

# Briefing Paper for **Travellers to Tibet**



Tibetan Centre for Human Rights and Democracy



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# Introduction

Commencing in 1959, the Chinese government introduced a western type of strategy to develop Tibet. Over a period of time, the Chinese-led propaganda has depicted Tibet as a “developed” country. However, the introduction of Chinese methods has not helped the living conditions of common Tibetan people. It is true, the Chinese government has brought material development to some urban areas of Tibet, but this is for the advantage of Chinese immigrants who are provided with land and other benefits; there is no equal support for the wellbeing of Tibetans. Such developments have also created a severe imbalance between the rural and urban areas of Tibet.

Living under the communist Chinese occupation for so long, the Tibetan people have not only been denied the equal benefits of development touted by China, but also their fundamental rights of expression, religious practice and opinion, and freedom to maintain their culture. By travelling in Tibet, tourists can view firsthand the human rights situation for themselves. The Tibetan Centre for Human Rights and Democracy (TCHRD) has decided to produce this briefing paper for travellers to Tibet, as a guide for those who have little or no knowledge of the political situation in Tibet, and also as a supplement for more seasoned travellers.

Travellers have an important role to play in the Tibetan situation. In recent years they have become a vital source of information on the situation in Tibet by conveying first hand accounts of the situation inside Tibet and thus emphasising the need to

support the Tibetan cause in the international community. This in turn heightens the pressure on China to rectify human rights abuses being perpetrated under its rule. TCHRD is hopeful that after reading this guide, travellers will observe with eager awareness the conditions in Tibet and upon returning share with us and others what they have seen and experienced during their journey inside Tibet.

The most important thing to pack for a visit to Tibet is some understanding of the political situation there. The political climate is volatile. Rules and regulations for travellers are often subject to random changes with little or no notice. Observation combined with awareness will allow you to see the reality of everyday life for Tibetans throughout Tibet. The guide also gives recommendations and information that will enable you to see beyond the façade presented by the Chinese authorities. This is not an insignificant task given the Chinese government's assertion: "We should use people from abroad to carry out the propaganda on Tibet for us, which are more powerful than when we do it."

Be informed before you leave home. Read up on both the Tibetan situation and travel conditions. There are various good publications and websites that can provide valuable and interesting information. DO NOT take materials with you relating to the Dalai Lama, including photos or videos of the Dalai Lama or related events, this booklet or other political literature, or any other sensitive documentation when you travel to Tibet; this could cause difficulties not just for you but for any local people who come in contact with you!

Throughout this guide, when referring to Tibet, our definition of the word 'Tibet' is that of the complete region of traditional Tibet, which encompasses the three regions of U-Tsang, Kham and Amdo. After the annexation of Tibet in 1951, China subdivided the country into seven administrative regions, the largest of which is the "Tibet Autonomous Region" ("TAR"). When China today refers to Tibet it means only the "TAR" which is less than half of the original Tibetan plateau. The remaining areas have been incorporated into existing Chinese provinces. This has been done in order to facilitate effective control over the population. Most of Amdo lies in the Chinese province of Qinghai, and small portions in Gansu and Sichuan. The former principalities of Eastern Kham have been incorporated into Sichuan and Yunnan, with smaller areas in Qinghai, and the "TAR". It is only the remaining areas of U-Tsang, Western Kham (and Western Tibet) that the Chinese authorities officially designate as the 72 counties of the "TAR". Therefore, when the Chinese authorities refer to Tibet they only mean the "TAR" region. In this paper however, the term Tibet is used to refer to the entire country as known to and recognised by the Tibetan people.

# Should I Visit Tibet?

Currently there is a tremendous drive to increase tourism in Tibet. There is also a general effort to project Tibet as having benefited from the Communist regime. For all travellers, there is an opportunity to assess this claim and personally witness what is happening to Tibetans in their homeland under Chinese occupation, and perhaps even help expose the reality of the situation to the international community.

Many travellers report having been frequently restricted by heavy Chinese regulations and some have described feelings of fear and intimidation. As a result, many people have misgivings about visiting Tibet. Some people feel somewhat immoral spending their money in Tibet, knowing that the Chinese government benefits from tourism. Contributions via transport costs and permits may be unavoidable, but careful choices of where other money is spent can reduce excess governmental financial gain.

Due to strict controls on access to outside information, many Tibetans are unaware of the level of support that exists in the international community for the Tibetan cause, or of the exile community in India. This information if judiciously passed on by a careful tourist can greatly boost the morale of those in Tibet.

Additionally, for decades the Chinese have consistently tried to impress on Tibetans that their culture, religion and language are worthless. Now Tibetans are witnessing foreigners travelling great distances - at great costs - to visit Tibetan holy places,

and showing an interest in their culture and language. This may encourage Tibetans to believe again in the value and worth of their own culture.

Tibetans are characteristically friendly and cheerful in their disposition. In some well-publicised cases foreigners have assumed that this means that these Tibetans are content with their situation and have abandoned the freedom struggle and their reverence for the Dalai Lama. A good way to assess the situation is to observe on Wednesdays in Lhasa the number of Tibetans offering prayers and participating in the incense burning ceremony. According to the Tibetan astrological calendar Wednesday is a special day for offering long life prayers to the Dalai Lama. Despite increased surveillance, Tibetans will gather in large numbers to attend the special Wednesday prayers especially since a ban was imposed in 1997 on observing the birthday of the Dalai Lama (6 July of the Western calendar). Despite the apparent appearance of freedom for Tibetan Buddhists to practise their religion, do not be fooled; religious repression is still rampant in today's Tibet.

# General Recommendations

Tibet, 'the roof of the world', has become a major attraction for travellers in recent years. Thousands of tourists from all over the world enter Tibet every year to view its beautiful valleys, monasteries, snow capped mountains and the natural lifestyle of the Tibetan people.

Generally, Tibetan people live simplistically and in tune with nature, keeping their distance from a materialistic way of life. Tibetan lives have long been entrenched in religion and 99% of Tibetans are followers of Buddhism, valuing all sentient beings with equal regard.

Local Tibetans welcome most foreign tourists to Tibet and will speak frankly with visitors who express curiosity about Tibetan culture or other topics familiar to Tibetans. Villagers can arrange tourist accommodation for you, enabling you to spend less money than you would by staying in a town or a city. By renting rooms in poorer villages, you can also help to finance the daily life of these people.

Tourists who can afford some time volunteering to teach Tibetan villagers how to maintain good hygiene are of great benefit and much appreciated as are travellers who are able to pass on information and skills in first aid, and recovery from emergencies and accidents.

## Talking to Tibetans

When you talk to Tibetans on an everyday level, you will find most of them open and friendly, but it is very dangerous for any Tibetan to discuss political or human rights issues with foreigners, or to pass on information for you to carry to the outside world. Never try to raise political topics with your tour guides or common Tibetan people. To actively seek such information places Tibetans at great risk and may cause their detention, arrest and imprisonment. You may encounter situations where a Tibetan urges you to talk about the human rights situation in Tibet, or raises sensitive topics with you. In these instances use your discretion, as for some reason Tibetans seem to have a tendency to disregard the obvious dangers to themselves. Do not underestimate the risks that these people are facing by approaching you, even if they seem to do so.

When talking with Tibetans always be aware of your location - of hidden security cameras, and of the possibility of others overhearing. For example, the famous teashop opposite the Snowlands Hotel is well known locally for the level of spies frequenting its crowded tables; others can be solitary diners in restaurants; or people 'hanging out' in discos and karaoke bars. It is also known for neighbours to report visits of westerners to Tibetan homes.

If a Tibetan does instigate a discussion with you or asks you to deliver information, use your judgment and assess the situation from all angles. Accounts from reliable sources can supply useful information for organisations such as TCHRD, but there are serious risks involved. Jot down notes later if necessary about what was said, but if you do document information, always keep the 'worst case scenario' constantly in mind - that if

you are detained for any reason, your belongings will be searched and notes read. Protect your source's identity by not writing his /her name, and write in a manner that will not give obvious information to an outsider, but from which you can still decipher accurate details afterwards. You can email details to TCHRD (see address at the end of the booklet) from your laptop or on your return home.

Information on the exile Tibetan communities is often little known, and it is well worth visiting India before you travel to Tibet, making the trip to Dharamsala to see at least one exile community. Dharamsala is the second home of the Dalai Lama and the Tibetan Government in Exile, and many newly arrived Tibetans as well as those born in exile live there. You can talk to Tibetans in India and find out why they fled their homeland, and learn more about the situation of the exiles.

However, in Tibet always remember the risk you are putting a Tibetan through whenever such topics are raised. The worst that can happen to you is interrogation and deportation, the least that can happen to a Tibetan is torture and imprisonment at the hands of the Chinese authorities.

## Photography

Photos can provide valuable documentation of all sorts of subjects in Tibet, and do not always need a verbal explanation in a country where talking may be dangerous, or difficult due to language barriers. Obviously any unusual occurrence or disturbance is a distinct, though dangerous, opportunity, but everyday sights and situations are just as important. Photograph the conditions Tibetans live and work under, in all regions of Tibet, as well as the changes the Chinese are making. Having said

this, an important aspect to keep in mind is that ‘nosy tourists’ are never welcome in Tibet. The authorities will allow you to take pictures to your hearts content, but can confiscate entire rolls of film/ memory cards on your way out; so be discreet.

Observe the amount of brothels and prostitutes in Lhasa and other major cities. The issue of prostitution is not a case in isolation but comes within a social context of a system, which has the underlying political aim of eradicating the influence of the Dalai Lama and corroding Tibetan morality. There are approximately 2,000 brothels and about 10,000 prostitutes in Lhasa (municipality) alone, many of them intentionally housed around the sacred kora path.<sup>1</sup>

## Security

The Chinese have an extensive security network throughout Tibet, but it is most obvious inside the ‘TAR’ region. The most prominent aspects of this system are the well-known cameras in places such as the Potala, Jokhang and the Barkhor kora (circumambulation) route in Lhasa, and the obvious presence of the uniformed police and military personnel. But these are only the superficial levels of the system - the tip of the iceberg. For the oblivious visitor, this can at best just mean that they never have any idea of the scrutiny that they have been under, but at worst can place Tibetans at grave risk when potentially well-meaning but mindless actions are taken by tourists.

There are a large number of not only plain-clothes police but also many undercover, and this is then linked in with a large spy network. Always be cautious, especially at the main tourist sites - such as Drepung or Sera monastery for example, where you may be approached by someone who will immediately start talking politics, or asking for photos of the Dalai Lama.

Understand also that all international phone calls from Tibet are routed through Beijing, and are taped and monitored. Free speech is not a viable concept in Tibet. Additionally, emails are filtered for 'trigger' words, and many websites banned - this means that you cannot access these and attempting to do so will trigger official interest on the internet café that you are using, as well as in yourself. So will writing about anything political from within Tibet via email. Chinese authorities have appeared to be using packet sniffer devices that scan internet transactions, including e-mail, to block text with sensitive word combinations. Even Yahoo! has now signed an agreement with Beijing to censor web searches from China. Please consider those who run the internet cafés and are trying to make a living from them. Also be mindful of the fact that if the owners are Tibetan, they will bear more severe consequences for breaches of Chinese censorship. Any international 'Tibet' website, including just doing a search for 'Tibet', America's CNN, the British BBC, Reporters Sans Frontiers (RSF) and the Australian ABC - all these are blocked, along with many others.

Previously, different branches of the Chinese security forces were indicated by the colour of the uniforms. However, in May 2001, all uniforms were changed to a standardised blue. Consequently, the Barkhor Patrol - consisting of previously unemployed youth and social outcasts, who are paid by the Chinese to patrol, clean and maintain peace specifically on the Barkhor; the PAP - People's Armed Police, often used to quell disturbances with specially trained violence techniques; and the PSB - the Public Security Bureau, the administrators of criminal justice in the 'TAR'; are now only identifiable by the differing Chinese characters on the arm badges. All of these operate within Lhasa, as do additional members of the PSB who are dressed in civilian clothing.

## Accommodation

Even if invited, it is essentially prohibited to stay in a Tibetan household inside the 'TAR' and this will place the family at serious risk of reprisals. Even in places where it is permitted - with authorised permission - it will still place that family under official observation. Considering the current political situation in Tibet, you should bear in mind that letters, telephone calls, emails, and faxes may be censored and surveyed. You are under surveillance all the time.

## Language

Even just a few words of Tibetan, such as the greeting "Tashi Delek", will be extremely well received by the Tibetan people. This not only shows them that you hold their language and culture in high enough esteem to learn even just those few words, but it differentiates you from the average tourist by telling them that you are interested in Tibet and its people. This can also help open up doors of friendship. Once talking with Tibetans, many who are always keen to practice their English on willing foreigners, you can easily discuss non-sensitive issues that are still vital to understanding and learning about what the situation is like for them there regarding general home life and everyday living conditions; about school, work, taxes, and healthcare - their views on life in general. Much can be learnt from what is not said. If you know any Tibetan words be sure to use them even with Chinese residents.

## Clothing

Loose, durable, comfortable clothing suitable for the season you will encounter is practical for Tibet. High fashion is not a consideration in a region that has yet to graduate clothing-wise from the 1980's except for big cities like Lhasa and Shigatse!

Tight or exposing clothing, especially on females, although now becoming common on tourists from Beijing, Shanghai and Hong Kong, marks you as an ignorant tourist. Decorum is still the standard for dress in Tibet, and with the environmental conditions that Tibet can deliver, function and practicality are by far the most important considerations. Apart from the discos there is little nightlife to consider dressing up for in Tibet, and overall Tibetans will far more appreciate an understanding of their sensibilities than an expanse of flesh.

Wearing Tibetan style clothing is definitely appreciated by Tibetans. As with the use of their language, you are telling them that you consider their culture both interesting and worthwhile. Even just a simple Tibetan style shirt will be noticed, but full traditional dress on a foreigner could be interpreted as indicating Tibetan sympathies and may bring you unwanted Chinese attention. The crass 'have-your-picture-taken-in-Tibetan-costume' tourist zone of the Potala Square is the obvious exception!

## Supporting the Protection of Tibetan Wildlife

In order to preserve Tibet's endangered species, please do not buy any wild animal products. If you see endangered wild animal skins in shops or markets, take photographs if you can and send them to TCHRD. To trade in rare pelts is an illegal offence under Chinese and international law, yet Chinese law enforcement in this regard has been inadequate at best.

Traditionally animal pelts have been used in some Tibetan dress or worn as decoration during festivals. However in January 2006, at a religious teaching ceremony in Amravati, India, the

Dalai Lama stressed the importance of wildlife protection and compassion towards animals, condemning the wearing of animal skins as ‘an act against religious practice’. He stated that the trade in animal skins and wearing of fur has had disastrous effects on Tibet’s dwindling wild animal population, condemning the trade in endangered animals such as tiger parts as “shameful”. In reaction to the Dalai Lama’s speech, Tibetans throughout Tibet immediately ceased using wild animal skins and fur. Large numbers of animal pelts already owned were burnt in individual or group ceremonies, in solidarity with this stance of protecting endangered wildlife and stopping the trade.

## Medical Issues

Make sure you inform your travel agency of any physical or mental conditions which require special or intensive care or equipment during your travel in Tibet. If you fail to disclose any such conditions, the agency may cancel your trip with no financial liability to themselves.

If you have any such conditions you need to bring necessary paperwork and specialist equipment with you. You should let your travel agency know immediately if any such circumstances arise after your trip has been booked.

# Historical Background

Tibet has a recorded history since 127 BC. The first king of Tibet, Nyatri Tsenpo, was enthroned in this year. During the reign of king Songtsen Gampo, and throughout the 7<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> centuries, the Tibetan empire reached its peak, extending into China and other central Asian countries. Tibetan armies seized the Chinese capital at Ch'angan in 763 during the reign of the great king Trisong Detsen. Between 821-822 a peace treaty was concluded between the Tibetan Emperor Tri Ralpa Chen and the Chinese Emperor Mu-tsung. During this period Buddhism was introduced into the country and became the state religion. Tibet occupied 2.5 million square kilometers of land between the two giants of Asia, India and China.

In 1642, the Fifth Dalai Lama assumed religious and secular power over Tibet. He established the system of Tibetan government called "Gaden Phodrang". In 1653, the Dalai Lama made a state visit to the imperial capital of China, recently taken over by the Manchu Emperors. The Manchu emperor Shunzi travelled on a four-day journey outside his capital (Peking) to receive the Dalai Lama and honoured him with the treatment reserved for an independent sovereign.<sup>2</sup>

The 13th Dalai Lama severed all ties with the Manchus when they attempted to depose him in 1910. When the Manchus fell to the Guomindang (Chinese Nationalists) led by Sun Yatsen in 1911, the 13th Dalai Lama issued a proclamation amidst the prevailing chaos reaffirming Tibet's independence on 14 February 1913.

Upon assuming power from the Guomindang in 1949, the Chinese Communists made it clear that the last remaining task for the victorious People's Liberation Army (PLA) was the "liberation" of Tibet. The upper echelons of the Communist party had already developed strategies for the incorporation of what they regarded as 'Chinese national minorities' within the framework of the People's Republic of China (PRC). However, the Communist leaders were acutely aware of their lack of influence in Tibet.

Since 1913 Tibet had, for all intents and purposes, been an independent state. It exercised full authority over its internal and external affairs and had its own distinctly Tibetan government, currency, postal system, language, and religion. However, the external threat to Tibet could not have come at a worse time, since Tibet's supreme leader, the Dalai Lama, was a young boy of fourteen years old who had not yet established his authority.

The first military skirmish between Tibetan troops and the PLA took place at the end of May 1950. On 29 July, Beijing Radio broadcast a speech by General Liu Bocheng, who stated that the primary task of the South-West Military Administrative Committee was to liberate Tibet and that the 'PLA must launch an attack'. With 40,000 PLA soldiers on standby ready to march into Lhasa, there was very little the Tibetans could do to counter the Communist advance, and a team was sent to Beijing to negotiate with the Chinese. The controversial 17-Point Agreement was signed in Beijing on 23 May 1951, thereby signing away what little was left of the claim of Tibetan independence.

By the summer of 1956 fierce resistance to so called reforms and Chinese aggression began to emerge in Eastern Tibet; by early 1959 this had spread to Lhasa and the PLA was on full alert. The final spark that led to the famous Lhasa Uprising of 1959 was an invitation extended to the Dalai Lama by the Chinese representative in Tibet, Tan Guansan, to an opera show in the Chinese military camp. When this information became public, the Lhasa masses became gravely concerned that the show was just a pretext to kidnap the Dalai Lama. Thousands of people gathered demanding to see the Dalai Lama and to stop him from going to the camp. A revolt broke out, rapidly expanding into a brief national uprising. Thousands lost their lives. His Holiness the Dalai Lama fled Tibet on 17 March 1959. On 23 March, the Chinese hoisted the five-star red flag over the Potala Palace. After he was given asylum in India, during his first press conference on 20 June 1959, the Dalai Lama refuted the 17-Point Agreement.

The retaliations for the 1959 Lhasa Uprising claimed the lives of thousands of Tibetans through execution, imprisonment or starvation in prison camps. According to a confidential Chinese government document, between March 1959 and October 1960, 870,000 Tibetans were killed. It was also during this period that thousands died as a result of the Great Leap Forward, an attempt by Mao to replace the production of agriculture by steel and to introduce the commune system. The second period of grave threat to the Tibetans was the Cultural Revolution (1966- 76) although in Tibet it reportedly lasted until 1979. Mao's frenzied efforts were based on a campaign to remove the "four olds"; old culture, old thoughts, old customs and old tradition. The third "dark" period was from 1987-1990 during which martial law was imposed in Tibet for thirteen months following a

series of large-scale demonstrations in Lhasa. It was during this period that approximately a hundred Tibetans were shot dead by the Chinese Police for calling for Tibetan independence. Additionally, thousands were imprisoned.<sup>3</sup>

In 1988 the Dalai Lama announced the five-point peace proposal, a major concession in an attempt to bring a solution to the Tibet issue. The struggle continues.....

# A Brief Background on the Current Situation in Tibet

Monitoring and evaluating the human rights situation in Tibet is a challenge, due to the lack of transparency and secretive nature in which the Chinese government function. China's human rights policies and practices in Tibet are not only contradictory but also self-defeating. Many of Beijing's policies regarding Tibet are directives that are implemented at the local authorities' discretion. As a result there is substantial discrepancy between different areas as to which policies are implemented and to what degree. There is no one area of Tibet that is representative of the situation for every Tibetan, and travellers will witness a variety of conditions and enforcement of policies throughout the country.

## Discrimination

China justified its invasion of Tibet with the proclamation the "civilised" Chinese were "liberating" the "backward and barbaric" Tibetans. Through this they have instigated a structure of racial prejudice and domination which has continued to intensify. The resulting constant level of racial discrimination by China effectively treats Tibetans as subhuman in many instances, such as cases of torture in prisons and treatment of schoolchildren. Discrimination affects every sphere of society, ranging from the highest levels of officialdom and government policy, to the everyday attitudes and interactions of the poorest immigrant. The consequences can be severe, affecting not only the lives and futures of individual Tibetans, but also of the race as a whole.

One such example of discrimination is the use of Chinese as the official language of Tibet. Chinese is used in all government and public offices and official situations. Employment in official positions directly depends on fluency in the Chinese language, immediately putting Tibetans at a disadvantage. All public signs and official documents are in Chinese script. In the 'TAR' it is now compulsory to have Tibetan script on public signs as well as Chinese, but the size and visibility of the Tibetan writing is significantly smaller. Also, the Tibetan used is a direct translation from Chinese rather than the correct Tibetan. This in itself is a deliberate undermining of the language of the Tibetan people.

As a visitor to Tibet, you can observe the attitude of both migrant and tourist Chinese towards local Tibetans, and what level of social interaction is there between Tibetans and Chinese; what language do the Chinese use with Tibetans?

## Population Transfer

One of the long-term official policies of Beijing has been active population transfer into minority countries, designed to effectively control dissident populations demographically. This is particularly predominant in urban areas in Tibet, resulting in the marginalisation of Tibetans which makes it impossible for them to participate in society on an equal basis. Along with an implanted sense of superiority carried by the Chinese migrants, Tibetans have become second class citizens in their homeland by virtue of their race alone.

This population transfer is a direct result of Chinese control over the 'development' of Tibet, designed with little consideration for Tibetans but with Chinese profit and benefit in mind.

Workers are shipped in from China via lucrative incentives, despite widespread Tibetan unemployment. Preferential housing and services, such as education and healthcare facilities, are established and run for the principal benefit of the Chinese settlers.

This intensive influx of Chinese comes in conjunction with the importation of Chinese culture and lifestyle. This sheer weight of numbers, combined with discriminatory practices, is heavily detrimental to the preservation of Tibetan culture and values, conservation of the environment and wildlife, and to the upholding of basic human rights for Tibetans. Chinese immigration centres on the urban districts; hence different pictures of Tibet can be obtained from visiting rural and urban areas. Even within urban areas it is well worth wandering around away from the main tourist sites and into the everyday sections of towns and villages.

Notice whether there are distinct 'quarters' or do Tibetans and Chinese live intermixed. If there are separate sections, are the conditions and facilities the same in each? Can you detect the attitude of each race toward the other? For what reasons have the immigrants come to Tibet, and how long have they been there? Do they get benefits for being there? How long do they plan to stay? What is their overall attitude about Tibet, and its people?

## Employment and Livelihood

Unemployment among Tibetans is constantly on the rise, and discrimination within employment is rampant. Apart from the incentives used to encourage Chinese immigrants to Tibet, there is great disparity in working conditions and wages between the

ances. Tibetans are more often given jobs involving high risks and poor conditions. Where the Chinese do hold identical positions to Tibetans they earn at least double the wage.

Compulsory confiscation of land, compulsory fencing and stock reduction quotas bite deeply into the ability of nomadic and rural Tibetans to support themselves. The majority of Tibetans' income level falls well below the Global Poverty Line. This meager income then directly affects access to education, employment, healthcare, food, clothing, and housing.

One of the major discriminatory practices within the employment field is not just the preference given to Chinese immigrants, but the level of fluency in the Chinese language as a determining factor. Tibetans are automatically disadvantaged; the only remaining option is to resort to bribery and connections (Ch: *guanxi*) to gain work, but this is more often than not beyond the means of most Tibetans.

Propaganda from Beijing focuses greatly on the hailed 'development' of Tibet. But benefits from increased infrastructure, and employment from the huge construction and mining projects



The sign reads: 10 workers wanted. Wages for the workers: Chinese: 50 yuans, Tibetan: 30 yuans.

located in Tibet, are not realities for Tibetans. Despite the high Tibetan unemployment levels, workers for these projects are imported from the Chinese mainland, which also adds to population manipulation within Tibet.

The infrastructure benefits are designed to assist the Chinese settlers, not local Tibetans. For example, Tibetans not only get second preference to the Chinese in housing allocations but are also evicted from their own dwellings so that Chinese-style apartment blocks can be constructed for the immigrants. Compensation for housing and land ranges from non-existent to meagre, and few, if any, options exist to replace lost assets.

Nor is the focus of Beijing's development projects on sustainability, as they are only concerned with the exploitation of Tibet's natural resources. Because of this destruction of their way of life, many Tibetans have to resort to running small business enterprises in an attempt to support their family.

What promotion and further training opportunities do Tibetans have? How did they get their job? How many unemployed Tibetans are within the local community? What chances of employment do they have? What do they do each day, and how do they survive without work?

Look at tourist services. Who owns and works at the restaurants and shops? Who is employed at the main tourist sites? Are tour guides Tibetan or Chinese? Who is selling traditional Tibetan articles and souvenirs? Where are the shops run by Tibetans located compared to the Chinese run enterprises?

China claims to have improved conditions for Tibetans over the years. The condition and quality of the houses that they live in, the clothes that they wear, and even their overall appearance and health will give some indication of the situation for Tibetans in Tibet. Ask what their standard of living is. Do they think that their situation has improved recently? What difficulties do they face in subsistence? Does the Chinese government assist in difficult times, such as drought or a severe winter? Do the Tibetans own the home they live in? Have Tibetans lost homes or land to housing or development projects? Were they compensated? Are Tibetans being employed at any local development project sites? Are Tibetans able to access and afford any of the new facilities that may have been constructed in their region? Do they feel they are benefiting from the projects or the accompanying infrastructure?

## Tour Guides

In 2007, 3.72 million tourists visited the Tibet Autonomous Region “TAR” from all over the world, a tenth of whom were non-Chinese foreigners - an increase of over 64% on the previous year. Most of these people travelled by the newly opened Qinghai-Tibet railway.

In January 2007, the Chinese government began issuing official ID cards for tour guides; those without cards were no longer allowed to continue their work. This plan was carried out largely in order to eradicate Tibetan guides in accordance with the Chinese policy of awarding jobs to Chinese immigrants and, additionally, in reaction to suspicion of Tibetan guides who had spent time in India, returning not just with a high level of proficiency in English but also increased knowledge of Tibetan history, culture, language and Buddhism. As a result, with the in-

roduction of the ID card, the Chinese authorities have gradually been replacing Tibetan guides with Chinese (Yuan Zong Dao Yon).

The remaining Tibetan tour guides are under constant suspicion and observation by the Chinese authorities. They are forbidden to discuss anything political or nationalistic with foreigners. They are expected to dole out the official Chinese line and propaganda on threat of loss of employment if they deviate from this. It is best to avoid discussing politics or potentially dangerous topics in the vicinity of your guide or driver, even if you do not involve them directly, as they are routinely questioned at the end of each trip. The less they overhear the safer it is for them.

## Education

With the dilution of Tibetan culture and language through the influx of Chinese immigrants, education is a decisive factor in the preservation of the Tibetan heritage. China claims great improvements in education in Tibet, mainly through the building of schools. But most of these are in urban districts, built for the education of Chinese children and those of Tibetan government officials. For the majority of Tibetans, lack of access to schools is still the main reason why their children are not educated - due to distance, discrimination, and high biased fees. Another major prejudice in education is the use of Chinese language as the medium of instruction. Tibetan children with no understanding of the language are treated as stupid, rather than uneducated. All higher levels of education, and most employment opportunities, rely upon fluency in Chinese. Tibetans are inherently at a disadvantage to native Chinese language speakers. This practice, along with the Chinese-culture

biased curriculum, is denying not just an education to many Tibetans, but also any education relating to Tibetan culture.

As a consequence of Chinese policies there are many Tibetans who cannot speak their own language; some believing that it is useless for their future, whilst others have never had an opportunity to learn to read and write Tibetan even if they can speak it. Even the monasteries, the traditional bastion of Tibetan education, are showing major signs of illiteracy.

Even if you speak no Tibetan, by listening you will hear what language is being used. What language is being spoken most often in business transactions, between Tibetans and Chinese, and between Tibetans and Tibetans? What language is being used socially, in written documents, and in personal letters by Tibetans? What do they speak in their own homes? In restaurants? How many Tibetans speak English?

Note where schools are located, especially in relation to Tibetan villages. If you visit schools, ask what subjects are taught, in what language? What is the ratio of Tibetan to Chinese teachers, and students? How much do Tibetans pay in school fees and extra costs? How does that compare to what the Chinese pay? Are they happy with the curriculum and the standard of teaching? Have they experienced any bias in examinations? How are their children treated by the Chinese teachers? Do their children have any problems with Chinese students? Do their children have Chinese friends? Are they allowed to celebrate Tibetan holidays and undertake religious practices? If Tibetan children are not at school, ask why not?

Compare the provision and condition of school facilities in rural areas to urban areas, and between schools primarily for Chinese and those for Tibetans. Ask Tibetan families if they have children being educated in India? If so what are their reasons for sending them there? Do they have problems with Chinese authorities because of this?

Talk to adult Tibetans - can they read or write? In what languages? Ask them about their own schooling and what/if any changes there have been since they were young.

## Religion

Buddhism has long been recognized as Tibet's main religion. Its biggest threat now is the aggressively atheist policies of Beijing. Regarding Buddhism as directly linked to Tibetan nationalism, monks and nuns are subject to intense restrictions and violations of human rights. These are designed to destroy both Buddhism and dissent in Tibet.

Apart from the gross destruction of monasteries over the years in Tibet, existing religious institutions face restrictions that make it difficult for them to function to their full ability. The numbers of monks and nuns allowed in monasteries and nunneries are strictly controlled. An age restriction of between 18 to 55 years is imposed, which essentially breaks the teaching cycle of the elder, highly educated Lamas instructing young novices. Incumbent "Democratic Management Committees" control the amount and content of study, and what religious rites are performed. Regular "Work Teams" under the 'Strike Hard' campaign impose "Patriotic Re-education" sessions, designed to indoctrinate the monastic community with communist ideals and the Party line, and suppress political dissent. Monks and

nuns are required to denounce the Dalai Lama and Tibetan patriotism. Any signs of dissidence or rebellion lead to dismissal from the monastery or nunnery, and often even arrest and imprisonment.

In September 2007, the Chinese government made further efforts to control Tibetan religion by bringing to an end the centuries-old traditional Tibetan system of recognizing reincarnate high lamas. The new measures stated that the Chinese CPC would now decide the legitimacy of reincarnate figures, with the stipulation, “The so-called reincarnated living Buddha without government approval is illegal and invalid”.

Tourism is what keeps Buddhism alive if at all. The Chinese government recognizes the financial value of Tibetan monasteries. It is not through any benevolence on the part of Beijing that they allow some reconstruction of monasteries and nunneries. Even within lay society, religion is increasingly sup-



**The destroyed portrait of the Dalai Lama at the Ngaba Kirti Monastery, which was peirced, torned and scrubbed by the Chinese security officials during their raid on 28 March 2008.**

pressed through new policies and restrictions. There is a focus on Tibetans in official government positions and offices, with the prohibition of partaking in traditional religious festivals and rites.

Photos of the Dalai Lama are banned throughout the Tibetan population. Many Tibetans, especially at monasteries and nunneries, may ask you for pictures of His Holiness. Although banned, they are greatly prized by Tibetans. If you do try to hand out pictures and are discovered you will most likely be fined and deported. All the Tibetans you have had contact with will be detained and interrogated, and probably imprisoned.

Heavy restrictions on certain religious festivals such as Saga Dawa and the Birthday of His Holiness are enforced to various degrees throughout the regions also. When visiting monasteries and nunneries, look around carefully and not only take note of the overall atmosphere of the compound and the monks and nuns, but also try to discern how much they are functioning in the real capacity of religious students. Is there evidence of studying or are they mainly used as guards and money collectors in the temples? What is the age range, and number of monks and nuns? Is this any different compared to the number there before the Chinese arrived? How are new novices selected, and how often and how many? Do the monks and nuns feel that they are receiving a good education, and to what sort of standard? How often are they subject to 're-education' sessions and what is involved in these?

How often are public religious ceremonies held at the local monastery or nunnery? How many lay Tibetans would attend

these? What sort of direct supervision is implemented during these times? Are there any restrictions on religious rites being performed in their community? Are they allowed an altar in their home? Are any religious festivals banned or restricted, and in what way? How do they feel about any government interference in their religious practice that they may experience?

## The Issue of Gedhun Choekyi Nyima, the 11th Panchen Rinpoche of Tibet

On 14 May 1995, His Holiness the Dalai Lama recognised Gedhun Choekyi Nyima, then six years old, as the reincarnation of the 10th Panchen Lama. Three days later, the boy and his parents disappeared from their home. Within a few months, the PRC government appointed its own Panchen Lama.



A year later, in May 1996, the PRC admitted to holding the 11th Panchen Lama “at the request of his parents” as “he was at the risk of being kidnapped by separatists and his security had been threatened”. Thus, despite its rejection of the Dalai Lama’s authority in recognising the Panchen Lama and its refusal to acknowledge Gedhun Choekyi Nyima as the true reincarnation, the Chinese government admitted the detention of the child. It is difficult to understand why the Chinese authorities would go to such lengths to pro-

vide “security” for a child who they consider to be just an ordinary boy.

When the six year old Gyaltzen Norbu was selected by the Chinese authorities as the ‘real’ Panchen Lama on 29 November 1995, and subsequently enthroned on 8 December 1995, there were massive protests all over Tibet. Consequently, along with photos of the Dalai Lama, pictures of Gedhun Choekyi Nyima were forbidden, whilst in many monasteries the picture of Gyaltzen Norbu was compulsorily displayed. (As a safe compromise, many Tibetans now display images of Choekyi Gyaltzen, the late 10th Panchen Lama instead).

In May 1997, the PRC launched their “patriotic education” campaign in monasteries and nunneries in the Tibetan region. Under the auspices of that campaign, the PRC further promoted recognition of the Chinese-appointed Panchen Lama and denunciation of Gedhun Choekyi Nyima. Reports from refugees fleeing Tibet, and from independent travellers, have confirmed that pictures of the Chinese-appointed Panchen Lama are displayed prominently throughout the main monasteries and tourist hotels of Tibet.

Born 25 April 1989, Gedhun Choekyi Nyima was, to public knowledge, the world’s youngest political prisoner. Many high level delegations and offices have expressed concern over his continued detention, including the former UN High Commissioner for Human Rights. However, the PRC continues to deny any outside access to the child and his parents. In October

2000, during a round of human rights dialogue with China in London, British officials raised the issue of Gedhun Choekyi Nyima. The photographs they were shown did not answer the basic questions asked about the Panchen Lama such as his whereabouts and well-being. We believe that these photos are not only a totally inadequate strategy to allay international concern, but that any form of perceived appeasement is an empty gesture.

In August 2001, a Polish parliamentary delegation visiting Lhasa was told in response to repeated questions that Gedhun Choekyi Nyima was healthy and was with his family. The delegation was promised photos of the boy within six weeks but never received them. Despite repeated requests, the Chinese government continues to refuse access to the boy or evidence of his whereabouts or wellbeing...

## Prisons

The majority of political prisoners in Chinese jails in Tibet have always been monks and nuns. All Tibetan political prisoners face extremely harsh conditions and maltreatment. Tibetans routinely undergo torture sessions in attempts to extract confessions while initially held in custody. Sentenced inmates face various tortures if they fail to conform to guards' demands, or to succumb to political indoctrination. Many have suffered isolated incidences of maltreatment after periods of dissidence within the prison walls.

A network of Chinese prisons straddles the Lhasa suburbs. The infamous Drapchi Prison lies in the suburbs to the north-

east of the Potala; New Lhasa Prison sits just beside, and on the valley edge and just beyond that are four others. Five km to the west of Lhasa is the Gutsa Detention Centre, where the majority of torture of prisoners takes place. To the east of the town is Trisam Prison. The Drapchi Prison and those nearby can be seen from the ridge to the west of Sera Monastery. At the foot of this ridge lies the sprawling Lhasa Cement Factory. This industry is a financial success mainly due to the use of prison labour.

Living conditions in all prisons are harsh, with malnutrition a significant problem. Prisoners routinely undertake hard labour, or often face unachievable quotas in the less physically intense work areas. Most face long hours of military-style exercise drills, regardless of age or physical condition. All failures to fulfill quotas or execute exercises correctly are met with harsh punishments. Any signs of dissent or patriotism are met with severe punishment. As of 2007, TCHRD has recorded at least 89 Tibetans who have died in prisons and outside prisons as a direct result of prison maltreatment and torture since 1987.

At strategic times the Chinese government sometimes releases political prisoners. This is performed merely for political and propaganda purposes; the fact remains these people should never have been jailed in the first place, but have yet been subjected to prison torture and maltreatment.

With gross oppression and human rights violations which prevail in Tibet, especially within the 'TAR', the country itself is effectively being designed and governed as a prison; with severe restrictions on movement, lack of freedom of speech or the right to assembly, maltreatment, discrimination and deprivation and the extreme poverty it breeds.

Prisons and politics are not subjects that are safe to discuss with Tibetans while you are travelling through Tibet, in any region. Do not try to initiate conversations along these lines, as you will be placing them at great risk. If a Tibetan tries to talk to you about these subjects, be extremely careful and use your discretion - not only as to where you are if you do decide to pursue these lines of discussion, but also as to whether to talk on these matters at all.

## Environment

Since China occupied Tibet in 1959, their materialistic policy of viewing nature as existing to serve immediate human desires, their mission to transport Tibet's natural resources to mainland China and their rapid construction of cities to house Chinese immigrants, have created a grave environmental crisis in Tibet.

Tibet has seen the erosion and degradation of grasslands as a result of Chinese policies began in the 1960s and 1970s, which tried to make the land yield more than the grasses could bear. Flooding from ill-designed plans to dam rivers for hydroelectric projects has also destroyed crops and grasslands, with no compensation offered to the Tibetans whose lands and livelihoods have been lost.

The great Tibetan forests have been systematically felled, and tree trunks floated to Chinese provinces downstream. Tibet's ancient pristine forests have also been trucked to China, by Chinese settlers working for state owned ventures, selling Tibet's natural heritage at low state controlled prices to other state enterprises making railway sleepers, mine pit props and construction timber.

After the disastrous Yangtze floods of 1998 China announced a logging ban. This at first seemed like good news, an opportunity to reforest bare slopes plunging down to the river valleys that not only provide central and southern China with water, but also India, Burma, Thailand, Laos, Cambodia and Vietnam.

However in reality, inside Tibet logging did not cease. It simply became more expensive to bribe local officials to issue the necessary permits, adding to the price, making wood a luxury commodity attracting more black economy operators.

Where massive forests of Himalayan fir, oak and rhododendron once flourished, the crisis of deforestation is an ongoing phenomenon. Reports of the US Department of Agriculture monitoring the situation on the ground have confirmed the eyewitness testimony of Tibetan refugees that logging continues throughout Tibet. The effect has been catastrophic, even as far as mainland China, which has seen frequent flooding as a result of deforestation.

The proliferation of unchecked mining projects throughout Tibet has caused widespread environmental destruction: hollowed out mountainsides, water pollution from toxic waste, soil pollution and decreasing crop yields around mining areas. Such projects, often run by private enterprises without license, or with licenses obtained through corruption, are not concerned about their impact on the environment. Grazing and farm land has suffered substantially, with families inhabiting these areas ordered by the Chinese government to relocate elsewhere.

Official Chinese plans concentrate massive capital investments in large scale infrastructure projects to extract natural gas from

Tibet, mine copper and chromites, and intensify exploitation of Tibetan salt lakes from which China takes the raw materials to make plastics, chemical fertilizer and magnesium.

Parts of the Tibetan plateau are already highly industrialized, with little attention paid to pollution control. In the arid Tsaidam basin of Tibet's far north, oil fields pump two million tons of crude oil annually to nearby petrochemical refineries. Asbestos mining, aluminium smelters, lead and zinc mining are expanding under the protection of politically powerful Chinese patrons. Tibetans are powerless to appeal for pollution control equipment to be installed, because the factories are owned and run by the same people who are supposedly in charge of environmental protection.

The powerlessness of Tibetan communities is evident in the case of the Tongren aluminium smelter, located in the quiet Tibetan farming Rongwo Chu valley just north of Rebkong (Tongren in Chinese). Due to a complete lack of pollution control equipment, toxic fluoride-laden smoke pours from this smelter, causing sheep, grazing on grass that absorbs the smoke, to die of starvation after their teeth fall out. All appeals have met with no response, as the smelter is owned by cadres of the nearest township, who are also the officials responsible for pollution control.

Many areas in Tibet are restricted to tourists because the Chinese do not want foreigners witnessing sites that are causing gross environmental damage or near ones that are politically sensitive, for example in the Lhoka district near Lhasa, which has major mining enterprises and some recently closed monasteries.

Apart from the detriment to Tibetan livelihoods and lifestyle, scientists have observed that the environment of Tibet affects the world's jet-streams, which result in an adverse impact on the global climate.

Talk to locals and find out what projects are active in their area and how they impact them. What evidence of logging do you see be it clear felling or logging trucks (note that many trucks are covered to hide the cargo)? If you are forbidden to enter an area do you know why, what may be in there? What levels of pollution do you see, for both land and water contamination? What evidence is there of non-natural soil erosion and landslides? How much wildlife can you see and how many different species? How aware are the Tibetans of the damage being done to their environment? How do Tibetans themselves treat their environment?

## Militarization and Control

Military and police bases are scattered throughout Tibet; every town has an army base of some size, and checkpoints are a regular feature of travel for both foreigners and Tibetans. Tibetans however are not allowed to travel freely in their own country, if even at all. Official permission is needed for any movement outside of the immediate area of residential registration, and severe fines and harassment of families are common upon violations of these restrictions. It is not just a case of requesting permission and a paper being issued, movement is tightly controlled and often prohibited. Chinese immigrants are not subject to the same level of these controls and restrictions.

The obvious presence of armed forces and security is designed as a direct deterrent for political dissidence, and personnel are

rapidly shipped to any location to subdue any unrest. At perceived times of heightened political tension, the military and security presence, plus other means of observation and monitoring in the streets is greatly increased, and at times curfews are enforced. It is solely the Tibetans, and to a lesser extent the foreign tourists, who are subjected to these control measures. The Chinese do not undergo these unremitting permit and identity checks or harassment.

Although it is not possible as a tourist to get details, when travelling around Tibet note the location and approximate size of military bases, prisons, monitoring equipment, police presence, patrols and checkpoints that you see. Observe how many uniformed personnel are on the streets, and at tourist and religious sites. Did you see any military vehicles - what was the size of the convoy; location and direction; and what were they transporting? It may be possible to talk to Tibetans about travel, and the procedures and restrictions that apply to them.

## Healthcare

There is substantial discrimination in the healthcare provided for Chinese and Tibetans, particularly for those Tibetans involved in politics. In prison, Tibetans are regularly refused medical attention as the officials claim that they are just trying to avoid work. When treatment is granted, the medications are usually outdated and incorrect. Hospitalisation of severe cases occurs only when the patient is critical, for an absolute minimum time. Having been refused proper treatment inside jail, once freed, recovery time and treatment is inordinately long, or in many cases, simply too late - many political prisoners die after their release from prison as a result.

There is also great discrepancy in the healthcare facilities provided in urban and rural areas of Tibet. Rural Tibetans and nomads can often have poor awareness of good hygiene, yet receive no health education from the Chinese government; and conversely face significant difficulties when seeking healthcare. Despite Beijing's much promoted 'development' in Tibet, which includes the construction of hospitals, the majority of these facilities are designed to support the Chinese immigrant population and are located almost exclusively in the Chinese-settled urban areas. Consequently, for rural Tibetans and nomads outside of these districts, very few facilities exist, and the long distances to medical facilities can be prohibitive, the terrain difficult and transport costs expensive.

Urban Tibetans have some access to healthcare but at a price. They are required to provide a substantial deposit, which may amount to years of income, before medical treatment is considered, even if their condition is critical. Charges for treatment are high, care is often substandard and inferior to that offered to Chinese patients (who are not required to provide a deposit), and ward conditions are poor, in contrast to superior ward and general facilities for Chinese patients.

One sector of imported Chinese modern culture which is booming in Tibet, with the support and condonement of the Chinese authorities, is the illegal trade in prostitution. In 2000, it was estimated that there were at least 7,000 Tibetan girls in the 1,000-plus brothels in Lhasa. Originally most prostitutes in Tibet were Chinese, and though many still are, the numbers of Tibetan girls involved are increasing due to lack of education and high levels of poverty. The lack of hygiene and sexual protective measures are a major health risk to these girls, and

consequently to all Tibetans. HIV/AIDS has become widespread within China. This is then combined with the absence of any educational programmes, preventative measures or treatment. The total absence of testing facilities within Tibet is the only reason there are no confirmed cases there.

## Forced Sterilization

Forced sterilization is a major issue for Tibetan women. In many areas, once they have given birth to the maximum amount of children allowed, many are subject to surgery or contraception techniques that leave a significant proportion of them permanently physically disabled, in continual poor health rendering them unable to work, or leading even to death. Many women are terrified to even seek medical care for other health problems, fearing the imposition of enforced sterilization or abortion procedures.

When travelling around Tibet keep an eye open for the location of medical clinics and hospitals. Note too the racial predominance of the population near the larger and newer facilities. Talk to people in a variety of locations as to how far they must travel to access healthcare and how much it costs them. Is it any different from the services the Chinese receive and how much they pay? What do Tibetans think about the standard of care they get? What types of medical care do they have access to - Chinese, Western, Tibetan? Are Tibetans in either urban or rural areas aware of HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases? Are they aware of sexual protection procedures? Are there any public health education programmes? Are they aware of and do they practise good hygiene in their everyday living?

# Travel to and around Tibet

## Travel in Tibet - outside The 'TAR'

Less than half of Tibet is under the jurisdiction of the Tibet Autonomous Region ('TAR'), which excludes much of Eastern Tibet. Most of the traditional Tibetan regions of Amdo and Kham have instead been incorporated by the Chinese into the provinces of Qinghai, Gansu, Sichuan and Yunnan. The majority of these areas are now open for foreign tourism. By travelling into areas away from the sinicised larger towns, it is possible to see Tibetans still living comparatively traditional lives. Villages tend to retain at least some of the traditional style housing of the region, though religious activities may still be restricted, and local festivals prohibited or curtailed.

Most of this region is easily accessed by independent travellers holding a Chinese visa. However, sensitive areas - such as mining and 'development' projects, prisons, military bases, and sites of recent political unrest - are either permanently or temporarily closed to foreigners both within and outside the 'TAR'.

## Permits

Travel in Tibet outside the 'TAR' only requires a mainland China visa, which can be easily obtained in most Chinese embassies.

## Transport

In the open areas, travel is permitted on local buses or by paying for a lift on a truck or hire vehicles.

## Accommodation

Enforcement of accommodation restrictions varies from location to location. In some areas there will be only one hotel where foreigners are permitted to stay, whereas in other areas it is possible to stay with local Tibetan families. However, you should be aware that foreigners staying with local Tibetan families will be under official surveillance.

## Travel in Tibet - inside the 'TAR'

Entry and travel within the Chinese designated "Tibet" is restrictive and expensive, and rules and laws often change without warning and are subject to individual application.

Highly sensitive days, such as political anniversaries and high level governmental visits, can prevent issuance of permits and visa extensions. Local political activism can also be the cause of abrupt closure of certain areas. Therefore, especially if travelling alone, it is worth keeping in touch with developments regarding regulations for the areas you anticipate travelling to, both before and during your visit.

Currently, no independent or individual travel is allowed in the TAR; you need to join an official tour group with driver, guide and hired jeep, or have a local travel operator arrange a tour for you.

## Permits

Entry into and travel around the 'TAR' region is strictly controlled and highly regulated, especially on the entrance routes into the 'TAR'; these regulations may change without warning.

Currently, foreign tourists who wish to travel in the TAR require up to 4 documents:

**A China Visa**

A **Tibet Tourism Bureau Permit (TTB)** which you need in order to enter the TAR

An **Alien Travel Permit (PSB)** if you are planning to travel to the 'unopened' areas in the TAR

A **Military Permit** which you need if you are planning to travel to 'military sensitive' areas

China Visa

A China visa can be easily obtained in most Chinese embassies; although it is wise not to mention Tibet as your travel destination when applying (the Chinese Embassy in Kathmandu is the exception), as this may cause delays.

If you enter Tibet via Nepal, it can be easier not to apply for a China visa in your country (see Travel to Tibet from Nepal section).

Tibet Tourism Bureau (TTB) Permit

This is necessary for entry to Lhasa or any other part of the TAR. When you take a flight or train to Lhasa you will need to show this permit when you check in. Whenever you buy a flight or train ticket to Lhasa you will also need to show this permit.

You need a Chinese Visa as well as a passport that is valid for at least 6 months before applying for the TTB. Generally it takes three days to get the TTB if you supply the full necessary documents. The TTB costs vary depending on your departure city, and there is no expiration date.

## Alien's Travel Permit (PSB Permit)

This is required to visit 'unopened' areas. It is issued by the Foreign Affairs Section of the Local Public Security Bureau (PSB). Usually you can apply for it once you arrive at Lhasa. It normally takes several hours and the cost is around 50 yuan/person. At present, you have to apply for a PSB Permit if you are planning to visit certain places in **Tsedang, Shigatse** (including Mt Everest), **Gyangtse (including Mt Kailash and Lake Manasarovar)**, **Nyingchi and Chamdo**.

NB Journalists, diplomats and government officials will not usually be issued a 'Tibet permit' (the TTB and PSB), as China is keen to keep close scrutiny of media coverage by foreign journalists; but will instead need to travel to Tibet under the arrangement of the Foreign Affairs Office of Chinese Government.

## Military Permit

This is currently required if you are planning to travel to Ngari, Nyingchi, and Nagqu which are regarded as the military sensitive areas in Tibet. This permit is issued by the military office in Lhasa, who will ask you to provide your passport and 'Tibet permit' (TTB and PSB) to apply. It usually takes about 1-4 days and currently costs 100 yuan/person.

## Controls that may be Enforced during your Stay in Tibet

These include:

- Permits and visa extensions refused or cancelled
- Increased surveillance
- Increased armed personnel presence

## Curfews

Late night hotel checks by the Public Security Bureau (PSB)

Increased number of checkpoints on travel routes

Prohibitions on kora or circumambulation routes, or incense burning

Random checks on Tibetans for permits

## Travel to Tibet from Mainland China

There are several ways of getting to Tibet. Once you are in mainland China, you can enter Lhasa by land or air.

### By Air

Independent travellers will have to purchase tickets from a travel agent, who will arrange tickets and permits by forming an ad hoc tour group.

### **Xining to Lhasa**

There are direct flights operating four times weekly between Xining and Lhasa, although these are more expensive than the bus fare from Gormud to Lhasa.

### **Chengdu to Lhasa**

Flights operate twice daily in season from Chengdu to Lhasa, through Air China. There are other flights operating from Beijing (via Xian or Chengdu), Guangzhou and Chongqing to Lhasa.

### **Kunming-Lhasa**

Currently a weekly Kunming-Lhasa flight is available.

### Overland

Most overlanders will try to reach Lhasa from Chengdu, Kunming, Xining (via Golmud) or Kashgar. Travellers can travel

overland by organised tour, 4-wheel-drive car arranged through a tour operator with driver and optional guide, by public bus or via the new railway. Travel by hitchhiking or cycling is practised although illegal.

### **The Sichuan-Tibet High way**

The highway is officially open as far west as Batang or Derge and can be reached from Chengdu by public bus. Thereafter, public transport is rare or non-existent and truck drivers face heavy fines if caught carrying foreigners. Cyclists and hitchhikers can avoid the main checkpoints by travelling in the night but if caught, the possibility of fines and being turned back at any village or hotel they stay in is high.

**Kunming to Lhasa** is connected to Lhasa by a spectacular 2400km Yunnan-Tibet Highway via Dali. Dechen (now “Shangrila”) “Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture” is the last open town along the Yunnan-Tibet Highway. The route from Dechen to Lhasa joins the main Sichuan-Tibet Highway near Markham.

**Kashgar to Lhasa** The 2884km journey along Xining-Tibet Highway from Kashgar to Lhasa via Mt Kailash is long and arduous.

**Golmud (in Qinghai) to Lhasa** A public bus service, taking between 28 - 48 hours is available from Golmud to Lhasa.

### **Qinghai-Tibet Railway**

The Beijing-Lhasa railway, opened in July 2006, has been hailed alternately as an astonishing feat of engineering and a severe blow to the preservation of Tibet’s heritage.

The line includes the Tanggula Pass, at 5,072m above sea level, the world's highest rail track. More than 960 km, over 80% of the Golmud-Lhasa section, is at an altitude of more than 4,000m. There are 675 bridges, totaling 159.88 km, and over half the length of the railway is laid on permafrost.

The train journey from Beijing to Lhasa takes just under 50 hours, covering 4,064 km. It runs at a speed of 160 km per hour on the plains, slowing down to 120 km per hour when it reaches the Qinghai-Tibet section. A direct line also runs from Chengdu, and direct lines from Shanghai and Guangzhou to Lhasa are due to open shortly.

### **Background and Implications of the Qinghai-Tibet Railway**

After the Qinghai-Tibet train began operation, the Dalai Lama expressed serious concerns about the impact of the railway on people's life, unemployment, prostitutes reaching Lhasa from mainland China and also concerns on the erosion of Lhasa's character and the further marginalisation of its Tibetan residents. The Dalai Lama says "I would say that the railway is made for more Chinese people moving to Tibet and also to create a better way for taking more Tibetan minerals to China. The railway is like a tsunami engulfing Tibet; the railway, like a tsunami, will wash away Tibetan traditions, culture and minerals."

The immense cost of building and maintaining the railroad is not merely for the benefit of tourism, although the revenue accumulated from the 1.5 million people (over half of them tourists) who used the train in its first year of operation alone, could be seen as reason enough. Tibet's vast mineral wealth was also a significant factor in the Chinese government's decision

to build the railroad. The line passes close to important gold reserves in Nagchu in the 'TAR' and copper reserves in Kyegudo in Qinghai. There are also plans to extend the line south from Lhasa into Shigatse, close to one of the largest copper deposits in the PRC in Shetongmon County.

Many Tibetan families have been forced to relocate to make way for the railroad, with little or no compensation offered. In just one instance, an entire village, containing 100 families' homesteads, was demolished and the inhabitants moved to a settlement 2.5 km away. They were offered no choice regarding their area of relocation, and lost their land and farming plots.

Compensation has also been denied to nomads whose grassland has been irreparably damaged by the railway's construction; for example, where the volume of vehicles used to carry rocks from mountains hollowed out to make railway tunnels has left the earth compacted and impossible to replant. Where nomads have been displaced, since China's abandonment of their compulsory communization policies, they are now required to settle permanently in houses leased to them by the authorities and to fence in their allocated land, frequently leading to their debt. The People's Republic of China promised to prevent degradation of the grassland, to lift nomads out of poverty and to bring development to Tibet, but the reality has been quite the opposite.

The railway's construction has brought considerable environmental destruction to Tibet's fragile high plateau ecology not just from escalated mineral and resource exploitation and devastation of grasslands, but with soil erosion, contamination of water sources and damage to wildlife.

China has also stated the railway will now be its main means of transporting troops into Tibet; whilst the influx of Chinese immigrants arriving by train is already significantly swelling China's population transfer policy. Additionally, more and more Chinese people are coming to Tibet from mainland China to make money, before returning home taking their earnings with them. These people leave no lasting benefit for the Tibetan people themselves.

As a traveller to Tibet, you can see whether the primary benefits of the Qinghai-Tibet railway belong to the Chinese, in particular migrant workers and temporary residents. How many staff on the train are Tibetan? How many passengers are Tibetan?

### **Golmud-Lhasa railway stations**

There are 45 stations along the 1,972 km long Qinghai-Tibet railway from Xining to Lhasa. Scenery-viewing platforms have been set up at nine stations; Yuzhu Peak Station, Chumaer River, Tuotuo river, Buqiangge, Tanggula Mountain, Lake Namtso, Nagqu, Damxong, Yambajing. The platforms are around 500-metres long and 1.25 metres high. Trains are scheduled so that passengers can make use of viewing platforms during daytime and take photos.

### **Travel to Tibet from Nepal**

If travelling from Nepal you will need a reliable travel agency in Kathmandu to apply for a China visa and Tibet Travel Permit for you. If you have been issued a China visa prior to your arrival in Kathmandu, this will be cancelled and replaced with a visa granted by the Consular Section of the Chinese Embassy in Kathmandu. This office is only open for visa application in

the morning of every Monday, Wednesday and Friday, except holidays. You are advised to arrive 3 days before your departure to Tibet.

**NB: If the people in your group are due to leave China separately, you should apply for individual visas rather than a group visa.**

By Air

### **Kathmandu - Lhasa**

There are currently three flights per week from Kathmandu to Lhasa, operating via Air China.

Overland

### **Kathmandu-Lhasa**

One can travel over the Dram (Zhangmu) border by renting a four-wheel vehicle with driver, or booking an organised overland tour from certain travel agents in Kathmandu.

**Weekly buses from Kathmandu to Lhasa are also due to re-commence in January 2008, having previously been suspended owing to problems faced by passengers in getting a Chinese visa.**

Travellers should be aware however, this route frequently closes in winter time due to heavy snows.

Via Purang **It is also possible to enter join a tour package entering Tibet at Sher (Nepalese Kojinath) near Purang, approximately 120km south of Mt Kailash. Sher is accessible via a five-day trek from Simikot in Western Nepal.**

# Places of Attraction in Tibet

## Holy Places

Tourism is what keeps Buddhism alive in Tibet. The Chinese government recognises the financial value of not only what they can reap from donations and offerings, from both locals and tourists alike, but also from the influx of money from tourists utilising the services during their visits to holy sites.

Consequently, if you want to leave donations or offerings at temples, the only way to ensure that the Tibetans benefit from your contribution is to give the money directly to the monks themselves. Obviously, the unavoidable entrance fees go straight into the Chinese coffers, but also the Khenpo (Abbot) of the monastery is forced to hand over all of the offerings from the altars as well. It is only money that is handed directly to the monks, or the Khenpo himself, that is kept and used by them. Be discreet.

When visiting any religious site, whether a temple or natural site like Mount Kailash, observe and honour the Tibetan customs. Dress appropriately and remove hats, do not smoke or leave litter, and walk clockwise around temples, statues and the site itself. Never touch the head of a monk or nun, and please use discretion and regard when photographing people or ceremonies. Ask permission first, keep quiet if moving around, and never intrude with your camera.

Many Tibetans, especially at monasteries and nunneries, may ask you for pictures of His Holiness. These are totally banned within the Tibet Autonomous Region 'TAR' and most of the other Tibetan regions. Even so they are greatly prized by Tibetans and so it is totally your decision as to whether you take these with you. If discovered you will most likely be deported, and Tibetans you have had contact with will be interrogated. Note, however, that small passport-sized pictures are the easiest hidden and handed over. Otherwise Mani Rinbu (the tiny pills blessed by His Holiness) and Tunga/Jendue (the blessed amulet/knotted cords) are also greatly appreciated and not banned - or obviously linked to His Holiness if discovered.

## Lhasa

Lhasa originally consisted of small villages nestling around the Potala and the Jokhang. Prior to 1949, Lhasa had an estimated population of 20-30,000. Now, there are an estimated 250-300,00 Chinese immigrants alone. Lhasa has been reduced to a bleak metropolis of glass-and-tile buildings. The only area with any remaining Tibetan character is around the Jokhang - and that is fast being torn down and replaced with Chinese imitations of traditional Tibetan architecture, and large multi-storey hotels.

## Potala Palace

The palace which was the former winter residence of the Dalai Lamas, has long been reduced to a museum resembling a mausoleum. The Potala palace has now been listed under the protection of world heritage by UNESCO, yet the Chinese government has closed down a large number of rooms, with visitors refused entry to much of the building. Police and spies roam throughout, and surveillance cameras are prolific.

The Potala palace has 13 stories, and is 117 meters high, containing numerous outstanding temples and the tombs of eight past Dalai Lamas. It was built by one of the greatest kings of Tibet, Songtsen Gambo, in the 7<sup>th</sup> century; with repairs and extensions carried out by subsequent Dalai Lamas until 1641. The Red Palace is attributed to the regent Desi Sangye Gyatso and was completed in 1693. The 5<sup>th</sup> Dalai Lama died in 1682; his death was concealed by the regent to enable completion of the construction without the distraction of political upheaval.

### Potala Square

Created for the '30 Year Celebrations of the TAR' by razing Tibetan homes, Potala Square is Lhasa's Tiananmen - designed as a large parking lot for military vehicles and a display ground for military might. Also a popular Chinese-tourist photo location, the Red Flag of China flying in front of the Potala is where Tashi Tsering attempted to raise the banned Tibetan flag in August 1999. Within a few months he had died from the injuries received at the hands of the Chinese police. The PSB are located at the southwest corner of the Square - the police vehicles outside easily identify the location. The Chinese government use the square to hold important meetings, and Chinese flags are now hoisted all around the square.

### Barkhor

Adjoining the recently widened (for military vehicles) Dekyi Shar Lam (Ch: Beijing Donglu), lies the holy centre of Lhasa. The Barkhor area surrounding the Jokhang is the last remnant of 'Tibetaness' in Lhasa, and it is fast disappearing. The frequently remodelled Barkhor Square, levelled in the early 1980s, is another open area designed to assist Chinese suppression of any displays of Tibetan nationalism. Both the Square and the



**Barkhor Square in Lhasa**

kora streets surrounding the Jokhang are constantly monitored by video surveillance cameras and numerous security personnel - both uniformed and otherwise. This is the location of the majority of freedom demonstrations by Tibetans - from individuals or small groups chanting independence slogans, to the full-scale mass protests that happened in the late 1980s. Much blood has been shed here, but the original cobblestone paving that witnessed such times has now been replaced with shiny granite slabs.

At the southwest corner of the Barkhor kora route, just around the corner from the Mandala Hotel, lies the PSB Station - with a gaping entrance way wide enough for military vehicles - which opens on to a large courtyard parking area. Topped with large Chinese character signs when walking along the southern section of the kora the PSB ironically sits directly under the view of the distant Potala.

## Jokhang Temple

The Jokhang itself was used during the Cultural Revolution as a military barracks and a slaughterhouse, and later as a hotel for Chinese officials. Of the few temples in Tibet not destroyed before the Revolution, like the Jokhang most only survived because they were used as storehouses for grain or accommodation for officials. The temples' statues and religious objects were, as with those from the Potala, destroyed or taken to be sold in China.

## Norbulingka

The Norbulingka is the remnants of the glorious summer palace of the Dalai Lamas. There are no obvious signs of the damage inflicted by the Chinese mortars on the night of the flight of the Dalai Lama in 1959, just absent buildings. Nor of the fierce resistance by the Tibetan people outside the gates. Maintained only enough to draw the tourist dollar, the main reason Norbulingka still exists is for the mockery of the annual Shoton (Yogurt) Festival in September - where the grounds are transformed into a mass of Chinese-run gambling stalls and side shows.

## Ramoche Temple

Second in importance only to the Jokhang, the Ramoche in northwest Lhasa, was built to house the Jowo Sakyamuni statue brought by Princess Wenchang as dowry in the 7th century, before being moved to the Jokhang after the latter's lengthy construction process. The image housed there today is claimed to be that brought to Lhasa by Songsten Gyampo's Nepalese wife; although the image was certainly missing from 1960-83, it may have disappeared much earlier during the Mongol invasions. When re-discovered it was found in 2 pieces.

## Kailash

Standing at 6,714m, Mount Kailash (Ghang Rinpoche), and the neighbouring Lake Manasarovar (collectively known as Kangri Tsosum - Ponri Ngaden) are said to be the heart of the ancient Shangshung Kingdom, the supposed land of origin of the pre-Buddhist Bon. The site marks the legendary 12th century battle of magical contests between Bon shaman Naro Bonchung and Buddhist sage Milarepa. Milarepa's victory displaced Bon as the prime religion in Tibet, firmly establishing Buddhism in its place. From the 12th century the Kagyupa flourished around the mountain, with monasteries and retreats springing up and pilgrims arriving in large numbers to pay homage to Ghang Rinpoche.

Mount Kailash is the most venerated holy site of four religions; considered by Buddhists as the abode of Demchok, the wrathful manifestation of Buddha Sakyamuni; to Hindus as the dwelling of Shiva the destroyer; and according to the Sanskrit tradition of Vishnu Purana (200BC) as a representation of Mt Sumeru, the cosmic mountain at the centre of the universe. Four major rivers have their sources here; the Indus, the Sutlej, the Tsangpo (Brahmaputra) and the Karnali. The holy Ganges also originates near this area. Tibetans consider all these rivers sacred and their sources even more so.

## Lake Manasarovar

At 4,556 m, Lake Manasarovar is the highest fresh-water lake in the world. Chiu Gompa monastery, spectacularly perched on a nearby rocky pinnacle, is reputedly the site of the cave where Padmasambhava lived for the last 7 years of his life. A brilliant turquoise expanse of water, the lake is also considered by Hindus as having been created in the mind of Lord Brahma.

# Monasteries in Tibet

## Drepung Monastery

Pelden Drepung dates from the early 15th century and at its height was the largest of Tibet's monastic towns, and possibly the largest monastery in the world (in 1641 it housed over 10,000 monks). Drepung also became an important centre of political power and, before the construction of the Potala by the 5<sup>th</sup> Dalai Lama, was the principal seat of the Gelug School. There were originally 7 dratsangs (colleges), but these were consolidated into 4, each with its own abbot and syllabus. The tantric college – Ngakpa Dratsang – was consecrated by Tsongkapa himself and contains the most powerful of Drepung's images – Dorje Jigche/Chogyel Chaktakma (a Buffalo headed deity who is the Gelugpa's principal tutelary deity). Despite repeated wars and plunder, much of the complex is unscathed and many of the current buildings date from the 17th-18th centuries. It was re-opened in 1980 with around 500 monks, but numbers have been reduced and there are now about only 300 monks due to China's Patriotic Education Campaign.

## Sera Monastery

About 4km north of Lhasa is the monastery of Sera. It was founded in 1417 by a disciple of Tsongkhapa on a site where the teacher and his foremost students had established hermitages. In 1959 Sera housed 5-6,000 monks; today there are only a few hundred. Much of the original complex was destroyed; however the chief colleges and Lhakhangs along with their images and relics were preserved – amongst them a Vajra believed to have arrived from India in a miraculous flight. One of the highlights of a visit to Sera is the mid-afternoon debating session attended by most of the monks which takes place in

an area specifically assigned for that purpose. The noise and fervor is exciting even if you can't understand a word they are saying.

### Ganden Monastery

Tsongkhapa founded the first monastery of the Gelugpa order, Ganden, in 1409 or 1417 (sources differ). It has remained the main seat of the Gelugpa, and it is the abbot of Ganden, the Ganden Tripa, rather than the Dalai Lama, who is head of the order. Of all Tibet's monasteries Ganden suffered most at the hands of the Red Guards, and was subjected to both artillery fire and bombing, probably due to its invasion by the Chinese during the cultural revolution.

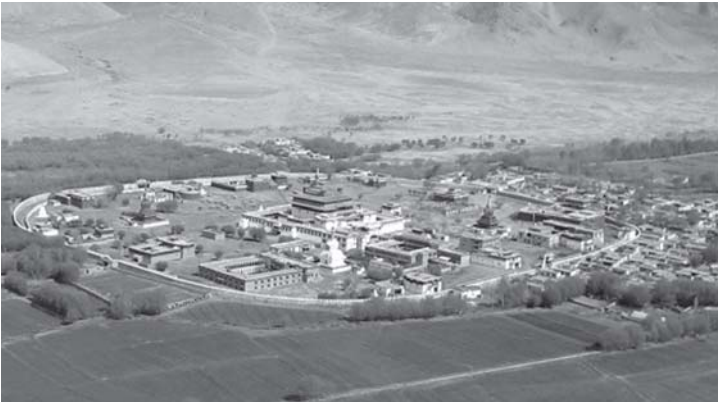
### Tashilhunpo Monastery

Founded in 1447 by a nephew and disciple of Tsongkhapa who was retrospectively named the first Dalai Lama. The original building was built above a sacred sky-burial site, the stone slab of which can still be seen on the floor. Tashilhunpo is one of the four great Gelug monasteries in Tibet, at its peak housing 4,700 monks, and is still the largest functioning monastic community in Tibet. While its extent has been reduced by two-thirds, most of the buildings razed consisted of monks' quarters. The principal temples and buildings mostly date from the 17th and 18th centuries, rebuilt following its sack by the Gorkhalis in 1792. The most amazing image is the 26m Maitreya, erected in its own Lhakhang by the 9th Panchen Lama in 1914 and covered with 279 kg of gold.

The title '**Panchen**' means 'great scholar' and was traditionally bestowed on the abbots of Tashilhunpo.

## Samye Monastery

Tibet's first monastery, probably constructed in 775-9 by Padmasambhava at the behest of King Trisong Detsen (revered by Tibetans as an emanation of Manjushri) who formally established Buddhist monasticism in Tibet. Buddhist temples had been established by Songsten Gampo some 130 years earlier, but due to hostility from aristocratic Bon families, the formal institutions of the Buddhist religion had not yet emerged. Over the centuries it has come under the influence of the Nyingma, Sakya and Gelug schools and is thus considered a symbol of Tibet's national identity.



**Samye Monastery in Lhoka Prefecture, Southern Tibet**

# Trekking in Tibet

## Climate and Trekking Season

Tibet's high altitude and atmosphere allow the sun's solar radiation to strike the earth with particular intensity. To protect your eyes and skin, you should bring sunscreen with a sun protection factor of at least 15, sunglasses, and a good lip balm. Zinc oxide creams with a high SPF are highly recommended. Generally, April to October is the best season for trekking in Tibet, although it depends on your route. A Tibetan trek in winter can still be pleasant due to the scarcity of tourists at this time, allowing you to enjoy the landscape with little interruption.

## High Altitude Diseases (HAD)

High altitude diseases can affect travellers at altitudes above 8,000 feet in the mountains of Tibet. The effects of high altitude disease generally last for around two days until the body acclimatises. The common symptoms of HAD are headaches, lightheadedness, nausea, vomiting and shortness of breath. You can prevent HAD by acclimatising slowly (taking your time to travel to high altitudes), taking garlic soup and frequently drinking plenty of water. If you get more severe symptoms even when resting, go to a lower altitude and get medical help.

## Major Trekking Regions in Tibet

### Everest Region (Jomolangma)

The exploration of Mount Everest has more frequently been undertaken from the Nepalese rather than the Tibetan approach, and trekkers have explored numerous trekking routes towards the world's highest peak from the Nepalese Himalayas. How-

ever, those who prefer more unexplored treks can opt for routes to the Everest range from the Tibetan Himalayan side. One Everest trek tour option from Tibet is to drive from Kathmandu across the Nepalese countryside to the Chinese border town of Zangmu before negotiating the road up through the deep gorges of Sunkoshi River to the ancient village of Tingri. You can then trek past Tingri to a base camp from which you can see Mount Everest.

### Kailash - Mansarovar pilgrimage

For well over a thousand years, pilgrims have journeyed to Kailash - Mansarovar to pay homage to the mountain's mystery; circumambulating it is an ancient ritual of devotion that continues to this day. Almost all major passes of the Uttaranchal Himalayas lead to Kailash - Mansarovar. The important ones in the Kumaon region are Lipulekh, Lampiya Dhura, Nuwe Dhura, Lowe Dhura, Unta Dhura, Jayanti and Kungri Bingri.

### Namchag Barwa Trek

Namchag Barwa is an excellent short trek for nature lovers and amateur botanists. The route begins in Pei, a small village that is also the staging post of treks to the great bend of the Tsangpo via Pelma Kochung and to Metog. Here a ferry crosses to Timpe on the North bank of the river, the site of a revered Guru Rinpoche cave and monastery. A trail leads north to the Nyima La pass, through forests and rhododendron groves, before passing through a nomad camp and open moorlands. From the pass there are views of the Assam Himalayas, including nearby Gyala Pelri and Namche Barwa. On the far side of the Nyima La is the Rong Valley, a heavily forested valley which is carpeted with primulas and violet irises from May to July. The best time for this trek is from May to October.

# Sensitive Dates to Observe whilst in Tibet

**March 5:** Major pro-independence protests took place on this day in Lhasa in 1988 and 1989.

**March 10:** National Uprising Day - Anniversary of the Lhasa uprising in 1959 commemorated by the exile community every year.

**July 6:** is the birthday of the Dalai Lama, born 1935.

**August- September:** Shoton 30th of the 6<sup>th</sup> Lunar month (Yogurt festival). Many pro-independence demonstrations have taken place during this time due to the crowd it attracts.

**August 1-3:** Lithang Horse Racing festival. Thousands of local people gather for this festival. In 2007, Ruggy A'drak came onto the stage and protested, leading to his arrest and subsequent mass demonstrations in Lithang. This may therefore be considered a sensitive time in the coming year.

**September 27:** First mass demonstration took place in Lhasa, 1987.

**October 1:** Founding of the PRC and major protests in Lhasa, 1988.

**October 17:** The US Congressional gold medal, the highest civilian honour in America, was awarded to the Dalai Lama in 2007.

**December:** Gaden Nga-Choe 25<sup>th</sup> of the 10<sup>th</sup> Lunar month (Death date of Ge Tsunkha-pa Lobsang Dakpa the founder of Gelugpa tradition). Many pro-independence demonstrations have taken place on this day. Since last year Chinese authorities have brought in new restrictions to ban the celebrations in Lhasa monasteries, with monks disallowed from entering monasteries on the day.

**December 10:** Nobel Peace Prize awarded to the Dalai Lama in 1989.

Restrictions will also apply during visits of high-level Government officials or international delegations

## Monlam Chenmo

Monlam Chenmo is known as one of the greatest religious festivals held on the first day of the first Tibetan month in Tibet. The event was initiated in 1409 by Je Tsong Khapa, the founder of the Geluk tradition. Thousands of monks from the three main monasteries of Drepung, Sera and Ganden would traditionally gather at the Jokhang Temple in Lhasa to chant prayers and perform religious rituals.

The motivation behind the festival is prayer for the long life of all the holy Gurus of all traditions, for the survival and spread of the Dharma in the minds of all sentient beings, and for world peace. These prayers are also intended to help overcome obstacles to peace and create conducive conditions for everyone

to live in harmony. Examinations for the highest 'Lharampa Geshe' degree (a degree in Buddhist philosophy in the Gelukpa tradition) were held during the week-long festival.

The butter lamp festival would be on the fifteen day of Monlam Chenmo in Lhasa (Chunga Chopa); the Dalai Lama would come to the Jokhang Temple and perform a Buddhist service during the festival. The Tormas would turn Barkhor Square in front of the Jokhang into a grand exhibition site. At the end of the festival, these Tormas would be burnt in a large bonfire. Thousands of pilgrims from all over Tibet would come for the prayers and teachings, and give donations to the monks and nuns. Some other monasteries would hold special prayer sessions and perform religious rituals, unfolding huge religious scroll-paintings (thankas) for the devotees to see.

Unfortunately during the Cultural Revolution, festivals such as this were banned and although Monlam Chenmo was revived in 1985, it was again banned in 1990 by the Chinese government. Molnam Chenmo festival has however gradually been revived in monasteries in India.

# Tibetan Festivals

There are countless festivals held all over Tibet; this section highlights only the major ones in and around Lhasa. Horse racing festivals in the summer and harvest festivals during the autumn are held throughout the region. The dates of even the same festivals may vary from region to region. For example, New Year's Day in Shigatse is celebrated at the beginning of December in the Tibetan calendar.

## Tibetan Festival Calendar (2008)

<b>List of Festivals</b>	<b>Dates in Tibetan Calendar</b>
Tibetan New Year (Losar)	<i>1-3 of the 1st Lunar month (Feb-March)</i>
Monlam Prayer Festival	<i>4-11 of the 1st lunar month (Feb-March)</i>
Butter Lamp/Choe-nga Choepa	<i>15th of the 1st Lunar month (Feb-March)</i>
Thanka unveiling at Tashilhunpo	<i>15th of the 5th Lunar month (July-August)</i>
Lhabab Dhechen	<i>22nd of the 9th Lunar month (Oct-November)</i>
Saka Dawa	<i>1-30 of the 4<sup>th</sup> Lunar month (May-June)</i>
Zamling Chisang/Samya Dolde	<i>5<sup>th</sup> of the 5<sup>th</sup> Lunar month (June-July)</i>
Choekor Duechen	<i>4<sup>th</sup> of the 6<sup>th</sup> Lunar month (July-August)</i>

# Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)

## **I) Question: When is the best time to go to Tibet?**

**Answer:** It is recommended that you visit Tibet around May to July, and September to October. Lhasa, Tsetang and Shigatse are suitable for sightseeing tours all the year round. The harsh climate generally makes it unsuitable to visit the Everest Base Camp area from October to April. During winter, roads might be blocked by heavy snow in Eastern Tibet and Ngari, whilst in August, heavy rainfall makes travel in these areas very difficult.

## **II) Question: What currencies can be used in Tibet? Can I use credit card and ATM cards?**

**Answer:** Besides Chinese Yuan, only US dollars are accepted. However, shops that accept American currency are very limited and you may not get a good deal for the exchange rate. The Bank of China also accepts credit cards, which can also be used at some hotels. ATM is not widely available.

## **III) Question: Is it advisable for me to bring a sleeping bag in case the bedding in hotels is not clean?**

**Answer:** In 3- or 4-star hotels in cities and towns like Lhasa, Tsetang, Shigatse and Gyangtse, you shouldn't need to worry about sanitation, but be aware travel in Tibet can be hard. If you are going to remote areas like Everest, it is wise to bring a sleeping bag to ensure a good sleep en route.

#### **IV) Question: Are the streets in Tibet safe?**

**Answer:** Generally it is quite safe in Tibet. As almost all Tibetans are Buddhists who believe good deeds will accumulate merit in their next lives, crimes are rare. You may however need to pay attention to the dogs, which are free to roam everywhere.

#### **V) Question: What medicines should I bring?**

**Answer:** Medicine is a must for travelers to Tibet. TCHRD suggests that you take some painkiller pills with you and enough medicine for colds, diarrhea, nausea and fever. Some nasal ointment and throat-moistening pills will be of help for those sensitive to cold (or freezing!) weather conditions. Please consult your doctor prior to your travels to Tibet.

#### **VI) Question: I have a cold, but my trip to Lhasa starts tomorrow. Can I join the trip as scheduled?**

**Answer:** TCHRD suggests that you postpone your trip and avoid taking the risk. People with respiratory problems will have great difficulties recovering from the cold. It is possible the chilly weather could cause pulmonary edema or even death. People who are suffering from colds, heart/cardiac illnesses, severe respiratory problems, hypertension, liver or kidney problems, anemia and other serious health problems are advised not to travel to Tibetan plateaus. Travellers suffering from these illnesses may have a hard time adapting to the Tibetan environment, which could result in the worsening of their conditions.

# Post Trip

TCHRD relies on recent arrivals from Tibet for most of its information. However, tourists are also a great source of information and the advantage tourists have over Tibetan refugees is the fact that they can corroborate their observations through the pictures they have managed to take!

We would appreciate if, as soon as possible after your trip, you could send information and observations including photographs with as much detail of dates and locations etc on them. If you witness important incidents or receive first hand accounts, please contact us urgently at:

## **Tibetan Centre for Human Rights and Democracy**

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HP (India)

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Website: [www.tchrd.org](http://www.tchrd.org)

# Suggested Readings and Websites

## Suggested Readings

### History & Politics:

**My Land and My People** - His Holiness the Dalai Lama, Editor David Howarth

**Freedom in Exile** - His Holiness the Dalai Lama

**In Exile from the Land of Snow: The definitive account of the Dalai Lama and Tibet since the Chinese conquest** - John F. Avedon

**The Dragon in the Land of Snows: A History of Modern Tibet since 1947** - Tsering Shakya

**Red Star over Tibet (reprinted as Tibet: The Road Ahead)** - Prof. Dawa Norbu

**Tibetan Nation** - Warren Smith

**Tibet: A Political History** - Shakabpa W D

**Demise of the Lamaist State** - Melvyn Goldstein

**Circle of Protest** - Ronald D Shwartz

**Lhasa: street with memories** - Robert Barnett.

### Biographies:

**Fire under the Snow** - Palden Gyatso

**Sorrow Mountain** - Ani Pachen

## Guidebooks:

**Mapping the Tibetan World** - Gavin Allwright, Atsushi Kanamaru and Yakiyasu Osada

**Tibet Overland** - Kym Mc Connell

**Tibet Handbook: A Pilgrimage Guide** - Victor Chan

## Suggested Websites

[www.tchrd.org](http://www.tchrd.org)

### **Tibetan Centre of Human Rights and Democracy**

The only Tibetan-run Human Rights NGO, based in Dharamsala, which monitors the Human Rights situation in Tibet. The site carries full, downloadable copies of all the publications of the Centre, including this guide, plus other information on political prisoners, news, and current campaigns.

[www.phayul.com](http://www.phayul.com)

### **Phayul**

An independent site focused on Tibetan news, this site has frequent visitors around the world. It is very popular in India and abroad due to its coverage of breaking news and timely updates.

[www.tibet.net](http://www.tibet.net)

### **Central Tibetan Administration.**

The official website of the Tibetan government in exile based in Dharamsala. This offers information on the political situation as well as on the Tibetan government in exile. It includes the online version of the bi-monthly Tibetan Bulletin, which covers all Tibetan issues, and regular news updates.

[www.atc.org](http://www.atc.org)

### **Australian Tibet Council**

This site not only covers an overview of the political situation, news and campaigns, but also has an excellent travel information section. A small amount of this information is Australian specific, but the majority relates directly to Tibet itself, is constantly and well maintained, and is a rich and thorough source of facts and advice for travellers.

[www.tibet.org](http://www.tibet.org)

### **Tibet Online**

A good wide-ranging site that covers news, human rights issues, and the environment, and has some travel links.

[www.tibet.ca](http://www.tibet.ca)

### **Canada Tibet Committee**

This site is designed to increase awareness of Tibet, and offers a valuable resource in the World Tibet News bulletins. Released daily, these collect and distribute all articles published in the media worldwide that relate directly to the Tibetan situation. The site also covers general information and current campaigns.

[www.tew.org](http://www.tew.org)

### **Tibet Environmental Watch**

A site detailing the existing environmental problems on the Tibetan plateau, with sections on wildlife, geography and development sections. It also features news and reports, plus a link to maps of Tibet and Lhasa.

[www.khamaid.org](http://www.khamaid.org)

**KhamAid**

A Kham specific site with a large section on travel.

[www.tibetsites.com](http://www.tibetsites.com)

Tibetsites.com features every website related to the Tibet issue; you should be able to find any information you need via this website.

[www.savetibet.org](http://www.savetibet.org)

A site which covers the current Tibet issues from all over the world.

# End Notes

1. Social Evils, Prostitution and pornography in Lhasa, TIN 1999 p IV
2. A brief survey of fourteen centuries of Sino-Tibetan relations, Tashi Tsering, Amnye Machen Institute, December 1988
3. The Tibetans, Steve Lehman, Essay by Robbie Barnett, 1998
4. Tibet Overland, A route planning guide for mountain bikers and other over landers, Kym McConnell pp45-46