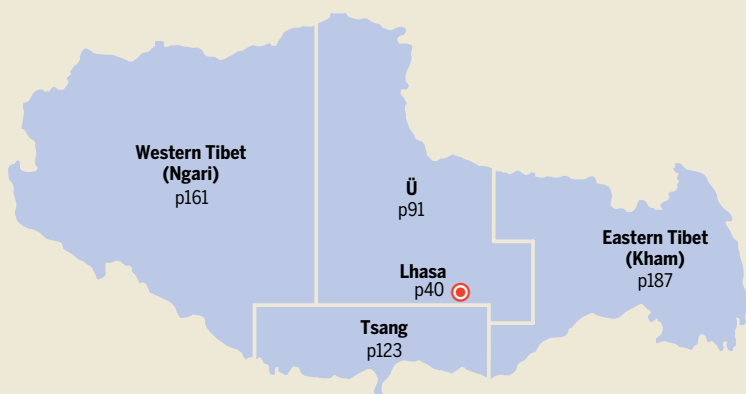




# Tibet



THIS EDITION WRITTEN AND RESEARCHED BY

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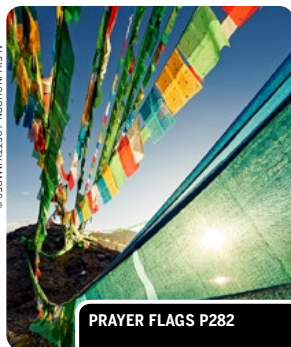
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A PILGRIM HOLDING A  
PRAYER WHEEL AND BEADS



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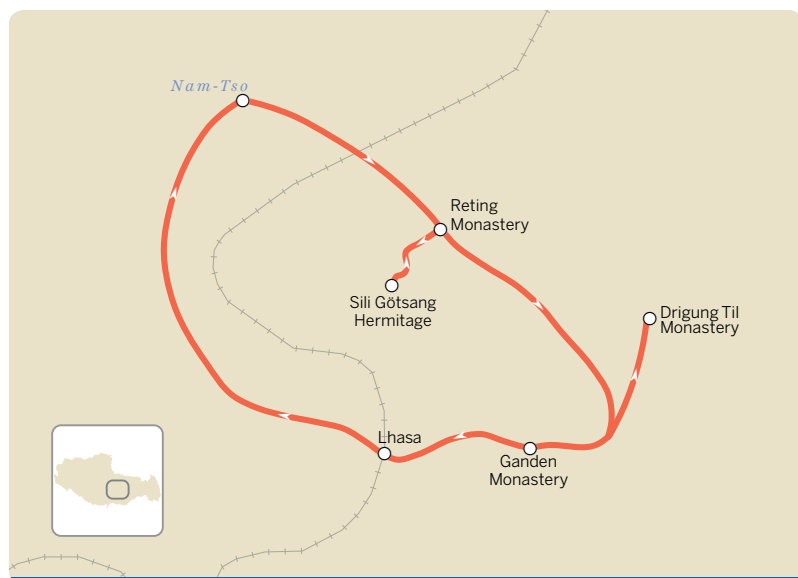
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# Itineraries



## Lhasa & Around

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.

Plenty of excursions can be made from Lhasa. An overnight return trip to stunning **Nam-tso** offers a break from peering at Buddhist deities, though allow a few days in Lhasa to acclimatise before heading out here. If you add three days you can loop back to Lhasa via the timeless and little-visited **Reting Monastery**, the amazing cliffside **Sili Götsang Hermitage** and the atmospheric **Drigung Til Monastery**, visiting **Ganden Monastery** en route to Lhasa.

To get way off the beaten track, explore the monasteries between Reting and Drigung Til, or around Nyima Jiangre.

9  
DAYS

## Lhasa to Kathmandu

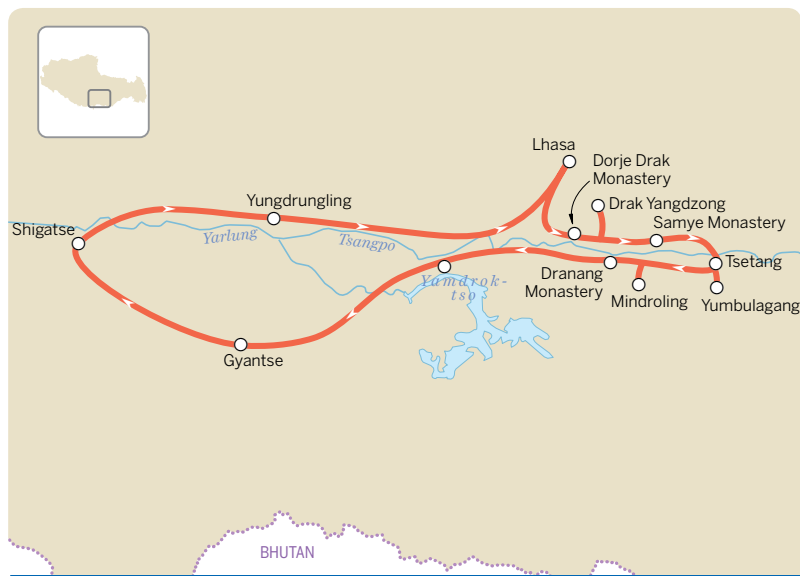
The 1300km Friendship Hwy between Lhasa and Kathmandu in Nepal is a classic overland journey and easily the most popular travellers' route through Tibet. It allows excellent detours to central Tibet's most important monasteries, plus views of the world's highest peak, and it's paved all the way! Combine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

From Lhasa you can head straight to the coiling-scorpion-shaped 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 short detour en route, 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 you'll have time to investigate the northern ruins.

The most popular excursion from the highway is to **Rongphu Monastery** and **Everest Base Camp**, just a few hours from the main highway. An overnight stay 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 because 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 north 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 **Zhangmu** and the gates of the Indian subcontinent at the Nepali border.

8  
DAYS

## Yarlung Tsangpo Valley Loop

If your time or funds are limited, you can't get much more bang for your buck than a short trip along the Yarlung Tsangpo Valley. The valley is just an hour from Lhasa and yet there are loads of surprisingly off-the-beaten-track destinations here. If you only have two or three days stick to the main valley sights; alternatively continue to Gyantse and Shigatse for a weeklong loop.

From **Lhasa** head south to the airport and then swing into the northern side of the valley, stopping first at charming **Dorje Drak Monastery**, with its dramatic views of sand dunes and the mazelike braids of the river. To get off the beaten track, make the overnight trip up the side Drak valley to the nunnery and caves of **Drak Yangdzong**, where you can join pilgrims as they squeeze themselves up wooden ladders and through narrow tunnels.

Next up is **Samye Monastery**, one of Tibet's great highlights and a fine place to over-night. Take in the morning views from Hepo Ri and then continue to the modern city of **Tsetang** to pick up permits. Budget a full day to visit the Yarlung Valley via Trandrak Monastery, **Yumbulagang** and the ruins of Rechung-puk.

Headed back towards Lhasa, the first stop is **Mindroling**, one of Tibet's most important Nyingmapa-school *gompas* (monasteries) and home to a monastery guesthouse. Nearby **Dranang Monastery** will appeal to art lovers with its important Pala-era wall murals. History buffs will want to make the short hike to the ruins of Jamapaling chörten, a sobering monument to the senseless destruction of the Cultural Revolution.

From here Lhasa's Gongkar airport is less than an hour away. Alternatively consider heading south over the Khamba-la to dramatic **Yamdrok-tso** and then over the Karo-la to **Gyantse**. Continue the next day to **Shigatse**, spending a day at Tashilunpo Monastery and kora, and then return to Lhasa or the airport via the Bön monastery of **Yungdrungling**.



**21**  
DAYS

## Mt Kailash Pilgrimage

Much talked about but little visited, Mt Kailash occupies one of the most remote and sacred corners of Asia. Once a rugged 4WD expedition, the ride out west is now much more comfortable thanks to a smooth, new paved road.

If you just want to visit Mt Kailash and Lake Manasarovar, the most direct route is along 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. Estimate a minimum of two weeks and consider 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 they complete the kora, pilgrims traditionally visit the sacred hot springs at Tirthapuri.

An ambitious but rewarding alternative is to travel 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 add the Guge kingdom sites around Zanda: you need most of a day to explore the otherworldly ruins at **Tsaparang**, plus a few hours in Zanda at **Thöling Monastery**. Adventurers could add an extra day on the way to Kailash, 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**.



## Eastern-Tibet Taster

For a completely different view of Tibet, head out to the wild forested valleys and gorges of eastern Tibet. Current permit restrictions have closed the epic overland routes through Kham to Sichuān province to all non-Chinese but you can still get a taste of the east by visiting the Kongpo region. Road conditions are best from late March to late April, and late September to early November.

From **Lhasa** a logical first step is the detour to **Drigung Til Monastery**, where you can overnight before continuing eastwards over a high pass to the beautiful but touristed lake of **Draksum-tso** at the entrance to the fascinating Kongpo region. The Swiss-style alpine scenery is like nothing you'll see in central or western Tibet. The lovingly restored **Lamaling Temple** is worth a visit and you could make an adventurous visit to sacred **Bönri** mountain.

From here the road climbs to the Serkhym-la, for excellent views in good weather of 7755m Namche Barwa, before winding down switchbacks into the cultivated fields and the lovely alpine village of **Tashigang**, which offers the rare chance of overnighing in a Tibetan homestay. The dramatic scenery continues as the fragile road inches its way through dramatic mist-drenched gorges north of the Yarlung Tsangpo.

The 800-year-old **Bakha Monastery** is well worth a stop before you reach the twin lakes of **Rawok**. There's some great accommodation right on scenic lake Ngan-tso, or camp by the shores of turquoise Rawok-tso, from where you can visit nearby glaciers.

Permit regulations mean you now have to return towards Lhasa, likely overnighing in the bland Chinese city of Bāyī en route. If you have a few more days consider swinging south from Rutok over the newly connected Magong-la pass into the Olkhar Valley. From here you can head back to Lhasa via **Samye** and **Dorje Drak** monasteries or fly out of Gongkar Airport.





## 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 Franklin, London, Melbourne, Oakland, Beijing and Delhi, with more than 600 staff and writers. We share Tony's belief that 'a great guidebook should do three things: inform, educate and amuse'.

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