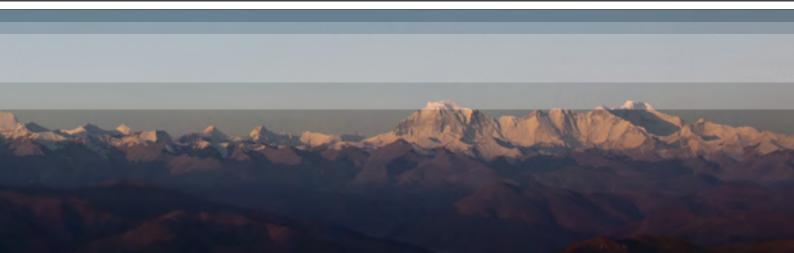
## MOMENTS on the road

Tibetan Highlands: Sichuan/Gansu/Qinghai/Tibet (14 Days)





### ON THE ROAD EXPERIENCES

BACK ROADS | HIDDEN GEMS

We love road journeys. They are by far our favourite way of traveling. We think the world of western China and the countries that border on this region – think Vietnam, Lao, Thailand, Myanmar, for example.

On the Road Experiences is all about sharing with like-minded travelers just how beautiful a road journey in these varied lands can be. Now turn the page to find out what we've come to love so much...



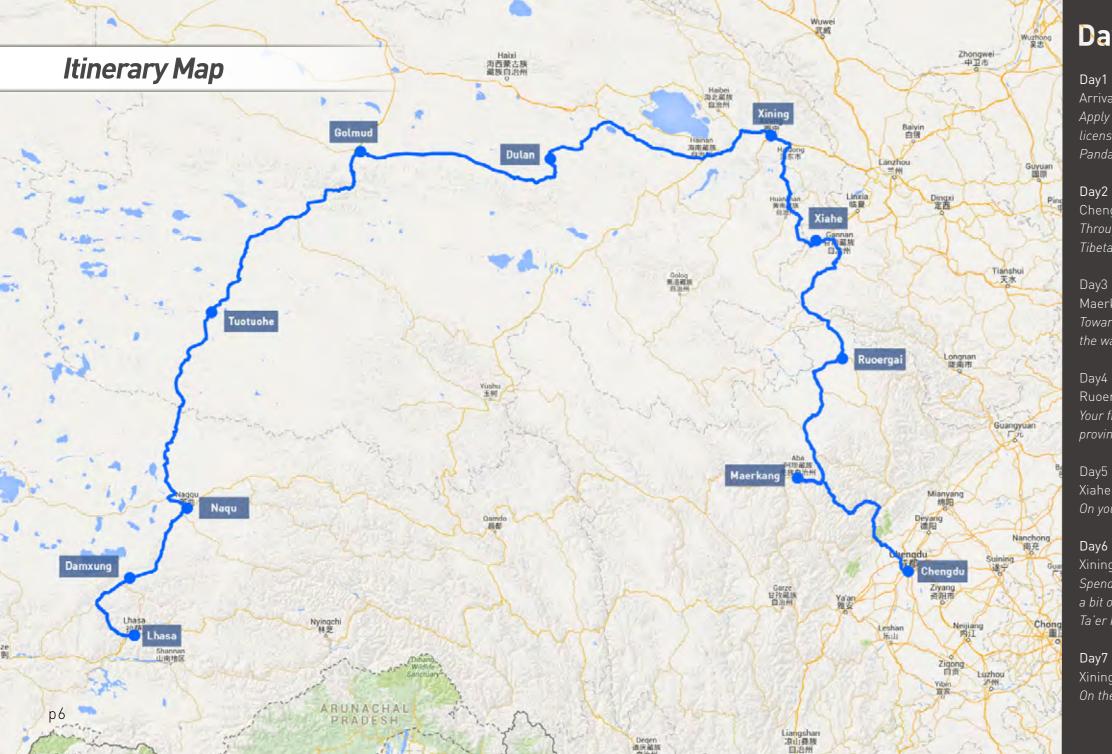
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#### Day-by-Day

Arrival in Chengdu – Apply for your temporary driving license and visit Chengdu's beautiful Panda Reserve

Chengdu to Maerkang – Through the valleys to the Gyarong Tibetan region

Maerkang to Ruoergai – Towards the very north of Sichuan on the way to Gansu

Ruoergai to Xiahe -Your first and only stop in Gansu province

Xiahe to Qinghai's capital, Xining -On your way to Qinghai

Xining -

Spend a day in and around Xining for a bit of rest and visit the spectacular Ta'er Monastery

Xining to Dulan -On the way to Golmud...

#### Day8

Dulan to Golmud -Across the Qaidam Basin to Golmud

#### Day9

Golmud to Tuotuohe – Up, up, up - Onto the Plateau and into the highlands of Qinghai

#### Dav10

Tuotuohe to Nagu – Cross the famous Tanggula Pass on your way to Tibet itself

#### Day11

Nagu to Damxung – Visit one of Tibet's holiest lakes. Lake Nam-tso

#### Day12

Damxung to Lhasa -Complete your journey with a beautiful drive to your final destination

#### Day13

In and around Lhasa -Visit Potala Palace and explore the old city of Lhasa

#### Day14

Depart from Lhasa -Lift must go on...Farewell Lhasa

#### Yes, it is possible...

A driving holiday in this part of the world is indeed possible. We take care of everything. All you need to do is come, drive and enjoy a rare adventure!

Tibetan Highlands: Sichuan/Gansu/Qinghai/Tibet – Chengdu to Lhasa as your final destination is a 14-day discovery of one of the planet's most extraordinary places, the Tibetan Plateau. On this journey you will experience the many faces of the plateau: from deep, forested valleys in northern Sichuan, to the wide-open plateau of Qinghai and the stunning landscape of Tibet.

Start your journey in Chengdu, a buzzing Chinese city, before leaving the misty Sichuan lowlands behind. Drive northwest to explore the clear, blue skies and open spaces of Sichuan's magnificent Aba and Ganzi regions. Cross remote swathes of the plateau, home to herds of Tibetan antelope and yaks, and pass the headwaters of Asia's mightiest rivers; the Yangtze, Yellow and Mekong. Before you arrive in Lhasa visit stunning Lake Nam-tso. Ringed by snow-capped mountains, the turquoise waters of the 'Sky Lake' have been revered by Tibetans for centuries. End your journey in the cultural and religious heart of Tibet: the holy city of Lhasa.

On the Road in China has paved the way for you to cross borders in your own properly insured SUV, so that you can enjoy the romance of a classic overland journey without any of the logistical headaches that typically accompany such journeys...









# 55 ...and are ON THE ROAD IN CHINA..." Yaks own the local roads









# Where the DRIVING is pure JOY..."





























# Day 1 Apply for your temporary driving license and visit Chengdu's beautiful Panda Reserve

In the morning we will help you complete your temporary Chinese driving license application, if required. This involves a simple eye test and some paperwork, and you will have your new license by lunchtime. Spend the afternoon with Sichuan's most famous residents, the giant pandas at Chengdu's Panda Breeding Centre, or visiting one of the fascinating archaeological sights around the city.

In the evening, we will meet for a safety briefing and enjoy a group dinner together in a lovely restaurant nearby the hotel. Dinner will be an opportunity to begin to acquaint yourself with the many flavors of Sichuan's cuisine and to meet your fellow travellers.

#### Please note:

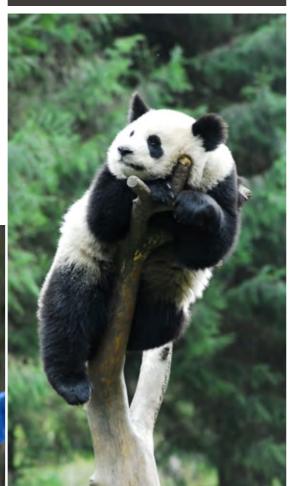
If you need to apply for your temporary Chinese driving license, you must arrive one day earlier (at any time convenient for you), we will arrange the airport pick up for you! If you currently hold a full Chinese driving license, it is possible to arrive today, a day later than those who need to do the temporary license application.

#### **Details**

Elevation
Highest Daytime: 500m
Overnight: 500m

Hotel

Shangri-La, Chengdu (\*\*\*\*)



#### Day 2 Through the valleys to the Gyarong Tibetan region...

Welcome on the Road in China! Today's destination is Maerkang, located in the Aba Prefecture, 360km northwest of Chengdu. After navigating out of busy Chengdu, you will find yourself on the China National Highway 317 (G317), which runs broadly west to east from Chengdu, Sichuan to Naqu in Tibet. It is 2,028 km in length.

After navigating out of Chengdu and our lunch en route, we will drive more and more into the countryside. The drive winds through a series of thickly forested valleys into the Gyarong Tibetan region around Maerkang.

A white chörten overlooks our turning into the Fubian River valley, and marks our entry into a region that the Red Army passed through on their Long March of the 1930s. As we reach the northern end of this bucolic valley, we will come to the village of Zhuokeji. Zhuokeji's

well-preserved official manor hosted Mao Zedong and other key communist leaders as they rested here from the rigours of the Long March in 1935.

Even today, the manor makes a relaxing place to stop, with views of the beautiful village below and the lush valley beyond. From Zhuokeji it is 8km to Ma'erkang, a modern town that runs the length of a narrow valley.

Note: This is your first stop in higher altitude. Please be prepared to take everything more slowly to help your body adjust to the altitude – and ask us for details of what else you can do to prevent altitude sickness from impacting your holiday.

#### **Details**

**Driving Distance & Duration** 

**Distance:** 360 km **Duration:** 7 hours

Elevation

Highest Daytime: 3200m

Overnight: 2600m

Hotel

Jingjinlong Grand Hotel, Maerkang (\*\*\*\*)





#### Day 3 Towards the very north of Sichuan on the way to Gansu

Ruoergai, also known as the Songpan Grasslands, is a county of Ngawa Tibetan and Qiang Autonomous Prefecture, bordering Gansu to the north. It is the northernmost county of Sichuan province and sits on the eastern part of the Tibetan Plateau and on the northern most edge of Aba grassland. It is part of Amdo, one of Tibet's most traditional regions. The Aba grasslands range across parts of three Chinese provinces with significant Tibetan influence: Sichuan, Gansu and Qinghai.

As nearly the entire county is covered in high altitude grasslands, it is perfect for herding yaks and sheep. During the summer, thousands of families live in traditional style yak wool tents on the grasslands. It is also the territory of the Goloks, nomads who speak their own dialect of

Tibetan, distinct from the local Amodo dialect.

Your drive today spans the transition from the deep valleys and thick forests of Gyarong to the high plateau that surrounds Ruoergai. From Maerkang you will retrace our steps to Zhuokeji before turning off the national highway and north onto a smaller provincial road, which will take you all the way to our destination. Slowly the

river valleys give way to the broad, open horizons of the Aba Grasslands.

This high altitude marsh proved a formidable barrier to the Red Army when they passed this way in later 1935. Fortunately for modern-day travellers, conditions have improved markedly, and this remote region is connected to the outside world by a series of surprisingly good roads.





## Day 4 Your first and only stop in Gansu province

The slender province of Gansu flows east to west along the Hexi Corridor, the gap through which all manner of goods once streamed from China to Central Asia.

Gansu offers an entrancingly rich cultural and geographic diversity. The ethnic diversity is equally astonishing: in Linxia, the local Hui Muslims act as though the silk route lives on; in Xiahe and Langmusi a pronounced Tibetan disposition holds sway, while other minority groups such as the Bao'an and Dongxiang join in the colourful minority patchwork.

Between Ruoergai and Xiahe, we will skirt the eastern edge of the wild Aba Grasslands on a good road that runs north into Gansu and Xiahe. 90km from Ruoergai, just before the Sichuan-Gansu border the village of Langmusi sits

nestled amongst the hills. While Langmusi today has a slightly ramshackle feel, it is home to two venerable monasteries constructed in the eighteenth-century – a testament to this region's early importance to Tibetan Buddhists, something you will see more evidence of in the coming days. In Gansu, the first major settlement is the modern town of Hezuo, a major trading centre for herbal remedies including the

rare and expensive cordyceps fungus. From Hezuo, a further 70km brings us to Xiahe, home to Labrang Monastery. Before checking into the hotel, a visit to this monastery is a must. It was founded in 1709 by Ngagong Tsunde and which accommodates nearly 2000 monks. The monastery is one of the six major Tibetan monasteries of the Gelugpa order. The others are Ganden, Sera and Drepung monasteries near Lhasa:

Tashilhumpo Monastery in Shigatse; and Kumbum near Xining, Qinghai.

The monastery occupies the western end of the town, encircled by a long wall of prayer wheels. If time permits, walk a kora around the monastery at dusk as monks ascend to the rooftops to pray beneath the evening skies before checking into your hotel.









#### Day 5 On your way to Qinghai

Today you will leave Gansu province behind and enter Qinghai province. Qinghai is a large, sparsely populated Chinese province spread across the high-altitude Tibetan Plateau. It's a place of strong Tibetan and Mongol

cultural traditions. The province received its name from the reason that there is an inland salt water lake: The Qinghai Lake, which is the largest lake in China and sits at an altitude of 3,300m. The capital city of Qinghai Province is Xining, your destination for today. Despite appearing very arid Qinghai Province is in fact the source of three of China's greatest rivers (the

Yangtze River, the Yellow River and the Lantsang River) and the province is honored as the 'water tower of China'.

Your drive from Xiahe to Xining takes you through a wide range of scenery, from high-altitude grasslands through dramatically sculpted desert-like landscapes to Xining, one of northwest China's largest cities. You will use a back road that climbs out of Xiahe towards the Gansu-Qinghai border, passing roadside chapels and herders' settlements as you go. A short detour will bring you to Wutun, a major centre for Tibetan thangka painting. Wutun's two small monasteries are decorated with a wealth of intricate paintings, some of which have survived for centuries in the region's dry climate.

For the next portion of your trip, monasteries give way to mosques as we leave China's ethnic Tibetan region behind and pass into the Muslim northwest. In Xining, the smell of grilled lamb and cumin wafts through the nightmarkets, and thousands gather for Friday prayers at the city's spectacular mosques.

#### **Details**

**Driving Distance & Duration** 

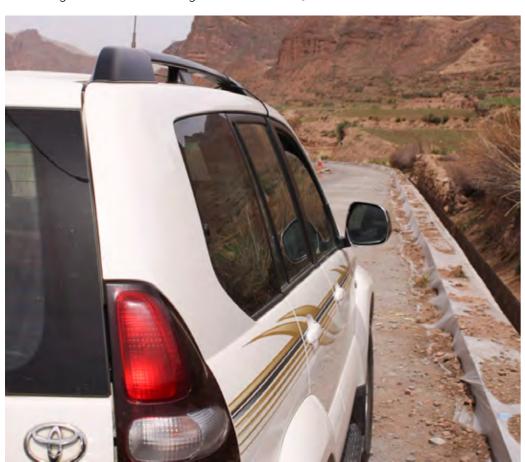
**Distance:** 270 km **Duration:** 6-7 hours

**Elevation** 

**Highest Daytime:** 3200m **Overnight:** 2275m

Hotel

Yinlong Hotel, Xining (\*\*\*)







# Day 6 Spend a day in and around Xining for a bit of a rest and visit the spectacular Ta'er monastery

Today you will have the whole day to explore the area around Xining, but perhaps most importantly, to get some rest for the more strenuous 2<sup>nd</sup> part of the journey.

What might you be in the mood for? An early visit of Ta'er Monastery, Qinghai's most vibrant monastery? It lies around 25km Southwest of Xining and also belongs to the six great Gelukpa sect monasteries in Tibet. Here you will witness the religious devotion of the Tibetan people – watch pilgrims as they prostrate themselves in front of the monastery's most important shrines, and see the monks debating in Taer's great courtyard.

A visit to the Museum of China Tibetan Medicine Culture, or to Ma Bufang's former residence? Ma Bufang was a warlord in the 1920s and his house has been really nicely restored, with some buildings covered in big jade tiles.

Xining is also a wonderful place to explore the province's varied cultures – Muslim (Huí, Salar and Uighur), Tibetan and Han Chinese – especially the culinary mix that these groups bring together.

Our team will be happy to arrange any of these to fill your day with wonderful memories.

#### **Details**

**Driving Distance & Duration Distance:** 0-50 km

**Duration:** 0-2 hours (Depends on your chosen activity)

**Elevation** 

Highest Daytime: 2200m Overnight: 2750m

Hotel
Yinlong Hotel, Xining (\*\*\*)

#### Day 7 On the way to Golmud

Today you will be driving along the Tibetan Plateau and Lake Qinghai to Dulan. Both, the current Chinese name "Qinghai" and the older Mongolian name Kokonor of Lake Qinghai translate to "Blue Lake". The lake lies 3194m above sea level and is located at the crossroads of several bird migration routes across Asia. Many species use Qinghai as an intermediate stop during migration.

Leaving the cold blue waters of Qinghai Lake behind, our journey continues west to the eastern edge of the arid Qaidam Basin. En route we will pass Chaka salt lake, a dazzling expanse of shimmering white crystals, and the largest of the Qaidam Basin's salt lakes - the basin's name comes from the Tibetan word for "salt marsh". From Chaka the road passes through an increasingly arid landscape towards Dulan, passing a string of settlements that grew

up to serve the camel caravans that transported goods through this desolate landscape to Golmud and Lhasa until the 1960s. Trucks having taken over their role, the camels now run wild – keep your eye out for hem wandering along the roadside!

#### **Details**

Driving Distance & Duration
Distance: 426 km
Duration: 8-9 hours

Elevation Highest Daytime: 3200m Overnight: 3100m

Hotel 都蘭金世界大酒店, Dulan [\*\*]



## Day 8 Across the Qaidam Basin to Golmud

Today's road is spectacular as it stretches across the edge of the Qaidam Basin, with the Kunlun Mountains to the south separating it from the central Tibetan Plateau beyond. The Kunlun Mountains are one of the longest mountain chains in Asia, extending more than 3,000 km. In the broadest sense, it forms the northern edge of

the Tibetan Plateau south of the Tarim Basin and the Gansu Corridor and continues east south of the Wei River to end at the North China Plain.

After reaching the highland town of Golmud in the afternoon, you are free to relax or explore the town – perhaps shopping in the town's enormous market or visiting one of Golmud's mosques. In the evening we will head for dinner in a colourful local restaurant serving Qinghai specialties.

#### **Details**

Driving Distance & Duration

**Distance:** 346 km **Duration:** 7-8 hours

**Elevation** 

Highest Daytime: 3200m

Overnight: 2800m

Hotel

DoubleTree by Hilton Hotel,

Golmud (\*\*\*\*\*)



#### Day 9 Up, Up, Up - Onto the Plateau and into the highlands of Qinghai

Today you will ascend to the Tibetan Plateau over the Kunlun Mountains on a wonderful road (the G109 that stretches from Beijing all the way to Lhasa) that arches and curves across the plains.

See Tibetan Antelope from the road and learn about the species' return from the brink of extinction, and soak up the open spaces that define this corner of Asia.

Stop for the night in the tiny settlement of Tuotuohe, which is the first town on the Yangtze – the river runs nearby, already broad and swift-flowing even this close to its source. Gaze out over the river and mountains, and imagine the journey that the river will undergo before it reaches its mouth near Shanghai – worlds away from the dusty streets of Tuotuohe...

#### **Details**

Driving Distance & Duration

**Distance:** 410 km **Duration:** 6 hours

**Elevation** 

Highest Daytime: 4500m

Overnight: 3600m

Hotel

Changjiangyuan hotel,

Tuotuohe (\*\*)



#### Day 10 Cross the famous Tanggula pass on your way to Tibet itself

After a short drive south along the G109, the main road you have used yesterday, you will leave the road behind as you drive west towards Mount Geladandong (6,621m).

After practicing some off-road skills – including crossing several small rivers – you will climb to a lookout from where you will be able to see

the mountain and the massive glaciers that feed the Yangtze. Stop for a picnic lunch in the wild before returning to the road and entering Tibet over the Tanglha Range, taking in one of the highest pass of the trip – at 5,231m – before dropping to Naqu, one of Tibet's highest towns and your overnight stop tonight.

#### **Details**

**Driving Distance & Duration** 

**Distance:** 410 km **Duration:** 6.5 hours

**Elevation** 

**Highest Daytime:** 5231m

Overnight: 4520m

Hotel

Naqu Hotel, Naqu (\*\*\*/\*\*\*\*)

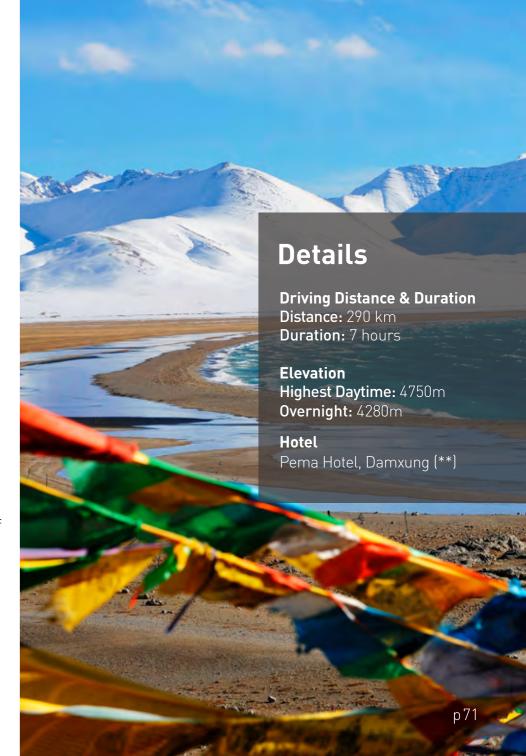


#### Day 11 Visit one of Tibet's holiest lakes, Lake Nam-tso

Today's drive from Naqu to Damxung is a short one through a beautiful landscape.

After lunch in Damxung, you will drive over the Laken Pass to catch your first sight of Namtso's glittering blue waters and drive to the island of Tashi Do – the best place to enjoy the dramatic scenery. The saltwater lake lies at 4,750m, and is ringed to the south by the Nyechen Tanglha mountain range, whose snow-capped peaks soar to over 7,000m – a truly awe-inspiring setting.

After walking around the edge of the island on a kora circuit used by pilgrims, or taking a ride on horseback, you will return to Damxung for dinner in a local restaurant.



# Day 12 Complete your journey with a beautiful drive to your final destination

Complete your long journey to Lhasa in an easy morning's drive, arriving in this fabled city in time for lunch overlooking the golden roofs of the Jokhang Temple.

Today's drive is the shortest and simplest of your trip; a quick jaunt down the G109 will bring you to your final destination on this journey, Lhasa! The road initially runs south through a wide valley, with the Nyechen Tanglha range to its west. 75km from Damxung, you will pass Yangbachen, a major geothermal hot-spot; keep an eye out for the area's geysers and jets of steam emerging from various industrial-looking buildings. Soon you have arrived in Lhasa!

The remainder of the day will be yours to spend as you wish - that said, we will arrange for you to see the major Lhasa sights tomorrow. Therefore this afternoon would be a great opportunity to relax in the sunshine and reflect on your

#### **Details**

**Driving Distance & Duration Distance:** 160 km

**Duration:** 3 hours

**Elevation** 

Highest Daytime: 4300m Overnight: 3650m

Hotel

Four Points Sheraton Lhasa (\*\*\*\*\*)

long and adventurous journey, before joining a group dinner in an atmospheric restaurant.



#### Day 13 Visit Potala Palace and explore the old city of Lhasa

After your long journey, today will be a day to enjoy simply being in Lhasa.

We start the day with a visit the magnificent Potala Palace, which lies in the center of the city, and wander through the richly decorated halls and chapels that were home to generations of Dalai Lamas. After lunch we will arrange a gentle walking tour around the old city, where we will pass markets and workshops where Tibet's traditional handicrafts are kept alive, as artisans paint thangkas and hammer out copper prayer wheels... Then we enter the holy precincts of the Jokhang Temple, one of Tibet's most atmospheric religious sites with its yak butter lamps, clouds of juniper incense and pilgrims murmuring prayers around you.

In the evening, join our farewell dinner, a great opportunity to look back over your amazing journey. We hope that you will return home with many beautiful, new memories from your time on the road in Sichuan, Qinghai and Tibet.

#### **Details**

Elevation
Highest Daytime: 3650m
Overnight: 3650m

Hotel

Four Points Sheraton Lhasa (\*\*\*\*)









#### **Choice of Cars**

We include in the package price an SUV we procure from Avis or Hertz or another reputable car rental company. Most of the SUVs are Toyotas, but on occasion Mitsubishis or other brands may also make an appearance.

We wish the car rental markets of China would be more developed and we could give you more choice, but this is not so: since we want to provide well-maintained and well-insured cars, the choice is rather limited.

But SUVs are in fact the right choice for driving journeys in this part of the world because they are spacious enough to accommodate a lot of luggage, photography equipment, and good-and-bad-weather gear. Also, they reinforce the feeling of adventure, exploration and discovery...which is, in the

end, the mood of journeys in this region, no matter how comfortable or even luxurious the night's hotel may be.

What's more, they offer sufficient clearance when required and thus add a sense of safety and all-round ability. (4-wheel drive capability is hardly needed in China these days since all roads are either very well-paved or, with good gravel, offer solid support.)

And so SUVs from reputable brands are our car of choice!

ANY car, as long as it is an SUV"

#### **Adventures and Discoveries in Local Cuisines**

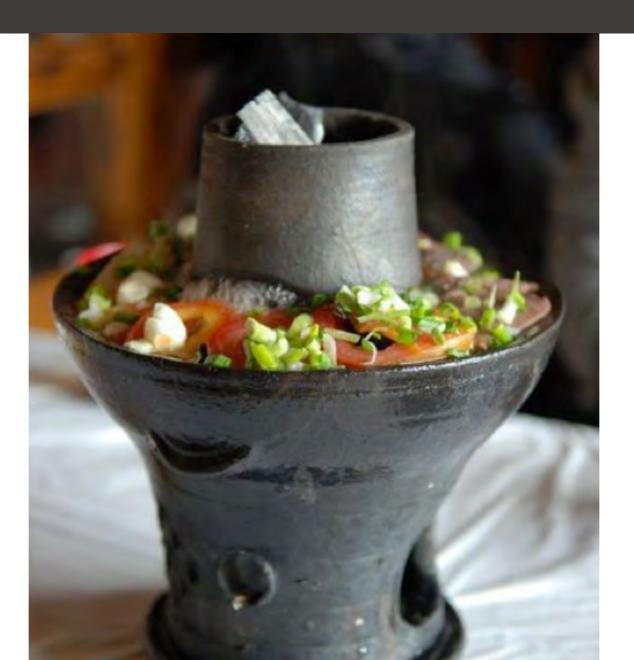
While this itinerary is not one of our 'Foodie'-themed journeys, we do believe that each one of our journeys should introduce you not only to hidden gems of cultural and scenic beauty, but that sampling local cuisines is also a must.

Wherever you travel with us, we will order, with very few exceptions, dishes fresh and on location with an emphasis on local produce. It is not uncommon for our guides to venture into the kitchen to pick this, that or the other vegetable and to ask the cook to prepare them in the finest possible way. (On occasion we do preorder a meal: this will normally be the case only for special occasions!)

Wine and beer is always included in our meals for you to enjoy. (When we travel into high-altitude, we suggest moderation!)

Finally, if you have special dietary requirements are particularly interested in the culinary aspect of one of our journeys, please let us know.

For private journeys, we can, of course, tailor the meal experience to your taste (and budget).









#### What's Included / Best Months to Go...

Generally speaking, our journey packages and prices are all-inclusive. Once you've paid and you arrive at the starting point, you really won't have to take out your wallet again.

- Cars a modern SUV is provided for all driving days, expertly maintained and serviced by Avis, Hertz, or other reputable car rental companies, and covered by the best insurance available, and hire car return from Lhasa to Kunming is also included
- International Journey Host, Guide and Support Vehicle – you will be accompanied by a registered Chinese tour guide, an On the Road Experiences host and a fully equipped lead car with a local support driver
- Routes we provide an extensively researched and carefully designed itinerary and state-of-the-art satellite navigation system with a preprogrammed route for the journey. You will also receive a detailed pre-departure pack and route book for the journey
- Driving License You will need a temporary Chinese driving license for which all arrangements and fees are included.
- Fuel & Tolls we provide petrol for the car throughout the journey and pay all tolls



- Airport Transfers all airport transfers are included
- Permits and Logistics all Tibet permits are included
- Hotels the best available or five-star accommodation is included in each overnight stop
- Meals breakfast (a choice of Western and Local is provided), and lunch and dinner are

included on all driving days, as are drinks. Meals on non-driving days as specified above. Prepare for a culinary adventure!

- Goodies you will enjoy an On the Road Home-Away-from-Home Kit containing wet towels, anti-bacterial gel and basic toiletries, and a daily picnic basket containing fresh fruit, fruit juice, water, and a mixture of sweets and nibbles
- Other Essentials we provide each car with walky-talkies

- Travel Insurance 24-hour medical assistance, evacuation and repatriation emergency service
- Tips & Entrance Fees basic tips and entrance fees for jointly attended activities are included
- Activities, Meals, Transport during 'free times' as indicated in this Journey Dossier
- Top-up Collision Damage Waiver insurance

#### What's Not Included

The only items not included are your flight to Chengdu and back from Lhasa, your China visa, and personal purchases (e.g., gifts, souvenirs).

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A picture is worth a thousand words. True, but when it comes to a road journey, moving images are priceless. Please visit:

http://www.ontheroadexperiences.com/en/video-gallery





BACK ROADS | HIDDEN GEMS

"Do not go where the path may lead, go instead where there is no path and leave a trail."

Ralph Waldo Emersor

