

## Songtsam Tibet “Lhasa Exploration” 5N/6D



*“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

Lhasa is the capital of the Tibet Autonomous Region and is located at an elevation of 3,992m (11,975ft), making it one of the highest cities in the world. Due to its highland temperate and semi-arid monsoon climate, it is known as the 'Sunshine City' receiving nearly 3,000 hours of sunlight each year. The city's name literally translates to the "Place of the Gods" and has been the cultural, economic, political, and religious centre of Tibet since ancient times. Home to the Potala Palace, Jokhang Temple, and the Drepung and Sera monasteries, it's the most representative "holy land" in the world because of its depth of profound history and strong cultural heritage. It is said that if you have not been to Lhasa, you will never know the history and essence of Tibetan culture. It is a city of mystical wonder and hidden beauty, attracting people from every corner of the world to visit, live, study, pilgrimage, and most of all, to be enlightened.

### 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 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 Lhasa (3,700m) Superior Suite Room D	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Pick up from Lhasa Gonggar Airport (1 hour drive) and check into the hotel. Here, you can take in the entire ancient royal city of Lhasa. This youthful “ancient structure” embodies the consistent philosophy of “connecting with local culture.” It was built with the participation of master craftsmen who twice contributed to major repairs of the Potala Palace. Drawing inspiration from the architectural form of the New Palace at Norbulingka—a classic Tibetan architectural model—it faithfully recreates the Potala Palace's Yangbajing lime-plastered exterior walls, the sun-drenched black window frames of the Jokhang Temple, the golden staircase of the Phodrang Pavilion beneath Norbulingka's green shade, and the fish-scale stone walls of Mindroling Monastery. Through this approach, it aims to showcase the exquisite beauty of local traditional architecture and pay homage to ancestral wisdom.</li> <li>➤ If you come early, you could enjoy the afternoon tea at the hotel and acclimatize to the altitude.</li> <li>➤ Have dinner at Songtsam Linka Lhasa.</li> </ul>
Day 2	Songtsam Linka Lhasa (3,700m) Superior Suite Room B, L, D	<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"> <li>➤ After breakfast, visit the iconic Potala Palace, (30 mins drive) a pearl of the Roof of the World standing atop Red Hill. The tour explores Tibetan history and culture through its sacred halls and invaluable treasures. (Visiting time will depend on ticket availability, and morning or afternoon schedules may be adjusted accordingly.)</li> <li>➤ Have lunch at Songtsam Linka Lhasa.</li> <li>➤ Visit Barkhor Street and Jokhang Temple (20 mins)</li> </ul>

		<p>drive). “First came Jokhang Temple, then came Lhasa” — For locals, Jokhang Temple and Barkhor Street are a mixture of religious and secular life, form the true heart of Lhasa. This is where locals begin and end their days, and where pilgrims bow in devotion from all directions. Barkhor Street is the boundary between the sacred and the mundane in Lhasa. Following the Songtsam guide, you will admire the 12-year-old life-size statue of Shakyamuni at Jokhang Temple, delve into the preserved memory of old Lhasa, and connect with the spiritual center of the city and Tibet.</p> <p>➤ Have dinner at Songtsam Linka Lhasa.</p>
Day 3	<p>Songtsam Linka Lhasa (3,700m) Superior Suite Room B, L, D</p>	<p>➤ After breakfast, we set out for the Khenpo Khenchen Pilgrimage Route in Shannan (1 hour drive). The Khenpo Khenchen retreat is a place detached from the world, emphasizing ascetic practice. Practitioners achieve inner peace by confronting their own shortcomings and the challenges of their environment. Only when we reached the sacred site of Guru Rinpoche, breathless from the climb, could we truly grasp how practitioners maintain mental clarity while coexisting with imperfection. Paying homage at Guru Rinpoche's sacred site teaches us to let go of the “ego” that clings to perfection. Though Qingpu remains silent, it allows every visitor to hear the loudest parts of their inner selves gradually fade into stillness.</p> <p>➤ Have lunch at the local restaurant.</p> <p>➤ In the afternoon, visit Samye Monastery (15 mins drive), as one of Tibet's most significant monasteries, Samye Monastery stands as an architectural marvel blending Tibetan, Han Chinese, and Nepalese styles. In the 8th century, Guru Rinpoche integrated Buddhist cosmology into its design, creating a masterful layout: the central hall symbolizes Mount Meru, surrounded by four main halls, while twin halls representing the sun and moon hang suspended to the east and west. Walking through this standing mandala, the architecture itself becomes the most exquisite classroom of Buddhist teachings.</p> <p>➤ Have dinner at Songtsam Linka Lhasa.</p>
Day 4	<p>Songtsam Linka Lhasa (3,700m) Superior Suite Room B, L, D</p>	<p>➤ After breakfast, visit Yamdrok-Tso (2 hours drive), one of Tibet's three holiest lakes, is a breathtaking sight. Spanning Shannan and Lhoka Prefectures, it's about 110 kilometers from Lhasa. With a circumference of around 250 kilometers, the lake twists and turns, its shape far from circular. The name “Yamdrok-Tso” means “Jade Turquoise Lake” in Tibetan. Under sunlight, its waters shift between vivid turquoise, deep blue, and emerald. For centuries, it has been a sacred site in Tibetan Buddhism.</p> <p>➤ Have a picnic along the Lake.</p> <p>➤ A special monastery tour -- step into the Gongga Qude Monastery (1.2 hours drive), which has a simple exterior yet astonishing artistic charm. Everywhere, murals bear</p>

		<p>witness to nearly 600 years of devout dedication by monks and artisans. Follow Songtsam guide, quietly appreciate the mural as if wandering through an art museum.</p> <p>➤ Have dinner at Songtsam Linka Lhasa.</p>
Day 5	<p>Songtsam Linka Lhasa (3,700m) Superior Suite Room B, L, D</p>	<p>➤ After breakfast, visit Norbulingka (20 mins drive), which is the summer palace of successive Dalai Lamas, where garden landscapes and Tibetan-style architecture are perfectly integrated, with lush green trees, are like a paradise hidden on the plateau, especially pleasant to visit in summer. During festivals, local people will gather on the grassland of Norbulingka for picnics and watch Tibetan operas. It is one of the most grand festivals in Tibet and a visual and cultural feast.</p> <p>➤ Have lunch at Songtsam Linka Lhasa.</p> <p>➤ Visit Sera Monastery (30 mins drive) to spin prayer wheels and pay respects to the renowned statue of Mahakala, feeling the compassion for all sentient beings behind it. If you go after 3:00 PM from Monday to Saturday, you can also witness the debate sessions, immersing yourself in Tibet's religious culture and unique atmosphere.</p> <p><i>If there is no debate practice on Sundays or major festivals, you may voluntarily choose whether to replace it with a tsatsa-making experience.</i></p> <p>Visit the Tsa Tsa Museum (30 mins drive) to learn about this traditional craft of making clay figurines and stupas. Guided by experts, you will experience the art of creating Tsa Tsa, discovering its profound cultural and artistic value.</p> <p>➤ Have farewell dinner at Songtsam Linka Lhasa.</p>
Day 6	<p>Departure B</p>	<p>➤ After breakfast, transfer to Lhasa Gongga Airport (1 hour drive).</p>





### **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 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.

