



Kham Adventure and Photography Tour.

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Day 3: Nangchen - Gar Monastery and Nunnery.

Day 4: Drive from Gar to Tsechu Monastery.

Day 5: Tsechu Monastery - Jamar Mani-Varka village.

Day 6: Varka village.

Day 7: Varka- Nangchen.

Day 8: Nangchen Town and surrounding monasteries.

Day 9: Nangchen - Surmang Monastery and Galden monastery.

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Day 11: Kyekundo. Janak Mani Stone Field and Kyekundo Monastery, and Kyekundo market.

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Day 1: Pick up from the Yushu airport and transfer to hotel

Pickup from the Yushu Partang airport in the mid-morning and transfer to hotel.

Acclimate to the high altitude and rest.

Day 2: Kyekundo (Yushu) - Nangchen

In the morning, we will drive through Palthang Grasslands bustling with the activity of yaks and sheep roaming the vast mountain slopes. After a short 1-hour drive, we will arrive at 3,800 meters and stop on the road to take pictures of the ramparts of the nearby rock face. By lunch time we will arrive in Nangchen. Nangchen county is one of 6 counties located in Yushu Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture in the Qinghai Part of Kham. Though Nangchen is remote and underdeveloped, it is one of the most beautiful parts of Tibet and has some of the most authentically preserved Tibetan culture. Nangchen was one of the 5 independent kingdoms of eastern Tibet and is renowned for having some of the fiercest warriors in Tibet. However, the native Kham people were not just only fighters, this county alone holds 155 monasteries, a huge number of monasteries for such a thinly populated area spread over snowy mountains and grandiose rock spires. These kingdoms were independent from both China and the Tibetan government in Lhasa and were each ruled by a Kham king. The former Nangchen kingdom expanded over all of modern day Yushu Tibetan Autonomous prefecture in southern Qinghai. The king of Nangchen ruled this region until the late 1950's/early 1960's.

Day 3: Nangchen-Gar Monastery and Nunnery

This day we will drive 55 km from Nangchen to Gar monastery past the Piza Village and Tibetan salt farms that produce white and red salt from the earth. These salt farms, still active today, were famous in the area; nomads used to ride for 2 weeks on the backs of yaks just for the opportunity to buy this salt for preserving food, feeding their yaks and sheep, and for reselling in other areas of southern Kham. Gar is one of the most amazing

monasteries in all of Tibet and many foreigners describe it as the most beautiful of all the monasteries we will see on this tour. Home to deer, blue sheep, and Himalyan Golden Monkeys, Gar Monastery is set against a dramatic spine of 4,500-meter mountain ridges and tall stands of native cedar forests. Gar monastery was founded by Gardamba Chodeng, the heart-disciple of Dukung Chopa Rinpoche (the first incarnation of Garchen Rinpoche). There is a lot to see and take in here; in addition to the virgin forest, Gar also offers views of a remote lake, many surrounding rivers and deep valleys, and offers wonders and spiritual treasures in both an upper and lower monastery. After a short visit to take in the serenity of nearby “sister” Gar Nunnery we will return to Gar monastery and sleep there with full bellies and satisfied hearts.

Day 4: Drive from Gar to Tsechu monastery

The road from Gar to Tsechu offers open lush valleys that run abruptly into the high, forboding fortresses of the nearby slopes and rocky mountains. This area is always one of the scenic highlights for the entire tour. Tsechu is the home to the royal Nangchen King’s original residence and thus was the historic capital of the entire Nangchen Kingdom. Drugpa Kagyu, one of the smaller school of Tibetan Buddhism, has an important presence here along with a monastery and an extensive sacred mani stone pile.

Day 5: Tsechu Monastery - Jamar Mani-Varka village

Jamar Mani is one of the most important of the 3 holiest mani stone piles found in the Kham area. In Jamar village pilgrims daily walk around this mani pile to achieve greater merit and to offer prayers of compassion for the world. We will join the pilgrims as they make their route around the Buddhist mantras hand carved into each rock of the millions of individual stones.

The Kyechu River, almost as big as the Mekong River, flows near the Jamar Mani. Here we will photograph the historic wooden Samsarma log bridge that spans the river. Like the original 200-year-old construction of the Samsarma bridge, there is a wealth of timeworn red clay and stone architecture here in the many old country villages. We can view these rural villages and in so doing gain a rare glimpse into the ancient customs of the Tibetan people. After this experience, we will drive 45 minutes from Jamar to Varka and sleep in Varka village.

Day 6: Varka village

Today we will explore Varka village- a treasure house of hidden art, scripture, and culture. Almost no foreigners have ever been to Varka and therefore it presents some of

the best kept secrets of Kham. This landscape offers great diversity ranging from small hermitages high in the mouths of caves where monks meditate for over 20 years to a natural hot spring that we can bath in at the base of the mountain.

Day 7: Varka - Nangchen

Today we will drive 4 hours from Varka village to Nangchen.

Along the way we can stop in some villages and come in intimate contact with the villagers. This will be a great chance to take some up-close portraits of locals and to gaze into a very isolated way of life in the mountains.

Day 8: Nangchen Town and surrounding monasteries

This day we will discover some of the monasteries that are outside of the county town of Nangchen. Zamo Monastery is a small monastery just a short 20-minute drive on the mountain above town. From the summit of this monastery we can stand and watch the wind rhythmically flutter the colorful prayer flags that cover the whole peak and look down on the splendor of Nangchen County and its many intricate geographical wonders. We will then go to visit a nunnery called Zamerchen Nunnery with more than 300 nuns. With a dramatic backdrop of high altitude snowy crags, this nunnery is seated right in front of a rocky hill that is full of white prayer flags, so many flags that some say it looks as if the hill is snow-capped from a distance.

Day 9: Nangchen - Surmang Monastery and Galden monastery

We will drive 1.5 hours from Nangchen to Surmang Monastery passing a quaint Tibetan village and majestic mountain views. Surmang is one of the most remote monasteries in Kham. This newly remodeled monastery has a large monk population of more than 300 monks. We will get an up-close look at the sacred routines of monks as they light butter lamp candles as offerings and meditate on Buddhist scriptures from the main monastery hall. From Surmang, we will continue another 20 minutes along the road to Galden Monastery. Galden Monastery is one of the most picturesque monasteries in Kham, sitting tranquilly on a mountaintop and with the brilliant blue Tsechu River wrapping all the way around it.

Day 10: Surmang Monastery - Kyekundo (Yushu)

We will drive 4 hours from Surmang Monastery back to the comparatively civilized Kyekundo. On the way we can stop in some of the villages seated in the expansive grasslands and have a few chats with the local nomads over a cup of freshly made yak yoghurt. The yak yoghurt is pretty tart but with a little sugar is as creamy as ice cream and very enjoyable.

Day 11: Kyekundo. Janak Mani Stone Field and Kyekundo Monastery, and Kyekundo market

In the morning we will visit Janak (Jiana) Mani Stone Field which is commonly known as Gyanak Mani. This is the world's largest prayer stone pile with more than two billion praying stones hand-engraved with Buddhist sculptures and pictures. With a walking kora of more than 3 km in length, this holy site is regarded as both the largest and the holiest mani stone area in Tibet. There are thousands of pilgrims that come from all around the Kyekundo area from 100's of kilometers away to walk around around these mani stones every morning. We will walk shoulder to shoulder with these pilgrims and get a very personal view of their daily life and devotion. We will also have an opportunity to photograph these devout and wonderful pilgrims. In the afternoon we will visit Kyekundo Dondrubling Monastery, which is easily visible from the town where we will be staying. Established in the 14th century, this monastery sits prominently on a high hill and provides a sweeping view of Kyekundo city. In the afternoon we will rest and enjoy the sights and sounds and smells of Kyenkundo town. We may even get an opportunity to see the traditional form of bartering in a local market where the local Kham people put their hands into each other's sleeves and haggle over price through a secret dance of the fingers inside their robes.

Day 12: Drive from Kyekundo to Sershul

We will drive 2.5 hours from Kyekundo to Sershul (Shiqu in Chinese). Sershul is a traditional Tibetan town of Kham. This remote area has some of the best grasslands in all of the Tibetan Plateau. Located 140kms east of Kyekundo,

Sershul, known locally as Dzachuka, is made up mostly of nomadic Tibetans who spend their lives herding sheep and yaks. With many nomads with long black hair and natural dreadlocks and sun-tanned faces, Sershul definitely has a "wild west" feel to it. Though remote and a bit wild, this area is safe and is a great place to see nomadic Tibetan culture, including excellent examples of the *chuba*, the traditional long-sleeved Tibetan robe. Sershul Monastery is an important Gelugpa monastery and lies on a beautiful hillside. From this vantage point in the summer you can see the green grass of the open valley with its nomad tents in the background. Currently hosting more than 500 studios monks, this is the biggest monastery in the Sershul area.

Day 13: Drive from Sershul to Dzogchen

We will drive from Sershul to Dzogchen. Dzogchen Monastery was founded by the first Rinpoche of Dzungchen, Pema Rigdzin, in 1684. The 4th Dzogchen Rinpoche was the master of two famous lamas named Patrul Rinpoche and Ju Mipham as well as many

other great masters in Tibet. In particular, Patrul Rinpoche and Ju Mipham were the highest and most revered lamas in the recent history of entire Nyingma Sect, the oldest school of Tibetan Buddhism. Patrul Rinpoche, in fact, retreated from society for 30 years in a meditation cave and wrote his famous text "Words of My Perfect Teacher" here.

Dzogchen Monastery, one of the six great monasteries of the Nyingma tradition, and has a stunning panorama that has been compared to the Swiss Alps in its beauty. The monastery lies couched in a gorgeous small valley full of pasture and forest that leads into and is fed by majestic snow mountains above. It is also the main monastery for over three hundred branch monasteries in the Kham, Amdo, and Central regions of Tibet and India. As home of the Dzogchen teachings of the "Great Perfection" and a site of several meditation caves that are in still in current use, there are a great number of blessed and holy sites to visit.

Day 14: Drive to Dege

We will drive 200km to Dege at 3,700 meters. Along the way we will stop in the town of Manigango and its nearby attraction, Yi Long Lake – a remote holy lake with Mani stones sitting on the edge of the lake. As the blue lake's surface calmly shimmers in the sun and ripples the reflection of the snow-clad mountains overhead, this scene makes a great picture that you may want to take home and have framed. Dege, as the cultural heart of Kham, is one of the largest and most important of the five kingdoms in Kham. It is one the best places to see traditional Tibetan culture and the most authentic Tibetan traditional dress. Dege printing house (or in Tibetan, "Dege parkhang") was built by Chogyal Tenpa Tsering, the 12th King of Dege, in 1729 . It is the oldest and biggest printing house in all of Tibet. Dege printing house contains more than 200,000 wooden handmade blocks each of which is inscribed with important texts on religious, historical, linguistic, artistic, medical, astronomical, and mathematical in the Tibetan language.

Day 15: Drive to Palpung

The drive from Dege to Palpung is a 2-hour drive along a very beautiful valley. Hiking from the ancient halls of the monastery, we will climb a hill to see the monastery and its surrounding evergreen forests and snowy mountains. Palpung was founded by the 8th Tai Situ in 1727. Palpung is the mother monastery of the Karma Kagyu Sect in Eastern Tibet, and is an influential center of thought with more than 180 branch monasteries and temples all over Tibet and India. The monastery once hosted more than 1000 monks and had one of the most academically outstanding monastic universities of the area. It is the seat of various lines of incarnate lamas, the most well-known being the Tai Situ and the

Jamgon Kongtrul Rinpoche.

Day 16: Palpung- ZongSar Monastery-Palyur

We will continue our drive through Dege County as we drive 1 hour from Palpung monastery to the next valley to a town called Dzongsar. Dzongsar Monastery was founded in 746 by a Bön lama. Located on a prominent hill overlooking the great Khamje Valley in Sichuan, China, the monastery is the birthplace of the famous incarnations in the Khyentse lineage. Today it is a vibrant Tibetan community that includes a large monastery, a shedra (monastic college), a clinic, retreat centers, and a school. Dzongsar is home to both lay and monastic practitioners of Tibetan Buddhism.

Then driving another 2 hours to the next county we will arrive at Palyul Monastery, one of the six mother monasteries of the Nyingma tradition of Tibetan Buddhism. Located in Baiyü County in the Garzê Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, this monastery was founded in the year of 1665 by Rigdzen Kunzang Sherab. Some 300 years later, the 11th in the throne of the Palyul lineage, Dowang Pema Norbu Rinpoche left Tibet and established the famous Namdroling Monastery in south India. In this way he preserved and spread many of the ancient teachings from Palyul Monastery.

Day17: Drive from Palyul to Yachen

This day we will drive 3 hours from Palyul to Yachen. Yachen Gar, also known as Yarchen Orgyen Samten Choling, is a monastery located on a peninsula on the Dzin Chu River, in Palyul County. Established by Khenpo Achu Rinpoche in 1985, it is home to more than 20,000 nuns and monks and as such is one of the largest and most important monasteries in the Dzogchen, Nyingma tradition. Ironically this very recently founded monastery, now the second largest in the world, represents the teachings of the oldest school in Tibetan Buddhism. Living according to monastic rules and traditions, the majority of the nuns reside on the peninsula village while the monks live across the river in a separate hillside encampment. It takes an hour just to walk around the monastery complex without stopping for photos and the sheer number of monks clad in maroon robes congregated in one area is truly mind boggling.

Day18: Drive from Yachen to Garze

We will drive 3 hours from Yachen to Garze. Along the way we will cross a 4,500-meter pass that offers incredible views of large, sharp granite palisades. Garze town is the old capital of Ganzi Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture in Sichuan Province in China. Today the new capital is located in Kangding. Largely untouched by globalization, it is an important

town that preserves the authentic historical Tibetan culture in the region of Kham. Situated in a large valley with grassy hills at an elevation of 3,400 meters (11,155 ft), Ganzi lies north-east of the gorgeous snow-streaked mountains of the Gongga Shan range. Tibetan culture is alive and thriving here.

Day 19: Explore Garze Monastery

This day we will explore the environment around Garze including Garze Monastery which is located 2 km north of Garze town. From a hilltop overlooking the town, we can view the lecture halls and homes of the monks in Garze County's largest Gelugpa monastery.

From here we will drive 30km to Garze County's second largest Gelugpa Monastery, Dargye Monastery, located in the productive farm country of Sichuan.

Day 20: Drive from Garze to Serta

We will drive 4 hours from Garze to Serta. On the way to the monastery we will stop in some typical Tibetan villages and look at some very old wood houses. From the monastery we will drive 25km to the sear of Serta County.

Day 21: Serta Larong Gar Monastery

Today we will visit the epic Serta Larong Gar Monastery. Serta Larong Gar is the heart of Tibetan Buddhist scholarship and is the largest Buddhist academy in Tibet. Founded in 1980 by the late Khenpo Jigme Phuntsok, there are 30,000 resident monks, nuns, and lay students undertaking religious education at this institute. Located in the Larung Valley, 15 kilometers away from the town of Serta, the enormous campus sits at an altitude of 4,000 m/13,123 ft. This giant of philosophical education is so expansive that it is more like an entire city rather than a singular monastery. One could easily spend several days just trying to navigate the complex system of alleys and gates in this large complex. With a myriad of temples, meeting halls, and thousands of dormitory buildings, Larung Gar attracts students and pilgrims from all over China and Tibet.

Day 22: Drive from Serta to Kangding.

We will drive 4 hours from Serta to Kangding. The morning will be mostly a driving day and in the afternoon we can walk around the small but busy crossroads of Kangding. In the afternoon we will arrive in Kangding, traditionally known by local Tibetans as Dartsendo. Kangding was a historically important area of trade and commerce between Chinese and Tibetan merchants. Tibetans sold their high quality sheep wool and yak

skins, caterpillar fungus, and medicinal plants in exchange for Chinese teas, rice, and colorful silks used to make fine Tibetan robes.

Day 23: Kangding to Chengdu

We will complete the final leg of our journey as we descend from the Tibetan Plateau to the modern city of Chengdu, capital of Sichuan Province. We will arrive in Chengdu in the late afternoon of this last official day of the tour so we recommend booking your flights departing Chengdu on the next day. Chengdu is a city of 12 million with lots to see and do so many of our clients decide to stay a few days extra to travel on their own and see the giant Pandas, taste the spicy Sichuan hot pot, and even to rest and get a good cup of coffee