



## Lakes and Monasteries Tour.

- Day 1:** Pickup from the Xining Airport and transfer to hotel.
- Day 2:** Xining - Kumbum Monastery - Qinghai Lake – Hainan.
- Day 3:** Hainan - Serdzong Monastery in Madao.
- Day 4:** Explore regions around Madao: Kyaring Lake and Nyoring Lake.
- Day 5:** Madao – Tso karm lake – Karna Monastery – Kyekundo.
- Day 6:** Kyekundo. Janak mani stone and Kyekundo Monastery.
- Day 7:** Kyekundo - Rongbo Tso lake - Rongbo Monastery and Bagan Monastery.
- Day 8:** Rongbo lake – Kyekundo.
- Day 9:** Kyekundo - Shangu Monastery - Nangchen.
- Day 10:** Explore monasteries around Nangchen: Gar Monastery and Gar Nunnery.
- Day 11:** Nangchen - Surmang Monastery and Garden monastery.
- Day 12:** Surmang – Kyekundo.
- Day 13:** Kyekundo Lhab monastery - Karsang Monastery and Tendu.
- Day 14:** Tendu - Kyekundo.
- Day 15:** Kyekundo fly back to Xining.

### **Day1: Pickup from the Xining Airport**

Xining is the capital of Qinghai Province and has a population of 2.5 million people and

is at an elevation of 2,500 meters. It is an interesting city of many contrasts, home to many different cultures and customs and at least 6 six different people groups including Han Chinese, Mongolians, Tibetans, Tu, Salar, and Hui. We will sleep in Xining for acclimatization purposes.

### **Day 2: Xining - Kumbum Monastery - Qinghai Lake – Hainan.**

We will drive 30 minutes from Xining to the famous Tibetan Buddhist monastery of Kumbum, which is home to over 600 monks, and the birth place of Tsongkapa the founder of the Yellow Hat or Gelugpa Sect. From Kumbum we will drive to Qinghai Lake, the largest salt lake in China, at 3,205 meters. We will drive 2 hours from Hainan to Serdzong Monastery in Xinghai County. Serdzong, home to over 350 monks, is a remote Buddhist monastery set on the side of a rugged mountain at over 3600m/12,000 feet. Serdzong provides excellent hiking opportunities.

### **Day 3: Hainan - Serdzong Monastery in Madao**

We will drive 215km through nomadic grasslands to the highest nomad town in Qinghai Province, the small town of Madao at 4350m/14,300 feet. This town is named in Tibetan for its proximity to the headwaters of the Yellow River and offers incredible folklore of traditional horse racing festivals including the horse racing grounds where the once poor, humble boy named Gesar won his fame and his bride through his exploits as an expert horseman and became king of the Ling Kingdom.

### **Day 4: Explore regions around Madao: Kyaring Lake and Nyoring Lake.**

From Madao we will drive 1.5 hours over the windswept high altitude plains to view some rare and indigenous wildlife that can be seen few other places in the world: Tibetan Antelope, Wild Ass, and the flat-faced and elusive Tibetan Fox. Arriving at 4,500 meters, we will explore and photograph the stunning clear blue lakes that are considered as the main sources of the Yellow River, Kyaring Lake and Nyoring Lake. Here we will also delve into the fascinating histories of these two lakes and their spiritual connection to the Kya Lao family and consequently to Tibetan King Gesar's wife, Dromo.

### **Day 5: Madao – Tso karm lake – Karna Monastery - Kyekundo**

We will drive 400km from Madao to Kyekundu through high plateau scattered with traditional black tents handwoven from the warm hair of the yak. This breathtaking drive will take us through rugged and desolate scenery at elevations between 3,800 meters and 4800 meters. We will get a taste for the harsh conditions that have made the Tibetan

people to be so self-reliant and strong. On the way we will visit Karna Nomadic Monastery and the world's biggest Guru Padmasambhava statue, towering over the surrounding grasslands at 4 stories high.

### **Day 6: Kyekundo. Janak Mani Stone Field and Kyekundo Monastery.**

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 scriptures 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 14<sup>th</sup> century, this monastery sits prominently on a high hill and provides a sweeping view of Kyekundo city.

### **Day 7: Kyekundo - Rongbo Tso lake - Rongbo Monastery and Bagan Monastery.**

Early in the morning we will drive the 200 km to Rongpo Lake, the most beautiful lake in Yushu Prefecture. While visiting this pristine, blue, high altitude lake we may have a chance to view the migration of the Black-Necked Cranes and the activities of yak herders as they milk their yaks and create tools and textiles from yak hair with expert craftsmanship.

### **Day 8: Rongbo lake - Kyekundo**

We will drive back from Rongpo lake to Kyekundo and on the way we will visit some rural nomadic villages and experience the historic stone architecture that is unique to this area. We will eat with a local village family and get the chance to sip piping hot yak milk tea, locally made bread, and tsampa, a dough made from Tibetan barley flour, milk tea, and yak butter. In the afternoon we will rest and enjoy the sights and sounds and smells of Kyekundo town. We may even get an opportunity to see the traditional form of bartering 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 9: Kyekundo - 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 10: Explore monasteries around Nangchen: Gar Monastery and Gar 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. In the afternoon we will drive back to Nangchen for a peaceful sleep.

### **Day 11: 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 12: Surmang - Kyekundo**

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 13: Kyekundo Lhab monastery - Karsang Monastery and Kyekundo.**

We will drive 2 hours past a forest of trees planted over 100 years ago by the founder and highest Lama of Lhab monastery. Lhab monastery is the biggest Gelugpa monastery in Yushu and is home to more than 400 monks. From Lhab monastery we will drive along the banks of the Yangzte River and encounter many traditional Tibetan villages with ancient stone houses, then finally arriving at Karsang Monastery. Along the drive to Karsang we will have the option to see the oldest Buddhist Zonya stupa in Kham. This holy stupa was one of the few cultural relics left standing after the Cultural Revolution and is believed to be a source of physical healing for those pilgrims who came to walk around its base. Karsang Monastery is located 4 km west of Chendu town and was founded by Amnye Dampa who lived from 1230-1303, a student of Chogyal phakpa, the fifth leader of the Sakya school of Tibetan Buddhism.

### **Day 14: Kyekundo fly back to Xining**

We will drive 30 minutes to the Kyekundo airport where will say our goodbyes and fly in a short, comfortable 1-hour flight back to Xining. The tour ends in Xining.