

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 eighteen 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 areas 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 as 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.

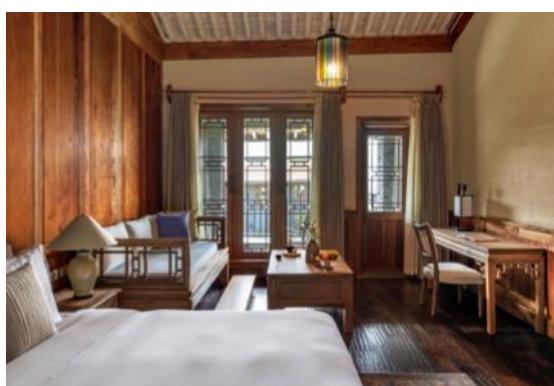


Go Off the Beaten Path in Comfort

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 Lodge 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 Lodge 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 (2,020m)

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 (1,900m)

Songtsam Lodge Cizhong on the banks of the Lancang River is the first winery Lodge in Songtsam. Cizhong Village, where the Lodge is located, is situated at the junction of Meili Snow Mountain and Biluo Snow Mountain and is a village with a mixed population of seven ethnic groups, including Tibetans, Han Chinese, Naxi, Lisu and so on. Songtsam Lodge Cizhong has four Tibetan-style stone and wood buildings, and the Lodge's interior design is a fusion of Chinese and Western aesthetics, with a light-hearted, lively and subdued color scheme.



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

The 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 Lodge Lijiang (2,400m) Deluxe Room D	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Pick up from Lijiang Sanyi International Airport (1 hour drive). <i>If you arrive early, you can head to the Dongba Academy. There, you can follow a teacher to learn Dongba characters, experience the woodblock printing of the Dongba Twelve Zodiacs, and enjoy a Naxi-style afternoon tea. This way, you can not only enjoy the fun of learning an unfamiliar writing system but also gain insight into how the local ancestors understood the world and life. Isn't that wonderful?</i> ➤ Have welcome dinner at Songtsam Lodge Lijiang.
Day 2	Songtsam Lodge Lijiang (2,400m) Deluxe Room B, L, D	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ After breakfast, visit Dayan Ancient Town (20 mins drive). Then stroll along the route described by Russian writer Peter Goullart in Forgotten Kingdom, and uncover the former glory of this vital Tea Horse Road town and the resilience of its people over centuries. The walk ends at Zhongyi Market, where you'll immerse yourself in the daily life of the Naxi people, explore local ingredients, and experience the vibrant charm of the ancient town. ➤ Have lunch at Songtsam Lodge Lijiang. ➤ Drive to Tiger Leaping Gorge (1.5 hours drive) for a day hike. Tiger Leaping Gorge is a scenic canyon on the Jinsha River, a primary tributary of the upper Yangtze River. It is one of the top 10 famous hiking trails in the world. In particular, we choose the most beautiful and less difficult route from Chama Guesthouse to Zhongtu Inn. <i>The route can be extended according to your physical strength and preference.</i> ➤ Have dinner at Songtsam Lodge Lijiang.
Day 3	Songtsam Lodge Tacheng (2,020m) Deluxe Room B, L, D	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ After breakfast, depart for Tacheng (4 hours drive) passing the First Bend of the Yangtze River and visit Shi Gu Village on the way. ➤ Once check-in, have lunch at Songtsam Lodge Tacheng. ➤ Relax and take in sights of the beautiful rice and flower fields and the surrounding ancient village. ➤ Visit Hada Village (15 mins walk) in the afternoon to learn how to make soy milk and tofu with a local family in their courtyard. ➤ Have dinner at Songtsam Lodge Tacheng.
Day 4	Songtsam Lodge Cizhong (2,200m) Deluxe Room B, L, D	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ After breakfast, visit Yunnan Golden Monkey National Park (30 mins drive) and hike for a while to search for the monkeys in the nature reserve. ➤ Have lunch at Songtsam Lodge Tacheng. ➤ In the afternoon, depart for Cizhong (4 hours drive). ➤ Arrive at Songtsam Lodge Cizhong and relax.

Day 5	Songtsam Lodge Cizhong (2,200m) Deluxe Room B, L, D	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Have wine dinner at Songtsam Lodge Cizhong. Combined with the integrated local culture of Cizhong, the restaurant of Songtsam Lodge Cizhong has carefully designed a 5-course dinner featuring fusion dishes—Western cuisine blended with local Yunnan ingredients. While dining, you can also taste 5 glasses of wine from Shangri-La, each reflecting different terroirs of the region. Starting with sparkling wine to awaken your taste buds, followed by red wine paired with the main course and ice wine with dessert, this experience allows you to fully savor the beauty of food and wine pairing. ➤ After breakfast, visit the Songtsam Rizui Vineyard (40 mins drive). In 1898, French missionaries arrived in Cizhong. While building the church, they also brought grape cultivation and traditional winemaking techniques to the area. Today, the northwestern Yunnan region remains one of China's most important wine-producing areas. Accompanied by Songtsam's travel guide, you will tour the vineyard of Songtsam Winery, learning how Songtsam uses the unique "biodynamic farming method" of Shangri-La to care for this land, as well as how nature, the local economy and people's lives are interdependent. ➤ Have lunch at Songtsam Lodge Cizhong. ➤ At Cizhong Winery, you'll embark on an exploration and tasting experience. Wine serves as a medium for sharing and expression, carrying stories of sunshine, soil, the cycles of seasons, and human connections. As Songtsam's only winery, what we aim to showcase is not just the unparalleled terroir of the Shangri-La region, but also our original aspiration to unveil the hidden mountain treasures that were once hard to reach. At the Cizhong Wine Experience Center, you'll get to see Songtsam's complete winemaking workshop, equipment, techniques, and cellars. Sipping on a glass of Songtsam's exclusive wine, you'll gain a deeper understanding of the charm of terroir. ➤ Have dinner at Songtsam Lodge Cizhong. ➤ Visit the century-old Cizhong Catholic Church (15 mins walk). The significance of Cizhong Village lies in its location on the Ancient Tea Horse Road. It is a village where different religions and ethnic groups coexist harmoniously. Here, there are not only monasteries and stupas of Tibetan Buddhism, but also a Catholic church—and to this day, more than half of the villagers practice Catholicism.
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Mass can be attended at 20:00 on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays, and at 9:00 in the morning on Sundays.

Day 6	Songtsam Lodge Meili (3,600m) Deluxe Room B, L, D	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ After breakfast, depart for Meili, check-in Songtsam Lodge Meili (1.5 hours drive), and take a short break to acclimatize to the altitude gradually. ➤ Have lunch at Songtsam Lodge Meili. ➤ Accompanied by the Songtsam guide, you will hike up the back mountain (<i>light hiking</i>). This area is the water source for Deqin County. The mountain is mostly covered with primeval forests, boasting rich vegetation. Its unique soil types and favorable climatic conditions have nurtured abundant wild edible fungus resources. In Yunnan in July, as long as there is rain, wild fungi such as matsutake, termite mushroom, boletus, and golden chanterelle will break through the soil. Various wild fungi you can't name grow freely in the forest on the back mountain of Songtsam Lodge Meili. They are rich in multiple vitamins and high-quality protein, with a unique flavor. Some also have health-beneficial
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Day 7

Songtsam
 Linka Shangri-La
 (3,300m)
 Deluxe Room
 B, L, D

- pharmacological effects.
- Explore the surrounding village and visit a local family to learn how to print Tibetan prayer flags (3-5 mins walk).
- Have dinner at Songtsam Lodge Meili.

- 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 (*weather permit*).
- After breakfast, visit Feilaisi Temple (30 mins 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 that, depart for Benzilan (2 hours drive), stop off Dongzhulin Monastery and the Moon Bay of the Jinsha River. Dongzhulin Monastery sits overlooking the beautiful Jinsha River. It is not that well known but has become popular with the local Tibetans. The Moon Bay of the Jinsha River is a bend 15 km north of Benzilan and the mountains on their way southward block the Jinsha River and as a result, a hairpin turn has been formed creating a natural wonder.
- Have picnic lunch in the forest.

Picnic lunch available from April to November, during December to March, have lunch at the Songtsam Lodge Benzilan.

- After noon, hike into Niding Forest (30 mins drive), which is a beautiful primeval forest filled with towering Yunnan and Huashan pine trees and an abundance of peonies, azaleas and irises. The hike starts in the small tranquil village of Niding and takes a circular route mainly downhill with low difficulty.
- Depart for Shangri-La (2 hours drive), visit Napa Lake, which is both an ideal field for herdsmen and a paradise for many species of birds.
- Have dinner at Songtsam Linka Shangri-La.

- After breakfast, visit Songzanlin Monastery (10-15 mins walk), the largest Tibetan Buddhist monastery in Yunnan province and sometimes referred to as the "Little Potala Palace".
- Have lunch at Songtsam Linka Shangri-La.
- After noon, you can choose which activity to participate in based on your personal preferences:

Day 8

Songtsam
 Linka Shangri-La
 (3,300m)
 Deluxe Room
 B, L, D

Option 1: On the grassland in front of Linka Shangri-La, experienced instructors will start with teaching you how to saddle a horse and lead a horse, guiding you step by step to become a graceful equestrian. After the horse-riding lesson, an archery experience will be held—draw the bow, nock the arrow, and enjoy the carefree time on the grassland.

Option 2: Have a city walk through Dukezong Ancient Town, with a history of over 1,300 years, this ancient town boasts the best-preserved and largest Tibetan residential complex in China. For the caravans traveling along the Ancient Tea-Horse Road, Dukezong was a vital hub—the first major stop after entering Tibet. Enjoy a cup of afternoon tea while listening to a Songtsam guide share stories about the old and new faces of the town and daily life in the region.

- Have dinner at Songtsam Linka Shangri-La.

Day 9 Departure
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- After breakfast, transfer to Diqing Shangri-La Airport (25 mins drive).

If your flight is scheduled for a later time, you may visit the Songtsam Museum. You will be given an explanation of the cultural knowledge contained in the museum's collections.



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 linka Shangri-La, and lodges Lijiang, Tacheng, Meili, and Benzilan, we 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 hotels 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 establish 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 bieti*), 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.

