

PLAN
YOUR TRIP

YOUR PLANNING TOOL KIT

Photos, itineraries, lists and suggestions
to help you put together your perfect trip

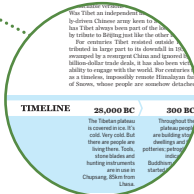
20 Top Experiences	4
Welcome to Tibet	14
Need to Know	16
If You Like	18
Month by Month	21
Itineraries	24
Tours & Permits	29
Regions at a Glance	35

UNDERSTAND
TIBET

GET MORE FROM YOUR TRIP

Learn about the big picture, so you
can make sense of what you see

Tibet Today	272
History	274
Landscapes in the	
Land of Snows	293
The People of Tibet	299
Tibetan Buddhism	307
Tibetan Art	322
The Future of Tibet	330



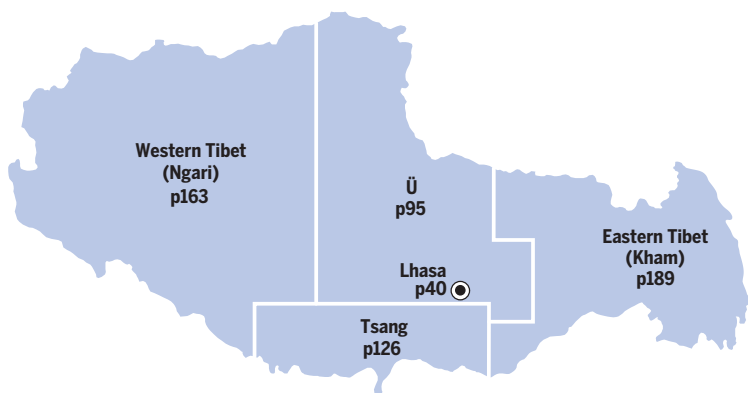
ISBN 978-1-74179-218-8



5 2 8 9 9



9 781741 792188



Directory A-Z	334
Transport	349
Health	361
Language	368
Index	387
Map Legend	394



THIS EDITION WRITTEN AND RESEARCHED BY

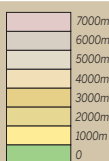
Bradley Mayhew

Michael Kohn, Daniel McCrohan

John Vincent Bellezza

Tibet

ELEVATION



CHINA

XINJIANG

Nam-tso

A taste of the Changtang northern plateau (p101)

Potala Palace

Spectacular fortress home of the Dalai Lamas (p52)

Drepung & Sera Monasteries

Great monastic cities (p78)

Tsaparang

Lost kingdom of exquisite Kashmiri-style art (p183)

Changtang Nature Preserve

Changtang (Northern Plateau)

INDIA

Mt Kailash

Asia's most sacred mountain (p175)

Delhi

NEPAL

Friendship Highway

Epic Lhasa-Kathmandu overland trip (p353)

Lucknow

INDIA

Mt Everest

Unsurpassed views of the North Face (p154)

Kathmandu

BANGLADESH

Gyantse Kumbum

A Tibetan architectural and artistic masterpiece (p132)

The external boundaries of India on this map have not been authenticated and may not be correct

Top Experiences >

Train to Lhasa

The world's highest railway (p356)

Barkhor

Endlessly fascinating pilgrim circuit (p42)

Ganden Monastery

A great day trip from Lhasa (p89)

Riwoche Tsuglhakhang

Hidden highlight of the east (p209)

Jokhang Temple

The spiritual heart of Lhasa (p45)

Samye Monastery

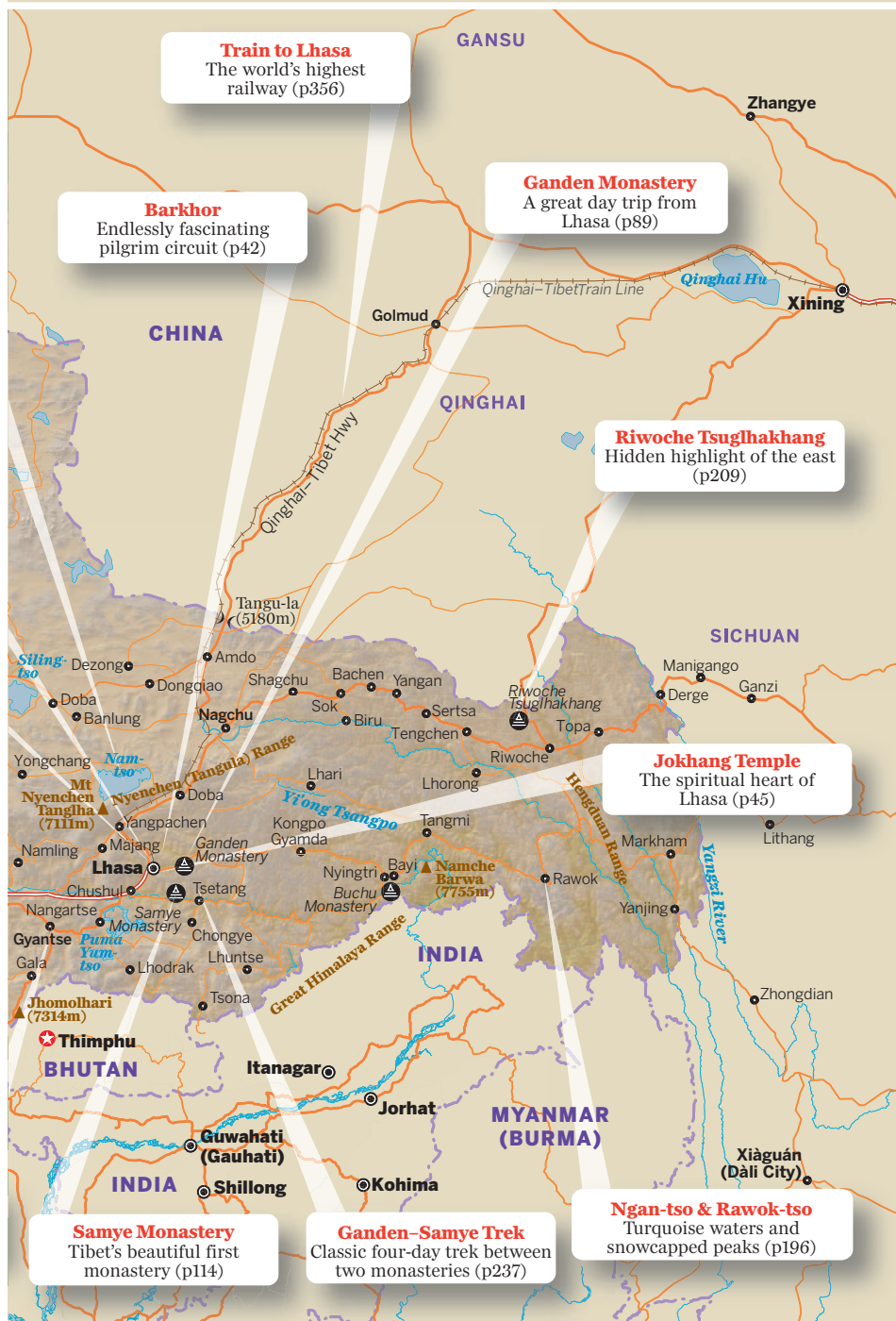
Tibet's beautiful first monastery (p114)

Ganden-Samye Trek

Classic four-day trek between two monasteries (p237)

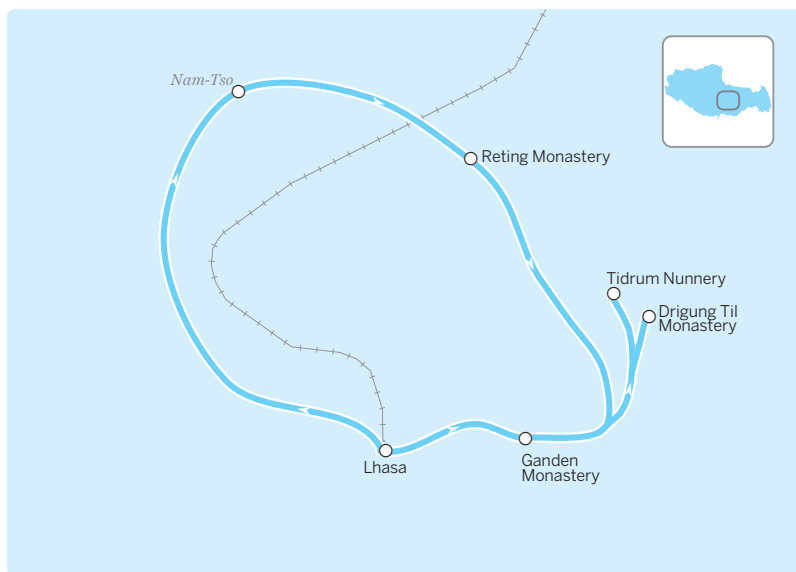
Ngan-tso & Rawok-tso

Turquoise waters and snowcapped peaks (p196)



itineraries

Whether you have seven days or 40, these itineraries provide a starting point for the trip of a lifetime. Want more inspiration? Head online to lonelyplanet.com/thorntree to chat with other travellers.



10 Days to Two Weeks Lhasa & Around

» The chief goal of travellers is Lhasa itself, the spiritual heart of Tibet. The **train ride** from Xining or Běijīng is a great way to get to Lhasa, but ticket demand in high season means it's easier to leave Tibet by train rather than arrive.

There's enough to see in and around Lhasa to occupy at least a week. Highlights include the **Potala Palace** (a Unesco World Heritage Site), the **Jokhang Temple** and the **Barkhor** pilgrimage circuit. The huge monastic institutions of **Drepung** and **Sera** lie on the edge of town, and **Ganden Monastery** is a fantastic day trip away.

There are plenty of excursions to be made from Lhasa. An overnight return trip to stunning **Nam-tso** offers a break from peering at Buddhist deities, though you should allow at least a few days in Lhasa to acclimatise before heading out to the lake. Add a day or two and return via the timeless and little-visited **Reting Monastery** to avoid backtracking.

With another couple of days, visit atmospheric **Drigung Til Monastery** and **Tidrum Nunnery**, both east of Lhasa. You can visit these directly from Reting or on a two- or three-day excursion from Lhasa.



Seven Days

Lhasa to Kathmandu

The 1300km Friendship Hwy between Lhasa and Kathmandu in Nepal is a classic overland journey and easily the most popular travellers' route through Tibet. It allows excellent detours to central Tibet's most important monasteries, plus views of the world's highest peak, and it's paved all the way! Combine it with the train route into Tibet for an epic overland tour.

From Lhasa you can head straight to the coiling scorpion-lake of **Yamdrok-tso** and take in the views from **Samding Monastery** before heading over the glacier-draped Karo-la pass to **Gyantse**. This town is well worth a full day: the *kumbum* (literally '100,000 images') chörten is a must-see and the fort is a fun scramble. A 90-minute drive away is Shigatse, with its impressive **Tashilhunpo Monastery**. **Shalu Monastery** is a worthwhile half-day trip from Shigatse, especially if you have an interest in Tibetan art.

A popular side trip en route to Kathmandu is to brooding **Sakya**, a small monastery town located just 25km off the Friendship Hwy. Overnight here and investigate the northern ruins.

The most popular excursion from the road is to **Rongphu Monastery** and **Everest Base Camp**, just a few hours from the main highway. An overnight here at 5000m guarantees both clear views and a pounding headache. It's not a good idea to stay here if you've come straight from Nepal, as the altitude gain is simply too rapid to be considered safe.

After Everest most people take the opportunity to stay the night in old **Tingri**, with its wonderful views of Mt Cho Oyu, before the scenic roller-coaster ride to **Nyalam** and nearby Milarepa's Cave. One interesting detour is to head east to overnight at **Peiku-tso**, a stunning turquoise lake nestled at the base of hulking Shishapangma. The highway drops like a stone off the dusty plateau, past misty waterfalls and lush green gorges to **Zhāngmù** and the gates of the Indian subcontinent at the Nepali border.



15 to 21 Days

Mt Kailash Pilgrimage

Much talked about but little visited, **Mt Kailash** occupies one of the most remote and sacred corners of Asia. Until very recently this trip entailed a rugged 4WD expedition, but the increasing number of paved roads under construction on the southern route is gradually making this a much more comfortable ride.

If you just want to visit Mt Kailash and Lake Manasarovar, the most direct route is the southern road (870km), a four-day drive from Lhasa along the spine of the Himalayas. Most people stop en route at Shigatse, Saga and Paryang, though Zhongba and Lhatse are also possibilities. Figure on a minimum of two weeks. See the first half of the Lhasa to Kathmandu itinerary for worthwhile extra stops in Gyantse and Sakya.

A *kora* (pilgrimage circuit) of the mountain will take three days and you should allow at least half a day afterwards to relax at **Lake Manasarovar**, probably at Chiu Monastery. You could easily spend a half-day at Darchen visiting Gyangdrak and Seylung monasteries. After the *kora* pilgrims traditionally then visit the sacred hot springs at **Tirthapuri**.

An ambitious but rewarding alternative is to travel one way to/from Lhasa along the longer (1700km) northern route to **Ali**, making a loop that will take three weeks. The six-day drive is astonishingly scenic but the towns en route are mostly charmless, so consider camping somewhere such as **Tagyel-tso**. From Ali you can make a good day trip to **Pangong-tso** and **Rutok Monastery**.

You'll need at least three extra days if you want to visit the Guge kingdom sites around Zanda: one day from Ali, one day to Mt Kailash (or vice versa) and at least one day to visit the sites. You need most of a day to explore the otherworldly ruins at **Tsaparang**, plus a few hours in Zanda at **Thöling Monastery**. En route to Kailash, adventurers could add on an extra day to explore the Bön school Gurugyam Monastery and the amazing ruins of the ancient Shangshung kingdom in the **Khyunglung Valley**.

Finally, if you are heading to Nepal from Mt Kailash, it's well worth taking the short cut south via stunning **Peiku-tso** and its views of Shishapangma to join the Friendship Hwy near Nyalam.



18 to 21 Days

Eastern Tibet Loop

Equally remote, but completely different scenically, are the wild valleys and gorges of eastern Tibet. Road conditions are best from late March to late April, and late September to early November. It's possible to enter or leave Tibet on a one-way trip but you can't beat the comprehensiveness of a loop route. The only snag is that permits can be hard to get even on a group tour. This is probably a trip for people who have already visited the major sights of central Tibet.

From Lhasa the southern route heads eastwards over a high pass to the beautiful but touristed lake of **Draksum-tso** and the fascinating Kongpo region, with its lovingly restored **Lamaling Temple**. From here the road climbs to the **Serkhyim-la**, for excellent views in good weather of Namche Barwa, before dropping down into the dramatic gorges north of the Yarlung Tsangpo. There's some great accommodation on lake Ngan-tso, or camp by the shores of turquoise **Rawok-tso**, from where you can visit nearby glaciers; otherwise Pomi and Pasho are the logical overnight stops. Swing north over the high passes into the deep red-hued gorges of the Salween and Mekong Rivers. Reach the modern town of **Chamdo** after five or six days and rest for a day, visiting the large Golden Jampaling Monastery.

From Chamdo the northern route continues three or four days westwards to **Nagchu**, likely overnighing at **Riwoche**, Tengchen and Sok, all the time gradually climbing to the high-altitude pasturelands of Amdo. This road less taken passes the impressive temple of the **Riwoche Tsuglhakhang** and the incredibly sited **Tsedru Monastery**, the largest Bön monastery in Tibet.

From Nagchu visit **Nam-tso** and **Reting Monastery** en route to Lhasa (allow three to four days), though the direct road can be completed in a day's drive if you are short on time.

A shorter and cheaper five- to seven-day loop itinerary from Lhasa to Kongpo could take in **Drigung Til Monastery**, Draksum-tso and Lamaling Temple, overnighing in Bayi before swinging back via Tsetang and Samye. Adventurous add-ons include a visit to sacred Bönri mountain, the remote oracle lake of **Lhamo La-tso**.



Two to Three Weeks

Overland Routes to Lhasa

There are three main overland routes from the east: the northern route and southern route through Sichuān and the shorter Yúnnán route. The Tibetan areas of western Sichuān and northwestern Yúnnán do not require travel permits; the eastern Tibetan Autonomous Region does and these are sometimes tricky to get, even on an organised tour. If your 4WD has to come from Lhasa to pick you up, you can save some money by meeting your guide close to the TAR border at Bātáng, Derge or Dēqín.

The northern route through Sichuān starts from Kāngdīng and passes the grasslands and monastery of **Tagong** and several large monasteries around **Gānzī**. The timeless printing press of **Derge** is a day's ride further but there are plenty of exciting excursions en route, including to the remote **Dzogchen Monastery** and the pretty **Yihun La-tso**. From Derge you cross into Tibet proper over some wild passes to **Chamdo**, the biggest town in eastern Tibet. For the route west of Chamdo, see the second half of the eastern Tibet loop; alternatively travel south to join the southern route.

The southern route through Sichuān runs west from Kāngdīng past the important Khampa town and monastery of **Lithang**, home to an epic horse festival in August, and then low-lying **Bathang**. The road up into Tibet via Markham and over concertina passes to Pomda ranks as one of the wildest and remotest in Asia. For the route west, reverse the first half of the eastern Tibet loop itinerary, overnighting in Markham/Dzogang, Pasho and Pomi.

A popular alternative option is to start in Yúnnán at the Tibetan town of Zhōngdiàn (Gyeltang), from where it's a day's ride to Deqin. From here you cross into the Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR) near the salt pans of Yánjǐng; then it's 111km to Markham on the Sichuān southern route.

From Zhōngdiàn to Lhasa, allow a week in a 4WD. From Chengdu it takes 10 days to two weeks along either the northern or southern route. You'll pass a number of hardcore Chinese cyclists en route.

Contributing Author

John Vincent Bellezza John has been living and travelling in Tibet and the Himalaya since 1983. A leading authority in the pre-Buddhist civilization of Tibet, he is affiliated with the Tibet Center, University of Virginia, as a senior research fellow. He has been charting Zhang Zhung and Sumpa, fabled cultures of Upper Tibet that had attained a surprising level of sophistication more than 2000 years ago. His most recent work, *Antiquities of Zhang Zhung*, is freely available online at <http://thlib.org>. He researched the Tibetan Treks chapter for this book. More information about John's life and work are available on his website: <http://tibetarchaeology.com>.



OUR STORY

A beat-up old car, a few dollars in the pocket and a sense of adventure. In 1972 that's all Tony and Maureen Wheeler needed for the trip of a lifetime – across Europe and Asia overland to Australia. It took several months, and at the end – broke but inspired – they sat at their kitchen table writing and stapling together their first travel guide, *Across Asia on the Cheap*. Within a week they'd sold 1500 copies. Lonely Planet was born.

Today, Lonely Planet has offices in Melbourne, London and Oakland, with more than 600 staff and writers. We share Tony's belief that 'a great guidebook should do three things: inform, educate and amuse'.

OUR WRITERS



Bradley Mayhew

Coordinating Author, Lhasa, Western Tibet, Tibetan Treks (Mt Kailash), Gateway Cities

A self-professed mountain junkie, Bradley has been visiting the Tibetan plateau for 20 years now, since studying Chinese for four long years at Oxford University. So far he's been horse trekking in Kham, travelled for four months in Bhutan, gumpa-stomped in Ladakh, trekked in Dolpo, done the Kailash kora twice and was last seen heading to Sikkim for Lonely Planet's India guide. Bradley has coordinated the last four editions of this guide and is also the co-author of over 25 Lonely Planet titles, including *Bhutan*, *Nepal*, *Trekking in the Nepal Himalaya* and *Central Asia*. He has lectured on Central Asia to the Royal Geographical Society and was recently the subject of a five-part Arte/SWR documentary retracing the route of Marco Polo from Venice to Xanadu, via Iran, Afghanistan and Central Asia. See what he's currently up to at www.bradleymayhew.blogspot.com.



Michael Kohn

U, Tsang Michael studied journalism at UCSB and took time off in 1994 to make a round-the-world journey that included a trip to Tibet. After roaming the Yarlung Tsangpo Valley he went overland to Nepal on an eight-day epic ride across the plateau. The trip had him hooked on Tibet. Michael returned to Tibet in 2004 to update the 6th edition of this guide. That time he covered Ü and Kham provinces before a second overland journey to Nepal. Michael has researched Lonely

Planet guides to China, Central Asia and Mongolia and has written two books of his own: *Dateline Mongolia: An American Journalist in Nomads Land*; and *Lama of the Gobi*, the first biography of Mongolia's famed monk Danzan Ravjaa. Michael is currently based in Ulaanbaatar with wife Baigal and daughter Molly.



Daniel McCrohan

Eastern Tibet, Overland Routes from Sichuan Daniel worked as journalist in the UK for seven years before turning his hand to travel writing. An Asia fanatic, he has been travelling regularly to the Tibetan plateau ever since he moved to China six years ago. He lives with his wife and two children in Beijing, but makes forays into the more remote pockets of western China as often as he can. Daniel has co-written Lonely Planet guides to China, Tibet, India and Shanghai. He also

worked as a presenter for Lonely Planet TV's *Best in China* series. His research trip for this book was detailed every step of the way on <http://twitter.com/danielmccrohan> – the first time Lonely Planet has commissioned an author to tweet! To find out more about Daniel, visit his website: <http://danielmccrohan.com>.

OVER MORE PAGE WRITERS

Published by Lonely Planet Publications Pty Ltd

ABN 36 005 607 983

8th edition – March 2011

ISBN 978 1 74179 218 8

© Lonely Planet 2011 Photographs © as indicated 2011

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Printed in Singapore

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be copied, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form by any means, electronic, mechanical, recording or otherwise, except brief extracts for the purpose of review, and no part of this publication may be sold or hired, without the written permission of the publisher. Lonely Planet and the Lonely Planet logo are trademarks of Lonely Planet and are registered in the US Patent and Trademark Office and in other countries. Lonely Planet does not allow its name or logo to be appropriated by commercial establishments, such as retailers, restaurants or hotels. Please let us know of any misuses: lonelyplanet.com/ip.

Although the authors and Lonely Planet have taken all reasonable care in preparing this book, we make no warranty about the accuracy or completeness of its content and, to the maximum extent permitted, disclaim all liability arising from its use.

© Lonely Planet Publications Pty Ltd. To make it easier for you to use, access to this chapter is not digitally restricted. In return, we think it's fair to ask you to use it for personal, non-commercial purposes only. In other words, please don't upload this chapter to a peer-to-peer site, mass email it to everyone you know, or resell it. See the terms and conditions on our site for a longer way of saying the above - 'Do the right thing with our content.'