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Tibetan
PHRASEBOOK & DICTIONARY

PRONUNCIATION • MEETING PEOPLE • GETTING AROUND
ACCOMMODATION • INTERESTS • TREKKING • FOOD • HEALTH

5TH EDITION
Published February 2014
First Published October 1987

lonelyplanet.com
UK £4.99
USA $8.99

ISBN 978-1-74321-183-0

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about the author

Sandup Tsering is a Tibetan Buddhist Scholar, interpreter and language teacher, and was born in Purang in Western Tibet. As a result of the Chinese invasion of Tibet in 1959, his parents fled to India, where they live in a refugee settlement. Sandup moved to Australia in 1984. He has a Bachelor of Arts and a Masters in Buddhism and was the President of the Tibetan Community of Victoria for five years from 1993 until 1998.

from the author

My special thanks goes to Ven Thupten Donyo and Kelsang Dhondup for their assistance with typing Tibetan script, and my wife and children for their support. I would also like to thank Alo Bhuti, Sonam Dolkar and Lobsang Dhargye for their help and input.

from the publisher

Scaling the heights of the *Tibetan phrasebook* was no small task. Sally Steward, Peter D’Onghia and Quentin Frayne arranged all necessary permits and Emma Koch helped with initial preparations. Editor Sophie Putman came on board to organise equipment and supplies, while proofreader Adrienne Costanzo lent her keen eye to ensure all went as planned. Experienced trekkers Karina Coates, Karin Vidstrup Monk and Rachel Williams joined the party and offered support across the most challenging terrain. Jim Jenkin served as a guide along the entire trail, Ben Handicott proved a dependable porter and Annelies Mertens guaranteed no-one was lost for words. Hunor Csutoros provided the trusty map, while Meg Worby contributed to navigation plans with her clever contents. Fabrice Rocher coordinated the final ascent and designers Belinda Campbell, Patrick Marris, Yukiyoshi Kamimura and David Kemp ensured it went without a hitch. Yukiyoshi’s talented illustrations of the Tibetan people, flora and fauna, inspired us all. The result: a euphoric summit celebration with châng all round.
## CONTENTS

### INTRODUCTION ....................................................9
How to Use this Phrasebook................ 10
Abbreviations ..................... 10
Legend............................ 11

### PRONUNCIATION ................................................13
Transliteration..................... 13
Vowels ............................... 13
Consonants ........................ 14
The Tibetan Writing System ... 15
Tones............................... 18
Stress ................................. 18

### GRAMMAR ...........................................................19
Word Order ....................... 19
To Be ................................. 28
Articles ............................... 19
To Have ............................. 29
Grammatical Terms .......... 20
Modals ............................... 29
Nouns................................ 21
Key Verbs ............................ 30
Demonstratives................... 22
Questions ........................... 32
Adjectives........................... 22
Negatives ............................ 34
Pronouns ............................ 24
Conveying ‘Yes’ & ‘No’ ....... 35
Possessives ......................... 25
Postpositions ....................... 35
Verbs ................................. 26
Conjunctions ...................... 36

### MEETING PEOPLE .................................................37
You Should Know .............. 37
Cultural Differences ............ 47
Greetings & Goodbyes ........ 38
Age................................. 48
Civilities .......................... 39
Occupations ....................... 48
Forms of Address .............. 41
Feelings ............................. 51
Body Language................. 41
Breaking the Language Barrier 52
First Encounters............... 43
Staying in Touch ................... 53
Making Conversation .......... 43

### GETTING AROUND ..............................................55
Finding Your Way ............... 55
Bus ................................. 60
Taxi .................................... 57
Car ................................. 61
Buying Tickets ..................... 58
Bicycle ............................... 63
Air ................................. 59

### ACCOMMODATION .............................................65
Finding Accommodation .... 65
Complaints .......................... 70
Booking Ahead .................... 66
Checking Out ...................... 72
Checking In ........................ 66
Renting .............................. 73
Requests & Queries.......... 68
# Contents

## AROUND TOWN
- Looking For .................................................. 75
- At the Bank ..................................................... 76
- At the Post Office ............................................ 77
- Telecommunications ................................. 79

## FAMILYS
- Questions .......................................................... 91
- Replies .............................................................. 92
- Family ............................................................ 93

## INTERESTS
- Common Interests ........................................... 97
- Art ................................................................. 99

## TREKKING
- Getting Information ....................................... 107
- On the Path .................................................... 110
- Camping .......................................................... 113
- Weather .......................................................... 114

## SHOPPING
- Looking For .................................................... 121
- Making a Purchase .......................................... 122
- Bargaining ...................................................... 124
- Souvenirs ......................................................... 124
- Essential Groceries ......................................... 125
- Clothing .......................................................... 126
- Colours ............................................................ 127
- Materials .......................................................... 128

## FOOD
- Through the Day .............................................. 135
- Breakfast ........................................................ 135
- Snacks ............................................................. 136
- Vegetarian & Special Meals ......................... 137
- Eating Out ....................................................... 137
- Typical Dishes ............................................... 140
- Self-Catering .................................................. 142
- At the Market .................................................. 143
- Meat & Poultry ............................................... 144
- Fruit & Nuts ...................................................... 144
- Vegetables ....................................................... 145
- Grains & Pulses ............................................... 145
- Spices & Condiments ....................................... 146
- Drinks .............................................................. 146
- In the Bar ......................................................... 147

## SIGHTSEEING
- Visiting Temples ............................................ 86

## PAPERWORK
- Paperwork ....................................................... 89
INTRODUCTION

Tibetan belongs to the Tibeto-Burman linguistic group of the Sino-Tibetan language family, with Burmese its closest relative. It’s spoken by over six million people, mainly in Tibet, but also in neighbouring Nepal, India and Bhutan, and used by Mongolians to study Buddhism.

There are many different Tibetan dialects and, due to differences in pronunciation and vocabulary, it can be difficult for people from different regions to understand one another. The main provinces, U-tsang, Amdo and Kham – all of which have been renamed by China – have their own dialects (and sub-dialects). Other Tibetan dialects can be found in bordering countries. However, greater social interaction among Tibetans from various regions in recent times has led to the development of a standard Tibetan language. In contrast to any of the traditional dialects, it’s much closer to classical Tibetan and is also the focus of this book.

Written Tibetan was devised in the 7th century AD by Thumi Sambhota, the minister of the famous Tibetan ruler, King Songtsen Gampo. He was one of 15 scholars sent to India by the king to compile Tibetan scripts so that Buddhist literature could be translated into Tibetan. Under the guidance of his main Indian teachers, Brahmin Lipikara and Devavidyasinha, Sambhota learned a number of classical Indian languages. He developed the Tibetan language based on the Sanskrit characters of the Devanagari script (used for many Indian languages). He also compiled grammar texts which are still the primary source for studying Tibetan grammar today.

Since its introduction, the writing system has barely changed, although the spoken language has evolved considerably. As a result, written and spoken Tibetan are quite different.

Speaking Tibetan is the key to understanding the unique culture, lifestyle and history of the country. This phrasebook will help you communicate with Tibetans and enrich your experience in Tibet.