

Songtsam Yunnan to Tibet “Tea Horse Road Expedition” 12N/13D



“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 Benzilan (1,900m)

Nestled in an intimate green valley by the Yangtze River, Songtsam Benzilan features spacious guest rooms, all decorated in a modern Sino-Tibetan style. The lodge is surrounded by authentic white-walled Tibetan homes and has views of a small prayer house that rests atop a hill. From the lodge, it is an easy walk to the nearby hills and traditional Tibetan villages, where temples are decorated with beautiful murals.



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.



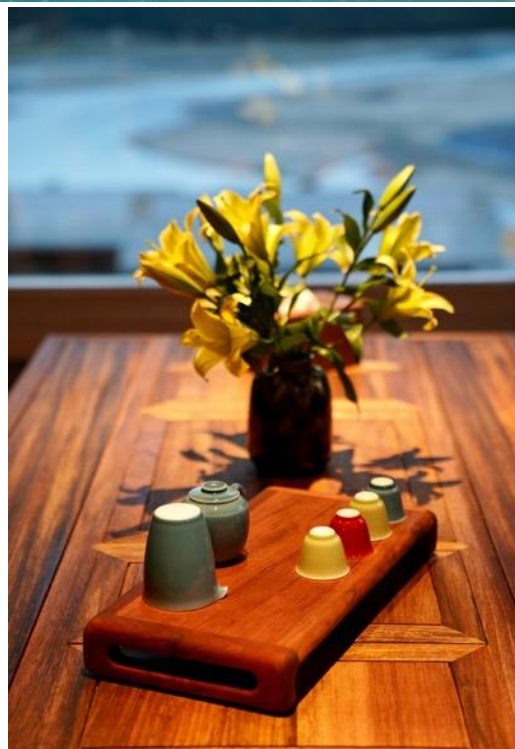
Songtsam Lodge Laigu (4,200m)

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.



Songtsam Lodge Bome (2,700m)

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 Basomtso (3,400m)

Songtsasm Linka BasongTso lies beside the Basumtso Lake, an alpine lake at the middle and upper reaches of the Ba River, which is the largest tributary of the Nyang River. Basumtso Lake is surrounded by mountains, and its climate is mild. The snowy mountain, the crystal lake, the lush trees, the monastery and the villages make up a perfect paradise.



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

The 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 Shangri-La (3,300m) Deluxe Room D	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Pick up from Diqing Shangri-La Airport (25 mins drive). ➤ Check into Songtsam Linka Shangri-La and relax with welcome drinks and local snacks, acclimatize to the altitude. ➤ Have welcome dinner at Songtsam Linka Shangri-La.
Day 2	Songtsam Lodge Benzilan (1,900m) Deluxe Room B, L, D	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ When wake up in the morning, enjoy your breakfast in the Chumekhar Tea House, which overlooked Lamuyamtso Lake. Listen to the guide telling the story of Xiaojiezi Village. Then, sip a cup of sweet tea, forming one of the impressions of Lhasa. Many people in Xiaojiezi Village have gone on pilgrimages to Lhasa, and it is the sweet tea carries the memories. ➤ Then visit the Songzanlin Monastery, the largest Tibetan Buddhist monastery in Yunnan province and sometimes referred to as the “Little Potala Palace”. Located 15 minutes’ walk from the hotel, it is also the most important monastery in southwest China. Accompanied by the guide’s insightful narration, immerse yourself in the breathtaking religious ambiance and exquisite Tibetan artistry of Songzanlin Monastery. Discover the profound cultural heritage of this sacred land, experience the sublime power of faith, and gain a deeper understanding of Tibetan wisdom and worldview. ➤ Have lunch at Songtsam Linka Shangri-La. ➤ After lunch, depart for Benzilan, stop off at Dongzhulin Monastery, which overlooks the beautiful Jinsha River (upper stretches of the Yangtze River). It is not that well known but has become popular with the local Tibetans. (2-hour drive) ➤ Check-in at Songtsam Lodge Benzilan, take a short break, and spend a peaceful afternoon. (20-min drive) ➤ Have dinner at Songtsam Lodge Benzilan.

<p>Day 3</p> <p>Songtsam Lodge Meili (3,600m) Deluxe Room B, L, D</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ After breakfast, start Niding Forest Hike & Picnic. 30-minute drive to Niding, where the landscape transforms dramatically from a cactus-studded arid valley to lush temperate mixed coniferous-broad leaf forests. This section of the Ancient Tea-Horse Road boasts some of the most breathtaking scenery, offering picturesque views year round. Follow the mountain streams as you wander through this paradise, encountering wildflowers, mushrooms, birds, and cascading waterfalls along the way. <p><i>The duration and route of the hike can be arranged based on the guests' physical strength.</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Have an outdoor picnic in the forest. <p><i>If the original lunch arrangement is disrupted due to weather or other force majeure factors, it will be replaced with lunch at the hotel.</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ In the afternoon, depart for Meili (2-hour drive). ➤ Arrive in Meili and check into Songtsam Lodge Meili. ➤ After a short rest, visit a local Tibetan home in Gujiunong Village. Explore the traditional Tibetan-style architecture and gain insight into their daily life. Enjoy freshly made yak butter tea, learn how to knead tsampa by hand, and use time-honored woodblock printing techniques to imprint the prayer flags. (3-5 mins walk) ➤ Have dinner at Songtsam lodge Meili.
<p>Day 4</p> <p>Songtsam Lodge Rumei (2,600m) Deluxe Room B, L, D</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Get up early and expect the Snow Mountain of Sunshine. Early in the morning, if you are woken up by the telephone ringing, it is to tell you that "Snow Mountain of Sunshine" has appeared! Then the curtains are lifted and the Sunshine rises above the top of Mt. Kawagebo (<i>weather permitting</i>). ➤ After breakfast, visit Feilaisi Temple (30-min drive), join a Sang offering, which faces Meili Snow, and you can hang the Tibetan prayer flags you made the day before here to pray for blessings. ➤ After breakfast, journey through dramatic landscapes where the 6,740m peak and the 2,200m Lancang River valley appear in one stunning view. Cross between snow mountains and deep gorges, passing from Yunnan into Tibet. Around noon, arrive at the ancient Yanjing Salt Field on the Yunnan -- Tibet border. (3-hour drive) ➤ Have lunch at the local restaurant, savor the local specialty - Yanjing 'Jia Jia' noodles.

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Visit the thousand-year-old salt fields, where traditional methods have been used for over 1,300 years, now a UNESCO-listed cultural site. Uniquely, red and white salt are produced on opposite banks of the same river. Then continue the journey past snow mountains and the Lancang River, crossing Hongla and Lawu passes, and arrive at Rumei. Check in at Songtsam Rumei Lodge. (3.5-hour drive) ➤ Have dinner at Songtsam lodge Rumei.
Day 5	<p>Songtsam Lodge Rumei (2,600m) Deluxe Room B, L, D</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ After breakfast visit a local ranch within a nomadic village at Maiba pasture to learn about the life of traditional Tibetan herdsman. In a traditional black yak-hair tent, sip butter tea while learning from the butler about the local herders' nomadic lifestyle - a timeless rhythm of following water and grass. The vast, colorful vistas of Maiba Pasture are painted with alpine meadows, crimson soil, and meandering streams. (1 hour drive) ➤ Have lunch at a local herder's home. ➤ Return to the lodge in the afternoon, relax, and enjoy afternoon tea. ➤ Have dinner at Songtsam lodge Rumei.
Day 6	<p>Songtsam Lodge Laigu (4,200m) Deluxe Room B, L, D</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ After breakfast depart for Ranwu. Today's drive is the dramatic shifts in landscape and altitude will take you through four seasons in a single day. We'll cross the famed Jueba Mountain and Dongda Mountain Pass, reaching the highest altitude point of our entire trip. (4-hour drive) ➤ Have lunch at Bangda local restaurant. ➤ Continue the journey through dramatic elevation changes as we cross Yela Mountain Pass and descend the famed "72 Bends" to the roaring Nujiang River. Traverse the depths of the Nujiang Grand Canyon, climb over Anjiula Mountain, and arrive at the secluded village of Laigu by Ranwu Lake -- a Tibetan settlement nestled at the foot of glaciers, home to the exclusive Songtsam Laigu Lodge. (5-hour drive) ➤ Dinner at the Lodge. If the night skies are clear, simply look up to being embraced by a breathtaking canopy of stars.

Day 7	Songtsam Lodge Bome (2,700m) Deluxe Room B, L, D	➤ Experience the magnificent sunrise on the lodge's terrace in the morning (<i>weather permitting</i>).
		➤ 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. (40-min drive)
		➤ Have lunch at Songtsam Lodge Laigu.
		➤ After lunch drive to the mirror-like Rawu Lake, surrounded by snow-capped mountains. Known for its tranquil and colorful water, the lake turns to dark blue or turquoise in accordance with the seasonal changes. (1 hour drive)
		➤ Continue driving along the Parlung Tsangpo River, winding through the world's third-largest canyon. Check in at Songtsam Lodge Bome. (3-hour drive)
Day 8	Songtsam Lodge Bome (2,700m) Deluxe Room B, L, D	➤ Have dinner at Songtsam Lodge Bome.
		➤ After breakfast, hike into the Gangyun Spruce Forest, which is listed among "China's Top 10 Most Beautiful Primeval Forests". Breathe in nature's symphony in this woodland that captivates geographers and botanists alike. (15-min drive)
		➤ Have picnic lunch at the Gang Village. <i>Picnics will not be available from November to the day before the Peach Blossom Festival in the following year, and will be replaced with boxed lunches or hotel lunches.</i>
		➤ In the afternoon, enjoy a foot bath with Tibetan medicine in your room. In high-altitude areas, a foot bath can promote blood circulation, increase oxygen supply, thereby alleviating the symptoms of altitude sickness. At the same time, it effectively relaxes the tense and sore muscles of the feet during travel, promotes the metabolism of the skin epidermis, nourishes and relaxes the body and mind, and dispels cold and fatigue.
		➤ Have dinner at Songtsam Lodge Bome.

Day 9	Songtsam Linka Basomtso (3,400m) Deluxe Room B, L, D	➤ Depart from Bome and journey towards Songtsam Linka Basomtso (2-hour drive), with a stop at Zhaxigang Village along the way. "Zhaxigang" means "Land of Auspiciousness" in Tibetan. Stroll along the village paths, gazing upon the majestic silhouette of 7,294-meter Mount Jialabailei in the distance.
		➤ Lunch at a Songtsam-partnered restaurant; in Lulang, savor the famed Lulang Stone Pot Chicken -- one of Nyingchi's most celebrated culinary specialties.
		➤ Afterwards cross the Sela Pass, traveling along the Yarlung Tsangpo and Nyang Rivers through picturesque landscapes of mountains and waterways, enjoying the ever-changing Tibetan scenery from your window. (4.5-hour drive)
		➤ Check into Songtsam Linka Basomtso.
Day 10	Songtsam Linka Basomtso (3,400m) Deluxe Room B, L, D	➤ Have dinner at Songtsam Linka Basomtso.
		➤ After breakfast, join the morning meditation and embark on a journey of physical and mental cultivation with Songtsam. During the meditation, explore your inner self and discover happiness, allowing your body and mind to deeply decompress and fully relax.
		➤ Follow the guide to the starting point of the lake-circling hike by car. Upon arrival, walk slowly along the path by the lake, wandering through the oak forests all the way. The azure lake water accompanies you throughout the journey, appearing and disappearing intermittently between the dense branches and twigs. If the weather is fine, you can also see the snow-capped mountains reflected in the lake. Occasionally, you may encounter local people who are circling the lake and praying. After the hike, take a boat back to the hotel. (20-min drive)
		➤ Have lunch at Songtsam Linka Basomtso.
		➤ You can take home the Tibetan incense you made with your own hands that can deeply experience the essence of Tibetan culture and enjoy a peaceful and joyful period of time. For thousands of years, Tibetan people have been guarding the unique scent of Tibetan incense with their strong hands and devout hearts. Tibetan incense originates from the daily ritual of "Sang Offering". When this natural fragrance floats over the snow-covered plateau, people believe that their prayers have been heard by the gods. Over time, this fragrance—capable of purifying negativity and warding off evil—gradually integrated into the daily home life of local people. It was used for disinfection, removing odors and repelling mosquitoes, thus giving

		<p>shape to the early form of Tibetan incense.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Have dinner at Songtsam Linka Basomtso.
Day 11	<p>Songtsam Linka Lhasa (3,700m) Superior Suite Room B, L, D</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ After breakfast, continue the journey to Lhasa. The outside views gradually transforms from mountain forests to villages and towns along the Lhasa River Valley. Finally, arrive in the holy city of Lhasa and check in at Songtsam Linka Lhasa. (5-hour drive) ➤ Have lunch at Songtsam Linka Lhasa. ➤ The slow-paced life of Lhasa easily infects every visitor. The lunch break here is particularly long, and sunbathing and drinking sweet tea are beloved pastimes shared by all locals. Songtsam skillfully brings this laid-back atmosphere into the hotel, creating a dedicated afternoon tea space in the lobby. Even local guests often come here to reminisce about the old afternoons on Barkhor Street. Here, you can savor sweet tea slowly and enjoy pastries and fruits; on selected dates, a band will be in residence, performing traditional Tibetan songs and dances to honor this leisurely way of life. ➤ Have dinner at Songtsam Linka Lhasa.
Day 12	<p>Songtsam Linka Lhasa (3,700m) Superior Suite Room B, L, D</p>	<p><i>Whether you are visiting Lhasa for the first time or seeking a deeper understanding of this sacred land, you will find a direction for your walk here. Today, follow in the footsteps of Songtsam's travel guide to embark on a Citywalk around the ancient city of Lhasa — you can explore the historical culture carried by the city, feel the daily life and warmth of local Lhasa residents, and learn how Tibetan people in Lhasa spend each day and approach life and things. This walking experience will show you a different Lhasa and a different culture: immerse yourself in Tibetan style in a sweet tea house, stroll leisurely on Barkhor Street, soak up the sun in the ancient city, wander around Chomsigkang Market, and step into the most traditional Tibetan ancient courtyard for a sincere conversation with local people.</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ In the morning visit the magnificent Potala Palace. Built in the 6th century, it is the iconic heart of Tibetan Buddhism and the highest palace in the world. (30 mins drive) ➤ Have lunch at Songtsam Linka Lhasa. ➤ In the afternoon visit Jokhang Temple, the spiritual center of Tibet and the holiest destination for all Tibetan pilgrims. During both day and night you will witness lots

		<p>of pilgrims praying in front of the temple. (20 mins drive)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Afterwards go to Barkhor Street to experience the most vibrant bazaar in Lhasa. A popular circumambulation for pilgrims it is seen as “a saint road” in the eyes of the Tibetan people. Here you can feel the local spiritual belief from pilgrims with different dresses and dialects from all over Tibet who pray devoutly along this street. ➤ Have farewell dinner at Songtsam Linka Lhasa.
Day 13	Departure B	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ After breakfast, transfer to Lhasa Gonggar Airport (1 hour drive).



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.

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 in 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, striking 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 is characterized by their big white wooden houses and colorful 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.

