

Tibetan Treks

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Why Go?

Tibet, the highest land on earth, is a trekker's dream. Its towering mountains, deep valleys and verdant forests offer unbounded opportunities for walking. On foot the joys of the Tibetan landscape are heightened and immediate, and all other modes of transport pale in comparison. The wonders of Tibet's natural environment are enhanced by the people met along the trail, heirs to an ancient and fascinating way of life. By plying the highland paths one can enter into the same solemn relationship with nature that has sustained Tibetans through the ages.

When to Trek

The best time to trek in Tibet is during the warmer half of the year. May and June are excellent months without much rain or snowfall but some high alpine passes may still be closed. July and August are the hottest months of the year, but they tend to be rainy and this can make walking messy and trails harder to find. September and October are excellent months for trekking, but in high areas the nights are cold and early snow is always a possibility.

PLANNING YOUR TREK

For all its attractions, Tibet is a formidable place where even day walks involve survival skills and generous portions of determination. The remoteness of Tibet combined with its extreme climate poses special challenges for walkers – and unique rewards. As it's situated on the highest plateau on earth and crisscrossed by the world's loftiest mountains, nothing comes easily and careful preparation is all important. Even on the most popular treks, which can involve several days of travel without any outside help, high passes up to 5600m are crossed.

Cities such as Lhasa and Shigatse provide bases from which to equip and launch treks. Walking the classic treks presented here will serve you well. Should you decide to venture further afield, there are certainly many more frontiers beckoning the experienced, well-equipped trekker.

It's a good idea to budget in one or two extra days for your trek, especially if a lot of road travel is needed to get to the trailhead: roads can be blocked, especially in the wet summer months. If on your own, you might also need additional time hiring local guides and beasts of burden.

Trekkers must be prepared for extremes in climate, even in the middle of summer. A hot, sunny day can turn cold and miserable in a matter of minutes, especially at higher elevations. Night temperatures above 4700m routinely fall below freezing, even in July and August. At other times of the year it gets even colder. In midwinter in northwestern Tibet, minimum temperatures reach -40°C . Yet Tibet is a study in contrasts, and in summer a scorching sun and hot, blustery winds can make even the hardest walker scurry for any available shade. Between the two extremes, the Tibetan climate – cool and dry – is ideal for

walking, but always be prepared for the worst.

Before embarking on a trek, make sure you're up to the challenge of high-altitude walking through rugged country. Test your capabilities by going on day walks in the hills around Lhasa and Shigatse. Attempt a hike to the top of a small mountain such as Bumpa Ri, the prayer-flag-draped peak on the far side of the Kyi-chu from Lhasa.

What to Bring

There is a great deal to see while trekking and you will be revitalised by the natural surroundings, but you must be prepared for extremes in weather and terrain. The time of year and the places in which you choose to walk will dictate the equipment you need.

CLOTHING & FOOTWEAR

As a minimum, you will need basic warm clothing, including a hat, scarf, gloves, down jacket, long underwear, warm absorbent socks, all-weather shell and sun hat, as well as comfortable and well-made pants and shirts. Women may want to add a long skirt to their clothing list. Bring loose-fitting clothes that cover your arms, legs and neck, and a wide-brimmed hat like the ones Tibetans wear. For information on culturally appropriate dress, see the box, p300.

If you attempt winter trekking, you will certainly need more substantial mountaineering clothing. Many people opt for synthetic-pile clothing, but also consider wool or sheep fleece, which have proven themselves in the mountains of Tibet for centuries. One of your most important assets will be a pair of strong, well-fitting hiking boots. And remember to break them in before starting the trek!

TREKKING DISCLAIMER

Although the authors and publisher have done their utmost to ensure the accuracy of all information in this guide, they cannot accept any responsibility for any loss, injury or inconvenience sustained by people using this book. They cannot guarantee that the tracks and routes described here have not become impassable for any reason in the interval between research and publication.

The fact that a trip or area is described in this guidebook does not mean that it is safe for you and your trekking party. You are ultimately responsible for judging your own capabilities in the conditions you encounter.