastery** : Founded in 1447 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 Panchen Rinpoche. Tashilhunpo has one of the world's largest status - a 9 storeyed gilded bronze statue of Maitriya, the future Buddha.

Later drive to Gyantse. **Gyangtse** is a pastoral town between Lhasa and Xigatse. It is 264 km Southwest of Lhasa (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. Here one visits the Kumbum Stupa and Pelkhor Chode Monastery.

Kumbum : It is one of the most unique and magnificent buildings in Tibet consisting of 6 storeys complete with a Buddhists Hall and a prayer hall. It has 112 chapels and its walls are adorned with religious paintings. Built in the 15th century, it has withstood all battles and revolutions since.

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.

Overnight at the Hotel.

Day 05 : Gyantse-Lhasa (3,650m): 261 Km.

Full day picturesque drive crossing over Karola (5,010m), Kamba La (4,794m), colourful Yamakrok Lake and the Tibetan lifeline river Brahma Putra (Yarlung Tsangpo).

Yamdrok 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.

Lhasa the capital of Tibet at an altitude of 3650 m, is situated on the north bank of the Kyichu River in the province of U (central Tibet). Two high craggy hills stand up in isolation from the valley floor. One, Red Hill, is topped by the Potala Palace and the other, Chockpori or Iron Hill, is crowned by a tall antenna.

Lhasa in Tibetan means "Place of the Gods" and Potala Palace " the residence of the Dalai Lama (the god king), is the earthly representation of the celestial Palace of Avaloketswora, the Buddha of infinite compassion whose incarnation in the human form is believed to be the Dalai Lama. As Tibet's political, religious and cultural centre it is a city truly blessed by the gods, where life is unhurried, is people jovial and yet remaining staunchly independent.

Lhasa consists of two district parts consisting of different architecture, population and lifestyle. Old Lhasa, the Tibetan section, centres around the Jokhang Temple. Its streets are narrow, between white washed stone houses whose walls slope inward as they rise. Windows are framed in black trapezoids, with protruding fan shaped eaves above. Many houses have brightly painted woodwork.

New Lhasa, the Chinese section, was built in the last 30 years around the base of the Potala. It is characterized by straight, broad streets and utilitarian buildings that houses Chinese style department stores and all kinds of government houses.

A Revolutionary Museum below the Potala displays the evidence of Chinese wrought economic and social change during the past 30 years.

Inspite of it's forced pace of modernization, Lhasa has not lost it's soul. It is a friendly city where a Tibetan will always return a smile.

Overnight at the Hotel.

Day 06 :

In Lhasa

Sightseeing tour of **Potala Palace** : This legendary palace built atop a single hill is synonymous with Tibet. First foremost king, Songtsen Gompo, it was 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.

Also visit the **Jokhang Temple** : Situated in the heart of old Lhasa, it houses Tibet's most precious religious relic, a golden Shankyamuni Buddha which was brought as a gift by the Chinese Princess Wen Cheng on the occasion of her wedding to the Tibetan King, Songtsen Gompo.



Surrounding the Jokhang Temple is the bustling Barkhor market place which is the religious and social focus of Lhasa. This, the spiritual centre of Tibet, is also the heart of Lhasa.

Overnight at the Hotel.

Day 07 : Full day sightseeing tour of Lhasa

Drepung Monastery : Drive 8 kms west of Lhasa to Drepung Monastery. Said to be the largest monastery in the world housing over 10,000 monks, it was founded in 1416 by the disciple of Te Tsonkhapa, founder of the Yellow Hat Gelukpa sect of Tibetan Buddhism. The second, third and the fourth Dalai Lamas lived and were entombed here. Drepung in Tibetan means 'Richmound'.

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

The Norbulingkha : The 'Jewel Park' as it is know 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 palaces are richly decorated, creating an atmosphere of peaceful repose.

Overnight at the Hotel.

Day 08 : Excursion to Ganden.

Ganden is located 45 km east of Lhasa along the road that follows the south bank of the Kyi Chu river. It denotes the Paradise of Tushita and the abode of Jampa, The Future Buddha. Ganden is the foremost Monastery of the Gelugpa Sect. It is also the most devastated. Of all the Great Six Monasteries (Ganden, Sera, Drepung, Tashilumpo, Labrang and Kumbum) of the Yellow Hat sect, none suffered as disastrously as Ganden. The ruins here, a result of the Cultural Revolution when artillery and vast quantities of dynamite were deployed, are the most extensive in Tibet. Over the last decade, hunculean efforts have gone into the rebuilding. Before the holocaust, over 2000 monks lived here. Now there are 300.

The monastery, one of Gelugpa's Great six was is built on a ridge called Gokpo Ri, the site where Tsong Khapa first meditated inorder to choose a place for the main monastery of the sect. Ganden's foundation was laid in 1409.

Later return to the hotel in Lhasa and the rest of the day is free.

Overnight at the Hotel.



Day 09 : Lhasa / Tsedang via Samye

After breakfast drive for about 3 hours towards west of Zedang and upon arrival at the ferry crossing point, cross the Tsangpo in a flat bottomed boat for about an hour and then a 30 minute drive in the monastery trucks over rough road to arrive and the enclosed walls of the Samye Monastery.

The Monastery is in a green valley among barren mountains surrounded by a village. Hebori is a small holy mountain to the east. Samye was founded in 779 by Trisong Detsen, Tibet's second religion king after he had invited prominent Buddhists from India including the most famous - Padmasambhava and Santirakchita.

It took over a decade to built Samye 775- 787. Trisong Detsen enacted religious laws placing the monks above the royal law and placing the noble families of Yarlung subject to the monastery. The Yarlung nobles clung to the old Bon Faith. It was the Samye that the famous debate took place between the Chinese and the Indian schools at around 971 or 793 A.D. The Indian view triumphed and was the model adopted for Tibetan Buddhism. From the complex only a part of the Great Hall and the surrounding cloister remain today.

The Great Hall was built in three styles - the lower part in Indian style. The cloister has some south chapel has a statue of Chenrezi and the West chapel houses fierce deities, considered so frightening that their heads are covered.

Later return via the same route i.e. 30 minutes truck ride and the a one hour boat ride across the Tsangpo river and the board the vehicles for the drive to Tsedang. Upon arrival, check into the Hotel.

Overnight at the Hotel.

Day 10: Sightseeing tour of Tsedang

After breakfast drive to Nyethang, a temple built sometimes between 1045 and 1050 by Atisa, an Indian Buddhist teacher who was invited to Tibet by the Kings of Guge, western Tibet in 1042. Nyethang contains three temples - the first houses a large stupa called Namgye Chorten, and a smaller bronza stupa contains the relics of Atisa himself. The third temple is called Tshepame Lhakang, the temple of Amitayus. Atisa 'main disciple Dramton founded the Kadampa sect.

Visit the castle of Yambulakhang, the oldest known dwelling in Tibet and the home of Yarlung Kings. According to legend the castle is supposed to have been built by King Nyatri Tsenpo around 130 B.C.

We also visit Trandruk Monastery built by Songtsen Gampo in 7th century- it is one of his three main surviving monasteries, the others being Jokhang and Ramoche. This is a Gelugpa monastery. One of the chapels houses tapestry of Sakyamuni said to have been made by Wen Cheng, Songtsen Gampo's Chinese wife. The Padmasambhava temple contains a bean painted by Marpa (11th Century) but which probably date from the 16th century. The temple also houses a seed pearl tapestry of Avalokiteshwara.



Overnight at the Hotel.

Day 11:

Lhasa-Kathmandu:

Early morning breakfast and then transfer to airport 02 hrs. drive. Departure of flight for Kathmandu would be approx. 10.00hrs, China Standard Time and arriving Kathmandu at 09.00 hrs. Nepal Standard time. The flight Lhasa / Kathmandu lasts for 01 hour ten minutes. During the flight you will see the following: Yarlung Tsangpo river, Lake Yamdrok, Mt. Kanchenjunga (8586m) and Mt. Makalu (8463m) and Mt. Everest (8848m). Weather permitting).

***End of Arrangements ***