



# Understand Tibet

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Between the economic boom and the political unrest, what does China's 'great leap west' mean for Tibet?

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Follow the transformation of Tibet from a warring empire to a Buddhist nation, and its perennially complex relationship with China.

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The Tibetan plateau is home to species on the brink of extinction as well as resources vital for the planet's future.

## **THE PEOPLE OF TIBET ..... 299**

Nomadic lifestyle, exiled communities, pilgrimage tradition – learn about the various unique facets of Tibetan identity.

## **TIBETAN BUDDHISM..... 307**

Before immersing yourself in the monasteries and temples, get an understanding of the religion that permeates everything in Tibet.

## **TIBETAN ART ..... 322**

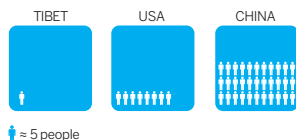
Buddhism is the dominant inspiration in Tibetan art, from masked dances and poems of lamas, to chörtens, murals and mandalas.

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Does Tibet's best hope for the future lie in the international community, in reincarnation or in its traditional culture?



## population per sq km



# Tibet Today

There is an increasing economic and social divide in Tibet. Per capita disposable income currently stands at over US\$1800 in the towns, but only US\$460 in the countryside.

Change is afoot in Tibet. The economy is booming; extended train links, airports and paved roads are revolutionising transport on the plateau; and Tibet's urban areas are expanding at an unprecedented rate. As part of its 'great leap west', the Chinese government has poured billions of US dollars into Tibet's infrastructure and resettled 1.3 million Tibetans in new housing, while a domestic tourist boom is fuelling hotel and restaurant construction across the plateau.

In most parts of the world this would all be good news, but herein lies Tibet and China's conundrum. Alongside the short-term tourists has come a flood of Chinese immigrants, whom Tibetans claim are the real beneficiaries of Tibet's economic boom. Although no figures are available, it is obvious that many Chinese people – attracted by preferential loans and tax rates, a less strictly enforced one-child policy, stipends for a hardship posting and easy business opportunities – are setting up shop in urban centres all over Tibet.

As the face of Tibet changes, many Tibetans feel they are becoming increasingly marginalised in their own land. China reminds them that it has brought in education, health and infrastructure, and spent millions renovating monasteries. Tibetan groups maintain that it is mostly Chinese immigrants who run Tibet's businesses, and that monasteries remain under tight political control and exist largely for tourism. The Chinese counter that they are just trying to bring economic prosperity to one of its most backward provinces, at a large financial loss. (Then everyone storms out of the room.)

Tibet's long-simmering tensions boiled over on 10 March 2008, the anniversary of the Dalai Lama's flight into exile, kicking off several days of protests by monks from Lhasa's big monasteries. As protest turned to violence, at least 19 people, mostly Han Chinese, were killed in rioting

## Dos & Don'ts

- » Don't wear brief skirts or shorts, especially at religious sites.
- » Don't point at people or statues with your finger, use your full upturned hand.
- » Don't pat children on the head, as the head is considered sacred.
- » Always circle a Buddhist monastery building or chörten clockwise.

## Top Books

**The Open Road: The Global Journey of the Fourteenth Dalai Lama** (Pico Iyer) An engaging look at the warmth and contradictions of the 14th Dalai Lama.

**Fire Under the Snow** (Palden Gyatso) A moving