

MOMENTS

on the road

Tibetan Highlands - Kunming to Lhasa
(13 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...

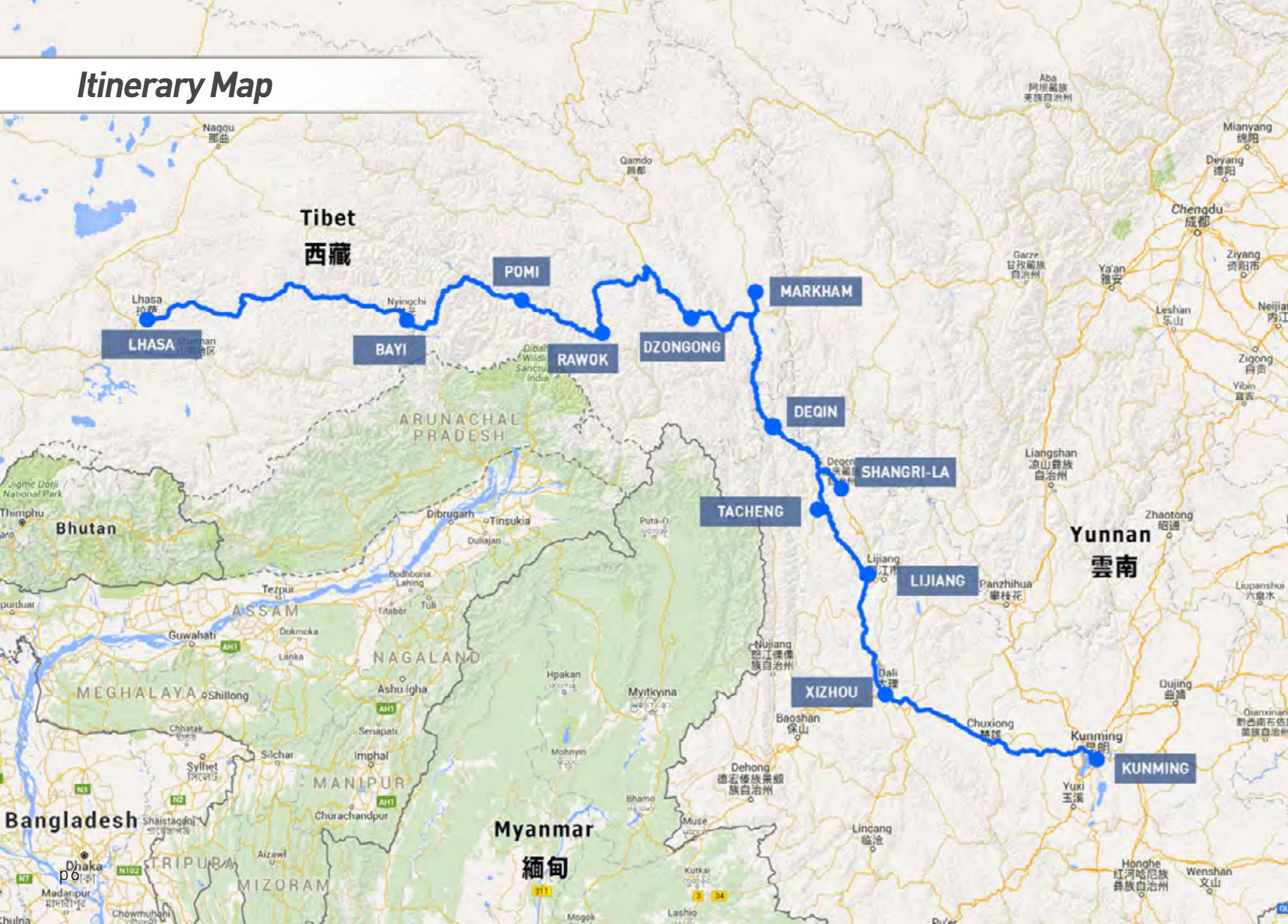




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Itinerary Map



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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...

Journey of discovery





“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...”



Jade Lake not far from Lijiang...

Jade Dragon Snow Mountain seen from the Black Dragon Pool, Lijiang...

“ 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!”

A wide-angle photograph of a mountainous landscape. In the foreground, a dark, rocky cliffside rises from the right, with a paved road curving along its edge. The road is bordered by a simple concrete guardrail. The background consists of vast, rugged mountains with deep valleys and ridges, all bathed in a soft, blue-tinted light. The overall scene conveys a sense of adventure and a challenging drive.

“Yunnan to Tibet
IS a driving
ADVENTURE...”

Near Tiger Leaping Gorge



“STUNNING
LANDSCAPES
on the way to
LIJIANG...”

From a back road near Baishuitai

“A colourful
WELCOME as
you APPROACH
TIBET...”



Tibetan prayer flags



“ Along the way,
one of the **LARGEST**
MONASTERIES in
SOUTH-WEST China...”

“RED-ROBED
MONKS in
Shangri-La”

At the Ganden Sumtseling Monastery

“

A chance to
**PURIFY
YOUR
MIND?”**

“ What a
SUNRISE at the
EDGE of
TIBET...”

Kawagebo peak in the Meili Snow Mountain range

A scenic view of a mountain trail with hikers and vibrant autumn foliage. The trail is rocky and winds through a forest of trees with bright red, orange, and yellow leaves. Four hikers are visible on the trail, moving away from the camera. The background shows a steep, forested mountain slope.

“ Wonderful
HIKING, if you
like, as a WAY TO
RELAX...”

In the foot hills of Meili Snow Mountain

An aerial photograph showing a long, winding road with 72 hairpin turns descending a mountain range. The road is light-colored and zig-zags across the brown and grey slopes. The terrain is rugged and mountainous, with some green patches in the lower valleys. The sky is clear and blue.

“72 hairpin TURNS
descending from
4,700m to 2,700m
on the way to
LHASA...”



“ RIVER
CROSSING...It
brings out the
CHILD in us!”



“ In SPRING or
in AUTUMN, an
ENCHANTING
place to
EXPLORE...”

Midui Glacier, near Pomi, Tibet

A wide, calm river flows through a valley. The surrounding hills are covered in dense, dark green forests, with thick white mist or fog rising from the trees and partially obscuring the landscape. The sky is overcast and grey. In the foreground, there are some green leaves and branches on the left side.

“LIKE a PAINTING,
mist in the DENSE
FORESTS on the
WAY to LHASA...”

The Brahmaputra flowing west, Tibet

“Where THIS
LAND is MY LAND,
says the YAK...”





“PROSTRATING
for SPIRITUAL
reasons...”



“IF you're LUCKY,
you will meet
FASCINATING
PEOPLE...along
this route...”

At a temple in Tibet...





“PILGRIMS
PRAY
in the shade...”

“GOSSIP
and PRAYER
go
hand-in-hand...”



The Jokhang, Lhasa

“RAINBOW
not
included...”

Day-by-day



Day 1 Arriving in Kunming and preparing for your journey

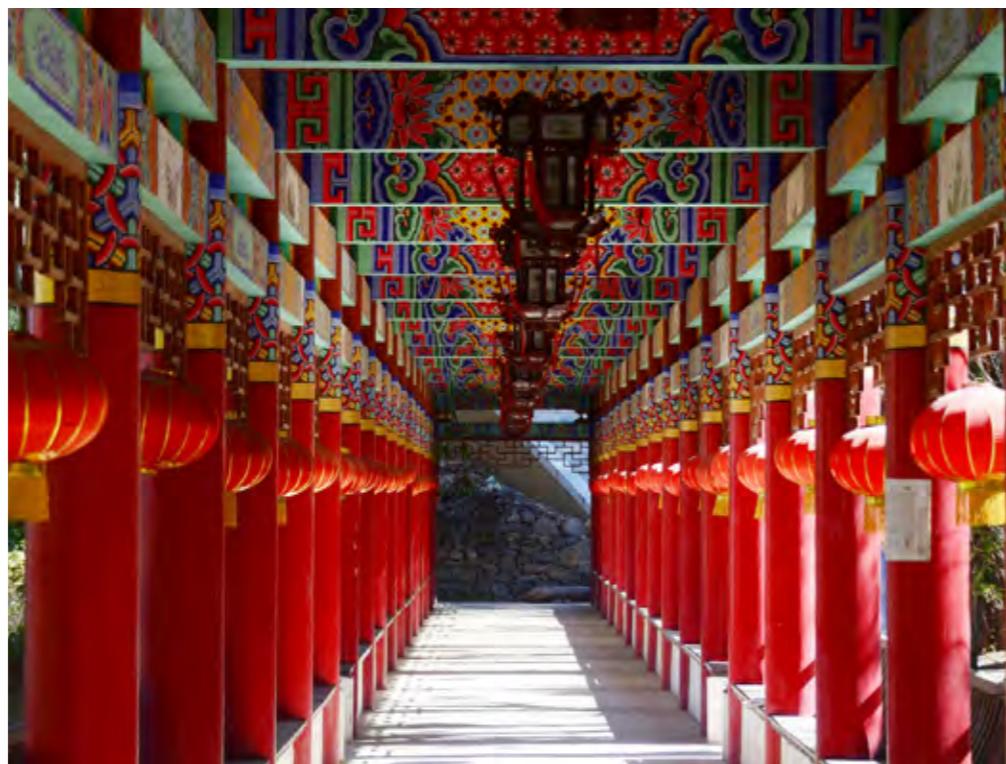
Arrive in Kunming according to your own arrangements.

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.



Details

Driving Distance & Duration

Distance: NA

Duration: NA

Elevation

Highest Daytime: 1900m

Overnight: 1850m

Hotel

InterContinental Kunming
(*****)

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.



Details

Driving Distance & Duration

Distance: 360 km

Duration: 4.5-5.5 hours

Elevation

Highest Daytime: 2050m

Overnight: 2000m

Hotel

Linden Centre, Xizhou (****)

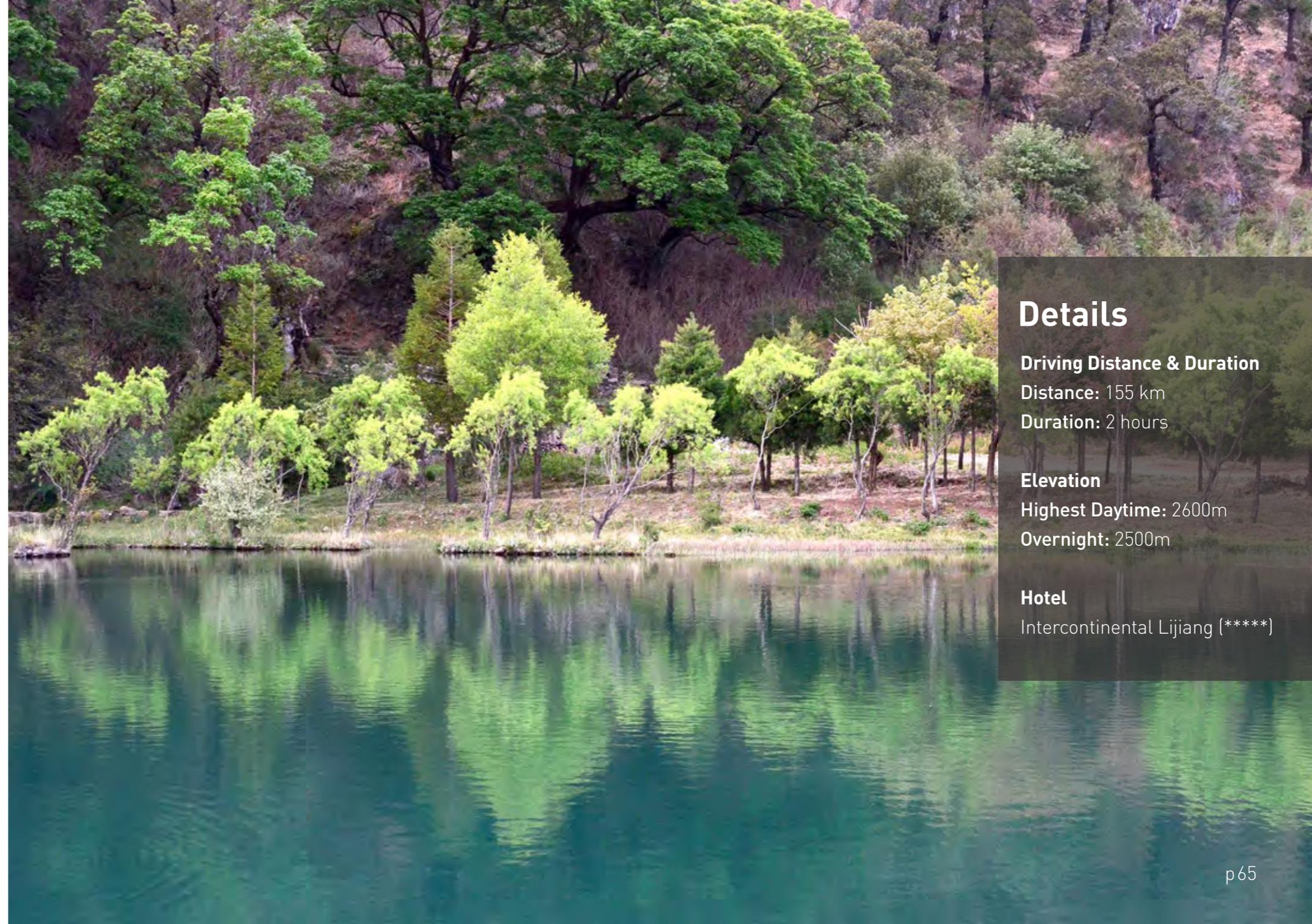
Day 3 To Yunnan's UNESCO world heritage town

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 “Naxhi 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 along-side 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.



Details

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 short 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!

Details

Driving Distance & Duration

Distance: 260 km

Duration: 7-8 hours

Elevation

Highest Daytime: 3800m

Overnight: 3300m

Hotel

Songtsam Retreat Hotel,
Shangri-La (****)

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.

Details

Driving Distance & Duration

Distance: 185 km

Duration: 3 hours

Elevation

Highest Daytime: 4000m

Overnight: 3600m

Hotel

Songtsam Lodge, Deqin (****)



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!



Details

Driving Distance & Duration

Distance: 160 km

Duration: 5 hours

Elevation

Highest Daytime: 4500m

Overnight: 3800m

Hotel

Zogang Hotel, Zogang (**)

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.



Details

Driving Distance & Duration

Distance: 250 km

Duration: 7 hours

Elevation

Highest Daytime: 4800m

Overnight: 3930m

Hotel

Blue Lake Inn, Rawok (***)



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.



Details

Driving Distance & Duration

Distance: 140 km

Duration: 2.5 - 3 hours

Elevation

Highest Daytime: 3000m

Overnight: 2740m

Hotel

Shenyang Hotel, Pomi (***)

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.

Details

Driving Distance & Duration

Distance: 230 km

Duration: 5.5 - 6 hours

Elevation

Highest Daytime: 4520m

Overnight: 3000m

Hotel

Fujiang Hotel, Bayi (****)

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: 400 km

Duration: 8 hours

Elevation

Highest Daytime: 5000m

Overnight: 3650m

Hotel

Shangri-La Hotel, Lhasa (*****)



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 goldenroofed 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



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 Mitsubishi's 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 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).



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- Unknown - pages 53, 78-79.

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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>”





ON THE ROAD EXPERIENCES

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 Emerson

