

INSPIRING

DREAM DISCOVER EXPERIENCE

JOURNEYS

Vol 4, Issue III, Oct – Dec 2018



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COME TO TIBET





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TAJ
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Taj Exotica Resort & Spa, Andamans, Radhanagar Beach Number 7, Havelock Island, Andamans- 744211 India



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Taj Coromandel, one of Chennai's best known landmarks, presents a rich fusion of South Indian design and classic elegance. With 212 grand luxury rooms and suites, the intimate five-star hotel has played host to famous political figures such as President Jimmy Carter, His Royal Highness Prince Andrew, President Bill Clinton, and the Emperor and Empress of Japan.

With a location as central as Nungambakkam, you have easy access to the business district, the US Consulate, and key shopping hubs like Mahatma Gandhi Road, Express Avenue, Spencer Plaza, Chennai City Centre, Khader Nawaz Khan Road and T Nagar. The location and proximity to the airport, coupled with 12,000 square feet (1,100 sq m) of event facilities, complimentary Wi-Fi and a modern business centre, make the hotel perfect for meetings and conferences. Our glorious Grand Ballroom is an exemplary setting for gala dinners and events.

Mahatma Gandhi Salai, Chennai, Tamil Nadu- 600034 India



FESTIVALS

JANUARY – MARCH 2019



BUTTER LAMP FESTIVAL

The Butter Lamp Festival marks the close of the Losar festivities. The festival involves lighting butter lamps (lamps made of butter) and displaying butter sculptures in order to commemorate Shakyamuni Buddha's great debating victory over his opponents about 2,500 years ago.

On this day, people go to temples to burn incense to worship Buddha. As darkness falls, they erect scaffolds that may be several stories high and display butter lamps they make themselves. The colourful and intricately designed butter sculptures, called 'Tormas', are created in various forms – gods, flowers and trees, birds and beasts, and can be lit.

In Lhasa, Barkhor Street and its square are lit with thousands of burning lights, and people dance and sing in the streets, making it a mesmerising sight.

LOSAR (TIBETAN NEW YEAR)

Losar is the most important festival in Tibet and much anticipated. Lhasa is the best place to witness celebrations. There are colourful parades, exciting competitions, ancient ceremonies, traditional dancing and chanting, and several other performances. People wear beautiful clothes and jewellery.

Special dishes are offered to family shrine deities, and doors painted with auspicious symbols, among other preparations.

On the first day of Losar, the one who fetches the "first water of the year" at dawn is considered the luckiest person of the year! Later, at the Jokhang Monastery people offer sacrifices to Sakyamuni, the founder of Buddhism.

Families pray and eat together and give gifts to each other. On the second day of New Year, locals visit their relatives and friends. The third day is usually spent at local monasteries.





Camp Teertham Presents

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Prayagraj Kumbh 2019

Events Calendars

Date (2019)	Day	Event
15th January	Tuesday	Makar Sankranti (1st shahi Snan)
21st January	Monday	Paush Purnima
4th February	Monday	Mauni Amavasya (Main Royal Bath 2nd Shahi Snan)
10th February	Sunday	Basant Panchami (3rd shahi Snan)
19th February	Tuesday	Maghi Poornima
4th March	Monday	Maha Shivratri

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INSPIRING JOURNEYS



Cover: Tibetan women

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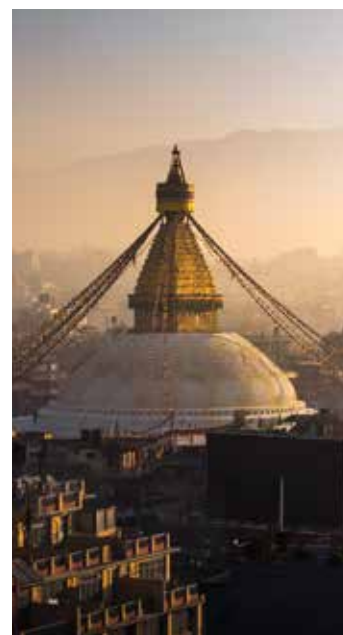
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EXPERIENCE



MESSAGE FROM THE RMD & CEO



Dear Partners,

As the year comes to a close and we anticipate the Christmas season and the promise of a beautiful new year, we bring you our special edition on a place that defines a moment in time, a destination that truly inspires gratitude and reflection. This is a compelling, deeply spiritual, extraordinarily beautiful country that is slowly but surely moving toward a better future while protecting and preserving much of what makes it distinctive. We present Tibet.

Our Cover Story takes you across some of the world's highest peaks and most magnificent landscapes to introduce you to a region where an intriguing mountain culture flourishes, suffused with the profound spirituality of Buddhism and the timeless faith of a remarkable people.

Explore the fascinating history of exchange and prosperity on an ancient trade route – plied for 13 centuries by horse caravans and human porters – that reveals magnificent landscapes, grand vistas, and a rainbow of cultures through some of the most daunting terrain on earth.

Come January 2019, the world will descend on the banks of the sacred River Ganges to experience not only a centuries-old festival but also extraordinary human solidarity, and the largest collective act of faith anywhere on earth!

Could you drink salty tea and eat sweet rice side by side? Or savour dried cheese from a female yak? Yes you could. Travel to the 'roof of the world' to discover an unusual and iconic cuisine that reflects its wintry landscape.

With eight of the world's highest mountains, splendid Himalayan trekking trails, superb national parks, breathtaking natural beauty, vibrant lifestyle, and great cultural diversity, Nepal beckons with its brand new 'Visit Nepal 2020' campaign.

Our Guest Columnist this time is a Tibet travel expert. He writes about how and why he was inspired to bring the world to Tibet, facilitating interaction between travellers and locals in a respectful and sustainable way.

Learning from cultures that are different from our own, understanding and appreciating them, and keeping minds and hearts open regardless of borders...this is the greatest lesson, rather, gift travel gives us.



While we look back on the people and places we shone the spotlight on in 2018, we hope that you are inspired to travel through our pages in the coming year; and have spurred you to explore new lands in more ways than one.

Wishing you love, joy, and peace this holiday season

With warm regards

Mario Habig
Regional Managing Director,
India and Indian Ocean

Amit Prasad
Chief Executive Officer,
Le Passage to India Journeys

 You only live once, but
if you do it right, once is
enough. 

– Mae West



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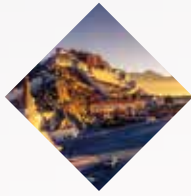
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COVER STORY



JOURNEY TO THE MOUNTAINS OF FAITH

Range upon range of spectacular snow-topped mountains tower over vast expanses of arid plains, turquoise lakes shimmer in the golden sun even as they rest in the icy shade of primeval glaciers, snaking highways make their way through lofty passes draped with colourful prayer flags that flutter without pause as winds sweep unchecked, and the north face of the world's highest peak is illuminated with magnificent mountain light – this is exquisite geography. And humbling.



Black Yak

WELCOME TO TIBET



We have a saying in Tibet: If a problem can be solved there is no use worrying about it. If it can't be solved, worrying will do no good.



– Heinrich Harrer, *Seven Years in Tibet*

Described simply as the 'Roof of the World', Tibet is the highest region on the earth. Tibet sits in the heart of Asia, right between India and China. Some consider it to be the far Eastern edge of Central Asia, while others classify it as East Asia. Tibet shares borders with Nepal, Bhutan, Burma, and China (which occupied Tibet in 1959). Tibet's extreme high-altitude mountains are the source of many of Asia's great waters, including the Indus, Sutlej, Yarlung Tsampo (which becomes the Brahmaputra in India), Salween, Mekong, Yangtze, and Yellow Rivers.

The Tibetan Plateau has an average elevation exceeding 4,500 metres and is regarded as the world's highest and largest plateau, with an area of 2,500,00 square kilometres. Home,

also, to some of the world's tallest mountains, Tibet has the ability to astound, transform, and inspire even the toughest of travellers.

Sky-high **Lhasa** – Tibet's traditional capital as also the capital of the **Tibet Autonomous Region** – is the centre of ancient Tibetan tradition and Tibetan Buddhist pilgrimage. Once a "forbidden city", Lhasa retains its air of mysticism, spirituality, and old-world charm. Wander the fabled mountain city and explore its extraordinary mix of winding alleyways, backstreet temples, markets, squares, and the old town.

At 12,139 feet above sea level, the dramatic **Potala Palace** dominates Lhasa's stunning skyline. The 13-storied complex monument,

rising to a height of above 117 metres, is the highest palace in the world. The seventh century structure was originally commissioned by Tibetan king Songtsen Gambo; eventually though, it was expanded and became the winter palace and home of the Dalai Lama when the monastic order came to govern Tibet. But when the 14th Dalai Lama fled to India during the 1959 Tibetan uprising, the Chinese government took over and converted the grounds into a museum.

Enclosed within massive walls, gates, and turrets built of rammed earth and stone, the White and Red Palaces and ancillary buildings of the Potala Palace rise from Red Mountain in the centre of the Lhasa Valley at an altitude of 3,700 metres. The White



Tibetan grasslands

Inscribed as a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1994, the Potala Palace is one of the most enduring spiritual sanctums in the world...

Palace holds the main ceremonial hall with the throne of the Dalai Lama. The Palace contains over a 1000 lavish rooms, labyrinthine corridors, nearly 10,000 painted scrolls, 698 murals, thousands of exquisite sculptures, carpets, canopies, curtains, porcelain, jade, and fine objects of gold and silver, as well as a large collection of ancient sutras and important historical documents. The Red Palace serves as the administrative area. Inside you can see the gilded burial stupas of eight Dalai Lamas, hundreds of

sacred Buddhist scrolls, and numerous shrines. Butter lamps light the hallways and monks silently keep watch to ensure that decorum is maintained.

Inscribed as a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1994, the Potala Palace is one of the most famous and enduring spiritual sanctums in the world.

The climb up the steps of the Potala Palace may be arduous but it is worth every bit the effort

just for the spectacular views from the top. For Tibetans, the most sacred and important pilgrimage site is the **Jokhang Temple Monastery** in the old town of Lhasa. Therefore, do make it one of your primary points of call whilst in Tibet.

Founded in the seventh century CE in order to promote Buddhism, the beautiful Temple is the oldest of its kind in Tibet, and is a **UNESCO World Heritage Site**. Painted in deep hues of red and gold, the geomantic



Jokhang Temple Monastery

The Potala Palace, Jokhang Temple Monastery, and Norbulingka are icons of Tibetan culture, religion, and governance...

complex comprises an entrance porch, courtyard, and hall flanked by accommodation

for monks, and storehouses on all four sides. Constructed of wood and stone, the structures are superb examples of the Tibetan Buddhist style of architecture, with influences from China, India, and Nepal. Inside, are housed over 3,000 images of the Buddha and other Buddhist deities and historical figures, alongside several other treasures and manuscripts. Murals depicting religious and historical scenes adorn the walls.

An inner shrine houses the country's holiest and most revered figure – the Jowo Rinpoche—a seated Buddha installed when Buddhism was adopted by Tibetan royalty in the seventh century. Buddhism is an integral part of the lives of modern Tibetans, and remains the most important defining element of their culture.

You can tell how deep and unshakeable their faith is when you see lines upon lines of pilgrims waiting outside the Temple, in



Barkhor Market

preparation for their special journey. Around the Temple too, you will find worshippers prostrating in prayer, turning their prayer wheels or bowing before Buddhist icons. The experience is fascinating, inspiring, and beautiful.

Drive to the outskirts of the city, around two kilometres west of the Potala Palace, to visit Norbulingka, the former summer palace of the Dalai Lama. Constructed in the 18th century, **Norbulingka** stands on the bank of the Lhasa River, amidst lush greenery. A vast, leafy garden integrates four palace complexes and a monastery as well as other halls, and pavilions, into the

LOKESH BAGGA

Lokesh Bagga is the Head of Sales and Operation for PureQuest India, Nepal, and Bhutan. He is passionate about adventure, developing new products with authentic experiences that showcase unique aspects of our destinations. As a member of the Royal Geographical Society of England and Eco & Sustainable Societies, he strongly believes in giving back to Nature. He can be contacted at lokesh@lpti.in



layout, showcasing exceptional design and architecture.

Norbulingka was also a religious, political, and administrative centre, having been a place for philosophical debates, contemplation, and for signing political agreements.

Norbulingka is a **UNESCO World Heritage Site**.

Through the beauty of their architecture, uniqueness of layout, and rich design, all set against an extraordinary landscape, the ensemble sites of the **Potala Palace, Jokhang Temple Monastery, and Norbulingka** are



Norbulingka complex



Sera Monastery



Monks debating, Sera Monastery

outstanding embodiments of Tibetan culture, religion, and governance.

Once you have finished exploring these three iconic sites, you can immerse yourself in the timeless atmosphere of old Tibet at Barkhor, Lhasa's traditional market. The immensely popular **Barkhor Market (Bazaar)** is the main square of Lhasa. Vibrant, colourful, and selling everything from fresh produce to fragrant incense, Barkhor is where you can find (and haggle for!) delightful traditional Tibetan handicrafts, Buddhist artefacts, carpets, paintings, sculptures and much more, to pick up as souvenirs or gifts.

We recommend heading out to the outskirts of Lhasa on day trips to truly experience the heart of Tibet's ancient faith and culture in three of the country's greatest Gelugpa or Yellow Hat (one of the five main traditions of Tibetan Buddhism) monasteries: **Drepung, Sera, and Nechung.**

Some five kilometres from Lhasa is the **Sera Monastery**, founded in 1419. It sits in the prettiest and most charming atmosphere, at the base of Mount Purbuchok. Sera Monastery was once an important centre for learning where around 5,000 to 6,000 monks also resided. Currently, around 550 monks are said to be living in the Monastery. The most intriguing feature here is the nine-metre image of Maitreya which was erected in 1419. In the courtyard of the Monastery,



IMPORTANT VISA AND INTERNAL PERMIT FORMALITIES BEFORE DEPARTURE:

1. While entering Tibet via China, Chinese visa must be obtained in the home country. Tibet permit is issued and delivered in the Gateway cities of China. A scanned copy of passport and copy of Chinese visa should be sent at least 20 days prior to arriving in the Gateway cities in China.
2. Before entering Tibet via the Gateway city of Kathmandu, Nepal, clients must spend at least 4 nights in Kathmandu (working days) for the final processing of Tibet visa as per the visa working days i.e. Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday and Friday.
3. Following documents are required to apply for Tibet permits: a) Clear, colour scanned copy of passport must be provided at least 20 days prior to arrival. b) Chinese Embassy visa form. (It needs to be filled up and sent in advance). c) 1 Colour passport (MRP) size photo (once clients arrive in Kathmandu) d) Original passport (once clients arrive in Kathmandu.)
4. The client's passport must match the copy, which was provided for permit formalities in advance. Passport must be valid for more than 6 months and it must be an ordinary passport.
5. There is no need to carry Chinese visa for entering Tibet via the Gateway city of Kathmandu. Likewise, Tibet visa will also be valid for China Mainland. For travelling to China, the program in China and length of stay must be intimated in advance to facilitate visa application for China.
6. There should not be any splitting or extending of Tibet visa for further journey to China or in China. This is extremely complicated and Chinese authorities may refuse this. So, the journey must be carefully planned and organised before booking the trip to avoid problems in future.
7. Chinese Embassy is closed during festivals; however Embassy accepts visa application in advance and issues visa after verification of the original passport. An urgent visa fee has to be paid and all necessary documents provided.
8. In Tibet, briefing is a must in order to provide any latest information, especially about sensitive issues. In-depth trip briefing is provided by a Tibetan expert. The last-minute briefing is highly recommended.

witness resident monks animatedly debate Buddhist philosophy as they pitch their knowledge against each other.

Explore the **Drepung Monastery**, perched on Mount Gambo Utse. Once home to some 10,000 monks, Drepung is still one of the most impressive monasteries in Tibet. Wander through its dark, centuries-old halls; listen for the lilting, booming chants of monks at prayer.

A 10-minute walk downhill from Drepung will bring you to the **Nechung Monastery**, historically known as the former seat of Tibet's State Oracle, until 1959. The Nechung oracle was considered the protector of the Buddhist state and the Dalai Lamas would make no important decision without consulting him. Nechung has a distinct air, different from the other monasteries; perhaps because it has long been associated with matters such as exorcism, possession, and pre-Buddhist rites.

Another noted monastery, around 50 km east of Lhasa, is the historic **Ganden Monastery** (founded 1417), one of the most important monastic sites in Tibet and the first Gelugpa monastery. Destroyed by China's Red Army in 1966, Ganden is once again a working monastery where some 400 monks now study. Two koras (pilgrim circuits) offer stupendous views over the crisscross Kyi-chu Valley.

Travelling westward from Lhasa, experience the distinctive culture of western Tibet and the traditional Tibetan way of life in local villages. On the way you will see the brilliant turquoise waters of **Lake Yamdrok**, cross two spectacular high passes, and experience a jaw-dropping hanging glacier before you reach **Gyantse**.

Historically Tibet's third-largest city, **Gyantse**, with its imposing ancient dzong (fortress) and city walls, retains the air and charm of old-world Tibet.

Here, explore the **Pelkor Chode**, a complex of monasteries and temples in which all four major sects of Tibetan Buddhism are worshipped. Work

Nechung has a distinct air; it has long been associated with matters such as exorcism, possession, and pre-Buddhist rites...



started on the complex in 1418 and was completed in 1425. Remarkably preserved, many statues and paintings inside date back to the time of its founding.

The centrepiece of the complex is the stunning **Kumbum (or Tashi Gomang Chörten)**. The Kumbum has nine floors or tiers and each tier has 76 unique chapels that contain various Buddhist images. Construction began in July 1427, and was probably completed in 1439. In Tibetan Buddhism, the term Kumbum means having 100,000 images and refers to a particular style of stupa construction in which chapels are housed in ascending symmetrical stories.

Shigatse, the second largest city in Tibet, is at a crossroads between its history as an ancient Tibetan settlement and the encroaching modernity of contemporary China.

Shigatse is home to the massive **Tashilhunpo Monastery**. Inside, a maze of around 39 amazing chapels, and shrines linked by mysterious alleyways and steep staircases welcome you. You cannot miss the huge Maitreya Chapel coated with gold; its workmanship is certainly impressive.

Here are a few very special Tibet experiences that you should definitely make a part of your Tibet itinerary if possible:

THE NORTH FACE OF MOUNT EVEREST

Discover and experience some of the most magnificent mountain vistas on Earth on a journey across the Tibetan Plateau to the storied North Face Base Camp of Mount Everest. Seldom visited, the Tibetan side of Mount Everest gives a clear, sweeping view



North Face of Mount Everest

of the mountain – simply out of this world. The sight of the soaring crags of Everest is an unforgettable, extraordinary, awe-inspiring experience.

The Everest Base Camp (EBC), elevation 5200 metres, is nearly 800 kilometres southwest of Lhasa. The classic route connecting Lhasa to the North Face Everest Base Camp is one of the most fantastic overland journeys on the planet. It takes you through some of the most spectacular regions of Tibet – pristine high altitude lakes, rivers, glaciers, farming valleys, and the Himalayas – and rare yet insightful glimpses of the Tibetan culture, faith, and way of life, until finally you are face to face (literally!) with the world's highest peak! Do note that you can drive all the way to the Tibet side of the EBC. However, trekking is also possible for those interested. Take fantastic photographs of the loftiest peaks on the earth and catch the sun rise in all its glory on Mount Everest. Three kilometres north of the Base Camp is the Rongbuk Monastery, thought to be the highest monastery in the world. Here, you could participate in a special private butter lamp ceremony and interact with the monks if you wish.

OVERLAND JOURNEY FROM LHASA, TIBET TO KATHMANDU, NEPAL

Undertake a fantastic overland journey from the barren Tibetan Plateau to the lush foothills of Nepal (around 1100 km) – the gradual yet thrilling descent, flanked by towering summits, takes you down to over 9,000 feet. Along the way, visit historic cities, see pilgrimage sites, witness the phenomenal natural beauty around you in timeless lakes and glaciers, discover remote mountain villages, and take stunning images of people and daily life on the plateau, watch the sunrise over Mount Everest, and take in panoramic views of the Himalayas...all this and more await you till you reach the Tibetan border town of Kyirong. This is where you will cross over into Nepal and later proceed to the Kathmandu Valley.

TRIP TO MOUNT KAILASH

Mount Kailash is a 6,638 metre-high peak in the Kailash Range which forms part of the Trans-Himalayas in the Tibet Autonomous Region. The mountain is located near the twin lakes of Manasarovar and Rakshastal,



Pilgrims making the kora around Mt Kailash and performing full body prostrations

Seldom visited, the Tibetan side of Mount Everest gives a clear, sweeping view of the mountain – simply out of this world...

close to the source of some of the longest Asian rivers: the Indus, Sutlej, Brahmaputra, and

Karnali (a tributary of the Ganges) in India. Mount Kailash is considered sacred in four religions: Bon, Buddhism, Hinduism and Jainism.

You cannot travel all the way up to Tibet and NOT attempt a kora (pilgrim circuit) around this exceptional Himalayan pyramid of rock and snow whose surreal four-sided summit has never been scaled. Commanding the region with its sheer physicality and spiritual aura, Kailash, for centuries, has been beckoning the faith of pilgrims and travellers, who circumambulate it in homage. You can set out for Mount Kailash from the

Tibetan town of Darchen, the starting point for pilgrimages in the region.

Jaw-dropping yet serene beauty. Phenomenal views of the world's highest mountains. Woolly yaks. Ruddy complexioned nomads. The unexpected flavour of po cha or butter tea. Rare, endangered, and exotic wildlife. Epic overland journeys on some of the world's most remote and primitive roads. Magnificent monasteries and monks in meditation. Aromatic incense sticks and glowing butter lamps. Thangkas and mandalas. The lilting chants of prayers. Extraordinary faith and devotion. Vibrant festivals. Warm homes and touching hospitality. Unique cuisine and distinctive culture. And...home to some of the nicest people you may get to know – for despite decades of political turmoil, immense hardship, and struggle for survival, they surprise, delight, and move you with their sheer simplicity, endless patience, complete tolerance, great generosity, and deep spirituality.

Welcome to Tibet. ①



Markam County in the very east of Tibet. In this region, near upper Mekong, lay the junction of the Sichuan and Yunnan branches of the route



DESTINATION



THE TEA HORSE ROAD: AN ASIAN ODYSSEY OF ENDURANCE AND EXCHANGE

Between the 7th century and the middle of the 20th, an intricate mesh of stone roads and mountain trails covering over 3,000 kilometres, ran from the tea-laden mountains of southern Yunnan and Sichuan in China through valleys, forests, gorges, rivers, and sky-high passes onto the Himalayan plateaus to Lhasa, the 12,000-foot-high capital of Tibet; and from there to Nepal, Bhutan, Sikkim and so on, before reaching the Indian subcontinent.



This highway through the sky was called the Tea Horse Road.

One of the longest, harshest, and most dramatic trade routes of the ancient world and in Asia, the Tea Horse Road (or Southwest Silk Road) was a crucial corridor of commerce and exchange between China and Tibet, linking two different cultures, economies, and kingdoms. It was also the oldest tea trade network in the world. Few tea drinkers know the story of how tea spread to every nation from its origin in the mountains of China.

HOW IT ALL BEGAN...

It was sometime in the 7th century that the Tubo Tibetan kingdom discovered tea. Initially acquiring a taste for its warmth inducing and therapeutic properties in a severely cold climate, Tibetan royalty and nomads alike soon developed a craving for it (that persists to this day!). However, Tibet's high elevation made it impossible for them to

China wanted Tibet's sturdy steeds for their Imperial Army. They were the best to take into battle against fierce nomadic tribes from the north...

grow it themselves.

China had the tea Tibet wanted. In fact, raw tea was considered so precious at the time that it was worth more than porcelain or silk! Tibet also had something China desperately needed: horses. In order to protect its empire, China wanted Tibet's sturdy steeds for their Imperial Army. They were the best

to take into battle against fierce nomadic tribes from the north, predecessors of Mongol emperor Genghis Khan's troops. Trade began – Chinese tea for Tibetan warhorses. And that is how the ancient Tea Horse Road got its name.

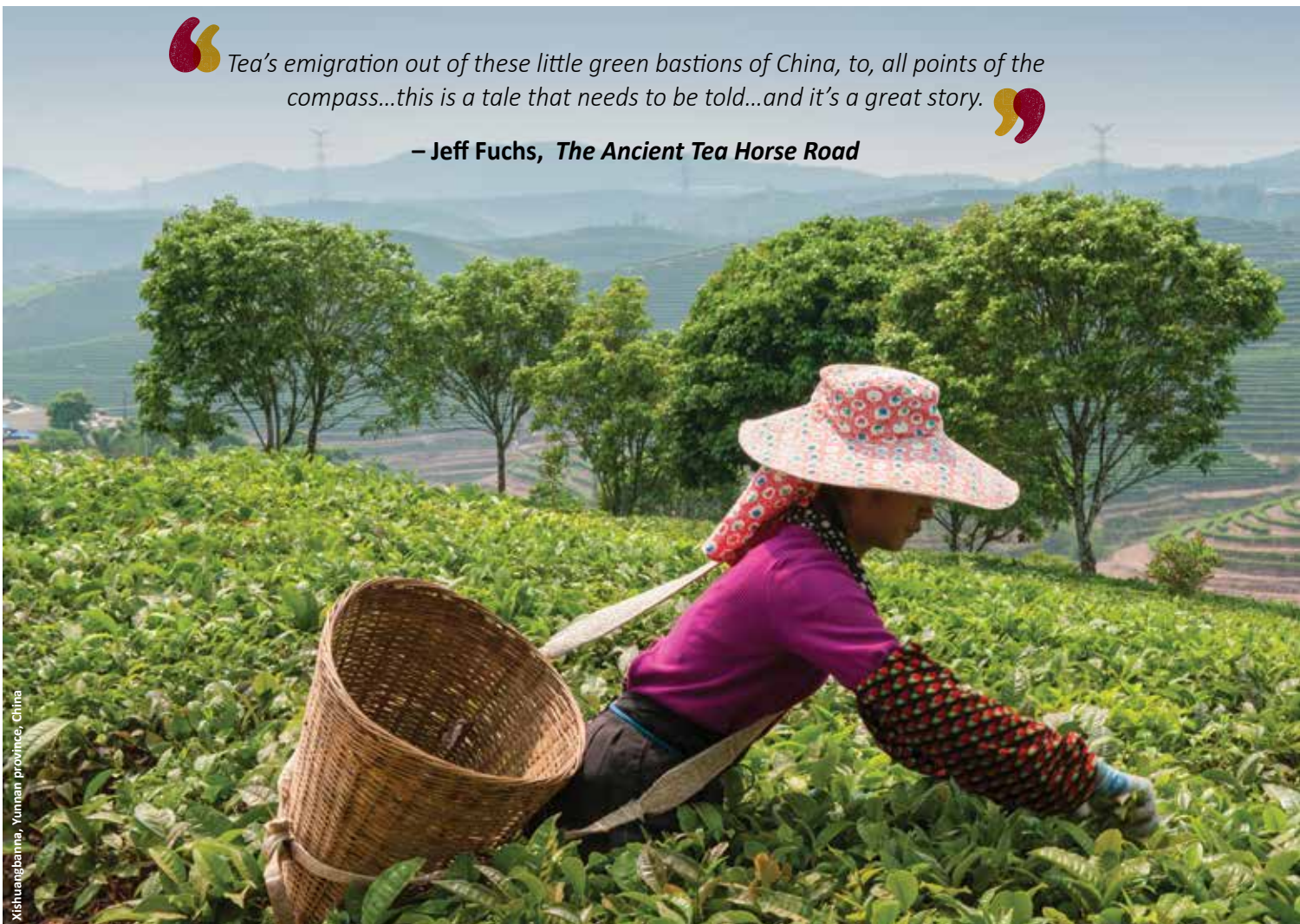
There were two main routes to Lhasa, from two different sources, both in southwestern China. The longer, and original, began in the tea mountains of Xishuangbanna (close to the Myanmar border) in China's Yunnan province, most of it converging first in the town of Pu'er (now called Simao) that gave the tea its name. The second route began in Ya'an, another major tea-growing region, in the Sichuan province; it eventually joined the Yunnan route before continuing through the mountains into Tibet.

AN EPIC JOURNEY

Horse, mule, and yak caravans, and human porters inched up the long and unforgiving route, battling blizzards, frostbite, thieves,

“Tea's emigration out of these little green bastions of China, to, all points of the compass...this is a tale that needs to be told...and it's a great story.”

– Jeff Fuchs, *The Ancient Tea Horse Road*



Xishuangbanna, Yunnan province, China

AMIT AGARWAL

With over two decades of experience in the travel industry, Amit currently heads the US & UK markets for the company. Passionate about travel and cuisine, he shares his knowledge and experience in developing new and exciting programs for his clients. Amit enjoys playing outdoor sports and cooking.

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and hunger upon the world's highest plateau to transport this treasured commodity in what now places it amongst the greatest odysseys made by man.

Chinese porters, both men and women, regularly carried 70 kg-90 kg of tea from factories and plantations in Sichuan. Then, at a designated point, the tea was sewn into



River Salween, Tibet

waterproof yak-skin cases and loaded onto the pack animals. The gruelling journey – anywhere between three to seven months – took them out of China's bountiful valleys, across the wind-beaten, snow-laden Tibetan Plateau, forded the freezing Yangtze, Mekong, and Salween Rivers, into the daunting Nyainqentanglha Mountains, ascended four killer 17,000-foot passes, and finally descended into Lhasa... where the magnificent Potala Palace (former residence of the Dalai Lama) commanded the view as the caravans neared the holy Tibetan city.

The exchange? A single horse for 60 kg of brick tea.

BRICK TEA

The tea bound for Tibet along the Tea Horse Road was the crudest form of the beverage. The 'shengcha' or green tea loved by the Chinese royals was impossible to keep green and fresh enroute, and so 'zhuancha', fermented Pu'er tea, developed. The tea bound for Tibet was typically pressed into discus-shaped cakes/bricks (called bing) and

wrapped only in bamboo-leaf to protect it from the elements. By the 11th century, brick tea had become the prime trading commodity between China and Tibet.



Pu'er Tea

Tibetan brick tea is extremely bitter and least smooth. To this day, it is made from the plant's large tough leaves, twigs, and stems. After several cycles of steaming and drying, the tea is blended with glue-like rice water, pressed into moulds, and dried. Bricks of black tea are still sold throughout modern Tibet.

PU'ER TEA

Xishuangbanna in the deep south of China's Yunnan province is the heart of the Tea Belt, which stretches from Assam to northern Vietnam. It is here that the special Pu'er tea is grown. Starting in the 7th century, this is the tea that inspired and launched the Tea Horse Road.

Pu'er tea's uniqueness comes from post-fermentation – unlike other teas, it continues to ferment even after packing.



The lightly flavoured tea bricks that left Yunnan were carried on horseback along the Tea Horse Road; and continued to ferment along the road, developing a strong flavour and aroma which appealed to Tibetan tastes. Enroute, the green tea turned to dark teak, and the taste became vibrant, richer, and fruitier. This final version of the tea, known as Pu'er, became highly sought-after by the royalty, nobility, and tea connoisseurs alike, not only for its distinct flavour but also for its health benefits.

BUDDHA ON THE ROAD

Buddhist monasteries dot the route. Buddhism reached the region at about the same time as the Tea Horse Road began — that is why religion, culture, and tea are deeply interlinked here. Monasteries influenced the trade in Tibet, and the ancient passageway connected the important monasteries.

You can only imagine the length and range of the Tea Horse Road when you discover that it covers, from south to north, all three great schools of Buddhism — Theravada in the south, Mahayana in central Yunnan, and Tibetan Buddhism in the north — resulting in different monastic architectural styles as well as an explosion of imagery, iconography, and ceremony in each region.



Colourful horse and rider

PUREBREDS AND FESTIVALS

The spectacular Nagqu Horse Festival celebrates Tibet's equestrian heritage. At this centuries-old summer gathering on the Tea Horse Road in northern Tibet, jockeys race Nangchen purebreds— long prized for their speed and stamina.

Through centuries of selective breeding, the Tibetans created a choice horse called the Nangchen. Standing only 13.5 hands high, fine-limbed and handsome-faced, with enlarged lungs adapted to life on the 15,000-foot-high, oxygen-deprived Tibetan Plateau, the Nangchen steeds were bred to be tireless and sure-footed on snowy high-altitude passes. These were the horses coveted by the Chinese centuries ago.

The Nagqu Festival tests the ability of the rider and power and stability of the horse in short and long distance races...

Nagqu, 320 km away from Lhasa, is known for its vast, lush, beautiful grasslands, resting high at 4,507 metres. This is where, between

mid-July and mid-August, Tibetans from across the country arrive in happy hordes. Dressed traditionally and stunningly adorned, they gather here a few days before the opening ceremony of the Festival, to set up their tents around the horse racing tracks.

Combining true competitive spirit and extraordinary performances in a single colourful event, the Nagqu Festival tests the ability of the rider and power and stability of the horse in short and long distance races. Enjoy marvellous horsemanship, and interesting events such as archery competitions, rifle shooting competitions, chopping, wrestling, stone lifting, archery on horseback, tugs of war, and Tibetan operas. Yak racing also takes place here; and horses and yaks, decked in colourful cloths and striking ornaments, are the real stars of the show! Even as the sun goes down,



celebrations continue with much singing and dancing around the fire.

The 8th century Nagqu Festival is not only a venue for Tibetan nomads to compete physically and trade farm products but also a rare chance for tourists to experience the authentic culture, heritage, and cuisine of Tibet.

THE ROUTE

In reality a complex network of trails that evolved organically, the Tea Horse Road was neither planned nor laid out. You can trace the ancient Tea-Horse Road by beginning where it all started – with Xishuangbanna in southern Yunnan. Next comes the town of Pu'er, which was the collecting point for the tea. The other prominent staging posts on the route were Weishan, Dali, Shaxi

(a Unesco World Heritage site), Lijiang (a Unesco World Heritage Site), and finally Gyalthang (modern-day Shangri-La), which is one of the last stops in China before the Tibet Autonomous Region and is nearly 10,000 feet higher than Xishuangbanna. Borderlands are especially fascinating. They are literally places on the edge, far from the main cities, and with secret parts and possibilities for exploration. Experience a rainbow of cultures on the Tea Horse Road, as you travel through towns that are home to ethnic minority nationalities who were integral to the tea-horse trade. Interacting with them will be the highlight of your journey.

By the mid-18th century the network of trails was carrying, aside from tea, a dizzying array of goods such as silks, wool, animal hides, fur, gold, silver, salt and much more.

The Tea Horse Road continued, until the mid-20th century, when paved, motorised highways and modern railways replaced caravan travel, making the transport of tea and other goods faster and easier.

Today, although no longer used as a trade route, this ancient road, plied for 13 centuries by horse caravans, continues to be a treasure trove of outstanding natural beauty and incredible cultural diversity.

Explore this fascinating history of exchange and prosperity against the magnificent background of the region's landscape that brought this route so close to heaven. For vestiges of the trail reveal grand vistas—and a surprising new exchange.

FOR YOUR INTEREST:

TIBETAN BUTTER TEA

Butter tea, known as Po cha, is prepared from churning tea, salt and yak butter. The tea used is a particularly potent, smoky type of brick tea from Pemagul, Tibet. Butter tea is drunk in quantities and at a frequency that makes it a Tibetan obsession!

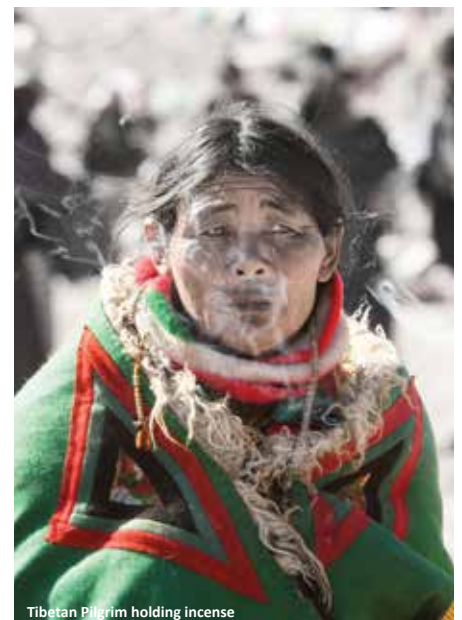
Po cha is considered a nutritious drink because of its warming quality and energy-giving high calorie count. It is also said to aid digestion, keep the mind focused, and promote a healthy cardiovascular system. Although not for the faint of heart, Tibet's Po cha might be just what you need for your next expedition!

This ancient road, plied for 13 centuries by horse caravans, continues to be a treasure trove of natural beauty and cultural diversity...

TIBETAN INCENSE

Handcrafted Tibetan incense is integral to Tibetan culture, medicine, and Buddhist practice. Traditional Tibetan medicine draws on Ayurvedic practice and Buddhism from India, making use of solely natural materials such as herbs and minerals that are carefully sourced from the region's mountains. An important way of delivering these naturally healing substances is in the form of aromatic incense; and the Tibetan style is famed for its complex formulae that are handed down in a 'lineage', often originating in monasteries and Buddhist colleges.

Apart from its therapeutic properties, Tibetan incense is regarded as a source of good energy and positive forces, a protection against evil spirits. It is also said to give clear vision and remove tiredness. 1



Tibetan Pilgrim holding incense





PRODUCT



VISIT NEPAL 2020

With a target to bring in 20 million tourists by 2020, the Ministry of Culture, Tourism, and Civil Aviation, Government of Nepal launched a national campaign 'Visit Nepal 2020' on May 29, 2018. The official logo of Visit Nepal 2020 was also unveiled by the Tourism Ministry.



We travel for romance, we travel for architecture, and we travel to be lost.

– Ray Bradbury

The objective is to promote 'Destination Nepal' amongst international travellers. Importantly, the campaign seeks to engage more locals in the field of tourism and improve livelihoods. The introduction of new tourism products and tourism activities will help achieve this.

The new tourism products will be divided into five major groups – Culture, People, and Heritage; Cities and Leisure; Outdoor and Adventure; Religion and Pilgrimage; and Nature and wildlife.

One district in each region and an ecological belt will be selected as the tourism hub of that region. Each of these travel destinations will be ranked on the basis of its popularity, cultural and traditional significance, natural beauty, archaeological importance, and hospitality. Apart from this, homestays and community-based tourism products will also be promoted.

The Nepal Tourism Board is leaving no stone unturned to improve the country's infrastructure to ensure not only that visitors will have the best possible experience during their stay here but also to bring in visitors throughout the year! Improving air connectivity by building two new international airports – the Gautam



Trekking trails; Image courtesy: NTB



Bardia National Park

Buddha Airport in Bhairahwa and Pokhara International Airport in Pokhara – is a major goal and work is going on in full swing to complete these two airports at the earliest. The existing Tribhuvan International Airport as well as airports in the mountainous areas are also being upgraded.

The services of Nepal's national airlines will be strengthened with the addition of more aircraft to its existing fleet. Overland transportation network linking Nepal, India, Bhutan, Bangladesh, and China is set to drastically improve, increasing land access for visitors who want to enter the country overland.



Kathmandu's Durbar Square, Nepal

WHY SHOULD YOU VISIT NEPAL?

A landlocked country nestled between India in the south and China in the north, Nepal stands tallest with its Himalayan mountainous terrain. Other than the tallest mountain in the world, Mt Everest (known locally as Sagarmatha), Nepal is home to eight of the world's highest mountains, making it one of the 'must-go' destinations for nature lovers. Trekkers from around the world can enjoy over 150 trekking routes, the experience of which is only enhanced by the warm hospitality of the local people around these routes, the most ethnic and organic varieties of food, breathtaking natural beauty, vibrant lifestyle, and great cultural diversity. And the reasons why Nepal was





Kumari: Image courtesy: NTB



Meet the people; Image courtesy: NTB

The Terai is an expanse of forest and grasslands that preserve some of the densest and most diverse wildlife habitat in the subcontinent...

for, the country's national parks will surprise and stun

you as you delve into tropical jungles and lose yourself in a land of treetop canopies, majestic tigers, magnificent elephants, rare rhinos, fluorescent butterflies, spectacular birdlife, and rivers with crocodiles and dolphins.

With over 100 ethnic groups, Nepal is a virtual melting pot of communities, tribes, languages, cultures, and faiths. Over 75 per cent of Nepal's population relies on agriculture, farming, animal husbandry, and fishing – hence, ensuring that the majority of the country's population lives in villages.

Visiting Nepal's villages especially, is like visiting an open air museum of history, art, and culture all rolled into one. A village tour is a fascinating way to discover traditional life in rural Nepal through the local people themselves. Both inspiring and informative, a village experience is a unique opportunity to understand the roots of the culture, customs, practices, indigenous skills, and lifestyle of the Nepali people. You will see how villagers make the most use of natural resources in a nature-friendly way; but most of all, you will learn how to find joy in life's simplest pleasures. 

PR ADHIKARI

P R Adhikari has worked in the travel and tourism industry for more than 25 years now, and is an integral part of the Vendor Management Team. This 'perfectionist by nature' loves working on data analysis and mastering new software. He can be contacted at pradhikari@lpti.in



Nepal is home to a network of trails also called the Great Himalaya Trails, an extensive trail system that covers Nepal from Humla and Darchula in the west to Kanchenjunga in the east. The diversity of trekking in Nepal cannot be found in any other region of the world. In fact, the lowest point in Nepal is 59 m above sea-level in the Terai region while the highest point is Everest, 8,848 m above sea-level, the two points are, in a straight line, only 200 kilometres apart.

Nepal's lowlands area in the south – called the Terai – is an expanse of forest and grasslands that preserve some of the densest and most diverse wildlife habitat in the subcontinent.

Giving you an experience of Nepal wholly different from the treks it is renowned



listed in the Top 10 Destinations to Travel in 2016 by the *National Geographic* and listed as the World's Best Value Destination in 2017 by Lonely Planet.



FESTIVAL



FESTIVAL



ARDHA KUMBHA MELA:

A COSMIC FAIR OF FAITH,
PILGRIMAGE, AND IMMORTALITY

JANUARY 15 - MARCH 04, 2019
ALLAHABAD, UTTAR PRADESH





It is wonderful, the power of a faith like that, that can make multitudes upon multitudes of the old and weak and the young and frail enter without hesitation or complaint upon such incredible journeys and endure the resultant miseries without repining. It is done in love, or it is done in fear; I do not know which it is. No matter what the impulse is, the act born of it is beyond imagination, marvellous to our kind of people, the cold whites.

– MARK TWAIN in

‘Following The Equator: A Journey Around The World’

THE LEGEND

The gods and the demons churned the ocean in their quest for amrit – the celestial nectar – which was believed to bestow immortality on those who drank it. What emerged first from the churned waters was poison, which Lord Siva drank, then the 12 gems, and finally, the long-awaited pitcher of ‘eternal’ elixir. A fight broke out between the gods and the demons for the possession of the precious pitcher (Kumbha). It was during the course of this tug of war that drops of the immortal nectar at four places – Ujjain in Madhya Pradesh, Haridwar in Uttarakhand, Trimbakeshwar near Nashik in Maharashtra, and Allahabad in Uttar Pradesh – sanctifying them forever.

Ujjain, Haridwar, Trimbakeshwar, and Allahabad thus became sites of great pilgrimage and the Kumbha Mela (the festival of the sacred pitcher) is celebrated by turn in each of

The Kumbha is held when Jupiter, the Sun, and the Moon are aligned in a distinct astrological position in the almanac...

these four places, over a course of twelve years. The four pilgrimage sites lie on

four sacred rivers:

Haridwar on the Ganges in Uttarakhand



Ujjain on the Shipra in Madhya Pradesh
Trimbakeshwar/Nashik on the Godavari in Maharashtra

Allahabad at the confluence of the Ganges, the Yamuna, and the mythical Saraswati in Uttar Pradesh.

Allahabad and Haridwar also host an Ardh (half) Kumbha every six years.

The Kumbha is held when Jupiter, the Sun, and the Moon are aligned in a distinct astrological position in the almanac – since all three celestial beings had a significant role to play in protecting the Kumbha from the demons during the fight. The celebrations occur at the exact moment that these positions are fully occupied, as it is considered to be the most auspicious time in Hinduism.

THE MELA

The Kumbha Mela is the largest public and religious gathering, and collective act of faith, anywhere on earth. It is a virtual mega township! The larger than life event deploys its own roads, pontoon bridges, and tents that serve as residences and venues for spiritual assemblies; and social infrastructure such as food outlets, hospitals, sanitation outlets, and vaccination clinics – like an actual city. The temporary settlement seamlessly serves the millions who throng here for 55 days, not to mention the additional millions who come for 24-hour cycles on the six main bathing dates. The Kumbha Mela has been recognised by UNESCO as an Intangible Cultural Heritage.

Allahabad is the site of the Ardh Kumbha Mela to be held in 2019.

The Mela draws millions of devout believers



Kumbha Mela

over the course of approximately 55 auspicious days to bathe at the city's fabled Triveni Sangam – the confluence of the three sacred Indian rivers the Ganga, the Yamuna, and the mythical Saraswati. It is believed that bathing in these holy waters cleanses the soul and accrues great spiritual merit.

The main bathing days are known as Shahi Snans, or Royal Bathing Days:

- January 15- Makar Sankranti (first Shahi Snan)
- January 21- Paush Purnima
- January 31- Magh Ekadashi
- February 04- Mauni Amavasya (second Shahi Snan)
- February 10- Vasant Panchami (third Shahi Snan)
- February 12- Rath Saptami
- February 19- Magh Purnima
- March 04- Maha Sivaratri

Sadhus (ascetics), pilgrims, and seekers of spirituality from all walks of life and from all over the country assemble at the Kumbha and take up residence here, not to mention the scores of tourists who come here to be part of this unique and spectacular experience. But it is really the akharas (homes/sects of sadhus) – essentially specific groups of religious warriors, also famous for their inter-sect rivalries – who dominate the festival.

The most visible sect at the Kumbha, however, are the Naga Babas or sadhus. Synonymous with the Kumbha, the naked sadhus cover their bodies only with ash, and wear their hair in dreadlocks.

The devout (entire families even) come and stay on the riverbanks for a month, leading a highly spartan and spiritually disciplined life. They bathe thrice, perform day-long pujas (act of worship), and eat only once a day. The atmosphere is deeply moving as and the fragrance of incense and flowers engulfs you. Langars or community meals are organised to serve Prasad (blessed food offerings).

THE EXPERIENCE

Sadhus perform seemingly impossible tasks of endurance – those who have stood on one leg for decades; those who can stay under water for hours; who can read your mind; who stay buried in the sand upside down; who meditate whilst standing on their heads and sleep in an upright position by taking the support of a pole or wall; and yet others who



Pontoon bridge

are bound by the vow of maintaining eternal silence!

Ceaseless echoes of chanting and exultant shouts rend the air. Religious pictures, garlands of marigolds, heaps of dazzling red vermilion, rudraksha beads, saffron threads, amulets, sandalwood, incense, oil lamps, and all sorts of other wonderful bits and pieces engulf the senses.

Meet people from all over the world. Make new friends. Take a dip in holy waters. And eat! Because only in spiritual India can the best tasting food be experienced. Take photographs. And make memories.

The Kumbha is about age-old rituals. But above all it is about unwavering faith in the face of all odds, the instant sense of connection, and a feeling of human solidarity. And ultimately about shared experiences in a splendid natural setting.

LAJPAT KUMAR

In the tourism industry for nearly three decades now, Lajpat is the cluster head of Le Passage – with the Scandinavia, Poland, Spain, Greece, and Italy markets, and is responsible for their Business Development. Lajpat loves travel, is a voracious reader, a movie enthusiast, a connoisseur-collector of music, and a foodie! He can be contacted at lajpat@lpti.in



Astounding, captivating, and incredibly humbling...the Kumbha has been uniting people for centuries, and will continue doing so for years to come. It takes its place amongst the greatest and most extraordinary journeys in the world.

Be there.



Naga Sadhus



The Journey of a lifetime, every time

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Momo



CUISINE



FLAVOURS OF COMFORT,
CELEBRATION, AND CEREMONY:

THE FOOD OF TIBET

When we come across 'Momo' counters in Delhi, do we think of Tibetan Cuisine? I am really not sure.

Usually, the people manning the counters are mostly either from Nepal or from India's North-east. Also, the ingredients have evolved so much to suit urban tastes that if we were to present the authentic momo, I am afraid customers may not even like it!

Anyway, that's the story of Tibetan cuisine. Even the stories inside Tibet are no different. With the huge influx of Chinese migrants, Tibetans have become a minority in their own land, and so has Tibetan cuisine.



You don't have to cook fancy or complicated masterpieces - just good food from fresh ingredients.



– Julia Child

TIBETAN CUISINE: A SHORT HISTORY

Historically, Tibet has had a close relationship with its neighbouring countries such as Mongolia, China, Nepal, and India; and along with cultural influences, there is bound to be some influence on the country's cuisine. However, because of Tibet's unique geographical location, extreme weather, and treacherous terrain, the staple food of Tibetans has remained almost unaltered for several centuries, which is true even now.

Taking weather and irrigation suitably into account, it was almost impossible to grow anything in Tibet, especially in areas where the lifestyle is nomadic in nature. It was only highland barley that emerged as the superstar among all the ingredients that were available indigenously or from neighbouring countries. I believe barley is also a binding force among the three provinces of Tibet even though the dialects are sometimes difficult to understand when people converse.

The remarkable yak and dri (female) are also integral to the evolution of Tibetan cuisine. Again, due to extreme weather conditions, Tibetans are heavy meat eaters and consumers of dairy products. Both the yak and dri play important roles; and it is the latter whose dairy products keep the women of the house busy from dawn to dusk. There is no such thing as 'Yak Butter', and you know now why! Men usually look after grazing and some hunting when required. Deeply Buddhist, Tibetans don't kill animals either for sport or in excess of what they need; proper rituals and prayers are always observed before doing so.

TSAMPA-EATERS

Barley's importance is huge in Tibet. It is not only easy to grow but also widely accepted too. Highland barley is unique and exclusive to Tibet. Scientific research findings also explain the same. Over the centuries, barley has not only become the staple food, but found a significant place in the religion as well as the culture of Tibet. Barley and barley flours are used extensively on occasions such as the Tibetan New Year 'Losar', Buddhist rituals, and even funeral ceremonies.

The highland barley grains are roasted and then grinding takes place under natural flowing stream mills. The whole process involves a considerable amount of community work and looks like some sort of festivity in the neighbourhood.

As my late mother used to say, for a nomadic family there isn't a specific time for meals, hence, you can have Tsampa anytime and anywhere. The most common way of eating Tsampa is in 'Pa' – usually made by mixing it with tea, butter, sugar, and dried cheese. The most common way is then to put it straight into your mouth by squeezing it into smaller pieces with your hand.

THUPTEN TSEWANG

Thupten Tsewang is a Tibetan born in India. He has worked at the Norbulingka Institute of Preserving Tibetan Arts & Culture and was one of the leading project managers of the Kalachakra Ceremony (Kumbh Mela for Vajrayana Buddhists) by HH The Dalai Lama in 2006. He was also Director, Foundation for Universal Responsibility of HH The Dalai Lama. Presently, he works with Arun Kapur, a renowned educationist, helping with his various endeavours from pre-schools and schools to NGOs. He can be contacted at thuptentsewang@gmail.com



Tibetan women cooking Tsampa

HEAVY TEA-DRINKERS

Another typical habit of many Tibetans is drinking Tibetan Tea or Bodcha. In popular culture, tea is prepared as either salted butter tea or black tea. Tibetans are happy to drink at least a few dozen cups from morning till late night!

For making salted butter tea, a special churner called Dongmo (a cylindrical length of wood about three to four feet in height) is used – this is to mix hot water, milk, butter, and salt. Each family HAS to have one of these ‘appliances’. My mother would keep her collection of Dongmos in super condition by attending to them every day. However, surprisingly, by the time I was an adult, her habit of drinking had changed to sweet tea, but with a pinch of butter on the rim of the cup. Perhaps that’s the perfect example of living in India with your roots in Tibet.

FESTIVITY AND OCCASIONS

There are certain occasions where certain kinds of foods are more dominant and popular. One such food item is Khabsay. You could call it a Tibetan-style deep-fried snack made of wheat flour. There are various kinds of **Khabsay** in varied sizes and shapes among which **Bungu Amchok** (Donkey-Ear) is especially made during the Tibetan New Year, mainly for decoration purpose for few days and later of course enjoyed by all the family members with Bodcha. One of the interesting articles on Khabsay is written by our fellow Tibetan Jamyang Norbu la (<https://www.jamyangnorbu.com/blog/2010/01/30/dipping-a-donkey-ear-in-butter-tea/>)

Over the centuries, barley has not only become the staple food, but found a significant place in the religion as well as the culture of Tibet...

Dresil, a lightly sweet rice with butter, sugar, and

raisins, droma (a small, slightly sweet tuber) served on special occasions such as religious affairs and marriage ceremonies.

Bhartsa-Marku, is somewhat like a sweet Tibetan macaroni, again, made of wheat flour and cheese, served specially during the religious fasting practice of Nyungne.

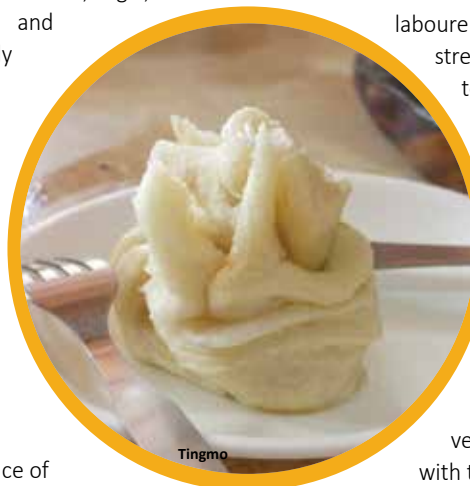
Guthuk, a variety of Tibetan soupy noodles, is eaten two days before the Tibetan New Year. The specialty is that it consists of nine items which predict the nature of those whosoever receives it in their bowl.

STORIES FROM EXILE

My earliest memories of childhood are from Manali in Himachal Pradesh, a state in India’s north, where I was born. My mother and father were young exiles from Tibet during the 1960s. During the course of several years of living in India, my mother would often fondly remember how the locals of Manali, especially of Palchaan, treated them so well. They would offer local produce along with the Tibetans who were mostly road

labourers and made the entire stretch of road from Manali to Leh. Tibetan dishes like

Thenthuk, Shabakleb, Momos, Tingmo, Dropa-Khatsa, Gyuma, Lowa Khatsa, Shabtra, Bodcha and Chang are some of the old dishes that they enjoyed even though living conditions were very tough. However, with time and experience, many Tibetans gradually started adjusting their eating habits.



Tingmo

POPULAR TIBETAN FOOD:

TSAMPA & BODCHA

As briefly mentioned earlier, Tsampa and Bodcha have become an important part of Tibetan Identity. In Tibet, this proclamation still stands I believe. But for Tibetans outside Tibet, they would love to associate with these two important preparations but savouring them in daily life is something that has dwindled drastically. Perhaps, because of the environment or influences from the immediate contacts in everyday life.

DAIRY PRODUCTS

Tibetans eat a lot of dairy – from fresh dri, goat or cow cheeses to yogurt to cheeses dried in rock-hard, bite-sized squares called Churra that you can suck on, sort of like a dairy jawbreaker.

BREADS

Tibetans eat plenty of wheat bread, not 'barley bread'. The most common breads are small round flat breads called **Baglep Korkun**, crusty yeasted round loaves called **Amdo Baglep**, steamed buns called **Tingmo**, and deep fried poofy breads called **Numtrak Baglep**.

MOMOS

Momos are the most popular food among the Tibetans. They can be made with both vegetable (though with limited varieties) and meats either as fried, steamed or served in soup. Though delicious in its own right, the momo requires skill and patience, for the process of making the momo can be quite challenging and tedious.



Chang

SHABAKLEB

The Shabakleb, a deep-fried bread stuffed with minced meat and vegetables, is as much beloved as the Momo. The labour-intensive process is immediately forgotten once this delicious bread is placed on the table, served with hot chilli sauce.

A BOWL OF THUKPA

Thukpa is basically a noodle soup of all types, famous for its warming effect especially in the cold climate of Tibet. Thukpa is usually made with meat and radish, and greens. The noodles are of many kinds, ranging from long spaghetti noodles to little conch-like shapes to the flat 'pull' noodles of thenthuk; and all of them are traditionally handmade. Nowadays however, both traditional methods and modern machines are used to prepare the noodles. Some of the varieties of Thukpa can be explained below but its aroma and taste are hard to describe.

- **Dethuk:** includes yak or sheep soup stock along with rice, different types of Tibetan cheeses and droma
- **Gyathuk:** long spaghetti-type noodle soup
- **Guthuk:** a noodle soup in Tibetan cuisine that is eaten two days before Losar
- **Thenthuk:** hand pulled noodle soup
- **Bhagthuk:** a common Tibetan cuisine noodle soup that includes small handmade conch-shaped noodles
- **Tsamthuk:** prepared with yak or sheep soup stock and tsampa as well as a variety of Tibetan cheeses



Shabakleb

MEAT

Contrary to popular belief, Tibetans are not usually vegetarian, and are in fact heavy meat eaters, eating primarily yak and goat. The first-generation Tibetans in India during the 1960-70s had hard times as they had to change this habit. In the cold climatic region of Tibet, meat has played an important role in the people's survival. It is difficult to grow vegetables on the Tibetan plateau, so Tibetan diets (at least in Central Tibet) have traditionally focused on barley, dairy products, and meat, when the household could afford it.

- **Yak Jerky:** A big favourite is yak jerky, and it is popular to serve chunks of meat at the table which we cut pieces of with knives and dip in hot sauce, which Tibetans love to put on just about anything
- **Shamdre:** Meat with potatoes, rice, and crystal noodles
- **Shabtra:** A simple stir-fried meat dish
- **Dropa Khatsa:** A spicy stir-fried tripe dish
- **Gyuma:** Sausage filled with blood and minced meat
- **Lowa Khatsa:** Made of pieces of fried animal lung and spices

CHANG: TIBETAN BEER

Chang is the traditional and mostly homemade alcohol in Tibet. Highland barley, millet, and rice grains are the major ingredients for Chang. As a traditional alcohol, it is the most popular drink during Tibetan festivals and on other special occasions, such as wedding ceremonies, religious ceremonies etc. However, Chang can also be made with rice, which is mostly the case with Tibetans living outside Tibet. In Tibet's social structure, Chang is often given to guests to welcome them. Chang has a great cultural significance and is often used as a tool to even settle disputes.

Here is a classic Tibetan recipe that you will enjoy:

THENTHUK OR 'PUL' NOODLE SOUP

SOUP:

- 1 kg Meat with Bone
- Ginger, Onion, Spring Onion
- ¼ teaspoon Erma (Szechuan pepper),
¼ teaspoon whole Pepper and Salt

DOUGH:

- 3 cups of Wheat Flour
- 1 Egg
- 1 ½ – 2 cups of Water

THENTHUK:

- Vegetable Oil
- ½ Onion – chopped
- 3 cloves of finely chopped Garlic
- ½ kg Meat, sliced into thin bite size pieces
- 300 gm of Radish, sliced into thin bit size pieces
- Spring Onion, for garnish
- Salt and Soya Sauce

SOUP BASE:

Put all the ingredients in a large pot, fill it with water half way through and bring it to a boil. Once it boils, bring the flame down and let it simmer for 45 minutes or so. Occasionally, you can skim off the scum that builds over the soup liquid. Add just a little salt to flavour the meat but not too much as you're going to use the soup later and it will get salty then.

DOUGH:

Put the flour in a large bowl, make a well in the centre. Add one egg and slowly add the water and knead the dough until it is firm but supple. Now, flatten the dough and slice it into strips about one inch wide. Add a little oil, and let it sit covered on a plate. This is your thenthuk dough ready to be pulled. (You can bypass the egg, but the egg addition makes the noodle a little firmer – it absorbs less liquid and keeps its firm).


THENTHUK:

The first step is to make the radish. In a pan, add a little oil and fry the radish on a medium flame by itself until it becomes nice and golden. Once browned, leave it aside – it will be added to the soup at a later stage.

In a big pot, add the oil, onion, and garlic, and let the onion brown. Add the meat, a dash of black pepper, salt to taste and as it browns, a dash of soya sauce to flavour the meat. Once the meat is nicely browned, add your strained soup stock and bring it to a boil, letting the meat cook nicely.

Finally, add the browned radish and now you are ready to throw your thenthuk. Basically, take one of the strips of oiled dough, flatten it out with your fingers and gently pull it till it is nice and flat like a long ribbon. Now, starting with one end, break off square thumb size piece from the end and throw it directly into the soup. Keep repeating – the trick is not to get the steam on your hands, so, stay a little clear of the soup pot and throw the dough into the soup. If this is too hard, you can pull off longer strips and add them to the soup. After adding all the dough, cover, bring to a boil, and turn off the heat. Let stand for two minutes and your soup is ready to serve. Garnish with chopped spring onion.

TO SERVE:

First serve the boiled meat accompanied by some nice spicy hot sauce. Next serve the bowls of thenthuk along with a side vegetable or two. 





TOP 5

GREAT RIVERS
RISING IN TIBET

Rivers gushing through deep canyons at the edges of the Tibetan plateau hold the highest hydropower potential in the world. The headwaters of seven major rivers are in Tibet: They flow into the world's largest deltas and spread in an arc across Asia. Tibet represents the largest body of ice and permafrost outside the Arctic and Antarctic regions. The Tibetan Plateau is home to the Himalayas, the world's tallest mountain range. Melt water from Tibet's glaciers and snowfall, and the rivers arising in Tibet provide 40% of the earth's population with fresh water.

Rivers support entire ecosystems. They carry tons of nutrient-rich silt downstream, a cocktail of elements needed for growing plants: nitrogen, phosphorus, potassium, magnesium and calcium. Silt is essential for agriculture and for bolstering the deltas against rising sea levels.

Scientists say the Himalayas also influence weather patterns, which help to predict rainfall and flood cycles. Two of the continent's wildest rivers have their sources in Tibet: the Salween and the Brahmaputra. Presenting some of Tibet's most important rivers.

SALWEEN (OR NU)

Around **2,815 kilometres long**, the River Salween originates from the River Nagqu in the Tanggula Mountains of Tibet. It flows from the **Tibetan Plateau** adjacent to the Mekong and the Yangtze, in the 'Three Parallel Rivers' **UNESCO World Heritage area**, at the epicentre of biodiversity in China; from there through Myanmar and Thailand and finally into the Andaman Sea in Southeast Asia.

The Salween river basin is the **second largest river** basin in Southeast Asia. Swift, powerful, and undammed, it is one of the longest and last free-flowing international rivers in Asia. The **Salween is the lifeline** of over six million people who live in the Salween watershed and depend on the river for their livelihood.

The Salween delta and associated wetlands support populations of the unique **Fishing Cat**, the Asian Small-clawed Otter and the Siamese Crocodile. It has the **world's greatest diversity** of turtles including the Giant Asian Pond Terrapin and Bigheaded Turtle. Highly endangered **wildlife species** such as the Golden Eye Monkey, Small Panda, Wild Donkey of Dulong and Wild Ox still flourish in this basin. The Salween is also known as the **'Grand Canyon of the East'** because of the spectacular scenery it offers along its course.

MEKONG (OR LANCANG)

From China to Vietnam, the **River Mekong is the lifeline** of Southeast Asia and offers glimpses into the regions **ancient history and diverse cultures**. The river is a major trade route between China and Southeast Asia. About **60 million people depend** on the Lancang River for their livelihood. The Mekong is truly a unifier as it is home to ethnic groups from six different countries – there are as many as 100 ethnic groups living along the lower basin alone.

At 4,350 km, it is the **12th longest river** in the world and the seventh longest in Asia, and flows through six countries: China, Myanmar, Thailand, Laos, Cambodia, and Vietnam. The River's head waters originate on the Tibetan Plateau and it flows down to the mountainous area through China's Yunnan Province in the Hengduan Mountains. As home to thousands fish, plant, bird, reptile, and mammal species, the Mekong is one of the most biologically diverse areas in the world.



YARLUNG TSANGPO

Explorers call Tibet's Yarlung Tsangpo the "Everest of Rivers" because it is extremely dangerous, and nearly impossible to navigate its entire length. The Yarlung Tsangpo has the highest average elevation—4,000 metres (13,000 feet)—of any major river in the world. It is also the longest river in Tibet, stretching for about 2,900 km and running through to eastern Tibet.

With headwaters originating at Angsi Glacier in western Tibet, southeast of Mount Kailash and Lake Manasarovar, it later forms the South Tibet Valley and Yarlung Tsangpo Grand Canyon before passing into the state of Arunachal Pradesh, India. Downstream from Arunachal Pradesh, the river becomes phenomenally wider and is called the Siang. After reaching Assam, the river is known as the Brahmaputra.

The Brahmaputra River Grand Canyon or Yarlung Tsangpo Grand Canyon is defined by superlatives. Carved into granitic bedrock, it falls over 5,300 metres (17,000 feet) from top to bottom in some places, making it the deepest canyon in the world – thrice as deep as the Grand Canyon. It is also one of the world's longest canyons, stretching over 500 kilometres (300 miles).



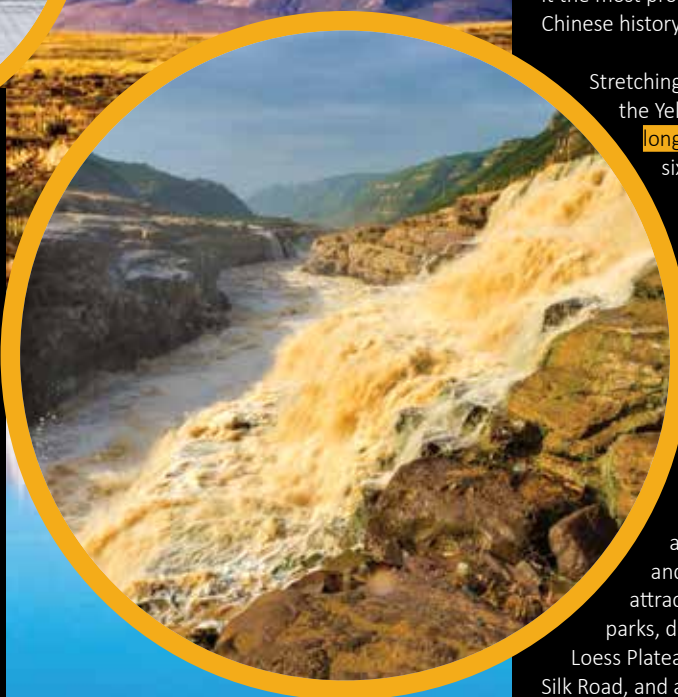
INDUS

One of the longest rivers in Asia (3610 km), the River Indus originates in the vicinity of Mount Kailash and the Mansarovar Lake in the Tibetan plateau and runs its course through China, India, and Pakistan (it is the longest river and national river of Pakistan) before merging with the Arabian Sea. Beginning in a mountain spring and fed with glaciers and rivers in the Himalayas, the River supports ecosystems of temperate forests, plains, and arid countryside.

The major cities – Harappa and Mohenjo-daro – of the Indus Valley Civilisation, one of three early cradles of civilisations of the Old World, grew and flourished along the Indus. The Indus region is home to diverse ethnic groups, religions, cultures, languages creating a spectacular border heritage of society and traditions dating back thousands of years.

The River has been the backbone of water, food production, agriculture, and the economy for Pakistan, and Punjab, India.

The Indus Valley trek in Ladakh is an exhilarating experience revealing snow-capped mountains on one side and on the other, the River Indus in all its glory.



YELLOW RIVER

The Yellow River (or Ma Chu in Tibet) originates in the Qinghai Province in the Tibetan Plateau and flows through into China. Called the 'Cradle of Chinese Civilisation' and also the "mother river of China", the Yellow River's basin was the centre of Chinese politics, economy, and culture for over 2,000 years, making it the most prosperous region in early Chinese history.

Stretching to a length of 5,464 km, the Yellow River is the second longest river in Asia and the sixth longest river system in the world. The name 'Yellow River' comes from the huge amounts of 'yellow' loess sediment it carries when flowing through the Loess Plateau – it is the world's muddiest major river.

The Yellow River is the site of numerous historic and ancient attractions, and stunning scenery. Top attractions include forest parks, deserts, grasslands, the Loess Plateau, ancient capitals, the Silk Road, and a "chocolate" waterfall. The Hukou Waterfall is the classic Yellow River attraction.



CONTINUING THE JOURNEY

In the time between the two wars, a British colonial officer said that with the invention of the airplane the world has no secrets left. However, he said, there is one last mystery. There is a large country on the Roof of the World, where strange things happen. There are monks who have the ability to separate mind from body, shamans and oracles who make government decisions, and a God-King who lives in a skyscraper-like palace in the Forbidden City of Lhasa.

– Heinrich Harrer, *Seven Years in Tibet*

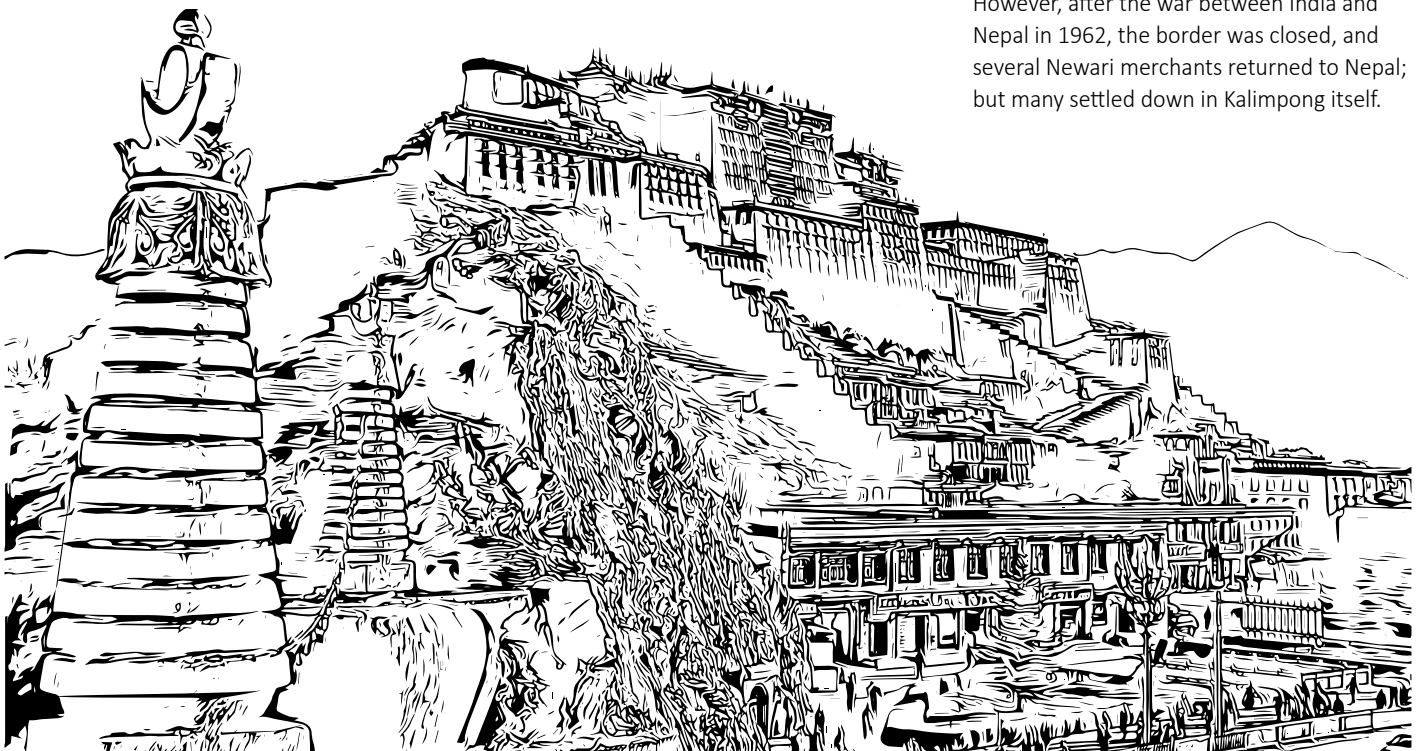
Around 624 CE the Great King of Tibet, Songtsen Gampo, married the Nepali Princess Bhrikuti. She brought many sacred images and highly skilled craftsman with her to Tibet, several of whom also built sections of the Potala Palace many years later.

In 1245 CE the famous Nepali artisan Arniko traveled to Tibet to build the Golden Stupa, and initiated a trans-Himalayan artistic culture. Arniko laid the foundation of cross cultural exchanges between Nepal and China.

The main passage into Tibet was an ancient trading route through Kyirong or Kuti (on the Nepal-Tibet border), until 1930, when, other easier and closer routes were found from Kathmandu to Lhasa via the Indian towns of Kalimpong or Gangtok (Sikkim). As these routes began to be used more and more, trade expanded as far as the Calcutta (now Kolkata) sea port. Newari merchants from the Kathmandu Valley would carry finished products made of bronze and silver, machinery, and food staples (rice), undertaking a journey which would take several weeks, or even months.

Later, Newari traders took, along with them, Nepalese artisans famous for their skilled craftsmanship, to Tibet. The craftsmen built monasteries, pagodas, and temples that today stand testament to their great contribution to Tibet's wealth of art and architecture. You can see their work in famous structures such as the Jokhang Temple in Lhasa, Tashilumphu in Shigatse, part of Samye Monastery, and the Kumbum Temple in Gyantse. Tibetan artists learned painting techniques and other forms of craftsmanship from Nepalese artists.

However, after the war between India and Nepal in 1962, the border was closed, and several Newari merchants returned to Nepal; but many settled down in Kalimpong itself.





In early 1950, my father, who belonged to a Newari family of priests, rebelled against family tradition and joined a group of Newari merchants travelling to Lhasa via Kalimpong. In Kalimpong, he learned to repair watches, a skill he quickly mastered before venturing to Lhasa. At this time, watches in Tibet were considered a symbol of prestige for men – especially amongst members of the Royal family and, ministers – who wore the most expensive watches.

During his time in Lhasa, my father fell in love with a Tibetan girl, my mother, but because of stark differences in culture and society it was hard for them to settle down. They decided to elope to the border town of Kalimpong. My father left earlier to make arrangements in Kalimpong for their new life. I remember my father telling me how scary and arduous the journey was – he had to trek for several days, ride on horses through high passes, walk through much snow, and cross ice cold rivers; and even encountered bandits!

It was a totally life-changing experience, especially for my mother, who was from a vastly different environment climatically, culturally, and socially. But their great love for each other overcame any difficulties.

Although we later moved to Nepal, I never had the chance to meet any of my grandparents in either Lhasa or Kathmandu; and nor did my mother ever manage to reunite with her family back in Lhasa – she passed away in 2003, and my father in 2016.

In early 1990, I travelled to Mount Kailash leading a group of people. It was quite difficult travelling from the Kodari port of entry and to drive all the way to Kailash since there were neither proper roads nor accommodation. The guide too, was not well trained and experienced enough to handle the tour. I could understand the situation since tourism was still very nascent in Tibet.

A few years later, after the death of my mother, I decided to travel to Lhasa to meet members of her family for the first time.



BASANT BAJRACHARYA

With over two decades of experience in the travel industry, Basant has travelled extensively in Nepal and Tibet, also in part due to his mixed parentage (Tibetan and Newari). He describes himself as a visionary who believes in doing business with purpose. Basant is a Tibet travel expert and the MD of Basanta Adventure Treks & Expeditions. He can be contacted at md@basantaadventure.com



After meeting them and seeing the rich cultural heritage and natural beauty of my motherland, I decided to introduce Tibet to the world through the tourism; and to be a channel to connect Tibet with people around the world. Hence, Basanta Adventure was born, after the culmination of many travel experiences throughout the Tibetan plateau.

WHAT WE DO:

We bring travellers to Tibet to experience not only the hospitality and beauty of the country but also the life, culture, and spiritual/religious beliefs of Tibetans that are facing immense changes due to rapid modernisation.


Tibet is a high altitude destination: we therefore design and organise holidays only after going through the minutest details of our customers to ensure their safety and comfort.

WHO WE ARE:

We are an authentic travel company, and one of the most experienced, committed to preserving the unique beauty, culture, and traditions of the country,



all the while aiming to facilitate interaction between travellers and locals in a respectful and sustainable way.

We are one of the only local Tibet travel companies to be certified under ISO 9001:2015, proving our ability to consistently provide products and services that meet customer and regulatory requirements. We have received the Travelife Award for our commitment to sustainable tourism. 





HOTEL

SHANGRI-LA HOTEL, LHASA

Arrive at the luxury urban resort, the Shangri-La Hotel, Lhasa in the heart of the Himalayas. A copy of *Lost Horizon* by James Hilton welcomes you in your elegant and spacious room. This is the legendary story of Shangri-La, a paradise for travellers high in the mountains – and the inspiration for the hotel's brand.

On the cool patio of the Lodgers Lounge, overlooking the ancient city and the magnificent mountains that guard it, enjoy a cup of tea while reading the book. Afterwards, gradually adjust to Lhasa's altitude with a visit to the hotel's unique oxygen lounge and reflexology pavilion. Your first day in one of the world's highest cities begins at the nearby Historic Ensemble of the Potala Palace, a breathtaking UNESCO World Heritage Site and traditional residence of the Dalai Lamas. The hotel is conveniently located within walking distance to Potala Palace, Norbulingka Palace, and Jokhang Temple.

From Lhasa, you can travel by car to each of Tibet's magnificent holy lakes, which the concierge is delighted to arrange. Returning to the hotel for dinner, drop in at Shambala for a taste of local barley wine and authentic Tibetan-Yunnan tapas.

Your breakfast the following morning is prepared in the open kitchens at Altitude, which offers delicious international fare throughout the day. Serves international fare and also has an outdoor dining area.

In the evening, you'll enjoy a relaxing massage in a private treatment room at Chi, The Spa before retiring to the comfort of your room to enjoy spectacular views of the Potala Palace and surrounding Himalayas. Shu Garden, the Hotel's Sichuan Cuisine Restaurant (with a seating capacity of 184 including 10 private dining rooms), serves authentic Sichuan cuisine and hot pot as well as Tibetan and Cantonese cuisine. All dining outlets draw from Tibetan culture and Lhasa's unique landscape, and provide seasonal outdoor seating.



The Shangri-La Hotel is the first hotel in Lhasa to offer comprehensive Health & Leisure facilities and services under one roof – Health Club, Gymnasium, Indoor Heated Swimming Pool, CHI, The Spa and Oxygen Lounge. The only oxygen lounge in Lhasa, it is open 24 hours to in house guests. The oxygen degree inside the lounge is the same as that at sea level.

The Grand Ballroom in the Hotel is the largest ballroom in the city. Its modern design draws from traditional Tibetan culture, with bold blue doors, a three-tone carpet and beautiful blue lotus paintings. The Function Room offers magnificent mountain vistas all round and a view of the Potala Palace.

The Hotel comprises 262 contemporary guestrooms and 17 expansive suites, as well as the exclusive Horizon Club Lounge. Rooms are spacious with a minimum size of 43 square metres and suites provide up to 86 square metres of luxurious space. Guests can enjoy stunning views of the Potala Palace or the breathtaking mountains.

FOUR POINTS BY SHERATON, LHASA

- Secretarial Service
- Copy/Printing Service
- Childcare Service
- Luggage Storage
- Non-Smoking Facilities
- Air Conditioned Facilities
- Safe Deposit Boxes
- Laundry Service
- Medical Services Available
- 24-Hour Concierge Service
- Disability Accessible Facilities
- In-Room Massage Treatments

RESTAURANTS:

Oxygen Lounge: Serves premium surf and turf dinner buffet featuring unlimited Australian steak, fresh crab, oysters, and sushi.

Lobby Lounge: Serves Southeast Asian-style food. This is an ideal spot for relaxing. Also offers a wide selection of coffees, freshly prepared pastries, cakes, and other gourmet specialties.

- Iron/Ironing Board
- Wake-up Service
- Nightly Turndown Service
- Humidifier
- In-Room Electronic Safe
- Trouser Press
- Escort to Guest Room at Check-In
- Knock Light (Hearing Impaired)
- Air-Conditioned Room
- Sprinklers in Room
- Fresh Flowers
- Turndown Service
- Individual Climate Control
- SPG® Kids Pass

FACILITIES:

- Currency Exchange
- Get Rewarded

Discover something new. Situated in eastern Lhasa city, the Four Points by Sheraton, Lhasa is on the Lhasa River and faces Jiangsu Avenue. Our great location is a 10-minute walk from the Jokhang Temple and Barkhorn Street and only an eight-minute drive from the Potala Palace. Get comfortable. Our 102 guest rooms, including three suites, are warm and inviting with a contemporary design. Enjoy the comforts of home such as a 32-inch flat screen LCD TV, High Speed Internet Access, the fabulous Four Points by Sheraton Four Comfort (SM) Bed, and more. Service with a smile. We're the only international brand hotel in Lhasa city and our friendly professional staff will make sure your stay is comfortable and unforgettable. Relax in our beautiful courtyard, designed in the Southeast Asian style, or enjoy a great meal in our restaurant.

Our rooms come with a courtyard view, while our Deluxe Suite features views of Potala Palace. Our Four Points Suite offers the extra space that you need, such as a large sitting area and kitchenette. Also, our 24-hour room service will ensure you have everything you need.

Humidifiers and oxygen facilities are provided to meet the needs of guests. The restaurant serves the choicest Western cuisine; and both non-alcoholic and alcoholic beverages.

SERVICES:

- Free Daily Newspaper (Local)
- Smoke Detectors in Room





HOTEL HIMALAYA, LHASA

One of the most reputed and well known hotels, Hotel Himalaya is back in business...revitalised and new after a complete revamp. Hotel Himalaya is located in the quiet area of Linkhor Road, within walking distance to Barkhor square, the local Tibetan market, Potala Palace, local restaurants, and banks. The Train Station is 15km away and the Airport is 60km away.

The hotel is equipped with every modern amenity. The increase in staff numbers, thanks to well trained staff from Nepal, is proving to be a great asset to the hotel's quality services. Hotel Himalaya is the only hotel in Lhasa which organises daily Tibetan historical and cultural shows at its Theatre.

All 157 rooms in the hotel, including Deluxe, Suite, and Junior Suites, are fitted with modern facilities and a heating system. There are 9 Suites, 4 Mini Suites, 12 Potala View Rooms, and 129 Deluxe rooms.

ROOM AMENITIES:

- Spacious Room
- Hair Dryer
- Air condition
- Television and Movie Channel
- Humidifier
- Complimentary 2 Bottle water daily
- Tea making machine herbal tea bag
- Locker
- 24 hours room service
- Wi-Fi
- House coat
- Slippers
- Spacious bathroom with 24 hours hot water



RESTAURANTS AND OTHER FACILITIES:

- 5 Banquet Halls
- 2 Tibetan style Banquet Halls
- Continental, Tibetan, and Chinese Restaurants
- Yeti Restaurant for Breakfast
- 3 Conference Halls
- Daily Cultural Show with Dinner

HOTEL SERVICES:

- 24 hours service
- English speaking staff
- Laundry service
- Money exchange service
- High speed internet service
- Locker service
- Storage service





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