
Farmers and Nomads of Amdo Tibet (U-Tsang) | 15 Days



This trip is designed for you to spend two days immersed in local families, firstly with farmers and then amongst the nomads. For these two days, you will be welcomed into the family and have the opportunity to participate in daily activities and gain a better understanding of Tibetan farming and nomadic people, life and culture. This trip will also allow you to attend the celebrations of Repgong shaman festival. The visit of some of the most important historical and sacred sites in Amdo, and the beautiful landscapes will complete this journey in a Tibetan area still little known.

Highlights

- Your Tibetan guide who will introduce you to his/her culture.
- Two nights immersed in Tibetan daily life with a family of farmers and two nights at a nomadic camp.
- Repgong Shaman Festival
- Visit some of the most important historical and sacred sites of Amdo region.
- Beautiful landscapes with plenty of short walking opportunities.

Itinerary

Day 1: Arrival in Chengdu and flight to Xining (2,275 meters above sea level)

- CHENGDU: You will be met at Chengdu Airport by one of the Global Nomad team members and then take your flight to Xining, capital of Qinghai Province.
- XINING: Your local driver and guide will meet you at Xining airport and you will go to your hotel (40 min driving) where you can relax for a while. Today and depending on the time of your arrival you will visit some small Buddhist temples in the center of Xining and walk in the streets.
- Overnight: Hotel.

Day 2: Xining – Trika (2 000 m)

- Distance: 130 km. Approximate travel time: 2 hrs.
- You will visit the monastery of Kumbum Jampaling (*Taer Si* in Chinese). This is one of the six most important monasteries of the Géluk school of Tibetan Buddhism. Founded in 1560, it was built at the birthplace of Tsongkhapa, the founder of the Géluk tradition.
- In the afternoon, drive to Trika (*Guide* in Chinese) and walk along the Yellow River.
- Overnight: Hotel.

Day 3: Trika - Achung Namdzong - Yadzi (2 040 m)

- Distance: 250 km. Approximate travel time: 5 hrs.
- You will drive to Achung Namdzong (3,000m above sea level), one of the three most holy sites in the Amdo region. It was in the hermitages of these sites that three monks from Central Tibet took refuge from persecution by the 9th century King Langdarma in order to preserve their Buddhist monastic traditions.
- You'll visit Samten Chöpelleng, the largest Nyingma nunnery in Amdo and climb a mountain (with stairs) where you will enjoy a breathtaking view of Achung Namdzong.
- In the afternoon, you will drive to Yadzi (*Xunhua* in Chinese) a region inhabited by the Tibetan and Salar people. The Salars are originally a people from Central Asia who came by the Silk Road and settled in this area of Amdo and intermarried with the Tibetan women. The Salars are Muslim, however their language and traditions have many elements of Tibetan culture.
- You will then go to a small village where a Tibetan farming family welcomes you.
- Overnight: Homestay.

Day 4: Yadzi

- Today is a day of immersion in the life of Amdo Tibetan farmers. You will discover their daily life and participate if you wish, to their work in the fields and other daily tasks.
- You can also take stroll through the village or countryside and go to the small monastery up in the valley.
- Overnight: Homestay.

Day 5: Yadzi - Repgong (2 600 m)

- Distance: 100 km. Approximate travel time: 1.5 hrs.
- In the morning you drive to the birthplace of the 10th Panchen-Lama (the second most important lineage of reincarnated masters after the Dalai-Lamas). You will visit his family house and a big stupa nearby.
- Visit Bimdo monastery where the previous Panchen-Lama began his monastic studies. You will meet monks to whom you can ask questions about Buddhist philosophy.

- Drive to Repgong (*Tongren* in Chinese). Regarded in many respects as the heart of Amdo, Repgong is particularly renowned for its schools of thangka painting (religious paintings) many of which adorn monasteries in the region. In 2009, the Repgong arts was recognized as part of UNESCO's 'Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity'.
- Before arriving in town, you will visit the monasteries of Senggéshong (upper and lower) with their beautifully decorated stupas, and a village art workshop near the monastery.
- Overnight: Hotel.

Day 6: Repgong

- You attend to Repgong shaman festival. This festival shows the vitality and importance of the pre-Buddhist traditions and beliefs in Tibetan culture. Nature is inhabited by spirits with which it is important to maintain good relations. During this festival, thanks to an oracle, the people enter in direct contact with their tutelary deities.
- Overnight: Hotel.

Day 7: Repgong

- Visit a small museum on thangka art opened by a vocational art school. It's a good opportunity to familiarize yourself with the techniques, styles and religious meaning of thangka art and painting methods.
- Visit Rongbo Monastery. It was first built in the 14th century by Lama Samten Rinchen, and then rebuilt in the 16th century by Lama Kelden Rinchen from the Géluk school of Tibetan Buddhism. Rongbo Monastery is now an important monastery with 35 branches in Repgong area.
- Overnight: Hotel.

Day 8: Repgong - Labrang (2 900 m)

- Distance: 140 km. Approximate travel time: 4 hrs.
- In the morning, you take a nice road that leads you to Labrang (*Xiahe* in Chinese) through small farmer villages, forests and rich grassland (you will stop many times to enjoy the scenery). Along the way you have lunch in a nomad family and visit Tsézhik Monastery of Bön tradition (Tibetan religion anterior to Buddhism).
- Overnight: Hotel.

Day 9: Labrang

- Visit Labrang Tashikhyil Monastery, the largest monastic complex of Amdo. This monastery was founded in 1709 by the first Künkhyen Jamyang Zhépa, who was regarded as an emanation of Master Tsongkhapa, the founder of the Géluk School. You will also visit the printing house of the monastery where you will see the traditional method of printing that uses intricately carved wooden blocks. These holy texts are printed in this monastery and then used in monasteries in the area. You are then free to walk around the monastery with pilgrims and in the nearby village and surrounding hills.
- Overnight: Hotel.

Day 10: Labrang - Taktsang Lhamo (3 300 m)

- Distance: 280 km. Approximate travel time: 4 hrs.
- You'll drive to Taktsang Lhamo (*Langmusi* in Chinese), a small town with two Tibetan monasteries set beautifully in the mountains, forests and meadows which surround them.
- Visit Kirti monastery, associated with the Dalai-Lama's Géluk order. Behind the monastery there are two caves, the Tiger Cave (*Taktsang* means Tiger's Den in Tibetan) and the holy cave of Palden Lhamo (a female divinity and protector of Tibet). It is said that Padmasambhava, the great Buddhist master who introduced Buddhism to Tibet, came to bless this area, but the people did not dare approach it because of the presence of tigers. Much later, Kirti Rinpoché, a student of Tsongkhapa made the tigers leave, allowing pilgrims to access this sacred site and to make offerings to Palden Lhamo. A little further on you will find a path that enters a beautiful valley where you may stroll through a meadow with eagles and vultures circling above you.
- Overnight: Hotel.

Day 11: Taktsang Lhamo – Nomad Camp (3 600 m)

- Distance: 90 km. Approximate travel time: 2 hrs.
- In the morning, you will go to the Sertri monastery (*Sertri* means 'golden throne') from where you can enjoy the scenery, walk around and discover a sky burial site.
- After lunch, you will drive to the vast grassland of Amdo and hike 3hrs to reach a nomad camp where a nomad family will welcome you. With the help of your Tibetan guide, you'll converse with them and gain a first-hand understanding of their lifestyle and culture. You will have the opportunity to walk through pastures and see some of the wildlife that lives there (foxes, antelopes, black-necked cranes, and so on). Bring good walking shoes! Simple dinner cooked by the family.
- Overnight: Camp.

Day 12: Nomad Camp

- Today, you will wake-up early to watch the milking of the dri (female yaks) and take part, if you wish, in your host family daily activities such as starting the stove, collecting and storing yak dung, herding, preparing meals, making butter and yogurt...
- Overnight: Camp.

Day 13: Camp de nomades - Linxia (2 000 m)

- Distance: 360 km. Approximate travel time: 7 hrs.
- In the morning, you go back to the road (2hrs hike) where your car will be waiting for you.
- Departure to Linxia, a Muslim city with many mosques, formerly an important place on the Silk Road.
- Along the way you will stop at Tsö (*Hezuo* in Chinese) to visit Serkhar Gutok (meaning 'golden castle nine-storey tower'). It commemorates an episode of the Milarepa's life, one of Tibet's most famous and influential yogis. The tower's nine storeys have many statues of eminent lay and religious Tibetan historical figures arranged based on the Buddhist traditions they were associated with.
- In Linxia, walk around in the streets and along the local markets where Tibetan traders come to buy carpets, religious objects, stones, knives, etc.
- Overnight: Hotel.

Day 14: Linxia – Jampa Kumbum - Lanzhou (1 600 m)

- Distance: 300 km. Approximate travel time: 5 hrs.
- To reach the site of the caves of Kumbum Jampa (*Binglingsi* in Chinese), you'll drive for 1 hour and take a boat. You'll arrive at a site of stunning beauty. Jampa Kumbum means "100,000 Jampa" in Tibetan (*Jampa* is the name of the Buddha of the future). In these caves you'll see a great range of important artistic styles. From the 5th century to the last Chinese dynasty, artists carved Buddhas of different sizes and styles in caves and in cliffs. There are 183 caves, 694 carved statues and 82 wooden statues. The frescoes are also quite beautiful. One 27-meter high statue in particular is very impressive. The statue depicts Jampa, "Maitreya" in Sanskrit, the Buddha of the future. After visiting this site, you travel on foot (a 1 hour walk or 10 minutes by car) and arrive at a small Tibetan monastery. This small monastery, survivor of the Cultural Revolution and home to only three monks, is so pleasant that we might spend hours drinking tea and talking with the passing pilgrims.
- We'll take the road to Lanzhou in the afternoon for the conclusion of our journey.
- Overnight: Hotel.

Day 15: Departure from Lanzhou

- Transfer to Lanzhou airport (1 to 2 hrs driving depending on traffic jam) for your return flight.

Please note that the transportation time is an estimation and doesn't include stops to go to toilets, take pictures... The travel time might also be longer related to weather, road constructions or local traffic police policies.

Price

Price for a group of 6 to 7 persons:

US\$ 2,614 per person in dual occupancy - hotel or tent

US\$ 2,931 per person in single occupancy* - hotel or tent

This price includes

- The transfers mentioned in the program, by private vehicle with driver
- Accommodation, breakfasts included
- Lunches and dinners (drink included: tea or mineral water)
- Entrance tickets for sites included in the program
- Services of an English-speaking Tibetan guide
- Days 11, 12 and 13: your luggage (one small bag per person) will be carried to the nomad camp, we will provide you with tents and camping mattresses but not with sleeping bags (*it is possible to rent sleeping bags in Xining if you inform us when you register to this trip. Renting price: US\$45*).
- Airfare from Chengdu to Lhasa (Day 1) and from Lanzhou to Chengdu (Day 15)

This price excludes

- Your Chinese visa fee
- Health and accident insurance
- Medical or repatriation costs
- International airfares
- Extra expenses due to circumstances beyond our control
- Drinks and personal expenses
- Sleeping bags for camps
- Tips for guide and driver

* For homestay, it is not possible to have an individual room.

Accommodation

Following hotels or similar:

Xining: Jinjiang Inn Hotel (2*)

Trika: Ledu Hotel (2*)

Repgong: Repgong Hotel (2*)

Labrang : Baoma Hotel (2*)

Taktsang Lhamo: Lhamo Hotel (2*)

Linxia: Linxia hotel (2*)

Lanzhou: Lanzhou hotel (2*)

Please note accommodations listed are rated and assessed by Global Nomad

2 = Simple and clean*

3 = Nice, very comfortable*

Homestays – Very limited comfort. There are no bathrooms, a basin and hot water will be provided for washing (hands, face, teeth, etc.). There are very basic Tibetan style toilets outside.

Concerning the night at the nomad camp, it is an experience that we highly recommend, however, be aware that you may not sleep much. Indeed, dogs bark continuously at night to ward off wolves, and at 5am, women get up to start their workday.

Warnings

Due to the high altitude of the places visited, it is essential to be in good physical condition to register to this trip. If your health is not so good, you should check with a doctor before taking the decision of coming to Tibet. During the trip, it is important to drink a lot of water (about 2 liters per day).

We reserve the right to modify the itinerary should circumstances beyond our control, namely those related to the specific situation of Tibetan areas, require us to do so.

It is strictly forbidden to talk about political matters with guides and Tibetans in general. This could have extremely serious consequences for them, the driver, the local agency and all agencies' employees. Likewise, it's forbidden to bring anything that could make local authorities unhappy.

During the trip, clients must follow the instructions of the guide and of the local agency.

Local Travel Agency who organizes the trip



JIMPA TRAVEL
Guojicun Gongyu Building 2,
Room 411, Xining,
Qinghai Province
China

A responsible trip



This GN certified trip is beneficial to the local population and contributes to the sustainable economic development of Tibetan society.

Inspired by ethical and sustainable tourism (ATES), the GN label verifies in-depth consideration of the needs and requirements of the local population and culture, providing the following guarantees:

✓ **Maximisation of local participation**

Your trip is created, organized and escorted by Tibetans. The travel agency and the guide will always be Tibetan but it might happen that the driver is not Tibetan if there are no good Tibetan drivers available.

✓ **Respect and promotion of the local culture**

Our Tibetan partners are very careful in ensuring their trips are respectful to their culture. They are also uniquely positioned to personally show you the beauty of their cultural heritage, their philosophy, and their deeply engrained joy of living.

✓ **Respect of the environment**

Agencies and guides are committed to following norms and principles minimizing any negative impact on the environment.

Global Nomad receives a commission from local agencies organizing this trip, enabling it to provide Tibetans entrepreneurs with advice, training courses, and promotion for their products. Thanks to your support we are able to provide tools that allow the Tibetan people to develop skills promoting their own native culture, ultimately benefitting themselves and their communities.

For more information visit our websites or contact us by e-mail.

Promotional site: www.globalnomad-tibet.com

Professional site: www.globalnomad-services.com

E-mail: contact@globalnomad-tibet.com

Traveler Code of Conduct

This code of conduct is not exhaustive but summarizes briefly what Tibetans expect from foreigners visiting them. While traveling in Tibet, your guide will give you more explanation about why and how to observe these cultural codes.

Respect for Tibetan customs

In a monastery

- When visiting a monastery, do not touch religious images and objects and avoid taking photographs inside the monastery or temple unless it is authorized.
- Do not wear shorts, tank tops, or other revealing clothing when visiting monasteries.
- Do not smoke or drink alcohol in the monasteries.
- Do not enter the enclosure of a monastery if your breath smells of alcohol or garlic.
- Remember to always walk around monasteries and stupas in a clockwise direction, except for in Bonpo monasteries.
- Do not point fingers at representations of gods or great lamas. Instead, gesture with your hand open and palm up as a sign of respect.
- Keep money in small change for poor pilgrims around the monastery; however if they are too numerous, you can push them away as locals do.
- Take off your hat at the entrance of the monastery.
- Do not throw tissues or spit into fires.
- Do not urinate near monasteries, rivers or near roads.

In a family home

- When you are invited into a family's home, always allow the host, the elderly and children to enter a room first.
- Tibetans do not eat horse, dog or monkey meat, and do not eat fish in certain areas; please respect their eating habits.
- When you receive a gift, always present your two hands to receive and lean slightly forward as a sign of gratitude.
- Say "Tashi Delek" to the family and sit according to the arrangement provided by the host.
- When you go to sit or if you want to get up, avoid crossing over people who are seated; instead, go around them.
- In a nomadic tent, do not step over utensils for food, which are often placed on the floor, or over religious objects.
- In a tent, people can sit crossing their legs on the ground, but this position is not permitted for women except for nuns.
- Do not touch a stove (for men); do not place your feet, shoes, or socks over a stove.
- If babies are present in the family, do not approach too near them and do not touch them without the agreement of the host.
- When you leave your host, you may hug or shake hands but in no case should you kiss.
- When you visit a nomad's tent, avoid any physical contact with women so as not to embarrass them.

Environment protection

Minimize Waste

- Bring your own reusable water bottle; you will be able to refill it with boiled water when trekking and in towns you can sterilize tap water with chlorine/iodine tablets or drops.
- Bring a small daypack or a cloth bag when you go shopping instead of having things wrapped in polyethylene bags in order to reduce plastic waste (which sometimes ends up in cattle's stomachs in the countryside). The cloth bags handed out at supermarkets can be reused many times.
- Bring rechargeable batteries including a small (solar) battery charger if you use a flashlight or other electronic devices. Batteries are often just buried along with the regular garbage, posing the risk of hazardous chemicals leaking into the ground water.
- Buy food with little packaging and especially try to avoid canned food or drinks. The manufacturing of cans is very energy intensive, as is their recycling.

Buy Locally

- Favor local snacks over imported goods: buying dried peaches, apples, cheese, walnuts, popped barley, tsampa, etc. not only reduces long transport distances but also benefits the local economy
- Buying traditional handicrafts made by Tibetans helps promote traditional skills which rely on local resources and environmentally friendly processing techniques. Never buy souvenirs made of endangered species.

Trekking: Leave no Trace

- Bring all waste back to a major city, including toilet paper and cigarette butts.
- Keep a distance of at least 50m from watercourses when defecating, washing yourself, your hair, clothes, or dishes. Use a bucket and biodegradable soap and shampoo. Waste water should be dispersed widely so it can be filtered through the soil.
- Use a small shovel to bury human waste at least 20 cm deep. Feces contain many pathogenic microorganisms that are responsible for gastro-intestinal diseases.
- Respect wildlife (keep at a distance, never feed wild animals, avoid loud voices and noises) and don't pluck plants and flowers; they are possibly endangered or threatened species and might have an important function in their ecosystem.
- Use existing trails and campsites. At high altitudes plants grow very slowly, and once the vegetation cover has been damaged it can take years to regrow.
- Do not make wooden bonfires (unless you are in an area with abundant forests). Wood is a scarce resource in Tibet, and cutting trees or uprooting bushes adds to erosion and desertification.

Transportation

- Consider purchasing a "myclimate" ticket in addition to your regular flight ticket to counterbalance the negative environmental impacts of air travel. "myclimate" (www.myclimate.org) is a non-profit foundation that offsets CO2 emissions by investing in renewable energies and energy efficient technologies. Tibet is particularly affected by global warming; try not to contribute to it.
- In cities, use public transportation or "manpower" (cycle rikshaws, a rented bike, your feet) instead of taxis to reduce motorized traffic and air pollution.

GLOBAL NOMAD
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