MOMENTS
on the road

Tibetan Highlands - Kunming to Lhasa
(13 Days)
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...
Itinerary Map ...where you will travel... p. 006
Yes, it is possible... p. 008
Journey of Discovery... p. 010
Day-by-day... p. 060

In closing...
Any car you like, so long as it is an SUV... p. 079
Adventures and discoveries in local cuisines p. 080
What’s included/Best Months to Go... p. 082
Photo credits p. 085
**Day-by-Day**

**Day 1**
Arrive in Kunming – Preparing for your journey

**Day 2**
Dali and Xizhou – To the heart of the Nanzhao Kingdom

**Day 3**
Xizhou to Lijiang – To Yunnan’s UNESCO world heritage town

**Day 4**
Lijiang to Shangri-La – Via the Tiger Leaping Gorge to the Edge of Tibet

**Day 5**
Shangri-La to Deqin – Gorgeous scenery and glaciers

**Day 6**
In and around Deqin – Exploring the foothills of Meili Snow Mountain

**Day 7**
Deqin to Markham – Onto the ‘Roof of the World’ and into Tibet

**Day 8**
Markham to Zogang – Adventure on the high plateau

**Day 9**
Zogang to Rawok – Mountain passes and riverside roads...

**Day 10**
Rawok to Pomi – Through the spectacular Sundzom Valley

**Day 11**
Pomi to Bayi – The road to Lhasa – the best and worst of the G318

**Day 12**
From Bayi to Lhasa – Arriving in Lhasa at last!

**Day 13**
Farewell Lhasa – Life must go on...or continue?
Yes, it is possible...

Tibetan Highlands (Kunming to Lhasa) is a discovery of the world’s most stunningly beautiful scenery: the valleys and mountains of the Tibetan Plateau.

Set out from Kunming, and travel through some of Yunnan’s best loved destinations – Dali and Shangri-La – as well as some of its most remote, before driving onwards and upwards to Lhasa.

En route, drive past Yunnan’s highest peak, Mount Kawakarpo (6,740 metres). Join Tibetan worshippers as they sing hymns in a remote Catholic church on the border of Yunnan and Tibet. Cross high mountain passes near Dzogong, before driving through the lushly forested valleys around Pomi and along the banks of the Brahmaputra. Finish your journey in Lhasa, and join scores of other modern-day pilgrims around the Jokhang, Tibetan Buddhism’s holiest shrine.

Join this spectacular journey and discover why mysterious Tibet has captured the imagination of explorers for centuries...

On the Road in Experiences has paved the way for you to cross provinces and into Tibet 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...
Awaking in China’s RURAL COUNTRYSIDE...
Take a lake shore DRIVE and enjoy the BEAUTIFUL sunset reflections..."
LIJIANG is touristy, but there ARE HIDDEN GEMS to DISCOVER..."
The lovely winding alleys of Lijiang’s old town are a UNESCO World Heritage site...
“The TIGER LEAPING GORGE... where the YANGTZE makes you TREMBLE!”
Near Tiger Leaping Gorge

“Yunnan to Tibet is a driving ADVENTURE…”
STUNNING LANDSCAPES on the way to LIJIANG..."
A colourful WELCOME as you APPROACH TIBET...
Along the way, one of the LARGEST MONASTERIES in SOUTH-WEST China..."
At the Ganden Sumtseling Monastery

“RED-ROBED MONKS in Shangri-La”
A chance to PURIFY YOUR MIND?
What a SUNRISE at the EDGE of TIBET...
In the foot hills of Meili Snow Mountain

“Wonderful HIKING, if you like, as a WAY TO RELAX...”
The beautiful Tanggula Mountain Range

Near Yela Mt. Pass, Tibet

"72 hairpin TURNS descending from 4,700m to 2,700m on the way to LHASA..."
Along the G318, Tibet.

“RIVER CROSSING...It brings out the CHILD in us!”
Midui Glacier, near Pumi, Tibet

“In SPRING or in AUTUMN, an ENCHANTING place to EXPLORE...”
The Brahmaputra flowing west, Tibet…LIKE a PAINTING, mist in the DENSE FORESTS on the WAY to LHASA…"
“Where THIS LAND is MY LAND, says the YAK...”
Pilgrims on their way to Lhasa

PROSTRATING for SPIRITUAL reasons...
At a temple in Tibet...

“IF you’re LUCKY, you will meet FASCINATING PEOPLE...along this route...”
The Jokhang, Lhasa

“PILGRIMS PRAY in the shade...”
“GOSSIP and PRAYER go hand-in-hand...”

The Jokhang, Lhasa
The Jokhang, Lhasa

"RAINBOW not included..."
Day 1
Arriving in Kunming and preparing for your journey

Arrive in Kunming according to your own arrangements.

We will meet you at the airport and transfer you to your hotel. If you require a temporary Chinese driving license, we will take you to the hotel via the Vehicle Licensing Bureau. All the documents for your temporary license will be prepared; you will just need to take a simple eye test and sign the forms.

After settling into the hotel, you may want to go for a stroll along the city-center Green Lake where many locals enjoy relaxing hours. The vicinity of the lake bustles with people young and old and throughout much of the year is lush green. Depending on the season, energetic migratory birds make the lake their temporary home.

In the evening, enjoy a group dinner together in a lovely, local restaurant near your hotel and attend our staff’s safety briefing.

Dinner will be an opportunity to begin to acquaint yourself with the many flavours of Yunnan’s cuisine and to meet your fellow travellers.

Day 2
To the heart of the Nanzhao Kingdom

On your first day, you will drive to Dali and on to Xizhou, home of the Linden Centre – a lovingly converted Bai minority mansion, where you will stay for the night.

Today’s route is designed to ease you into driving in mainland China…mostly on a wonderful highway that allows us to gain distance from Kunming, the capital of Yunnan province.

Yunnan has one of the best road networks in China, as today’s drive will demonstrate. After a relaxed start to the day you will set out from Kunming and drive along a world-class highway until you reach Dali – formerly capital of Yunnan’s Nanzhao Kingdom.

The population of the region around Dali is predominantly Bai minority and you will see ladies wearing the traditional Bai headdress all over Dali. Tourism is now the mainstay of Dali’s economy, but in years gone by the city was the capital of the Nanzhao Kingdom, which ruled a swathe of what is today Yunnan Province and northern Burma between the 8th and 9th centuries AD.

From Dali it is only a short drive north to the Bai minority village of Xizhou…a hidden gem in the countryside.

Slowly, we’re sure, you will feel your workday stresses ebb as you ease into the rhythm of travelling.
Day 3
To Yunnan’s UNESCO world heritage town

In the early morning, we recommend either a stroll through Xizhou market – a real treasure! – or a drive by the shore of lake Erhai.

Then, after breakfast at the Linden Center, it is a short drive to Lijiang where you arrive for lunch. Lijiang, former capital of the “Nakhi Kingdom”, was introduced to the West by eccentric American botanist Joseph Rock in the 1930s and 40s. The cobbled streets of Lijiang’s old town, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, run alongside crystal clear streams and up the steep slopes of Lion Hill, from where you can enjoy a wonderful view over Lijiang’s old town to 5,000 metre (16,400 feet) tall Jade Dragon Snow Mountain.

After lunch we have planned for a visit to the tiny village of Yuhu, Joseph Rock’s home while he was stationed in the Yunnan region. Yuhu is a pretty Naxi minority village very close to Jade Dragon Snow Mountain. It feels a few decades away from Lijiang’s busy old town thanks to the fact that it remains more or less undiscovered and is therefore almost tourist free [although, sadly, this is changing rapidly, too.]

In the evening, we have a special dinner planned for you in the old town of Lijiang. While inevitably busy with tourists, the stroll through the beautifully lit alleyways of Lijiang is always enchanting.

Driving Distance & Duration
Distance: 155 km
Duration: 2 hours

Elevation
Highest Daytime: 2600m
Overnight: 2500m

Hotel
Intercontinental Lijiang [****]
Day 4
Via the Tiger Leaping Gorge to the Edge of Tibet

Today will be your first day of driving in the countryside of northwest Yunnan.

You will first drive on a stretch, newly built highway that will take you in short order to the Tiger Leaping Gorge – one of the deepest gorges in the world!

The afternoon will be for driving lovers as we ascend from 1,800m to 3,300m in a matter of a few hours. We will drive along one of the most beautiful roads we’ve discovered in this part of the world (weather permitting)! It will be a long day!

Day 5
Gorgeous scenery and glaciers...

Before your departure, we invite you to visit the Tibetan home of a family which we have gotten to know well over the years. We suggest a light snack in their house to taste not only yak butter tea and Zanba, but also some of their other simply dishes of yak meat and roast potatoes. It will be a pleasure to talk to the members of the family about their lives.

The scenic drive from Shangri-La to Deqin winds through lush temperate and alpine forests with breath-taking views over the Baima Pass at 4,350 meters. There is a chorten (white stupa) at the pass with many prayer flags placed by the faithful asking for blessings. The Yangtze drainage area lies on one side of the pass and the Mekong on the other.

Baima National Reserve, a UNESCO designated world heritage site, is one of the few truly wild places left in China. Nearly all of the world’s species of rhododendron originated from this area. There are even still a few spots where red pandas and snow leopards roam free. Surrounded by snow-capped mountains and forested valleys, it is indeed Shangri-La.
Day 6
Exploring the foot hills of Meili Snow Mountain...

Deqin is situated at the foot of the Meili Snow Mountain Range which is remarkable for its impressive chain of glaciated peaks more than 6,000 meters high. At sunrise and sunset, the soft sunlight illuminates all twenty peaks.

The Meili Snow Mountain Range is a sub-range of the Hengduan Mountains which run north to south, marking the boundary between Tibet and Yunnan.

The main peak is Kawagebo, standing at 6,740 meters. Kawagebo is the first of the six most sacred mountains in Tibetan Buddhism. Over 10,000 pilgrims make the 240 kilometer trek around the mountain each year. As of today, none of the major peaks have been scaled. Tibetan Buddhists believe that Great Spirits dwell in the mountains.

You will have a whole day to explore the area around Deqin. What might you be in the mood for? A gentle hike along lovely mountain trails? A short driving excursion to Feilaisi, a small, but charming Tibetan Buddhist temple? A visit to a Tibetan house for a simple lunch as the Tibetans eat it? A stroll through the border town of Deqin? We 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
(Depending on your chosen activity)

Elevation
Highest Daytime: 3600m
Overnight: 3300m

Hotel
Songtsam Lodge, Deqin [****]

Day 7
Onto the ‘Roof of the World’ and into Tibet

Shortly after leaving Deqin you will enter Tibet and the countryside quickly gets wilder and more remote. You will make a stop at a Catholic Church close to the border where the congregation’s singing is wonderful – many songs are familiar hymns sung in Mandarin overlaid with haunting Tibetan harmonies and rhythms.

Today’s road leads through steep valleys, more often than not following the Mekong river further and further upstream. If you look carefully, on the opposite side of the road, you can see an ancient trail carved into the side of the rock… which is where the tea horse caravans travelled.

Tonight’s overnight stop is in the frontier town of Markham, which has a real wild-west feel to it.

Details
Driving Distance & Duration
Distance: 220 km
Duration: 5 hours

Elevation
Highest Daytime: 3880m
Overnight: 3750m

Hotel
Kangsheng Hotel, Markham [**]
Day 8
Adventure on the high plateau

Today’s driving distance is relatively short, but the road maybe, depending on the state of recent repairs, rough because it is frequented by trucks.

However, the route and the scenery will more than compensate for it: While crossing three high passes – including the tallest on the trip - Dongdha Mountain Pass at 5,100 metres (16,730ft) - you will get to enjoy amazing views over the Tibetan Highlands of Eastern Tibet.

Tonight’s hotel is the most basic on the trip, and one of the very few hotels we use that has only squat toilets - but Zogang is the most remote stop on our journey, and unfortunately there are limited choices in this region of Tibet!
Day 9
Mountain passes and riverside roads...

On the way from Zogang to Rawok, you will leave behind the G214 national road and join China’s longest such road – the G318, which winds from Shanghai all the way to the Mount Everest Base Camp. This road will take you up the Mount Yela Pass – just over 4,600 metres (15,090 feet). Although this isn’t the highest pass of the trip, it is made the most exciting by the spectacular descent through seventy-two hairpin turns down to 2,700 metres elevation (8,860 feet) – a breathtaking descent. Once you reach the bottom of the descent, you will find yourself by the side of another one of China’s mighty rivers, the Salween which flows from its source in Qinghai south toward Myanmar.

At the end of the day, you will arrive at tiny Rawok on the shore of Lake Rawok, a lovely alpine lake fed by nearby glaciers.

Day 10
Through the spectacular Sundzom Valley...

Take an early morning drive out to the shore of Lake Rawok to watch sunrise, before returning to the hotel for a leisurely breakfast.

After a short drive through the main Sundzom Valley you will turn off the main road into a side valley to explore the area around Midui Glacier – hike or take a ride on horseback towards the glacier before taking a break for a picnic lunch.

After lunch it’s a short but beautiful drive towards Pomi, your overnight stop.

Hotel
Blue Lake Inn, Rawok [***]
Day 11
The road to Lhasa – the best and worst of the G318

Today you will experience the extremes of the G318.

Soon after you leave Pomi the road narrows and you leave the smooth pavement behind and the road winds along a steep hillside. You’ll need to take this short section of road slowly before the road condition improves dramatically and the road turns towards some of the most beautiful landscape of the entire journey. On a clear day, as you cross the 4,560 metre Serkym-La Pass, you will be rewarded by seeing eastern Tibet’s highest mountain, the 7,700 metre tall Mount Namjagbarwa. After arriving in Bayi you can relax from the day’s lows and highs in a good hotel and enjoy an excellent dinner.

Day 12
Arriving in Lhasa at last!

The drive from Bayi to Lhasa is long, but all on good roads, and through yet more stunning countryside. Today you will also climb the second highest pass of the trip – the 5,025 metre (16,480 feet) Pa-La Pass.

Gradually the valley in which the G318 runs opens up until you arrive in Lhasa, where you will wonder at the sight of the Tibetan capital – not least because you have driven here all the way on your own! In the evening enjoy a delicious Tibetan meal and evening dance performance together, or a well-earned drink in an atmospheric bar.

Details
Driving Distance & Duration
Distance: 230 km
Duration: 5.5 - 6 hours

Elevation
Highest Daytime: 4520m
Overnight: 3000m

Hotel
Fujiang Hotel, Bayi [****]
Day 13
Life must go on, or continue?

Some of you will have to fly home today because life must go on.

On the other hand, if you can spare an extra day or two, why not stay on to explore Lhasa’s old city – a warren of prayer-wheel workshops, pool halls and teahouses (why not stop and try some yak butter tea?), to join the scores of pilgrims waiting to worship at the holiest shrine of Tibetan Buddhism – the golden-roofed Jokhang – and of course, to make time to visit the iconic Potala Palace. Lhasa is also a wonderful place to just sit and watch the world go by. However you spend it, an extra day or two would be a fitting end to your amazing journey.

If you have yet more time, well, why not extend your trip to the Mount Everest Base Camp by joining our “Roads on the Roof of the World” journey?

Whatever you choose to do, we will be here to help you make the arrangements.

Details
Driving Distance & Duration
Distance: NA
Duration: NA

Elevation
Highest Daytime: 3650m
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”
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 or 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 in China 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 pre-programmed 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 flights to Kunming and back from Lhasa, your China visa, and personal purchases (e.g., gifts, souvenirs).
A picture is worth a thousand words. True, but when it comes to a road journey, moving images are priceless. Please visit:

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

Ralph Waldo Emerson