

The Yunnan to Tibet Tea Horse Road Expedition 11N/12D



"In Tibetan culture legend has it that in another time and space there is a kingdom called Shambhala. It is a quiet and peaceful kingdom because everybody there knows the source of happiness."

Mr Pema Dorjee
Founder & Chairman of Songtsam

From the centre of the Three Parallel Rivers to the very highest mountain peaks, the Songtsam Yunnan to Tibet route is designed for intrepid travellers to discover the region's living heritage through comfort, authenticity, and an enlightened spirit of adventure. Extended across dramatic altitudes within the Tibetan plateau, the area is home to a number of UNESCO World Heritage Sites and the demographic contains Tibetans and most of the twenty-five ethnic minorities found in Yunnan province, many of who still follow ancient traditions and customs.

For centuries people have been fascinated with the idea of Shambhala, a mythical kingdom and Buddhist pure land. It is rumoured to have inspired British author James Hilton who published the 1933 novel *Lost Horizon* in which Shambhala is called Shangri-La, a paradise on Earth hidden in a Tibetan valley.

Where can you find Shangri-La? In the places where Songtsam is located...

Songtsam Linka Shangri-La (3,300m)

Hidden in the city's peaceful and green valleys between Tibetan villages and Himalayan barley fields, our hotel is located a short distance away from the Songzanlin Monastery. Tibetan-style rooms, dining facilities, spa, and other modern amenities are housed in lovingly hand-built stone structures spread over 21 acres of hillside surrounded by snow-capped mountains.



Songtsam Lodge Meili (3,600m)

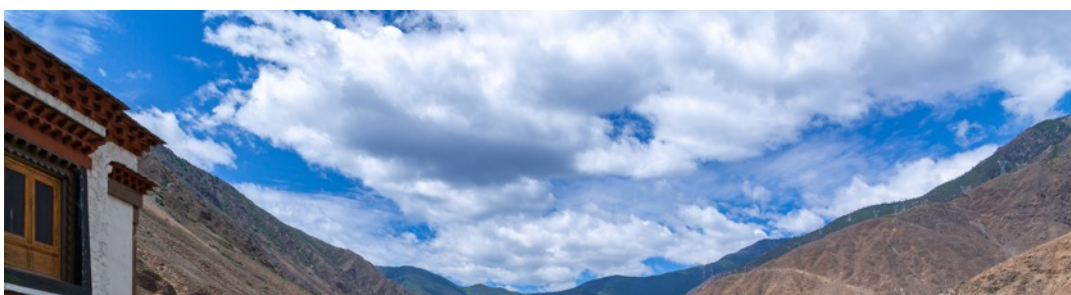
Built in an unspoilt village away from any tourists and overlooking the majestic Meili mountain range. Rooms are furnished with large comfortable beds, sofas, and timber flooring, providing a warm atmosphere that

combines rustic charm with modern comforts. Most of the rooms come with a cosy fireplace and a stunning view of Meili Snow Mountain.



Songtsam Lodge Rumei (2,600m)

Located in a valley next to Zhuka Village in the north and vast farmland in the south. The lodge's rooms all face Lancang River, ensuring views of the natural stream outside and the green terraces nearby. The lodge embraces bright colours such as green, yellow, white, and peacock blue, mirroring the colours of the sky and surrounding snow-capped mountains, rivers, and fields.





Songtsam Lodge Laigu (4,200m)



Our highest property set on a cliff side facing glaciers and nestled among the area's snow-capped mountains and lakes. The lodge also uses state of art oxygen concentrator technology to achieve a 24-hour closed oxygen supply. The floor heating is imported from Denmark and the floor-to-ceiling triple-layered vacuum glass windows provide warmth and UV protection whilst at the same time offering breathtaking views of Rawu Lake.





Bome lies in the neighbouring area between the Himalaya and Nyenchen Tanglha mountain range of east Tibet. Also known as the “Swiss Alps of Tibet”, Bome is a paradise with its weather being warm in the winter and cool in summer. The area features primeval forests, snow-capped mountain ranges, stunning rivers and holy lakes and splendid glaciers.



Songtsam Linka Lhasa (3,700m)



Built on the edge of an old park our retreat offers spectacular views of the nearby Potala Palace located only 5 kilometers away. From the hotel's slaked lime coloured walls to the indigo carved windows and fish-fin shaped facade, all of these architectural details pay great respect to traditional artisans, Tibetan culture, and ancient wisdom. Rooms exhibit a unique combination of modern and traditional Tibetan aesthetics that are elegantly decorated with wooden floors, wall tapestries, and handcrafted copperware. Each room is also fully equipped with oxygen concentrators to relieve AMS and ensure good rest.





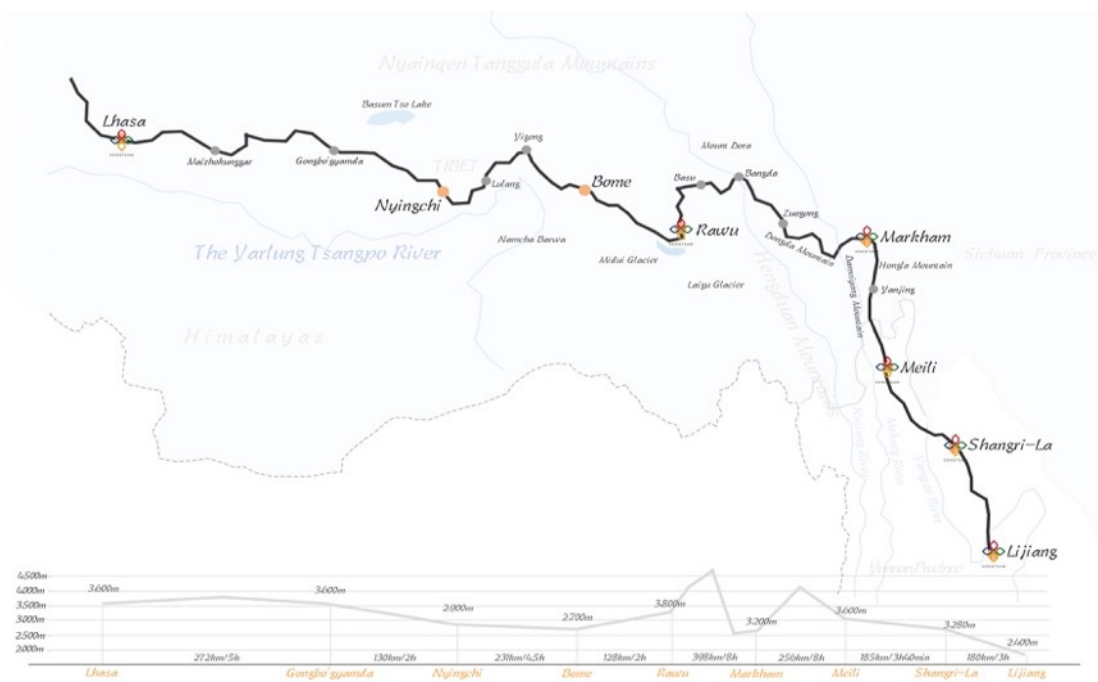
Trip Schedule

Program starts from Shangri-La and ends in Lhasa. All information in this itinerary is accurate to the best of our knowledge but please note that changes to our trips can and do occur.

Day	Overnight Location	Activities
Day 1	Songtsam Linka /Lodge Shangri-La (3,300m) Deluxe Room D	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Pick up from Diqing Shangri-La Airport and check into the hotel. - Welcome dinner at the hotel. - Relax to acclimatise to the altitude.
Day 2	Songtsam Lodge Meili (3,400m) Deluxe Room B, L, D	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - After breakfast, visit Napa Lake and drive along the Yangtze River valley towards Benzilan (1.5-hour drive). - Stop off for lunch at Songtsam Lodge Benzilan. - In the afternoon, visit the 300-year-old Dongzhulin Monastery to learn about Tibetan Buddhism. - Continue onto Meili via Baima Snow Mountain (2-hour drive). - Arrive at Songtsam Lodge Meili in the late afternoon and visit a nearby local family to print traditional Tibetan prayer flags. - Dinner at the lodge.

Day 3	Songtsam Lodge Rumei (2,600m) Deluxe Room B, L, D	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - After breakfast, drive to Meili Snow Mountain to hang up the prayer flags printed yesterday (40-minute drive). - Pass through snow-capped mountains and the Mekong River valley officially entering Tibet (2-hour drive). - Visit the 1000-year-old salt fields to learn about the history and process of ancient salt making. - Savor a bowl of Jiajia Noodles, a local specialty, for lunch before crossing the Hongla Mountain and Lawu Mountain in the afternoon (3.5-hour drive). - Dinner at the lodge.
Day 4	Songtsam Lodge Rumei (2,600m) Deluxe Room B, L, D	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - After breakfast, visit Maiba Pasture (seasonal) to see the rich pasture land, yaks grazing, and the plateau pika (1-hour drive). - Lunch at the pasture. - Return to the lodge and relax in the afternoon. - Dinner at the lodge.
Day 5	Songtsam Lodge Laigu (4,200m) Deluxe Room B, L, D	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - After breakfast, depart for Rawu (9-10 hours in total). - Reach the highest point of the journey at 5,130m over the Dongda Mountain Pass (2-hour drive). - Stop off for a picnic at the Bangda Grassland at noon (eat at a local restaurant in the winter). - In the afternoon, travel along the long and winding "Nu Jiang 72 Turns" (2-hour drive). - Continue to climb the 4,400m Anjiula Mountain Pass and arrive at Songtsam Lodge Laigu to experience the spectacular sunset on the terrace (2.5-hour drive). - Dinner at the hotel.
Day 6	Songtsam Lodge Laigu (4,200m) Deluxe Room B, L, D	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Experience the magnificent sunrise on the lodge's terrace in the morning. - After breakfast, head to Duosong Tso (a holy and secret lake without any tourists) to witness the pristine forest, blue lake, and snow-capped mountains. - Return to the lodge for lunch. - Free leisurely time in the afternoon or if you are feeling active, visit the ancient blue Laigu Glacier on foot (30-minute drive). - Dinner at the hotel.
Day 7	Songtsam Linka Bome (2,700m) Deluxe Room B, L, D	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - After breakfast, drive to the mirror-like Rawu Lake surrounded by snow-capped mountains. - Drive along the Palong Tsangpo River and through dense forest to Songtsam Linka Bome (3-hour drive). - Have lunch at the hotel. - In the afternoon explore the tranquil and vast Guxiang

		<p>Lake away from the town.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Dinner at the hotel.
Day 8	<p>Songtsam Linka Bome (2,700m) Deluxe Room B, L, D</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - After breakfast, drive to Zhuxi Glacier and visit the 400-year-old ancient Pulong Temple. - Return to the hotel for lunch. - In the afternoon, take a leisurely hike to the Spruce Forest (1.5-hour trek). - Dinner at the hotel.
Day 9	<p>Nyingchi Tingyard Hotel or similar (2,900m) Deluxe Room B, L, D</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - After breakfast, drive to Lulang via the Tongmai Bridge. - Stop off at the Artel Poly Hotel for lunch. - Hike into Zhaxigang Village situated at the foot of the Jialabailei Summit (1-2 hour trek). - Pass by Lulang's immense forest to see the snow-capped mountains, meadows, cattle and sheep. Arrive at Nyingchi via the Nyingchi Sejila Mountain Pass. - Check in and have dinner at the hotel.
Day 10	<p>Songtsam Linka Lhasa (3,700m) Superior Suite Room B, L, D</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - After breakfast, visit the Basong Tso holy lake and Tsozong Gongba Monastery located in the middle of the lake on Tashi Island (2-hour drive). - Stop off for lunch at a local restaurant in Bahe Town. - Follow the G318 highway to Lhasa (4-hour drive). - Check in and have dinner at the hotel.
Day 11	<p>Songtsam Linka Lhasa (3,700m) Superior Suite Room B, L, D</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - After breakfast, visit Potala Palace, the iconic heart of Tibetan Buddhism and the highest palace in the world. - Return to the hotel for lunch. - In the afternoon, visit Jokhang Temple, the spiritual center of Tibet and the holiest destination for all Tibetan pilgrims. - Afterwards go to Barkhor Street to experience the most vibrant bazaar in Lhasa. - Enjoy a farewell dinner at the hotel.
Day 12	<p>Departure B</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - After breakfast, transfer to Lhasa Gonggar Airport.



Travel Notes:

- Since you will be travelling in a high-altitude area, we do not recommend you join this trip if you have heart disease, high blood pressure, or respiratory disease.
- This itinerary is suitable for ages 18-70.
- Due to the plateau's strong ultraviolet radiation please prepare 50+ sunblock and sunglasses.
- This itinerary needs to have a signed travel contract and exemption agreement.



Trip Expectations

Trip difficulty: This journey is considered moderately strenuous when touring and moderate when hiking. Our itinerary includes full days of activities, which start early in the morning and end in the evening. Each person can respond to a change in altitude differently so in the event of altitude sickness we would move to a lower altitude. After plenty of rest, symptoms usually subside. For more information we advise consulting with your doctor.

Road conditions and transportation: Depending on the size of the group, we travel in well maintained SUVs or vans. Experienced Songtsam drivers drive all vehicles. Some sections of the road follow winding mountain paths and are bumpy especially when some parts are under construction. We will make stops at beautiful villages and scenic spots on the way and will prepare water and snacks for the road trips.

Weather: During this trip you will experience diverse temperatures. The temperature can change from 20 degrees centigrade to 5 degrees centigrade within one day. Wearing layers of clothes is advisable to allow for changes in temperature.

Meals: During your journey you will get to try Tibetan cuisine, which includes a good amount of barley flour-based items such as dumplings and noodles, as well as red meat such as yak and mutton. At Shangri-La, Meili, Rumei, Laigu, and Lhasa properties plus all contracted hotels, we will provide set menus, which combine Tibetan and Chinese cuisine and include complimentary soft drinks and a glass of wine.

Emergency evacuation and procedures: We suggest all travellers purchase an International SOS (an AEA company) Service Plan, which provides emergency evacuation to the nearest medical facility of international standards.

Trip escorts: Our well-trained local guides are specialists on Tibet and the local region and will travel with you throughout the trip. All originating from different villages and areas, all Songtsam guides have stories to share about their hometowns, which provides deeper travel experiences for all guests to understand the local culture and geography.

The Songtsam Story



Some memories never fade. It seems like only yesterday that Songtsam founder and Chairman Mr Baima Duoji was on his way back to Shangri-La with ambitious plans to shoot a documentary of his childhood home. While it had been many years since he had last set foot in his native land, fond memories came pouring back. He remembered the excitement of climbing local mountains as a young boy, the intimate solitude of his town's temples, and the people who helped define him as a person.

Finally, he was home. The rush of emotions made him wonder: How could he give back? What more could he do? Soon it all became clear. He thought about the region's rich culture and how he could create a way for travellers to come and experience a new way of life. A place that was more than the usual hotel and gift shops, a place where guests could immerse themselves in living history. So Baima turned his family's small guesthouse into the first Songtsam lodge.

Inspired by the rich Tibetan culture, he worked with local artisans and members of the community to help produce and run Songtsam Lodge Shangri-La. Eleven properties and nineteen years later, Baima's vision continues to grow, and so does the Songtsam experience.

About the Area



The great China tectonic plate runs into the Tibetan Plateau in northern Yunnan, forging high mountain ranges with soaring snow-packed peaks. Three major rivers, the Yangtze (Jinshajiang), Mekong (Lancangjiang) and Salween (Nujiang) run through deep gorges with wild, untamed scenery. This charming destination is diverse in nature and culture due to its unique geography, indeed, one can experience all four seasons in just one day. Due to the vast range in altitude, travellers can quickly move from cold snowy mountains to warm flower-filled valleys.

Northwest Yunnan is the richest area in China in terms of biodiversity, boasting unique flora and fauna, and is possibly the most biologically diverse temperate region on earth. This is the original location of the world's gardens: in spring and summer, the surrounding hills are blanketed with rhododendrons and camellias. The Victorians collected and brought these to the Western world. The temperate forests and lowlands contain over 3,000 species of orchids and more than 200 of the world's 400 species of rhododendron. In summer time, strikingly blue irises are in blossom along the mountain paths.



Bird watching and cycling bring travellers in close proximity to all kinds of migrant birds at their winter heaven around Napa Lake, including the black-necked crane – the holy bird for Tibetans. High in the forests between the Mekong and Yangtze River lives the rare Yunnan Black snub-nosed monkey (*Rhinopithecus biteti*), one of the world's most endangered primates – fewer than 2,000 are now found in the wild. These monkeys live at the highest altitude (3,000-4,500m) of any animal primate.



Historically, people were separated by the soaring mountains and deep gorges in this area, facilitating the development of the most distinctive ethnic cultures. Kham Tibetans in Diqing are characterized by their big white wooden houses and colourful customs, which differ from Tibetans in other areas of Tibet. In this area along the Lancang River, although the shining golden roofs of Tibetan Buddhist monasteries sparkle in the light, Tibetans here follow Catholic teachings and practice their ceremonies at small Catholic churches surrounded by vineyards. Travelling from the highlands to the banks of the rivers, styles of housing and costume change.

The Lisu people, another ethnic group, dwell close to the water in the mountain valleys.



The Tea Horse Road, an ancient trade route linking tea-producing areas with Tibet, connects the mountains and deep gorges as well as different ethnic groups. For hundreds of years, horse caravans travelled along this route carrying tea to Tibet and India, and bringing other commodities back home. This route has formed a corridor rich in culture, as different groups interact with each other in their daily lives. Today, one can travel around this area journeying along different parts of this ancient trail.





Songtsam Boutique Retreats & Tours
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