

Songtsam Exploring Yunnan Circuit 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”.

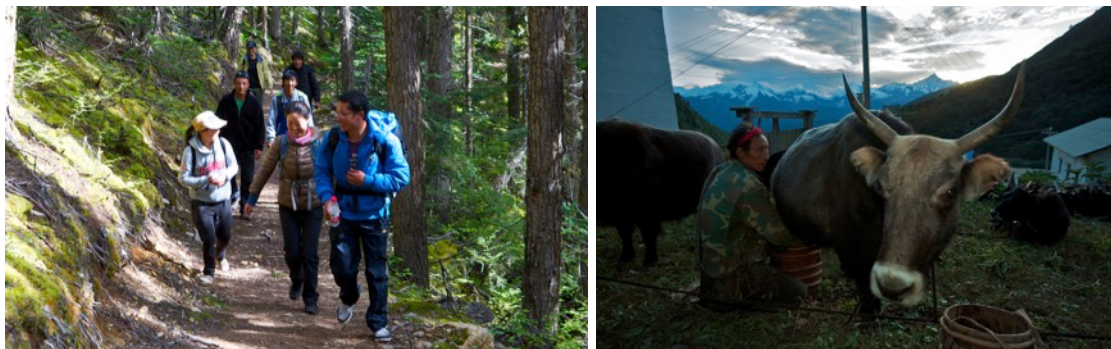
Songtsam have built a series of hotels and lodges in eighteen carefully selected locales, which enable guests to experience the different cultures and landscapes inherent in these regions. By combining stays at the different Songtsam properties our circuit tour takes you into the heart of the Three Parallel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

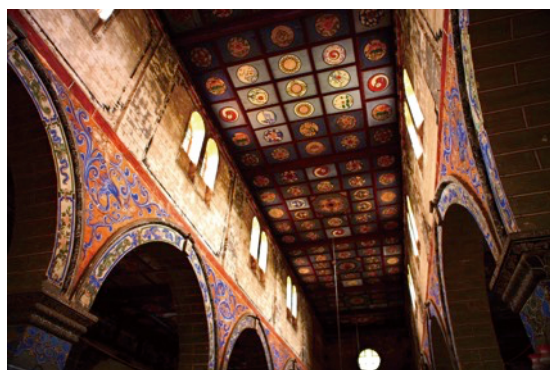
Every year Tibetans and travellers from all over the world make their journey to worship Kawagebo, the highest peak of the Meili snow mountain range. Our tranquil lodge is located away from main tourist areas and we know the most beautiful and untamed paths around Meili. Our guided hikes take you off 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:

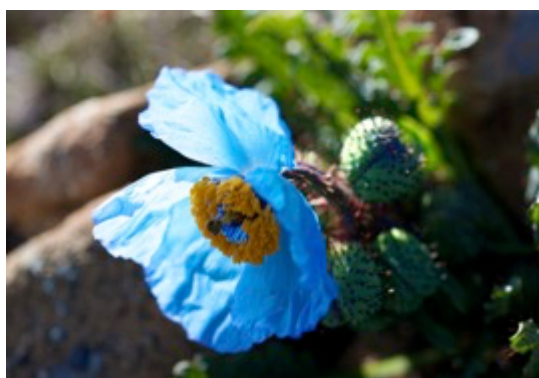
- Dharma Cave and the road of pilgrimage.
- Local family visits of different ethnic minorities: Tibetan, Naxi and Lisu.
- Cizhong Catholic Church and the charming upper Mekong River valley.
- Qudengge, where local people get the “key” to worship Mt. Kawagebo.
- Important Tibetan monastery visits such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

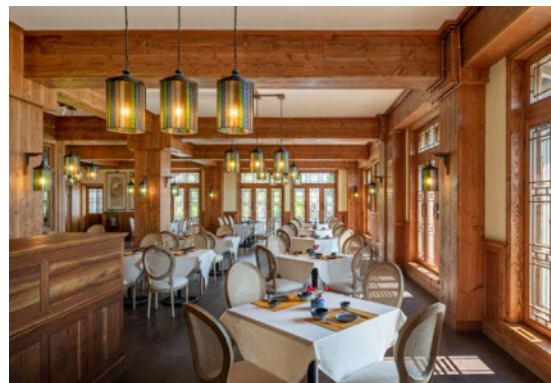


Go Off the Beaten Path in Comfort

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	➤ Pick up from Lijiang Sanyi International Airport. Check into the hotel (1-hour drive) and have welcome dinner at Songtsam Lodge Lijiang. ➤ If your flights arrive early, you may visit Baisha Old Town . It still preserves an authentic Naxi heritage. Elderly Naxi women in traditional costumes sell homegrown vegetables along the streets; at the village entrance, old men perform the centuries-old Baisha Fine Music. Nearby, the Baisha Murals blend the style of Tibetan Buddhist painting. Created during the Ming and Qing dynasties, they stand as a precious testament to art and faith.
Day 2	Songtsam Lodge Lijiang (2,400m) Deluxe Room B, L, D	➤ After breakfast, visit Dayan Ancient Town (20-min 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 local restaurant. ➤ Drive to Tiger Leaping Gorge (1.5-hour drive) for hiking. 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	➤ After breakfast, depart for Tacheng (4-hour 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. ➤ Riding a bike in Tacheng at an altitude of only 2,000 meters, you can enjoy the scenic greenway along the river. Along the way, the white stupa in the rice fields and the tranquil villages come into full view, with wisps of smoke rising in the distance. Breathe deeply amid the serene greenery. ➤ Follow your guide across vast farmlands for a local ingredients tour. Visit hospitable Naxi families in Hada Village (15-min walk). Add beans and turn ancient stone mills passed down through generations to make soybean milk and tofu pudding from heirloom soybeans cultivated for thousands of years. One sip brings an authentic, mellow original flavor. ➤ Have dinner at Songtsam Lodge Tacheng.

Day 4	Songtsam Lodge Cizhong (2,200m) Deluxe Room B, L, D	➤ After breakfast, visit Yunnan Golden Monkey National Park (30-min drive) and hike for a while to search for the monkeys in the nature reserve. ➤ Have lunch at a local restaurant (2-hour drive). ➤ In the afternoon, depart for Cizhong (1.5-hour drive). ➤ Arrive at Songtsam Lodge Cizhong and relax. ➤ 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.
Day 5	Songtsam Lodge Cizhong (2,200m) Deluxe Room B, L, D	➤ After breakfast, Head to Bengong Temple (30-min drive), which belongs to the Nyingma school of Tibetan Buddhism. Founded in 1637, it is located in Shidi Village, Yanmen Township, Deqin County. The name "Bengong" means "above the grassy dam," named after its location on a terraced grassy slope. After visiting the temple, you can go on a circumambulation trek around the mountain. The view from the mountaintop is breathtaking, offering a panoramic overlook of the entire lake and river below. ➤ Have a vegetarian meal at the temple. ➤ At the Cizhong Wine Experience Center, savoring a glass of Songtsam's mystery wine blend will lead you to a deeper understanding of the charm of terroir. Wine is a medium of sharing and expression, carrying within it the sunlight and soil, the cycle of seasons, and the stories among people. As Songtsam's exclusive winery, what we aim to present is not only the unique terroir of the Shangri-La region but also our original aspiration to reveal the hidden mountain sanctuary, bringing clarity to what once seemed beyond reach. ➤ Have dinner at Songtsam Lodge Cizhong. ➤ Visit the century-old Cizhong Catholic Church (15-min 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. <i>Mass can be attended at 20:00 on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays, and at 9:00 in the morning on Sundays.</i>
Day 6	Songtsam Lodge Meili (3,600m) Deluxe Room B, L, D	➤ <i>If you are interested, before departing for Meili, you can also visit the Rizui Vineyard. The recommended season is July to October (40-min drive).</i> 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.

Day 7
Songtsam
Linka Shangri-La
(3,300m)
Deluxe Room
B, L, D

- After breakfast, depart for Meili, check-in Songtsam Lodge Meili (1.5-hour 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 (*light hiking*). 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 pharmacological effects.
- Explore the surrounding village and visit a local family to learn how to print Tibetan prayer flags (5-min 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 the Wunongding Viewing Platform (15-min drive), where you can join a Sang offering ritual. Facing the majestic peaks of Meili Snow Mountain, you can hang your handmade Tibetan prayer flags to pray for blessings and good fortune.
- After that, depart for Benzilan (1.5-hour 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.

If you are interested, you may enter Dongzhulin Monastery for a visit.

- 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-min 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-hour drive), visit Napa Lake, which is both an ideal field for herdsmen and a paradise for many species of birds (*If your time permits*).
- Have dinner at Songtsam Linka Shangri-La.

Day 8	Songtsam Linka Shangri-La (3,300m) Deluxe Room B, L, D	➤ After breakfast, visit Songzanlin Monastery (15-min 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. ➤ Afternoon, you can choose which activity to participate in based on your personal preferences: 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: The thangka painting experience offered by Songtsam allows you to explore this profound art form under the guidance of a master painter and complete your very first piece. As an "encyclopedia" of Tibetan culture, the thangka features distinctive ethnic characteristics, rich religious elements, and a unique artistic style. Option 3: Making Tibetan incense by hand. For thousands of years, the Tibetan people have preserved the essence of Tibetan incense with their devoted hearts and hardworking hands. Tibetan incense originates from a daily ritual activity—"Weisang" (smoke purification offering). When this natural fragrance spreads across the snowy plateau, it is believed that one's prayers have been heard by the divine. ➤ Have dinner at Songtsam Linka Shangri-La.
Day 9	Departure B	➤ After breakfast, transfer to Diqing Shangri-La Airport (25-min drive). ➤ <i>If your flight is scheduled for a later time, you may visit the Songtsam Museum.</i> You will be given an explanation of the cultural knowledge contained in the museum's collections.

Trip Costs

Price unit: (CNY) per person

Date	Shoulder Season	Peak Season	Holidays
Private Tour (2 PAX)	44,200	47,100	50,500
Private Tour (4 PAX)	35,200	37,600	40,300
Private Tour (6 PAX)	36,100	38,500	41,300
Private Tour (8 PAX)	33,600	35,900	38,500
Single Room Supplement	9,400	11,500	15,500

Shoulder season: 3 Jan-12 Feb, 24 Feb-30 Apr, 6 May-9 Jul, 26 Aug-27 Sept, 8 Oct-23 Dec, 2026

Peak season: 1 Jan-2 Jan, 10 Jul-25 Aug, 24 Dec-31 Dec, 2026

Holidays: 13 Feb-23 Feb, 1 May-5 May, 28 Sept-7 Oct, 2026

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.
- Standard drinking water and snacks throughout the trip.
- Complimentary minibar in guest rooms.
- Service of English-speaking 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 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.

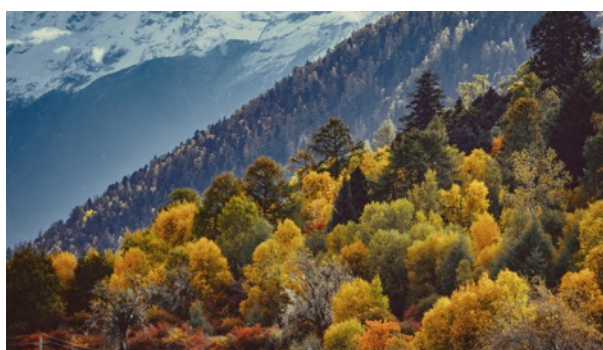
Inspired by the rich Tibetan culture, he worked with local artisans and members of the community to help establish and run Songtsam Lodge Shangri-La. Eleven properties and eighteen years later, Pema's vision continues to grow, and so does the Songtsam experience.

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.

