

Crossing the Changthang

The 19 day tour from Lhasa to Mt. Kailash and across the Changthang is an exciting trip that takes you to areas that few travelers experience. This adventure starts with a few days exploring the capital city of Lhasa and all the major monasteries and temples there. From Lhasa, you will then go to the turquoise colored holy lake of Yamdrok before visiting the nice town of Gyantse. You will then explore the massive Tashi Lhunpo Monastery in Shigatse, Tibet's second largest city. After Shigatse, you will start exploring the vast wilderness of Western Tibet starting in Saga. From Saga, you will go to Lake Manasarovar, which is holy to both Tibetans and Hindu's. Then you will spend a full day gazing out to Mt. Kailash, Tibet's most famous holy mountain. After Mt. Kailash, you will then wander around the ruins of the ancient Kingdom of Guge. From there, you will travel across the Changthang, Tibet's far northern plateau. This desolate, but ruggedly beautiful area is covered in snow-capped peaks, beautiful valleys and has plenty of wildlife! This itinerary is just a suggestion and can be modified in any way.

Day 1: Lhasa

Welcome to Lhasa! Your guide and driver will meet you at the train station or airport and transfer you to your hotel.

Day 2: Jokhang Temple and the Barkhor Circuit

Lhasa, elevation 3650m, is the holiest city in Tibet and each day pilgrims from across the Tibetan Plateau arrive in the city to worship at one of the many temples found there. You will spend 3 full days exploring the city. The first day you will visit Jokhang Temple, the most famous temple in Tibet. From the rooftop you will see religious pilgrims prostrating in front to the Jowo Buddha statue inside the monastery. Afterwards, you will explore the endless maze of markets and restaurants that line the ancient Barkhor circuit. While exploring the Barkhor circuit, you will rub elbows with Tibetan pilgrims who are prostrating their way around the Tibetan Quarter.

Day 3: Potala Palace and Sera Monastery

In the morning, you will visit the Potala Palace, the most recognizable structure in Tibet. Built in the year 637, the Potala Palace rises 13 stories and has more than 1000 rooms. In the afternoon, you will visit the great monastery of Sera, where monk debates take place each day. If you are interested in hiking, there is a pilgrimage circuit around the monastery that takes about an hour to complete.

Day 4: Drepung Monastery, Ramoche Temple and the Tibetan Quarter

This day you will explore Drepung Monastery. Drepung was formerly the largest monastery in the world and is still one of the 3 most important monasteries in Tibet. Below Drepung is Nechung Monastery, the former home of Tibet's state oracle. In the afternoon, we will visit Ramoche Temple as well as a small nunnery in the Tibetan Quarter.

Day 5: Lhasa-Yamdrok Lake-Gyantse 260kms, 5.5 hours

You will travel from Lhasa to Yamdrok Lake, one of Tibet's holiest and most beautiful lakes. Yamdrok Lake sits at 4450m and is an amazing turquoise color. The 7191m Mt. Nojin Kangtsang can be seen in the distance. After visiting the lake, you will drive to the mid-sized town of Gyantse. Gyantse, elevation 3950m, is famous for its massive hilltop military fort and for the Pelkor Chode Monastery, which has the tallest Tibetan Buddhist stupa in Tibet.

Day 6: Gyantse-Shigatse 90kms, 1.5 hours

In the morning, you will depart Gyantse for Shigatse, Tibet's second largest city. Shigatse, elevation 3840m, is home to the Tashilhunpo Monastery. Along with exploring the monastery, you can also hike the ancient pilgrim circuit along with hundreds of Tibetan worshippers.

Day 7: Shigatse-Saga 450kms, 7 hours

From Shigatse, you will drive to Lhatse where you can explore the Lhatse Chode Monastery and observe the local Tibetan farming culture found in this town. From Lhatse you will begin going through the nomadic regions of western Tibet. Along the way, you will stop at the turquoise colored waters of Ngamring Lake before arriving at Saga, elevation 4490 meters.

Day 8: Saga-Paryang-Lake Manasarovar 485 kms, 8 hours

This day you will continue following the upper reaches of the Brahmaputra River going through vast expanses of grasslands that are home to yaks and sheep before arriving in Paryang, elevation 4590 meters. Afterwards, you will arrive Manasarovar, Tibet's holiest lake, which sits at 4590 meters. Manasarovar is an important pilgrimage destination for Tibetans as well as Hindu's from India and Nepal. From the lake, you can see Kailash in the distance.

Day 9: Lake Manasarovar-Darchen 35kms, 1 hour

In the morning, we will make the short drive to Darchen, the starting point of the trek around Mt. Kailash. From Darchen, there is a short trek to Gyangdrak Monastery, which has a great view of Kailash.

Day 10: Darchen-Zanda 290kms, 6 hours

From Darchen, we will continue driving west towards the ancient Kingdom of Guge. Along the way, you will see small herding villages and the unique landscape of western Tibet.

Day 11: Zanda and the Guge Kingdom 36kms, 1 hour

This day you will explore the ancient Kingdom of Guge located at Tsaparang. This mysterious place is nearly 1200 years old and is one of the wonders of western Tibet. You will be able to spend the full day exploring this very interesting area.

Day 12: Zanda-Ali 190kms, 4 hours

In the morning, you will depart for Ali, the capital town of western Tibet. The landscape along the way will continue to be barren grasslands with desert that is home to sheep and yak herders.

Day 13: Ali-Gegye 115kms, 3 hours

From Ali, you will begin your journey across the Changthang, Tibet's far northern plateau. This sparsely populated region is home to Tibetan nomads and plenty of wildlife.

Day 14: Gegye-Gertse 356kms, 7 hours

This day, you will continue crossing the Changthang. Along the way, the chances of seeing wildlife such as gazelle, wild donkeys, Tibetan antelope and more.

Day 15: Gertse-Tsochen 250kms, 5 hours

The route from Gertse to Tsochen is quite beautiful going through scenic valleys with views of 6000 meter high mountains in the distance. Tsochen is a mid-sized Tibetan nomad trading town with a small monastery called Mendong.

Day 16: Tsochen-Saga 290kms, 6 hours

From Tsochen, you will head south to Saga, where you will meet back up with the main road to Lhasa.

Day 17: Saga-Shigatse 450kms, 7 hours

This day, you will go to Shigatse, the second largest city in Tibet. You will arrive in Shigatse with time to walk the pilgrimage circuit around Tashi Lhunpo Monastery.

Day 18: Shigatse-Lhasa 260kms, 5 hours

The last day of the tour, you will arrive back in Lhasa with enough time to stroll the streets of the Barkhor a few more times to pick up any last minute souvenirs.

Day 19: Depart Lhasa

This itinerary can be modified in any way.