



China and Tibet via the Sky Train

About your tour guides:

- Dr. Jim Merryman is a Professor of Anthropology at Wilkes University whose research specialty is pastoral nomads like the ones we'll meet in Tibet. This will be the tenth Wilkes trip he has accompanied.

- Mr. Jeff Levinson of Dallas, PA, is president of Lune Tours. Jeff has spent the past four years in China, speaks Mandarin, and has trekked across China and Tibet.

The custom itinerary below stems from Jeff's local research and Jim's academic insights. The tour will expose our travelers to a side of China and Tibet rarely seen by tourists.

Tibet Itinerary - Summer 2009

June 21 - Arrive in Beijing

Upon arrival at the Beijing Capital Airport, We will be met by our local Chinese guide who will help us transfer to the hotel. In the afternoon, sit back and enjoy a rickshaw tricycle tour through traditional BeiJing neighborhoods to get a glimpse of what life was like in China before it underwent the current vast modernization. These neighborhoods or hutongs are traditional alleys where communities live in close proximity. The wood and stone craftsmanship in these hutongs is intricate and is not seen in modern Chinese buildings. After the rickshaw tour visit a local family and get a chance to talk with two long time residents of BeiJing. We finish our first day in China with a traditional Peking Duck dinner.

Accommodation **INLODGE HOTEL**

Featuring a blend of comfort, modern technology, and advanced facilities, the InLodge is the hotel of choice for travelers and business people coming to Beijing. Located within walking distance of the central Beijing subway, guests of the InLodge enjoy convenient access to the city. The Inlodge Hotel is also close to the 2008 Olympic Games Competition Venues District in Beijing. All 150 rooms and suites in the hotel come with modern amenities.

Beijing, capital and cultural heart of modern China, is a city where past, present and future meet. Though rapidly transforming itself into a modern metropolis with towering high rise buildings, colorful billboards and multi-lane highways, the traditional city is never more than an alley away.

June 22 - Beijing

Start the day with a walk around TianAnMen Square, the largest city square in the world. It is on this square where China's leaders preside over the enormous rallies that take place. Next, visit the Forbidden City, the ancient home to the imperial family and a marvelous monument to Chinese architecture. The city contains a magnificent collection of Chinese bronzes, porcelain, paintings, jade and other treasures. From the Forbidden city we climb the hill in JingShan Park for a panoramic view of the city. After lunch in a local restaurant we visit the Beijing City planning museum before an early dinner and the most popular acrobatic show in Beijing.

Acrobatics is an interactive art form. Everyone can easily appreciate the talent and strength exhibited by the performers. Chinese Acrobatics is one of the oldest performing arts. Its history can be traced back to Neolithic times. It is believed that acrobatics grew out of labor and self-defense skills, which people practiced and demonstrated during their leisure time.

June 23 - Beijing

After breakfast, we have a full day private guided excursion to visit the Great Wall. The Great Wall is one of the great wonders of the world. There is nothing quite like standing on the top tower, looking at the Wall snaking its way across the tops of the mountains, and envisioning ancient armies locked in combat, the Great Wall at Badaling is 31

miles north of Beijing. Later, visit the Ming Tombs and be impressed by the beauty of the location and the tranquility of the surroundings. For almost 3,000 years Chinese rulers have built their tombs there. The selection of the grave sites is based on wind patterns and water levels to ensure that only benevolent spirits would inhabit the area. Also part of the Ming Tombs is a visit to the Spirit Way. This road is 765 yards long and guarded by 36 ancient human and animal statues, each of which was carved from its own piece of marble. On the way back to the city, have a short visit to the Beijing cloisonné ware factory, which is the most famous local craft form. The technique used today of inlaid copper and enamel filling was developed in the Jingtai period of Ming Dynasty, over 500 years ago. After an early dinner, we transfer to the train station to board the Sky Train to Tibet.

June 24 – Sky Train

Full day on the train

The Qinghai-Tibet Railway (or Sky Train, Lhasa Express, Rocket to the Rooftop of the World) is truly a technological wonder and one of the great engineering feats of our age. In 2001, hundreds of thousands of workers began laying track over the Kunlun Mountains and across the Tibetan plateau. The railway cuts across some of the highest, and most forbidding geography in the world. The 710 mile railway crosses mountain passes up to 16,500 feet high and travels over terrain that is frozen all year round. In order to ensure that the tracks would not become unstable as the ground thaws Chinese engineers designed a solar powered cooling system for the rails. The railway cost \$4 billion USD to construct and in its completed form has 675 bridges and 44 stations, the highest of which is 16,600 feet above sea level.

The train itself is also filled with modern technology. The GE diesel engines (built in Erie, Pennsylvania) are specifically designed to run in the rarefied air of the plateau. Each car is fitted with personal oxygen supplies to help passengers adjust to the high altitude as well as UV light filters for the windows. From a personal comfort perspective the cabins have individual flat screen TVs and power outlets for personal electronic devices.

This railway which now connects Lhasa to the rest of the Chinese rail network is part of the government's efforts to economically develop China's west and link it to the rest of the country.

Highlights of the Train journey include:

- The Hol Xil National Nature Reserve: The most likely place along the trip to catch site of Tibets fauna. Tibetan antelope, yaks, wild donkeys, sheep, and marmots are some of the animals that you may see on the journey. As a side note regarding animals and the train: more than 30 pathways above tunnels and below bridges have been built to allow animals to follow annual migration routes that would have otherwise been endangered by the train.
- The Kunlun Mountains: the backbone of Asia. Among the KunLun peaks is Yuzhu Peak, where China's climbing team trains.
- Tuotuohe: the source of the Yellow River.
- Qinghai Lake: The largest lake in China which is about the same size as the Great Salt Lake in Utah. Over 20 rivers flow into the lake but none flow out. The lake maintains its water level through evaporation. The Qinghai lake supports a variety of animals including birds which feed on the fish of the lake. Many of these birds return to Qinghai Lake during their biannual migrations. Cormorants, geese, cranes and swans are plentiful here. In the summer months herds of yak arrive at the lake.
- Golmud: The mineral, oil, and chemical are the major industries of Golmud. It is also a major transportation hub connecting China's eastern and northern cities to the southwest and Tibet. For visitors the surrounding landscape is reminiscent of a lunar landscape as the region at an altitude of 10,000 feet is treeless.
- Golmud-to-Lhasa section: This section of the journey which is passed through on the second day offers the most breath-taking scenery. Over 80% of the journey is at altitudes above 13,000 feet and half the track on this sector was laid atop permafrost.

During the ride there will be a few activities for our group. We will be showing movies on Tibet and Tibetan history, offering basic classes in Mandarin and Tibetan to help you navigate the city, and holding lectures on nomadic and Chinese culture

June 25 - Lhasa

After a full day on the train, arrive in Lhasa around 8 pm. At the train station we will meet our local guide and transfer to the hotel.

Accommodation LHASA HOTEL

The Lhasa Hotel is one of the only international 4-star hotels in Tibet. With 450 rooms it is one of the largest hotels in the whole of Tibet. The hotel is centrally located close to the Potala Palace and the neighboring Norbulingka Park.

Lhasa, in the Tibet autonomous region, covers 4600 square miles in area, with a population around 400,000. It has an average annual temperature of 45 degrees Fahrenheit, and an average annual precipitation of 18 inches. Mineral and stone resources, including: copper, iron, silver, granite, marble around Lhasa are very abundant around Lhasa. Agriculture is also very important to Lhasa. the main crops are: wheat, highland barley, tomatoes, and cucumbers. The traditional specialties of Lhasa are carpet, jewelry, highland barley wine, snow-lotus and Zang flowers.

June 26 - Lhasa

After breakfast at the hotel we meet our local guide and visit the central structure of Tibet, the Potala Palace. The palace was built in the 17th century by the Dalai Lama and is set on a hill overlooking the city. The palace is an architectural wonder with thousands of colorfully painted rooms, chapels with silk brocade banners, and religious statues. After the palace we visit Jokhang Temple. This temple is one of the main pilgrimage sites for Tibetan Buddhists. Approaching the temple we will see some of these pilgrims lighting candles and lamps, and others carrying offerings of food into the temple where they go to worship. On our tour through the temple we will see its numerous chapels wrapped in colorful banners and the huge golden Buddhist symbols that cap the building. After lunch at a local restaurant we finish our first full day in Tibet with a trip to the Barkhor Market. At the market enjoy the stimulating sights, sounds and fragrances of Tibetan commerce. The market is full of herbs, spices, dried fruits and nuts from all over Asia; glittering brass, bronze & copper religious objects; hand-woven piled carpets; yak butter; hand-painted religious scrolls; bright prayer flags; and much more.

June 27 - Lhasa

****Optional Activity - Add 75 USD**** Day trek in the mountains around Lhasa. Enjoy the magnificent scenery of the Himalayan foothills. Along the way we stop in a nomadic campground for Yak butter tea. The trek winds through the beautiful Shey Valley where the nomad camp is located. The trek includes transportation, water, lunch, tea, and a local nomad as a guide. Most of the trekking will be at altitudes above 12000 feet so participants should be in good physical condition and acclimatized to the altitude.

About the Trekking Company - Highland Trekking Initiatives exists as a company to provide travelers with a glimpse of the fragile land of Tibet and the nomadic people that live there. HTI treks not only provide an opportunity to experience the richness of the Tibetan landscape but also provides nomadic Tibetans with opportunities for employment. HTI uses the funds from the trips to support projects such as: the Ngari Red Cross partnership, nomad education, micro-enterprise businesses for herders, live-stock & rangeland management, and ecological preservation. Highland Trekking Initiatives is dedicated to the ecological preservation of Tibet. Threats to the nomadic lifestyle in Tibet are taken very seriously and HTI strives to offer treks that have no negative impact on the local nomads or the land that is traversed on the trek. The high grasslands of Tibet are some of the most ecologically fragile in the world and it is HTI's goal to partner with Tibetan Nomads in the preservation of their great land.

June 28 - Lhasa

Day excursion to Namtso Lake. Namtso lake is the highest saltwater lake in the world at 15,500 feet above sea level and the largest saltwater lake in Tibet. Its purity and solemnness are symbols of Qinghai-Tibet Plateau. In Tibetan, Namtso means 'Heavenly Lake' and its five islands are used as spiritual retreats for pilgrims. Lunch is included today. In the evening return to Lhasa.

June 29 - Lhasa to Gyantse

After breakfast begin our drive to Gyantse. On the way we stop to see Yamdrok Yumtso Lake and the Karola pass. As one of the three holy lakes in Tibet, Yamdrok Yumtso is said to be the female Guardian of Buddhism in Tibet. Every year, many devotional followers in Tibet and other places go there for pilgrimage. Karola Pass at 15,700 feet climbs between two lofty mountains, Nozing Khangsa 23,700 ft and Ralung 20,460 ft. After arriving in Gyantse we check into the hotel and have the rest of the evening free.

June 30 - Gyantse to Shigatse

Today we drive 56 miles from Gyantse to Shigatse. Shigatse is the second largest city in Tibet after Lhasa and is the home to the Panchen Lama. En-route visit the famous stupa - Gyantse Kumpum, which some say is the most stunning architectural wonder in Tibet. On arrival in Shigatse we will visit. In the afternoon you will visit "Tashilumpo Monastery" which sprawls on the slopes of Mount Niser, southwest of Shigatse. The monastery grounds cover an area of approximately 7.5 acres. There are many priceless and rare historical articles in the monastery.

July 1 - Shigatse to Lhasa

Drive back to Lhasa. In the evening after our long drive we will enjoy a large group farewell banquet

July 2 - Lhasa - Beijing

The morning is at your leisure. In the afternoon we will meet at the hotel and transfer to the airport for the flight to Beijing. On arrival we transfer with a guide to the InLodge hotel.

July 3 - Beijing to US

Transfer to the airport for our return flight to the US.