

Songtsam Yunnan Circuit

"Exploring Three Parallel Rivers" 8N/9D



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

Mr Pema Dorjee
Founder & Chairman of Songtsam

The Three Parallel Rivers area of Yunnan encompasses a majestic land hemmed in by the mighty Yangtze, the free-flowing Mekong, and the wild Salween. Many of the twenty-five different ethnic minorities currently living in Yunnan can be found in this area, which features snow-capped peaks more than 6,000m high, glaciated gorges, and terraced rice fields. The peaceful people that inhabit the region have not only preserved this area for generations, but have also nurtured this "Shangri-La".

Songtsam have built a series of hotels and lodges in five carefully selected locales, which enable guests to experience the different cultures and landscapes inherent in these regions. By combining stays at the different Songtsam properties our circuit tour takes you into the heart of the Three Parallel Rivers area and lets you explore this magical land.

Trip Highlights

This trip is for adventurous travelers looking for an experience that offers physical and cultural activities, wildlife discovery, and untouched off the beaten path regional exploration. From the stunning views of the highest snow peak in Yunnan to the lush and floral Mekong valley, this trip takes you through the heart of the Three Parallel Rivers area and reveals its living heritage.

[Explore Untamed and Wild Terrain at Meili Snow Mountain](#)

Every year Tibetans and travellers from all over the world make their journey to worship Kawagebo, the highest peak of the Meili snow mountain range. Our tranquil lodge is located away from main tourist area and we know the most beautiful and untamed paths around Meili. Our guided hikes take you off the beaten track allowing you to connect with nature whilst at the same time offering a private experience of this spiritual land with no crowds.



Understand the Rich Culture Through Experiential Activities

Our Songtsam circuit offers breathtaking landscapes and wonderfully diverse cultures. All activities are designed so that guests can experience true authentic living heritage, which includes:

- Dharma Cave and the road of pilgrimage.
- Local family visits of different ethnic minorities: Tibetan, Naxi and Lisu.
- Cizhong Catholic Church and the charming upper Mekong River valley.
- Qudengge, where local people get the "key" to worship Mt. Kawagebo.
- Important Tibetan monastery visits such Dongzhulin Monastery in Benzilan and Songzanlin Monastery in Shangri-La.



Enjoy the Great Geographic Diversity and Wonderful World of Wildlife

Due to the quick and varied changes in altitude, one can move from cold snowy mountains to warm flower-filled valleys within a couple of hours, experiencing four seasons within one day. Great biodiversity is the highlight of this route, which includes:

- Meeting with the Yunnan snub-nosed monkeys in Tacheng.
- Discovering hundreds of different kinds of rhododendrons (blossoming from late May to early June).
- Revealing the home place of numerous flowers you find around the world.
- Wild mushrooms growing in the woods (usually from July to September) whilst hiking mountains and village paths.



Go Off the Beaten Path in Comfort

Throughout the journey guests will be staying in Tibetan style boutique hotels and lodges. All Songtsam properties feature an exquisite level of amenities, handpicked antique furniture and art collections, and a level of service that one wouldn't expect for such remote places.

Songtsam Linka Lijiang (2,400m)

Our retreat is located at a nearby small Naxi-ethnic village named Ciman, where the traditional way of living still thrives. Surrounded by pinewoods and a pear garden, Songtsam Linka Lijiang offers spectacular views of the old town, Jade Dragon Snow Mountain, and Lashi Lake. The hotel's design is grand in appearance and has an interior layout in the style of a Naxi courtyard that is decorated with exquisite Hui-style stone sculptures.



Songtsam Lodge Tacheng (1,900m)

Part of a mixed Tibetan/Lisu farming community, Songtsam Tacheng enjoys a comfortable climate and boasts the region's most fertile land. The spacious and cozy rooms in the main building face beautiful terraced rice fields and mountains in the distance. The lodge is elegantly designed to showcase fine Chinese art and style; big windows and balconies enable guests to take in the stunning rural scenery.



Songtsam Lodge Cizhong (2,200m)

A hundred years ago, French missionaries ventured into landlocked valleys of Yunnan province to share their religion. A century later, the churches that remain in these regions continue to thrive. Cizhong Catholic Church, where service in Tibetan is still held every Sunday, is the most beautiful of these churches, even after many years of disrepair. The Songtsam Cizhong lodge sits in this lovely Tibetan village, surrounded by the grapevine-covered slopes of local vineyards.



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 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.



Trip Schedule

Program starts from Lijiang and ends in Shangri-La. 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 Lijiang (2,400m) Deluxe Room D	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Pick up from Lijiang Sanyi International Airport. - Welcome dinner at the hotel.
Day 2	Songtsam Lodge Tacheng (2,020m) Deluxe Room B, L, D	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - After breakfast, visit the Wenfeng Temple, one of 'The Five Famous Temples of Lijiang' and the highest institution at an elevation of 4,465m. It is the only temple in northwest Yunnan where monks can stay for over three years to engage in intense meditation. After visiting the main temple we take a stone path or drive to the mediation cave located in the mountain above. Once we reach the top of the mountain, you can overlook the Lijiang dam to the east, the Beacon Hill, and the Jade Dragon Snow Mountain to the north resulting in a spectacular panoramic view (3 hours). - Return to the hotel and have lunch. - In the afternoon, depart for Tacheng passing the First Bend of the Yangtze River and visit Shi Gu Village on the way. - Continue onto Tacheng along the valley of the Yangtze River and arrive in the afternoon. Once check in, relax and take in sights of the beautiful rice and flower fields and the surrounding ancient village. - Dinner at the lodge.
Day 3	Songtsam Lodge Tacheng (2,020m) Deluxe Room B, L, D	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - After breakfast, visit the Dharma Cave and take a walk along the road of pilgrimage (30-minute drive). - Return to the lodge and have lunch. - Visit Hada Village in the afternoon to learn how to make soy milk and tofu with a local family in their courtyard. - Dinner at the lodge.
Day 4	Songtsam Lodge Cizhong (2,200m) Deluxe Room B, L, D	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - After breakfast, visit the Yunnan Golden Monkey National Park and hike for 1-2 hours into the nature reserve. - Drive to Cizhong along the scenic upper Mekong River (4-hour drive). - Have lunch at local restaurant or opt for a lunch box. - Continue onto Cizhong and visit Shouguo Temple on the way

		<p>along Lancang River.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Arrive at Cizhong in the afternoon and explore the nearby Catholic Church. - Dinner at the lodge (option to join the church mass after dinner – available on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Friday evenings).
Day 5	<p>Songtsam Lodge Meili (3,600m) Deluxe Room B, L, D</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - After breakfast, depart for Meili stopping off at Qudengge, where local people get the “key” to worship Mt. Kawagebo (1.5-hour drive). - Check in and have lunch at the lodge. - In the afternoon explore the surrounding village and visit a local family to learn how to print Tibetan prayer flags - Dinner at the lodge.
Day 6	<p>Songtsam Lodge Meili (3,600m) Deluxe Room B, L, D</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Experience the golden sunrise over Mt. Kawagebo. - After breakfast, take part in a small ceremony paying homage to Mt. Kawagebo with the prayer flags printed yesterday. - Day hike into Baima Snow Mountain area for 4-6 hours with a lunch box. - Free leisurely time in the afternoon to relax. - Dinner at the lodge.
Day 7	<p>Songtsam Linka/Lodge Shangri-La (3,300m) Deluxe Room B, L, D</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Experience the golden sunrise over Mt. Kawagebo. - After breakfast, depart for Shangri-La visiting the Moon Bay of the Jinsha River on the way. - Have lunch at the local restaurant, enjoy the Nixi chicken hotpot lunch. - Continue onto Shangri-La. - Check in and have dinner at the hotel.
Day 8	<p>Songtsam Linka/Lodge Shangri-La (3,300m) Deluxe Room B, L, D</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - After breakfast, visit the Napa Lake, which is both an ideal field for herdsmen and a paradise for many species of birds. Every winter the lake turns into a temporary habitat for migratory birds, such as bar-headed geese, wild ducks, and black-necked cranes, which is one of the twelve rarest bird species in the world. During this period, the lake becomes an ideal place for birdwatchers and nature-oriented travellers from around the world. - Return to the hotel and have lunch. - In the afternoon, visit the Shangri-La Brewery, owned by a Swiss Tibetan, who returned to his hometown and founded a brewery, where highland barley and high quality water resources in combination with Tibetan conditions are used to develop an excellent highland barley craft beer. Enjoy the beer while visiting and learn more of the story of the brewery. - In the evening, visit a local Tibetan family home to sample butter tea, try local delicacies, and enjoy a farewell hotpot dinner

together.

Day 9	Departure B	- After breakfast, transfer to Diqing Shangri-La Airport.
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Trip Costs

Land Costs INCLUDE:

- All land transfers on best-in-class local transportation indicated in the itinerary.
- All admission fees and activities indicated in the itinerary.
- All accommodation based on double occupancy.
- All meals starting from dinner on the first day to breakfast on the last day.
- Drinking water and snacks throughout the trip.
- Complimentary soft drinks, coffee, tea, and drinking water at all Songtsam hotels and lodges.
- Service of local guides.

Land Costs DOES NOT INCLUDE:

- Medical, travel insurance or evacuation insurance plans.
- Domestic or international airfare to Lijiang and from Shangri-La.
- Personal telecommunication.
- Excursions and activities not included in itinerary.

Trip Expectations

Trip difficulty: This journey is considered moderate 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. In the event of altitude sickness, we would move to a lower altitude. After plenty of rest, symptoms usually subside. For more information, please consult 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, beef and pork. At Lijiang and Shangri-La Linkas, and Tacheng, Cizhong, Meili, and Benzilan lodges, we 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 Pema Dorjee 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 Pema 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 eighteen years later, Pema'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.

