



THE SPIRIT OF TIBET TOUR

(9 nights / 10 days)

Itinerary

Day 01: KATHMANDU / TSEDANG

After breakfast transfer to airport for Kathmandu / Gonggar flight by SZ 408. This fifty-five minutes flight is the world's most spectacular flight viewing Mount Everest, Gauri Shanker, Kanchanjunga, Makalu, etc.

Arrive Gonggar airport and drive 2 hours to Tsedang. This drive is along the Yarlung Tsangpo river - fields of barley and wheat and apple and pear orchards are interspersed with stretches of rocky mountains and sands dunes. Enroute we stop at 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 Jokhag 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 Snow Pigeon Hotel.

Day 02: TSEDANG

Drive west of Tsedang and cross the Tsangpo in a flat bottomed boat then a 45 minute drive over rough road brings you to 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 to 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. Return to Tsedang for the night.

Overnight at the Snow Pigeon Hotel.

Day 03: TSEDANG / LHASA

Drive Tsedang to Lhasa. Enroute visit the Mindroling Monastery.

After the sightseeing tour, continue drive to Lhasa. Upon arrival, check into the Himalaya Hotel (New Wing).

LHASA - The capital city of Lhasa, situated at an altitude of 3607 meters (11,830 feet) lies on the north bank of 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 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.

In spite 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.

Rest of the day is at leisure.

Overnight at the Himalaya Hotel (New Wing).

Day 04: LHASA

AM: Visit Potala Palace - this architectural wonder - a spectacular edifice whose gold roofs soar high above the town and rise more than 300 meters above the valley floor can be seen from all directions for miles around. The present Potala was built mainly in the Fifth Dalai Lama's reign between 1645-1693 and remained the centre of political and religious power for the Dalai Lamas.

With over 1000 rooms, it contained the living quarters of the Dalai Lamas while they lived, and their magnificent golden tombs when they died. Regents, tutors and other high lamas had apartments in the palace too. The Potala held the offices of government, a huge printing house and a seminary run by the elite order of monks who surrounded the God-King to train government officials. Hundreds of elaborately decorated chapels and shrines, halls and corridors contain thousands of gilded statues - Tibet's pantheon of Buddhas, Boddhisattvas, saints and demons.



Today the Potala is a statue museum with 35 caretaker monks, but to many thousands of Tibetan pilgrims it remains a beloved shrine.

PM : 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 Gampo. **JOKHANG** is the spiritual centre of Tibet, its mostly holy place, the destination, over time, of millions of Tibetan pilgrims. Its oldest part dates back from the 7th century A.D. Legend says that Songtsen Gampo, who built the temple, threw his ring into the air, promising to build a temple where it landed. The ring fell into a lake and struck a rock where a white stupa miraculously appeared - an auspicious sign.

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 Himalaya Hotel (New Wing).

Day 05: LHASA

AM : Sightseeing tour of Lhasa including the **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 'Richmond'.

PM: Visit **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.

Continue on to **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 13th and 14th 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 within its spacious walled garden, it contains the main throne hall, an audience hall, the Dalai Lama's private apartment and his mother's apartment.

Overnight at the Himalaya Hotel (New Wing).

Day 06: LHASA / GYANTSE / SHIGATSE

From Lhasa drive to **Gyantse** via the **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 and supports a population of scale-less fish in its non-saline waters. It is about 124 kms from Lhasa. (Packed lunch recommended which can be had



on the way. Enroute pass through 3 major passes called the **Kamba La (4749 m)** and **Karo La (5010 m)** and **Simi La (4300 m)**.

Gyantse: is a pastoral town between Lhasa and Shigatse. It is 264 km Southwest of Lhasa (total 8 hrs 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.

Continue on the 90 kilometer drive to Shigatse on a well tarred road. Enroute visit the Shalu Monastery.

Upon arrival at **Shigatse**, check in at **Shigatse Hotel or Shan Dong Mansion**.

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 Panchen Rinpoche. Tashilhunpo has one of the world's largest status - a 9 storied gilded bronze statue of Maitreiya, the future Buddha.

Overnight at the Shigatse Hotel or Shan Dong Mansion.

Day 07: SHIGATSE / SEGAR (3,900m): 244 Km. / RONGBUK (110 KMS)

Continue scenic drive crossing over Gyatchu La (5,220m), the highest pass enroute to Lhasa from where a road to Mt. Kailash bifurcates to the west.

After about 5 hours of driving arrive at Segar - Also called New Tingri and is surrounded by Mountains. It 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.

After purchasing the National park entry tickets for the participants and vehicles at the National Park Office in Shegar, drive to the check post. Upon clearance head off towards Rongbuk. Firstly, there is a slow ascent to the Gyatso la pass and then a very steep and winding descent for about 2 hours to arrive at a small Tibetan Settlement of Tashi Dzom. From here the trail is more level as we continue to Rongbuk which takes about 1 ½ hour.

Upon arrival, check into the Rongbuk, in Forest Guest House.

Overnight at the Rongbuk, in Forest Guest House.

Day 08: RONGBUK / BEYOND EBC / RONGBUK

Follow the dirt road south; the Dzakar Chu, now much reduced in volume, is on your right. Soon the valley broadens and the road leaves the river to continue its



ascent on the other side, swerving to avoid a rockslide. At the base of the slide is *chorten*; at its top are the ruins of the Samdrupo Nunnery (a small chapel has been rebuilt). The Everest Base Camp is just beyond some moraine hills. The rest of the afternoon is free to explore this area and is possible to take a couple of short excursions beyond the Base Camp upon payment of a fee of US\$ 200.00 per person.

(The treks beyond EBC - Climb the moraines of the Central Rongbuk Glacier, immediately south of the camp, to some small glacier pools. The other is to trek to the Qianjing glacier. Head up a small canyon east of the Base Camp to a rough track that crosses a vast lateral moraine 200 m above camp. Follow this south on a relatively level platform high above the Central Rongbuk Glacier. At the end of the moraine is the Qianjing Glacier; about 4 hours walk from the Base Camp. To the south are the fine views of the Everest North Face.

Later return to the Rongbuk Guest House.

Overnight at the Rongbuk Forest Guest House.

Day 09: RONGBUK / ZHANGMU (4,350m): 294 Km.

Retrace the drive till the 26 kilometer mark and then set off towards the river. Cross the bridge and follow the mountain road to Tingri which can be reached in about 4 ½ hours. From here drive on the highest plateau of the world with typical view of the Tibetan landscape offering sheer feeling of standing on the roof of the world. Cross the Lalung La (5200m), Thong La (5050 m) from where, weather permitting, there are breathtaking panorama of beautiful Himalayan ranges of Shisapangma, Cho Oyu including Mt. Everest (8,848m) but dwarfed by the vastness of the Tibetan plateau.

Descend to the Nyalam Pass (3,800m) and then continue on the 40 kilometer drive to Zhangmu. However, take a short visit to the Milerapa Cave enroute.

Zhangmu (2,500 m): 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 Zhangmu Hotel.

Day 10: ZHANGMU / KATHMANDU (123 Km.)

Early morning, complete China Immigration formalities and then board vehicles for a scenic drive to Kodari Nepal/Tibet Border). Upon arrival at the border, complete Nepal Immigration formalities and then met by representatives from Kathmandu, board the waiting vehicles for a 4 ½ hour drive through the beautiful Nepalese countryside to Kathmandu (**1,300 m**).

****End of Arrangements****

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SUMMITS