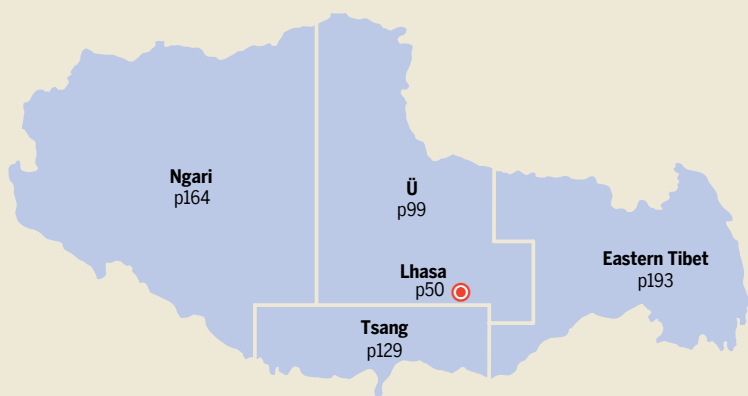




# Tibet



Stephen Lioy, Megan Eaves,  
Bradley Mayhew

## PLAN YOUR TRIP

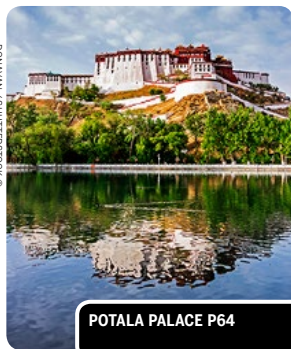
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Above: Prayer flags at Yamdrok-tso (p132)

# Preface



THE DALAI LAMA

The issue of Tibet is not nearly as simple and clear cut as the Chinese government often tries to make out. I believe that there are still widespread misunderstandings about Tibetan culture and misapprehensions about what is happening inside Tibet. Therefore, I welcome every opportunity for open-minded people to discover the reality of Tibet for themselves.

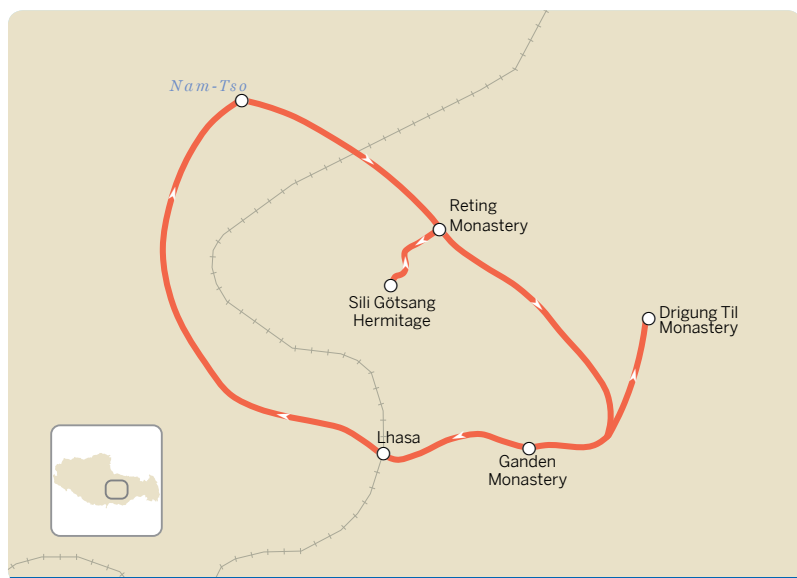
In the context of the growing tourist industry in Tibet, the Lonely Planet travel guide makes an invaluable contribution by providing reliable and authoritative information about places to visit, how to get there, where to stay, where to eat and so forth. Presenting basic facts and observations allows visitors to prepare themselves for what they will encounter and exercise their own choice.

There is a Tibetan saying: 'The more you travel, the more you see and hear.' At a time when many people are not clear about what is actually happening in Tibet, I am very keen to encourage whoever has the interest to go there and see for themselves. Their presence will not only instil a sense of reassurance in the Tibetan people, but will also exercise a re-straining influence on the Chinese authorities. What's more, I am confident that once they return home they will be able to report openly on what they have seen and heard.

Great changes have lately taken place in this part of the world. Recent events have made it very clear that all Tibetans harbour the same aspirations and hopes. I remain confident that eventually a mutually agreeable solution will be found to the Tibetan problem. I believe that our strictly non-violent approach, entailing constructive dialogue and negotiation, will ultimately attract effective support and sympathy from within the Chinese community. In the meantime, I am also convinced that as more people visit Tibet, the numbers of those who support the justice of a peaceful solution will grow.

I am grateful to everyone involved in the preparation of this 10th edition of the Lonely Planet guide to Tibet for the care and concern they have put into it. I trust that those who rely on it as a companion to their travels in Tibet will enjoy themselves in what, despite all that has happened, remains for me one of the most beautiful places on earth.

# Itineraries



**10**  
DAYS

## Lhasa & Around

Everyone coming to Tibet visits Lhasa and there's enough to see in and around the city to occupy at least five days. This loop gives a great taste of Tibet without travelling thousands of kilometres.

If you are on a tight budget you can avoid pricey vehicle hire by staying in Lhasa, or maybe taking a side trip by train to Shigatse. Must-sees in **Lhasa** 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 both offer worthwhile pilgrim circuits.

Plenty of excursions can be made from Lhasa. An overnight return trip to the stunning salt lake of **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 from Nam-tso via the timeless and little-visited **Reting Monastery**, the amazing cliff-side **Sili Götsang Hermitage** and the atmospheric **Drigung Til Monastery**, visiting **Ganden Monastery** en route.

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.

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 on the way 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 and option to visit vertiginous Shegar Dzong. From here on your route is more uncertain. The old road via misty waterfalls and lush green gorges to Zhāngmù was closed at time of research. The new route via **Kyirong** branches off the Friendship Hwy and passes jaw-dropping views of Mt Shishapangma, the highest mountain inside Tibet, before skirting **Peiku-tso**, a stunning turquoise lake nestled at the base of the Langtang Himal range. From here on is *terra incognita*, as the road drops into the lovely forested Kyirong Valley and descends to the Nepal border at Rasuwagadhi in the Langtang region. Only a handful of foreigners have taken this road since it opened in 2017.

8  
DAYS

## Yarlung Tsangpo Valley loop

If your time is 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. In just three days you can see the main valley sights.

Spend the first few days in **Lhasa** acclimatising, and then head south to the airport and swing into the northern side of the valley, stopping first at charming **Dorje Drak Monastery**, with its demanding kora path and its dramatic views of sand dunes and the maze-like 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 overnight. 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, photogenic **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* and home to a simple monastery guesthouse where you can overnight. Nearby **Dratang 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 wanton destruction of the Cultural Revolution.

From here Lhasa's Gongkar airport is less than an hour away. Alternatively, consider heading south to the Khamba-la for a short hike overlooking dramatic **Yamdruk-tso** and then an overnight stay at the guesthouse at **Samding Monastery**, with its fabulous views. The next day, drive over the high Karo-la pass to **Gyantse**. Continue the following day via the ruined Tsechen fort to **Shigatse**, spending a day at Tashilunpo Monastery and its kora, before returning to Lhasa or the airport via the unusual Bön monastery of **Yungdrungling**.





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DAYS

## Mount 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 is now much less of an ordeal thanks to a new paved road. The scenery remains just as spectacular.

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 and Saga, but Drongba, Paryang and Lhatse are also possibilities. We'd recommend extra stops in Gyantse and Sakya, for a minimum 14-day return trip.

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. It's well worth budgeting a day to drive a circuit of the lake, one of the most spectacular in Tibet. 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 pretty charmless, so consider camping somewhere beautiful such as **Tagyel-tso** or remote Tsari Nam-tso. From Ali you can make a good day trip to spectacular **Pangong-tso** bordering Ladakh, as well the petroglyphs and old town around **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 other-worldly 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, you can make the short detour to stunning **Peiku-tso**, with its views of Shishapangma, before descending into the Kyirong Valley.



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HUNG CHING CHIH / SHUTTERSTOCK ©

Top: Drepung Monastery (p84), near Lhasa

Bottom: Pilgrim and prayer wheels near Potala Palace (p64), Lhasa



10  
DAYS

## Best of Eastern Tibet

For a completely different view of Tibet, head out to the lush forested valleys, alpine scenery and wild gorges of the wild east. Unlike the overland route to Sichuān province, the following route through Kongpo and southern Kham to Yúnnán is open. Check with agents to see if this has changed; if so you'll have to return to Lhasa from Rawok-tso.

From **Lhasa** a logical first step is the detour to **Drigung Til Monastery**, where you can overnight before continuing east 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 trip to sacred **Bönri mountain**, perhaps even trekking around it.

From here the road climbs to the **Serkhym-la**, for excellent views of 7755m Namche Barwa, before winding down switchbacks into lovely alpine villages and then the mist-drenched gorges north of the Yarlung Tsangpo. Road conditions are always dicey here but are generally best from late March to late April, and late September to early November.

The 800-year-old **Bakha Gumpa** is well worth a stop for both its unusual island location and its historical connections to a scandalous 1400-year-old story about Chinese Princess Wencheng and Tibetan minister Gar Tongtsen. From here you reach the incredibly scenic 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.

Depending on the state of permits in eastern Tibet, you may have to return to Lhasa from Rawok, possibly detouring via the Yarlung Tsangpo Valley and Samye Monastery.

If permits are being issued for southern Chamdo prefecture (confirm with your agency), you can continue east out of the lush mountains of Nyingtri prefecture and into the harsh dry landscapes of the upper Mekong Valley, stopping at small but lively **Pomda Monastery**. Remote roads continue southeast along former salt-and-tea-trade routes, over a series of roller-coaster passes and through gorges to the junction town of Markham. From here branch southeast to reach **Déqin** in Yúnnán province, for an incredible overland adventure.

# Behind the Scenes

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We love to hear from travellers – your comments keep us on our toes and help make our books better. Our well-travelled team reads every word on what you loved or loathed about this book. Although we cannot reply individually to postal submissions, we always guarantee that your feedback goes straight to the appropriate authors, in time for the next edition. Each person who sends us information is thanked in the next edition – the most useful submissions are rewarded with a selection of digital PDF chapters.

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## OUR READERS

**Many thanks to the travellers who used the last edition and wrote to us with helpful hints, useful advice and interesting anecdotes:**

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Cover photograph: Monk with prayer beads, Reinhard Goldmann/Getty ©

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# Map Legend

## Sights

- Beach
- Bird Sanctuary
- Buddhist
- Castle/Palace
- Christian
- Confucian
- Hindu
- Islamic
- Jain
- Jewish
- Monument
- Museum/Gallery/Historic Building
- Ruin
- Sento Hot Baths/Onsen
- Shinto
- Sikh
- Taoist
- Winery/Vineyard
- Zoo/Wildlife Sanctuary
- Other Sight

## Activities, Courses & Tours

- Bodysurfing
- Diving/Snorkelling
- Canoeing/Kayaking
- Course/Tour
- Skiing
- Snorkelling
- Surfing
- Swimming/Pool
- Walking
- Windsurfing
- Other Activity

## Sleeping

- Sleeping
- Camping

## Eating

- Eating

## Drinking & Nightlife

- Drinking & Nightlife
- Cafe

## Entertainment

- Entertainment

## Shopping

- Shopping

## Information

- Bank
- Embassy/Consulate
- Hospital/Medical
- Internet
- Police
- Post Office
- Telephone
- Toilet
- Tourist Information
- Other Information

## Geographic

- Beach
- Hut/Shelter
- Lighthouse
- Lookout
- Mountain/Volcano
- Oasis
- Park
- Pass
- Picnic Area
- Waterfall

## Population

- Capital (National)
- Capital (State/Province)
- City/Large Town
- Town/Village

## Transport

- Airport
- Border crossing
- Bus
- Cable car/Funicular
- Cycling
- Ferry
- Metro station
- Monorail
- Parking
- Petrol station
- Subway station
- Taxi
- Train station/Railway
- Tram
- Underground station
- Other Transport

## Routes

- Tollway
- Freeway
- Primary
- Secondary
- Tertiary
- Lane
- Unsealed road
- Road under construction
- Plaza/Mall
- Steps
- Tunnel
- Pedestrian overpass
- Walking Tour
- Walking Tour detour
- Path/Walking Trail

## Boundaries

- International
- State/Province
- Disputed
- Regional/Suburb
- Marine Park
- Cliff
- Wall

## Hydrography

- River, Creek
- Intermittent River
- Canal
- Water
- Dry/Salt/Intermittent Lake
- Reef

## Areas

- Airport/Runway
- Beach/Desert
- Cemetery (Christian)
- Cemetery (Other)
- Glacier
- Mudflat
- Park/Forest
- Sight (Building)
- Sportsground
- Swamp/Mangrove

Note: Not all symbols displayed above appear on the maps in this book



## 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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