

# Qīnghǎi 青海



Lying on the northeastern border of Tibet, Qīnghǎi is one of the great cartographic constructions of our time. For centuries the area was part of Amdo in the Tibetan world; these days it's separated from the Tibetan Autonomous Region by little more than the colours on a Chinese-made map.

A relatively unknown province, nicknamed 'China's Siberia' for its gulags and nuclear dumping grounds, Qīnghǎi may not immediately strike you as an ideal travel destination. Think again: this vast area is also home to dozens of Tibetan monasteries, epic grasslands, one of Tibet's holiest mountains (Amnye Machen) and the headwaters of three of Asia's greatest rivers – the Yellow (Huáng Hé), Yangzi (Cháng Jiāng) and Mekong (Láncāng Jiāng).

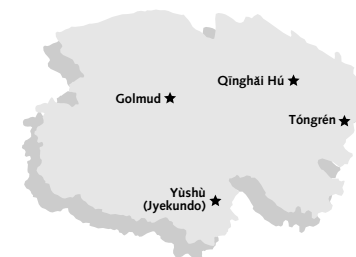
Add to this a mix of ethnic groups, including Tibetans, Goloks, Tu, Mongols, Salar and Hui, and a vibrant religious life. The current Dalai Lama, the 10th Panchen Lama and Tsongkhapa, founder of the Gelugpa sect of Tibetan Buddhism, were all born in present-day Qīnghǎi.

For the traveller, Qīnghǎi forms the launching pad for some of China's wildest journeys: the new train link to Lhasa; overland to Yùshù (Jyekundo) and on into the wilds of western Sichuan; through the back door to Gānsù and the Labrang Monastery; or west from Golmud, following the deserts of the southern Silk Road into Xīnjiāng.

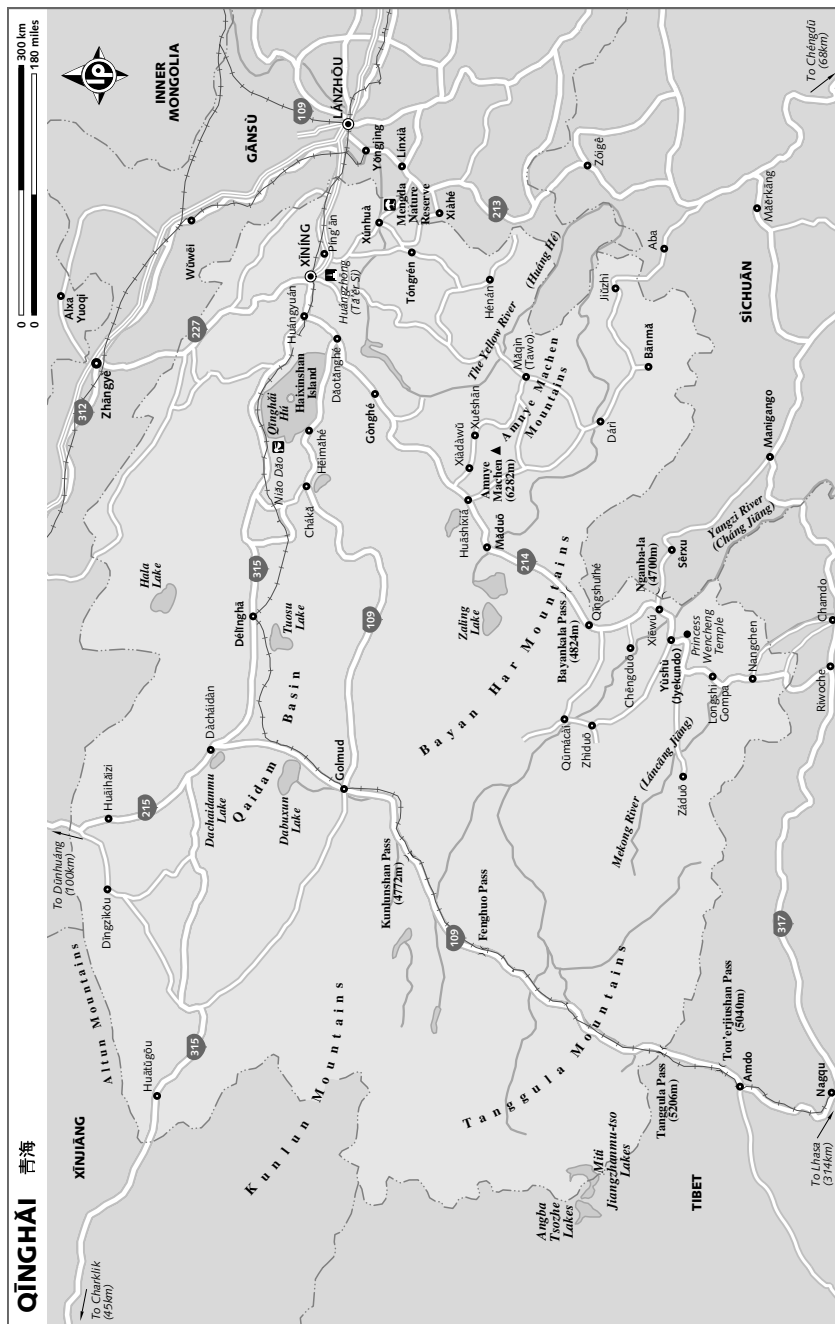
China's economic miracle has been slow to come to Qīnghǎi; it's the country's fourth-largest province but its third poorest. Travel can be a little rough here and few travellers make it further than Xīníng. Those visitors that do explore the region keep their secrets well; Qīnghǎi is one of the frontiers of adventure travel in China.

## HIGHLIGHTS

- Drop in on a local artist in **Tónggrén** (p905) and buy a *thangka* (Buddhist painting) direct from the source
- Take the train overland to Lhasa traversing the **Tibetan Plateau** (p924) via Golmud
- Visit Qīnghǎi's namesake, the bird-watcher's delight of **Qīnghǎi Hú** (p904)
- Make the overland journey across the grasslands to the Tibetan monastery town of **Yùshù (Jyekundo)** (p908) and on into western Sichuān, crossing from Amdo into Kham province



■ POPULATION: 5.3 MILLION



## Climate

Qinghai's climate is determined by the high altitude – wherever you go, it's likely to be cold and arid, though during the day the sun can get pretty intense. Summer (June to September) is the best time to visit.

The east and south are high, grassy plateaus, with elevations varying from 2500m to 5000m. Both the Tanggula Range along the border of Tibet and the Amnye Machen Mountains in the east have peaks at more than 6000m.

Northwestern Qinghai is a large basin consisting mainly of barren desert, salt marshes and saline lakes. The Kunlun Mountains along the border with Xinjiang have summits that top out at a dizzying 6860m.

## Language

Most of the population in Qinghai speaks a northwestern Chinese dialect similar to Gansuhua (part of the Lanyin Mandarin family). Tibetans speak the Amdo or Kham dialects of Tibetan.

## Getting There & Around

Most people train it into the province, either via nearby Lanzhou or along the controversial new line to/from Tibet (see p924). Distances are huge in Qinghai and you'll probably need a combination of overnight trains or sleeper buses to cover much ground. Out in the remote southeast corner, bus is the only option.

## XINING 西宁

☎ 0971 / pop 770,000

Xining is the only large city in Qinghai and is the capital of the province. Long established as a Han Chinese outpost, it's been a military garrison and trading centre since the 16th century.

Perched on the edge of the Tibetan plateau, the booming city is not the most aesthetic, but it's more manageable in size than its big brother Lanzhou (in Gansu). The food and lodging is good and it's a perfect springboard from which to dive into the surrounding sights.

## Information

### INTERNET ACCESS 网吧

**Tiántáng Niǎo** (per hr Y2-5; ☎ 24hr) Down the alley, just to the east of Da Shizi, with sofas and cold drinks.

**Xiǎdú Wǎngjīng** (Huzhu Lu; per hr Y2; 24hr)

## LAUNDRY

**Laundry** (Gǎnxidiàn; Huzhu Lu) An inexpensive place next door to the Post Hotel.

## MONEY

**Bank of China** (Zhōngguó Yínháng; ☎ 8:30am-5:30pm Mon-Fri, 9:30am-4:30pm Sat & Sun) main branch (Dongguan Dajie); smaller branch (Dong Dajie) The two banks change cash and travellers cheques.

## POST

**Post office** (yóujú; Da Shizi, cnr Xi Dajie & Nan Dajie; ☎ 8:30am-6pm)

## PUBLIC SECURITY BUREAU

**PSB** (Gōngānjú; 35 Bei Dajie; ☎ 8:30-11:30am, 2:30pm-5:30pm Mon-Fri) Extends visas in three days. Take bus 14 from Dongguan Dajie or 24 from Bei Dajie.

## TOURIST INFORMATION & TRAVEL AGENCIES

**China International Travel Service** (CITS; Zhōngguó Guójí Lǔxíngshè; ☎ 613 3844; 156 Huanghe Lu) Open weekends from May to October only.

**China Travel Service** (CTS; Zhōngguó Lǔxíngshè; ☎ 823 4935; 3rd fl, 124 Changjiang Lu)

**Qinghai Tibet Adventures** (Sānjiāngyuán Tǎnxiàn Lǔxíngshè; www.qcta.com; ☎ 824 5548; Rm 301, 13 Bei Dajie) Trekking and mountaineering.

**Wind Horse Adventure Tours** (Xīhǎi Gōngmín Chūrùjīng Fúwúzhōngxīn; www.windhorseadventuretours.com; ☎ 824 4629; Nan Dajie) Trekking and cultural excursions.

## Sights

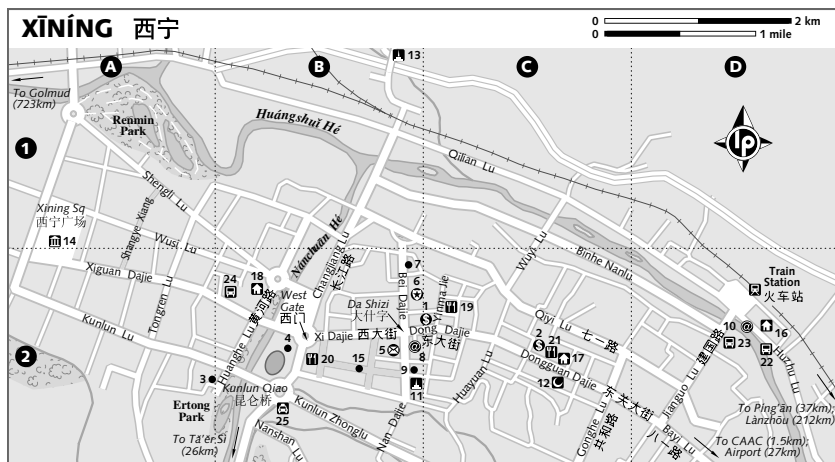
### QINGHAI PROVINCIAL MUSEUM

青海省博物馆

This good **museum** (Qinghai Shèng Bówùguǎn; 58 Xiguan Dajie; admission Y15; ☎ 9:30am-4pm Tue-Sun) has a Tibetan focus, with a real sand mandala and great festival masks. It also has a few Silk Road exhibits and some amazing Stone Age jade ritual implements. The entrance is on the west side. To get there, take bus 9, 16 or 104 from near the train station, or bus 25 from Dongguan Dajie.

### BĚISHĀN SÌ 北山寺

A 15-minute jaunt up the barren mountainside northwest of the city brings you to **Běishān Sì** (North Mountain Temple; admission Y5). The hike and views are pleasant, though the dramatic 1700-year-old cliff-face temples are mostly closed. Bus 107 runs near here from the train station.



INFORMATION		SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES		EATING	
Bank of China 中国银行	1 C2	Jintā Sì 金塔寺	11 B2	Daxin Jie Night Market	
Bank of China 中国银行	2 C2	Mosque 清真大寺	12 C2	大新街夜市	19 C2
CITS 中国国际旅行社	3 A2	North Mountain Temple		Mǎlínhàn 马林汉古城第一烤	20 B2
CTS 中国旅行社	4 B2	北山寺	13 B1	Xiǎoyuánmén Měishígōng	
Laundry		Qinghai Provincial Museum		小圆门美食宫	21 C2
干洗店	(see 16)	青海省博物馆	14 A1	Yínlóng Dàjiùdiàn 银龙大酒店	(see 18)
Post Office 邮局	5 B2	Shuijing Xiang Market		<b>TRANSPORT</b>	
PSB 公安局	6 B2	水井巷商场	15 B2	Buses to Airport	
Qinghai Tibet Adventures		<b>SLEEPING</b>		(Mínzhǔ Bīnguǎn)	22 D2
三源探险旅行社	7 B2	Post Hotel		Long-Distance Bus Station	
Tiāntáng Niǎo		邮政宾馆	16 D2	长途汽车站	23 D2
天堂鸟网吧	8 B2	Yáháo Huāyuán Bīnguǎn		Mini-buses to Huángzhōng & Tǎ'ěr Sì	
Wind Horse Adventure Tours		雅豪花园宾馆	17 C2	去湟中、塔尔寺的汽车	24 B2
西海公民出入境服务中心	9 B2	Yínlóng Dàjiùdiàn		Taxis to Tǎ'ěr Sì	
Xiādū Wǎngjǐng		银龙大酒店	18 B2	去塔尔寺的出租车	25 B2
夏都网景	10 D2				

**SHUIJING XIANG MARKET** 水井巷商场 Xining's largest market (Shuijing Xiàng Shāngchǎng) occupies several streets and is an enjoyable place to browse and watch the crowds watch you. There is a good supply of snacks at the west end if you need to stock up. It extends east from the West Gate (Xī Mén).

**OTHER SIGHTS**

The city's main mosque (Qingzhèn Dài; 30 Dongguan Dajie; admission Y10; ☎ 8am-noon, 2-5pm) is one of the largest in China's northwest, and worshippers still spill out into the surrounding streets during Friday lunch-time prayers. The architecture is more Běijīng than Baghdad. You can't enter the main building, but you can stroll around the grounds. It was built during the late 14th century and has since been restored.

Also worth a quick visit is the **Jintā Sì** (19 Hongjuesi Jie), a small but lovely Tibetan-style temple named after a long-destroyed golden *chörten* (Tibetan stupa).

**Sleeping**

**Post Hotel** (Yóuzhèng Bīnguǎn; ☎ 813 3133; 138 Huzhu Lu; 互助路138号; dm Y10-14, d without bathroom Y36-45, r with bathroom Y55-65) This long-time budget choice is still as reliable as ever. You'll need some training in the hot-water contraption in the rooms with showers.

**Yáháo Huāyuán Bīnguǎn** (☎ 814 8377; fax 817 1900; 150 Dongguan Dajie; 东关大街150号; tw Y160-180; ☎) Rooms here are a bit snug, but they're much nicer than any other midrange option and discounts of up to 40% make it a great deal. Take bus 1 four stops from the train station.

**Yínlóng Dàjiùdiàn** (☎ 616 6666; www.ylhotel.net; 36 Huanghe Lu; 黄河路36号; tw Y980; ☎ ☎ ☎) This

21-storey tower is surprisingly stylish, glamorous even, and easily the top place in town. Discounts of 30% are common.

**Eating**

**Mǎlínhàn** (Shuijing Xiang Market; dishes from Y5) If you're tired of the same old kebabs, Mr Ma and his family also skewer vegetables smothered in a special sauce. Take the western side of the market alley south from Xi Dajie for about 500m.

**Daxin Jie night market** (Daxin Jie; dishes from Y4) This is the best place for dinner. You can dine for pennies on grilled squid kebabs, fried potato slices and punnets of strawberries.

**Xiǎoyuánmén Měishígōng** (126 Dongguan Dajie; dishes Y18-24) This upmarket Muslim restaurant has a good reputation among locals. Look for the hanging red lanterns.

**Yínlóng Dàjiùdiàn** (☎ 616 6666; 36 Huanghe Lu; dishes Y68; ☎ 6-9pm) This place has a blowout buffet that offers excellent value. The spread includes sushi and seafood, plus free beer!

**Getting There & Away**

**AIR**

There are flights available from Xining to Běijīng (Y1450), Chéngdū (Y990), Guǎngzhōu (Y1650), Shànghǎi (Y1850), Gōlmud (Y840, twice weekly) and Xī'ān (Y650, thrice weekly). There is also a twice-weekly flight to Lhasa (Y1720); at the time of research you still had to go through the CITS (p901) in order to purchase your ticket, but this should change in the future.

The **Civil Aviation Administration of China** (CAAC; Zhōngguó Mínháng; ☎ 818 9056; 32 Bayi Xilu; ☎ 8.30am-6.30pm) has a booking office on the eastern edge of town. To get there, take the eastbound bus 25 to Bayi Lu, or bus 28 from the train station.

**BUSES FROM XĪNING**

Buses leaving from the long-distance bus station include the following:

Destination	Price	Duration	Frequency	Departs
Hěimǎhé	Y25.30	4hr	7 daily	7.30am-2pm
Lánzhōu	Y53	3hr	hourly	7.50am-6pm
Tóngguán	Y30	4hr	half-hourly	7.30am-5pm
Xúnhuà	Y26	5hr	half-hourly	7.20am-4.30pm
Yùshù	Y154	20hr	4 daily	12.30pm, 3.30pm, 4.30pm
Zhāngyè	Y69	9hr	3 daily	7.30am, 5.30pm, 6.30pm

**BUS**

The **long-distance bus station** (Jianguo Lu), near the train station, serves all destinations except Tǎ'ěr Sì. Foreigners are not allowed on the buses to Lhasa (Y355, 30 hours) but bus drivers will likely proposition you anyway.

For the overland route to Sèrshu in Sichuān, head first for Yùshù and continue on from there via Xiěwú.

**TRAIN**

Xining has two express trains to Lánzhōu (hard/soft seat Y33/50, 2¾ hours) leaving at 12.12pm and 7.23pm, plus many more long-distance trains. There are three evening sleeper trains to Gōlmud (hard/soft sleepers Y131/202, 16 hours).

For information on trains from Lánzhōu to Lhasa, see p924.

You can buy tickets at the train station or **city train ticket office** (☎ 8.30am-noon, 1.30pm-5.30pm; 2nd fl, Post Office, Da Shizi; commission Y5).

**Getting Around**

The airport is 27km east of the city. A shuttle bus (Y16) leave two hours before flights from the Mǐnzhǔ Bīnguǎn on Huzhu Lu.

Bus 1 (Y1) runs from the train station along Dongguan Dajie to Da Shizi and the West Gate. Taxi flagfall is Y6, which covers the first 3km.

**AROUND XĪNING**

**Tǎ'ěr Sì 塔尔寺**

One of the six great monasteries of the Yellow Hat sect of Tibetan Buddhism, **Tǎ'ěr Sì** (admission Y80; ☎ 8.30am-6pm), or Kumbum in Tibetan, is in the town of Huángzhōng, 26km south of Xining. It was built in 1577 on hallowed ground – the birthplace of Tsongkhapa, founder of the Yellow Hat sect.

While of enormous historic significance, Tǎ'èr Sì today seems to have been relegated to museum status by Běijīng. The artwork and architecture are redeeming, yet the atmosphere and scenery pale in comparison with other monasteries in Amdo. If the thought of being led around a Tibetan monastery by a Chinese tour guide dressed in fake Tibetan clothes makes you wince, then spend your time at Labrang Monastery instead (see p856).

Nine temples are open, the most important being the Grand Hall of Golden Tiles, where a 11m-high *chörten* marks the spot of Tsongkhapa's birth. The monastery is also famous for its sculptures of human figures, animals and landscapes carved out of yak butter.

Admission tickets are sold at the building diagonally opposite the row of stupas. Photography is prohibited inside the temples.

#### SLEEPING

**Kumbun Motel** (Chányuè Zhàn; 禅越栈; dm Y20, tw with bathroom Y160) If for some reason you want to spend the night, this motel is situated in the old monks' quarters.

#### GETTING THERE & AWAY

The best bet is to take one of the shared taxis (Y6 per seat) that queue up at the Kunlun Bridge traffic circle south of the West Gate (Xi Mén). Bus 3 runs here from the train station.

If you take a minibus (Y4) back to Xining, you may be dropped at the private **bus station** (26 Xiquan Dajie), from where buses 22 or 29 will take you into the centre of town.

#### Píng'ān

About 30km southeast of Píng'ān, in the sleepy village of Taktser (Hóngyá; 红崖) is the **birthplace of the Dalai Lama** (dìshíwǔ dàlái gùjū; 第十四达赖故居). The building, a former school, is (perhaps surprisingly) open to visitors and you can visit the room where his Holiness was born (marked by a golden *chörten*), as well as a restored chapel that has his former bed and throne. A side room displays some old family photos, including those of the Dalai Lama's parents, sister and brothers.

The Dalai Lama last visited here in 1955 en route to Beijing to meet with Chairman Mao. The previous (13th) Dalai Lama paused here en route to Labrang just long enough predict his own next reincarnation. Spot the building by its large wooden gate tied with *katags* (white ceremonial scarves).

Minibuses shuttle frequently from Xining to Píng'ān (40 minutes), from where you can hire a minivan for around Y80 for the half day. The route takes you through Sánhé and Shíhuìyáo villages, before the final 6km climb to Taktser village. Alternatively, minibuses run when full to Shíhuìyáo (石灰窑), from where it's a tough hour's walk.

On the way back, just 2km from Píng'ān, you could visit **Báimǎ Sì** (白马寺), a dramatic cliff-front temple that looks better the further you are from it.

#### QINGHAI HÚ 青海湖

☎ 0970

Qinghai Hú (Lake Kokonor) is a somewhat surreal-looking saline lake west of Xining. The huge lake (more like an inland sea) has often served as the symbolic midway point between Tibet and Mongolia. It was here in 1578 that the Mongolian leader Altan Khan conferred upon Sonam Gyatso (then head of the Gelugpa sect) the title of Dalai Lama, *dalai* being the Mongolian translation of *gyatso*, or ocean.

The main attraction is **Niǎo Dǎo** (鸟岛; Bird Island; admission Y58), located on the western side of the lake, and about 300km from Xining. It's a breeding ground for thousands of wild geese, gulls, cormorants, sandpipers, extremely rare black-necked cranes and other bird species. Perhaps the most interesting are the bar-headed geese. These hardy birds migrate over the Himalayas to spend winter on the Indian plains and have been spotted flying at altitudes of 10,000m. You will only see great numbers of birds during the breeding season between March and early June. Niǎo Dǎo is no longer an island, although it used to be before the lake receded and made it part of the mainland.

Be aware that tourism here is depleting the native fish population, which the birds depend upon for survival. Stating that you don't eat fish (*wǒ bù chī yú*; 我不吃鱼) well in advance of any meals is highly encouraged.

Qinghai Hú is also ground zero in China's struggle against avian flu. If there has been an outbreak recently, you may find the lake is off limits to visitors.

#### Tours

Between May and early October, tour buses run daily to Niǎo Dǎo (four hours). CTS in Xining (p901) charges Y150, transport only,

for a long day trip (8am to 5pm). Most day trips visit the closer, uninteresting Jiāngxīgōu harbour – if you want any amount of time at Niǎo Dǎo, you are better off with a two-day trip.

Tours generally include a brief stop at the twin pagodas of Sun Moon Pass (Riyuè Shānkǒu; admission Y25), where Princess Wencheng stopped in the year 641 en route to Tibet (p910).

#### Sleeping & Eating

**Niǎo Dǎo Bīnguǎn** (鸟岛宾馆; ☎ 865 2447; dm/tw Y20/160) If you're not content with a day trip, you can stay here overnight. It's north of Hēimǎhé on the west side of the lake, and has a restaurant on the premises.

#### Getting There & Away

Unfortunately there are no public buses to Niǎo Dǎo. The closest you can get is to the small settlement of Hēimǎhé, 50km away, from where a taxi will cost Y50. From Xining there are six departures to Hēimǎhé (Y33, four hours) between 7.45am and 3.30pm; the return schedule is similar.

#### TÓNGRÉN (REPKONG) 同仁

☎ 0973

Tónggrén (Repkong in Tibetan) is an amiable mid-sized monastery town of Tibetan monks and Hui shop owners, both of whom cater to the valley's many monasteries. For several centuries now, the villages outside town have been famous for producing some of the Tibetan world's best *thangkas* and painted statues, so much so that an entire school of Tibetan art is named after the town.

Visiting the monastery Wútún Sì (right) not only gives you a chance to meet the artists, but also to purchase a painting or two, fresh off the easel. You can't change money here, so have a little extra Renminbi on hand, in case something strikes your fancy.

The villages surrounding the monasteries are a mixture of Tibetans and Tu, distant cousins of the Mongols.

#### Sights

**RONGWU GONCHEN GOMPA** 隆务寺

Tónggrén's main **monastery** (Lóngwù Sì; admission Y18) is a huge and rambling maze of renovated chapels and monks' residences, dating from 1301. It's well worth a wander, especially in the morning, though what you actually get

to see depends on which chapels are open. The road leading to the monastery is lined with shops selling everything a Tibetan Buddhist could want, from monk's cloaks to yak butter.

#### WÚTÚN Sì 吾屯寺

Sengeshong village, 6km from Tónggrén, is the place to head if you're interested in Tibetan art. There are two monasteries, divided into an **Upper (Yangou) Monastery** (上寺; Shàng Sì; admission Y10), closest to town, and a **Lower (Mango) Monastery** (下寺; Xià Sì; admission Y10). The monks will show you around whatever chapels happen to be open and then take you to a showroom or workshop. These are no amateur artists – commissions for their work come in all the way from Lhasa, and prices aren't cheap. Consider that even a small *thangka* takes a minimum of one month to paint. Note that no-one speaks English.

The Lower Monastery is easily recognisable by its eight large *chörten* out front. The 100-year-old Jampa Lhakhang and the new chapels dedicated to Chenresig and Tsongkhapa are worth a look.

The Upper Monastery has the better art school. Worth visiting here is the old *dukhang* (assembly hall) and the new chapel dedicated to Maitreya (Shampa in Amdo dialect). The murals here are superb.

To get here, take a minivan (Y2 per seat) from Tónggrén. Visit in the mornings for the best chance of finding the chapels open.

#### GOMAR GOMPA 郭麻日寺

A pleasant hike across the valley from Wútún Sì is the mysterious 400-year-old **Gomar Gompa** (Guómǎn Sì; admission Y10), which resembles a medieval walled village. There are supposedly 130 monks in residence but the place always seems to be deserted. Next to the entrance is an enormous modern *chörten*.

From here you could walk back to Tónggrén in an hour along the west edge of the river, passing **Nyentok Gompa** (Niándōuhù Sì; 年都平寺) en route.

Further up the valley is **Gasar Gompa**, marked by its distinctive eight *chörtens*.

#### Festivals & Events

Besides the **Monlam Festival** (see Xiàhé, p857) at the beginning of the Tibetan New Year, Tónggrén is particularly famous for its five-day body-piercing **Lulol (Shaman) Festival**, beginning

## BUSES FROM TONGREN

Destination	Price	Duration	Frequency	Departs
Línxià	Y34	3hr	1 daily	8am
Xiàhé	Y21	3hr	1 daily	8am
Xíníng	Y30	4hr	hourly	7.20am-4pm
Xúnhuà	Y14	2½hr	5 daily	8am-3pm

on the 21st day of the sixth lunar month (July or August). Also called the 'shaman' festival, the event has its roots in the pre-Buddhist Bön religion and takes place in four different villages on different days.

## Sleeping &amp; Eating

**Sānxīn Bīnguǎn** (三鑫宾馆; ☎ 872 5776; 80 Zhongshan Lu; 中山路80号; dm Y15, s/d with bathroom Y60/70) An excellent-value place next to the market, with hot water available only in the en suite rooms.

**Huángnán Bīnguǎn** (黄南宾馆; ☎ 872 2293; 18 Zhongshan Lu; 中山路18号; dm Y15, tw Y70-288) This foreigner-friendly place has a wide range of rooms, the best of which are set back off the road. Rooms are dark but clean.

**Homeland of Rebkong Arts Restaurant** (Règòng Yírèngé; 热贡艺术人阁; Zhongshan Lu; dishes from Y5) A cosy Tibetan-style restaurant run by the Huángnán Bīnguǎn serving Chinese and some Tibetan dishes. There's an English menu.

## Getting There &amp; Away

The road to/from Xiàhé is particularly scenic, passing some dramatic red rock scenery and the impressive Gartse Gumpa, where local Tibetan herders board the bus to sell fresh yoghurt.

## MENGDA NATURE RESERVE

## 孟达天池

This pleasant reserve (Mèngdá Tiān Chí; admission Y25) is located in the mountains above the Yellow River, 190km southeast of Xíníng. The focus of the reserve is Heaven Lake (Tiān Chí), which is a sacred lake for both the local Salar Muslims and Tibetan Buddhists. The Salar have their origins in Samarkand and speak an isolated Turkic language, giving the nearby crossroad town of Jiēzi a Central Asian feel.

Mengda is a spectacular one-hour bus ride from Xúnhuà, and the roadside scenery is every bit as beautiful as the reserve itself. The road is cut into arid cliffs, following the coppery-green Yellow River as it snakes its way along below.

You need to hire a minivan (Y60) to get off the main road to the reserve car park, from where it's a stiff 40-minute hike up to the lake. You can walk around the lake in half an hour. You could take a minivan (from outside Xúnhuà bus station) bound for Dàhéjià (Y8) to the turn-off and then hitch or take a motorbike taxi the remaining 6km up to the car park.

From May to October it's possible to stay at the lakeshore **Báiyún Shānzhǔāng Bīnguǎn** (白云山庄宾馆; tw Y120-180) or you can stay in the nearby town of Xúnhuà (循化) at the **Jiāotōng Bīnguǎn** (交通宾馆; dm Y13-30, tw Y70-90), next door to the bus station.

From Xúnhuà there are six daily buses to Línxià (Y19, three hours); four daily buses to Tóngren (Y14, 2½ hours); and hourly buses to Xíníng (Y25, five hours).

## GOLMUD 格尔木

☎ 0979 / pop 200,000

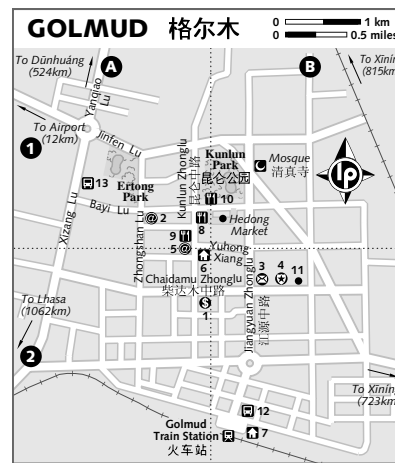
Unless you are an engineer or an escaped convict on the run, the only reason to visit this strange outpost in the oblivion end of China is to continue overland into Tibet. While it isn't a terrible place, you probably wouldn't want to stay around Golmud (Géermù) more than a day, and few visitors do. The booming town owes its existence to mining and oil drilling and, most recently, to the construction of the train line to Lhasa, for which it is a logistical base.

## Information

**Bank of China** (Zhōngguó Yínháng; cnr Kunlun & Chaidamu Lu; ☎ 8.30am-6.30pm Mon-Fri, 10am-4pm Sat & Sun) You can change travellers cheques and cash here.

**CITS** (Zhōngguó Guójī Lǚxíngshì; ☎ 841 2764; ☎ 8.30am-noon & 2.30-6pm Mon-Fri) CITS has offices on the 2nd floor of the Golmud Hotel and, less reliably, at the Tibet bus station. If the office is closed the hotel reception can call and someone will come. If you're planning to go to Lhasa legally, this is your first stop (see opposite).

**Internet Plaza** (Liántōng Wǎngyuàn; China Unicom Bldg, cnr Zhongshan Lu & Bayi Lu; per hr Y2; ☎ 24hr)



## INFORMATION

Bank of China 中国银行	1 A2
CITS 中国国际旅行社	(see 6)
CITS 中国国际旅行社	(see 13)
Internet Plaza 联通网苑	2 A1
Post Office 邮局	3 B2
Post Office 邮局	(see 6)
PSB 公安局	4 B2
Rùnzéyuán Wǎngbā 润泽源网吧	5 A2

## SLEEPING

Golmud Hotel 格尔木宾馆	6 A2
Golmud Mansions 格尔木大厦	7 B2

## EATING

Jiale Supermarket 家乐超市	8 A1
Xi āngshǐhǎi Xiǎochǎo 香四海小炒	9 A1
À lán Cǎntīng 阿兰餐厅	10 A1

## TRANSPORT

CAAC 机场售票处	11 B2
Golmud Bus Station 长途汽车站	12 B2
Tibet Bus Station 西藏汽车站	13 A1

**Post office** (yóujú; Chaidamu Lu) There's a branch office in front of the Golmud Hotel.

**PSB** (Gōngānjū; Chaidamu Lu; ☎ 8am-noon & 2.30-5pm Mon-Fri) Bus 2 comes here from the train station.

**Rùnzéyuán Wǎngbā** (56-14 Kunlun Lu; per hr Y2; ☎ 24hr) Internet access.

## Sleeping &amp; Eating

**Golmud Mansions** (Géermù Dàshì; ☎ 845 2208; 33 Yingbin Lu; 迎宾路33号; dm Y30, tw Y120-238) This good option is conveniently located next to the bus and train stations, with good triple-bed dorms but no common showers.

**Golmud Hotel** (Géermù Bīnguǎn; ☎ 842 4288; 219 Kunlun Zhonglu; 昆仑中路219号; r without bathroom Y40, tw with

bathroom Y100-258) There are two buildings – the *bīnguǎn* (upmarket hotel) and the *zhāodàisuǒ* (hostel). Get the rooms with a bathroom (Y120) in the hostel wing for best value. Hot water in the common showers can be temperamental.

**Xiāngshǐhǎi Xiǎochǎo** (Kunlun Lu; dishes Y5-20) Just across from the main gate of the Golmud Hotel, this is a great Sichuanese restaurant. The *guōbā ròupiàn* (pork with rice crisps) is enough for two.

**Àlán Cǎntīng** (48-1 Bayi Lu; dishes from Y6) is a good Muslim restaurant that serves great *gànbàn miàn* (spaghetti-style noodles with meat sauce; 干拌面).

**Jiale Supermarket** (Jiālè Chāoshì; cnr Kunlun & Bayi Lu) Located underground, this is a good place to stock up on food for the bus ride.

## Getting There &amp; Away

## AIR

Nobody actually flies to Golmud, but if you want to buck the trend, the city has four weekly flights to Xíníng (Y920) and Chéngdū (Y1350). Airport buses (Y10) depart from CAAC (☎ 842 3333; Chaidamu Lu), or take a taxi (Y30).

## BUS

The Golmud bus station is opposite the train station. The 524km trip from Golmud to Dūnhuáng departs twice daily, at 8am (Y88, eight hours) and 6pm (Y95 to Y100, 12 hours); the latter is a sleeper. It's a scenic trip through the desert and mountains, but take a jacket as it can get cold at night. You may need to pick up an annoying permit (*lǚxíng zhèng*) at the PSB (Y50) before you buy your ticket – remember it's closed weekends.

Buses to Lhasa depart from the **Tibet Bus Station** (Xizàng Chēzhàn; Xizang Lu) at 3pm and take anywhere from 20 to 25 hours; see p915.

If you're planning on taking the southern Silk Road to Kashgar, kick things off with the 3pm sleeper bus to Huàtǔgōu (Y175; 14 hours), from where there are morning buses to Charklik (Ruòqǐāng) in Xinjiāng.

## TRAIN

Express trains depart in the evening for Xíníng (train 5702, 14 hours) and Lánzhōu (train N904, 18 hours). A hard sleeper berth to Xíníng costs Y131 to Y156. Avoid the slower local train (8760).

Transport to Tibet was all up in the air at the time of research. Practical details for the Lhasa train were sketchy at time of writing. No

trains actually start in Golmud but you should be able to buy tickets on a through train, of which there are four or five a day. A hard seat on the morning train costs Y143 but at the time of writing you couldn't buy a ticket at the train station without first shelling out Y1440 to CITS for a tour/permit. This may change. Bear in mind that long-distance trains often arrive a few hours late. The 1140km trip takes around 15 hours. See p924 for more.

## Getting Around

Bus 1 (Y1) runs from the train station to the Golmud Hotel. Taxis in town cost Y5.

## MT AMNYE MACHEN 阿尼玛卿山

The 6282m peak of Machen Kangri, or Mt Amnye Machen, is Amdo's most sacred mountain – it's eastern Tibet's equivalent to Mt Kailash in western Tibet. Tibetan pilgrims travel for weeks to circumambulate the peak, believing it to be home to the protector deity Machen Pomra. The circuit's sacred geography and wild mountain scenery make it a fantastic, though adventurous, trekking destination.

The full circuit takes seven to nine days, or five on a horse, though many foreigners limit themselves to a half circuit. Several monasteries lie alongside the route, including Guri Gomba near Xiädawü and Chörtén Kharpo (White Stupa) at Chuwarna. Some nearby spots are linked to the Tibetan hero Gesar of Ling.

Independent trekkers can hire pack horses and Tibetan- and Chinese-speaking guides (Y50 per day for a horse) from Xuěshān and Xiädawü, the two main starting points for the trek, but beyond that you need to be totally self-sufficient. Organised trips are possible but not cheap. Travel agencies such as **Qinghai Tibet Adventures** (Map p902; Sānjiāngyuán Tānxián Lǔxíngshè; ☎ 824 5548; www.cqta.com; Rm 301, 13 Bei Dajie) and **Wind Horse Adventure Tours** (Xihǎi Gōngmín Chūrùjīng Fúwùzhōngxīn; www.windhorseadventuretours.com; ☎ 824 4629; Nan Dajie) arrange all-inclusive trips for around US\$80 to US\$110 per day. At the mountain you may find yourself asked for an admission fee of Y100, as well as an 'environmental fee' of Y30 per day.

With almost all of the route above 4000m, and the highest pass hitting 4600m, it's essential to acclimatise before setting off, preferably by spending a night or two at nearby Māqin (3760m). You can make a good excursion

70km north of town to **Rabgya Gomba** (Lājīa Sì; 拉加寺), an important branch of Tibet's Sera Monastery. The best months to trek are May, June and September.

## Getting There & Away

You can approach the mountain from two directions. It's possible to take the bus to Māqin (Tawo) and then hitch or hire a minivan out to Xuěshān (Chuwarna), the traditional starting point of the *kora* (pilgrimage path). Buses to Māqin (nine hours) depart Xīníng at 8.45am (Y62) and 9.30am (Y77) and there are also evening sleepers (Y82).

From the west, first get yourself to Mādūo or Huāshíxiá, and then find a jeep to Xiädawü. From Xīníng, buses to Mādūo (Y83, 10 hours) leave daily at 8am.

## YÙSHÙ (JYEKUNDO) 玉树

☎ 0976

Yùshù (Jyekundo) is one of the remotest corners of one of the remotest provinces of China. Straddling the grasslands of Amdo to the north and the deep forested valleys of Kham to the south, the prefecture is overwhelmingly (97%) Tibetan and dotted with dozens of impressive monasteries.

Long an important caravan town along the trade routes to Tibet, Yùshù bursts at the seams during its three-day horse festival (from 25 July), when tens of thousands of Tibetans swagger into town. At any time of year, you'll see crowds of Tibetans hunkered down in the central square selling *yartse gomba*, a highly valued medicinal caterpillar fungus collected from the surrounding grasslands.

The few foreigners who make it out here are mostly headed along the wonderful overland route to western Sichuan, though it is theoretically possible to continue south to Nangchen and on to remotest eastern Tibet.

Note that there's nowhere to change money in Yùshù.

## Information

**Etōng Tiānxià Wǎngbā** (7-7 Minzhu Lu; per hr Y3)

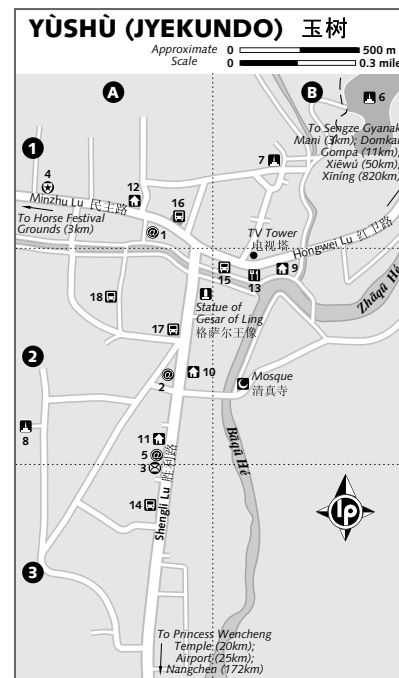
Internet access, down a side alley.

**Post office** (yóujú; Shengli Lu; ☎ 9.30am-5.30pm)

**PSB** (Gōngānjú; ☎ 882 8915; 144 Minzhu Lu; ☎ 9am-noon, 3-6pm Mon-Fri) Can extend visas.

**Yángguāng Wǎngbā** (Shengli Lu; per hr Y3; ☎ 24hr)

Internet access.



## Sights

The **Jyekundo Dondrubling Monastery** (Jiéǔ Sì) has a dramatic location in a natural bowl overlooking the town. First built in 1398, the rebuilt main assembly hall is very atmospheric, with a fantastic inner sanctuary of towering Buddhas. The monks here are friendly and you'll probably get invited in for a cup of butter tea. A *kora* leads up the hill behind the monastery for great views of the town. The best way to get here is to go on foot through the old town via the atmospheric *mani lakhang* (chapel containing a large prayer wheel). Alternatively get a taxi for Y10.

One sight you shouldn't miss is the **Sengze Gyanak Mani** (Māní Shíchéng; 嘛尼石城), which is one of the largest *mani* walls in Tibet, founded in 1715 and consisting of an estimated two billion mantras that are carved in stone. Pilgrims circumambulate the wall continuously, tuning rows of prayer wheels, some of which are over 10m tall. The wall is 3km east of town in Xīnzài (新寨) village. Minibuses 1 and 2 run here from town (Y1).

The town's dramatic central statue is of King Gesar of Ling, a revered Tibetan

## INFORMATION

Etōng Tiānxià Wǎngbā 统天下网吧	1	A1
Internet Café 网吧	2	A2
Post Office 邮政局	3	A3
PSB 公安局	4	A1
Yángguāng Wǎngbā 阳光网吧	5	A2

## SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

Jyekundo Dondrubling Monastery		
结古寺	6	B1
Mani Lhakhang	7	B1
Namgyal Chörtén	8	A2

## SLEEPING

Jiéǔ Sì Bīnguǎn 结古寺宾馆	9	B2
Labu Monastery Hotel 拉布寺宾馆	10	A2
Wǎimào Bīnguǎn 外贸宾馆	11	A2
Yùshù Bīnguǎn 玉树宾馆	12	A1

## EATING

Snowlands Namtso Restaurant		
雪域纳木措湖饭馆	13	B2

## TRANSPORT

Bus Station 客运站	14	A3
Bus to Sèrshu 到石渠的班车	15	B2
Minibus Stand 小车站	16	A1
Minibus to Princess Wencheng Temple 到文成公主庙的中巴车	17	A2
Prefectural Bus Station 州客运站	18	A2

warrior-god whose epic deeds are remembered in the world's longest epic poem of the same name.

At dusk join local pilgrims on a walk around the white **Namgyal Chörtén** in the west of town.

## Sleeping & Eating

**Wǎimào Bīnguǎn** (Shengli Lu; 胜利路; tw without bathroom Y60-80, tw with bathroom Y80-120) This is a good bet, just five minutes from the bus station. The friendly floor ladies do their best to keep the bathroom odours under control and the helpful manager can arrange a laundry service. Rooms have a kettle and basin for washing clothes.

**Yùshù Bīnguǎn** (☎ 882 2999; 12 Minzhu Lu; 民主路 12号; tw Y80, tw with bathroom Y140; ☎) This place is located in a new block and will offer the best rooms in town when finished in 2007.

**Labu Monastery Hotel** (Lābùsì Bīnguǎn; ☎ 882 7369; Shengli Lu; 胜利路; tw Y80, tw with bathroom Y140-160) It's less about yak butter and more about en suite bathrooms at this other monastery-run place. The rooms are clean and the dorms have common showers in the courtyard.

**Jiéǔ Sì Bīnguǎn** (☎ 882 8018; 67 Hongwei Lu; 红卫路 67号; dm Y10-20, d Y60, tw Y150) This monastery guesthouse, 250m from the central crossroads,

offers good value dorms and the monks add plenty of local flavour.

Shengli Lu is lined with tiny Muslim and *shānguō* (mini-hotpot) restaurants. For a more Tibetan atmosphere try the upstairs booths of the **Snowlands Namtso Restaurant** (Xuěyù Nàmúcuò Hú Fànguān; teas Y5-8, dishes Y10-30) on Hongwei Lu.

## Getting There & Away

### AIR

Yùshù's new airport, 25km south of town at the old military airfield in Batang, hadn't opened at the time of research but you can expect weekly flights to Xíníng and maybe even Lhasa.

### BUS

Yùshù is an intimidating 20-hour, 820km-long sleeper bus ride across the grasslands from Xíníng. The trip isn't as bad as it sounds but be prepared for an altitude headache (much of the route is above 4200m) and get a window berth so you can at least suck in a modicum of fresh air to dilute all the cigarette smoke. Buy your ticket the day before to guarantee a good berth. Formal toilet stops are few and far between.

Sleepers leave Yùshù's main bus station at noon and 1pm for Xíníng (Y154). Nonsleepers leave at 8.30am and 9am (Y115) and pass through Mǎduō (Y47) around 3pm.

For Sìchuān there is a daily bus to Sèrshu (Shíqú) at 7.30am (Y30, five hours) from Hongwei Lu, which runs via Xiěwú (Y8) and the 4700m Nganba-la pass.

The separate prefectural bus station (*zhōu kèyùnzhàn*) runs a daily buses to Gānzī (Y134) at 8am, though you'd be nuts to take the direct sleeper bus to Chéngdū (Y280, 30 hours, every other day).

Other destinations are more hit and miss. You should be able to track down daily buses to Zádūo (Y40) and Chēngduō (Y20) at 8am. Cramped minivans depart when full from the main square for Zhiduō (Y40 per person) and Qūmácaì (Y50).

## AROUND YÙSHÙ

There are lots of monasteries around Yùshù and you could spend a couple of great days exploring the surrounding valleys.

### Princess Wencheng Temple

文成公主庙

Hidden down a side valley, 20km south of Yùshù, this famous **temple** (Wéchéng Gōngzhǔ

Miào; admission Y10) marks the spot where Chinese Princess Wencheng paused for a month en route to marry (and eventually convert to Buddhism) King Songtsen Gampo of Tibet. The inner chapel has a rock carving of the Tibetan god Vairocana (Nampa Name in Tibetan) that allegedly dates from the 8th century.

It's well worth joining the pilgrims on the 40-minute *kora* above the temple. The trail ascends from the end of a row of eight *chörtens*, just past an ancient rock inscription in Tibetan, and climbs through webs of prayer flags to great views of the gorge.

From the temple you can make a 30-minute detour on foot back towards the main road and then south to **Zhira Gompa** (Jírán Sì; 吉然寺). The small monastery backs onto a cliff riddled with holy caves, and has a meditation retreat and *kora*. At the far end of the *kora*, continue south for 15 minutes to the impressive Chörten Kharpo (White Stupa) sky burial site.

On the way back to Yùshù you can stop off at sprawling **Trangu Gompa** (Chángǔ Sì; 禅古寺), which has some fine modern Repkong-style murals in its twin assembly halls.

A monastery minibus runs to the temple from Yùshù at 10am (Y4), passing Trangu Gompa (Y2) en route, and returning around 1pm. Hitching back shouldn't be a problem. A return minivan costs around Y50.

### Yùshù to Xiěwú

Just 11km north of Yùshù is the large **Domkar Gompa** (Dāngkǎ Sì; 当卡寺), a steep 20-minute hike (or short drive) up the hillside. Home to 200 monks, most of the chapels here have been newly renovated. From the southern chapels it's a five-minute walk to a sky-burial spot, from where you can hike down to Dieger (Dōngfēng) village and catch a lift back to Yùshù.

Further on the road crosses the Tōngtiān Hé over a new bridge. A side road branches off to the right for 6km (1½ hours' walk) to **Sebda Gompa** (Sāibā Sì; 赛巴寺), an excellent potential day trip from Yùshù. The turn-off is just north of the checkpost and marked by a 'Welcome to Sebda' sign. After 20 minutes of walking, branch off up the side valley (don't cross the bridge). The main assembly hall is impressive but most surprising is the new chapel featuring a huge 18m statue of Guru Rinpoche. The adjacent **ethnographic museum** (admission Y5) has some offbeat gems

and good English captions. A huge 38m rock carving of the Chenresig (the Bodhisattva of Compassion) is being built on the cliff next door. If you have more time you can explore the ruins of the old monastery on the ridge behind the *gompa* or do some great hiking in the opposite valley.

Finally, at Xiěwú village, by the turn-off to Sèrshu, is the Sakyapa-school **Drogon Gompa** (Xiěwú Sì; 歇武寺), on a fine hillside location. Atop the hill is the scary *gōnkhang* (protector chapel), adorned with snarling stuffed wolves and Tantric masks. Only men may enter this chapel.

Minivans buzz up and down this road (Y10), or you can take the 8am Sèrshu bus to Xiěwú and then work your way back. Hiring a minivan for the day is the safest bet.

### Nangchen 囊谦

Perhaps the most ambitious route is south to the former Tibetan kingdom of Nangchen, and then on to Riwoche and Chamdo in eastern Tibet. The paved road to Nangchen goes over three passes and via Lungshi Gompa (Lóngxī Sì; 龙西寺) en route.

Minivans and the odd Land Cruiser leave for Nangchen (Nángqiān; Y40 per seat, three hours) from Yùshù's main bus station when full, sometime around 8am. Stay overnight at the **Nángqiān Bīnguǎn** (囊谦宾馆; dm Y30, tw Y150), before taking another minivan for the rough 245km route to Riwoche (Y100 per person). You'll have to bluff your way past the checkpoint at the Tibetan border and bear in mind that without a permit you may well get sent back.

# Tibet 西藏



In China, hyperbole and metaphorical association rule – everything is described as ‘the (blank) of (blank)’. How remarkable is Tibet (Xīzàng, or the ‘Western Treasure House’ in Chinese), then, that its most famed moniker – ‘the Rooftop of the World’ – is an understatement? Saying Tibet is atop a vast plateau that is 4000m to 5000m high hardly begins to describe things.

Say ‘Tibet’. Imagine the highest of azure skies; serene *drokpas* (nomads) atop their horses; city-state temples; rivers of orange-clad monks and flapping prayer flags. It is one-eighth of China’s area (three Texas!) but home to a mere 2.7 million people. Its forbiddenness and isolation has helped seal the mesmerising grip Tibet has long held on the western mind.

Of course, there’s that one thorny modern issue. There simply seems no middle ground on the dilemma of China and Tibet – one must either believe that the opportunistic Han are ‘ruining’ Shangri-la, or that they wrested literally millions of slaves from feudal serfdom. The truth, as always, lies somewhere in between. Loathe it, love it, or remain uncomfortably ambivalent about it, Chinese rule is likely (and Chinese cultural influence *definitely*) here to stay.

In the end, simply remember this as you travel around: living in the harshest of environments and under endless cultural strain, Tibetans have never had it easy. Remarkably resilient, they have managed to maintain not only their culture and religion, but also their joyful outlook.

The verdant Yarlung Tsangpo (Brahmaputra) valley is the soul of Tibet. Western Tibet is higher still, and its spiritual and geographical focal point is sacred Mt Kailash (Kang Rinpoche), in whose vicinity rise the sources of the Indus, Sutlej and Brahmaputra Rivers.

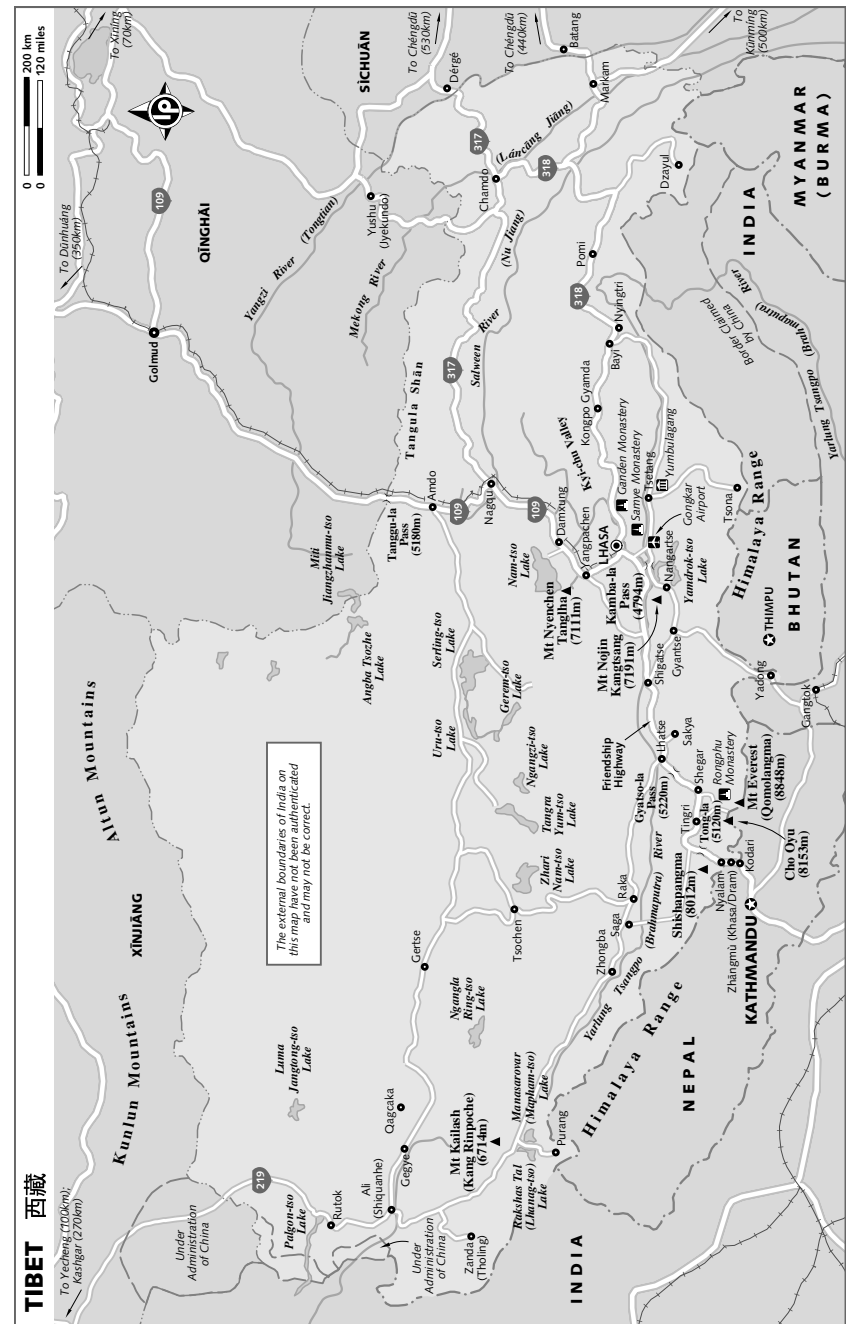
## HIGHLIGHTS

- Make a personal pilgrimage and be awed by the Potala Palace, Jokhang Temple and Barkhor circuit in the holy city of **Lhasa** (p917)
- Wind your way up Gyantse’s **Kumbum Chörtén** (p929), Tibet’s architectural masterpiece
- Breathe heavily and marvel at the indescribable colours at **Nam-tso Lake** (p927)
- Feel your soul change as you gaze at a Mt Everest sunrise from **Rongphu Monastery** (p932)
- ‘Enjoy’ the teeth-rattling trip on the Friendship Hwy from **Lhasa to Kathmandu** (p915) over the plateau’s high passes and down into the subcontinent, before this bad boy gets paved
- Scrape the sky as you traverse the wilds of Tibet (and Qinghǎi) on the **Qinghai–Tibet railway** (p924), the world’s highest and a monumental feat of engineering



■ POPULATION: 2.7 MILLION

■ [www.tibet.com](http://www.tibet.com)





## History

Recorded Tibetan history began in the 7th century AD when the Tibetan armies were considered as great a scourge to their neighbours as the Huns were to Europe. Under King Songtsen Gampo, the Tibetans occupied Nepal and collected tribute from parts of Yünnán.

Shortly after the death of Gampo, the Tibetan armies moved north and took control of the Silk Road and the great city of Kashgar. Opposed by Chinese troops, the Tibetans responded by sacking the imperial city of Chang'an (present-day Xi'an).

Tibetan expansion halted in 842 with the assassination of King Langdarma, and the region broke up into independent feuding principalities. Never again would the Tibetan armies leave their high plateau.

Into the power vacuum moved the Buddhist clergy. When Buddhism reached Tibet in the 3rd century AD, it adopted many of the rituals of Bön, the traditional animistic religion of the region; this, combined with the esoteric practices of Tantric Buddhism (imported from India), provided the basis for Tibetan Buddhism.

The religion had spread through Tibet by the 7th century; after the 9th century the monasteries became increasingly politicised; and in 1641 the Gelugpa (Yellow Hat sect) used the support of the Buddhist Mongols to crush the Sakyapa, their rivals.

The Yellow Hats' leader adopted the title of Dalai Lama (Ocean of Wisdom), given to him by the Mongols; religion and politics became inextricably entwined and both were presided over by the Dalai Lama. Each Dalai Lama was considered the reincarnation of the last. Upon his death, the monks searched the land for a newborn child who showed some sign of embodying his predecessor's spirit.

With the fall of the Qing dynasty in 1911, Tibet entered a period of *de facto* independence that was to last until 1950, when a resurgent China invaded Tibet.

At this point perspectives diverge wildly, resulting in a *Rashomon*-like interpretation of historical events. China insisted it was 'liberating' the Tibetans from feudal serfdom and bringing it back into the motherland's fold, of which it had always been part. Tibet naturally disputed that last claim.

Along with freedom, China claimed to have brought modernisation and hope to the pov-

erty-stricken region. This didn't stem gradually increasing popular unrest, resulting in a full-blown revolt in 1959, which was overwhelmingly crushed by the People's Liberation Army (PLA) – tens of thousands were killed through 1960. Amid popular rumours of a Chinese plot to kidnap him, the Dalai Lama fled to India; he was followed by other leaders and he now represents over 100,000 Tibetans in exile. Following the uprising, China ruled Tibet with a heavy hand, imprisoning and executing thousands. Tibet arguably suffered more famine than the rest of China during the Great Leap Forward and more cultural devastation during the Cultural Revolution.

The Dalai Lama, who has referred to China's policies as 'cultural genocide', continues to be worshipped by his people, and his acceptance in 1989 of the Nobel peace prize marked a greater sympathy on the part of the Western world for the plight of the Tibetan people. China's economic potential, of course, crows many world leaders from pressing China on the Tibet issue. The Dalai Lama himself is now resigned to pushing for autonomy rather than independence.

The Chinese are truly baffled by the ingratitude of the Tibetans, and in many ways they have a point. Idyllic as it may have seemed (that 'Shangri-la' hold on the world's consciousness), Tibet pre-1950 was a place of abject poverty ruled by an elite (who seemed to care not a whit for improving the lot of the common folk), and, yes, slavery (feudal serfdom sounding more benign but amounting to the same thing). China has developed roads, schools, hospitals, an airport, factories and a burgeoning tourist industry in Tibet. Beijing's ongoing 'Develop the West' campaign is perhaps not wholly unlike the US' pioneer mantra 'Go West' – west being a metaphor for opportunity – resulting in more Han migration to China's sparsely populated western provinces. (Have some sympathy for the Average Zhou migrant; most are simply escaping poverty in other regions and searching for a better life elsewhere.)

Many Tibetans, who cannot forgive the destruction of their culture and heritage and the continued military/police presence, see things differently. If inward migration increases – particularly following the 2006 opening of the railway line connecting Lhasa to the rest of China (see p924) – there is a question as to how Tibetans can possibly maintain their own culture.

For help with Tibetan language, see the Language chapter, p985.

## Climate

Most of Tibet is a high-altitude desert plateau at more than 4000m and many passes exceed 5000m. Days in summer (June to September) are warm, sunny and dry, and you can expect some rainfall in southern Tibet in the evenings, but temperatures drop quickly when it gets dark. The best time to visit depends on what part of Tibet you're heading to, but for most places pick May, June or October.

You can now buy low-grade trekking gear in Lhasa, but it is advisable to bring sunscreen, lip balm, deodorant, a water purification system and any medication you might need from home. Travellers will need to be particularly aware of acute mountain sickness (AMS); for a full discussion of prevention and treatment, see p982.

## Getting There & Away

Although there are five major road routes to Lhasa, foreigners are officially allowed to use the Nepal and Qinghai routes only. For more information on the new rail line, see p916 and p924.

## NEPAL ROUTE

The 920km road connecting Lhasa with Kathmandu is known as the Friendship Hwy. It's a spectacular trip over high passes and across the Tibetan plateau, the highest point being Gyatso-la pass (5220m) outside Lhatse. The rough terrain truly taxes the body and spirit (though paving has already started).

By far the most popular option for the trip is renting a Land Cruiser and driver through a travel agency in Lhasa (p924). A five-day Land Cruiser trip from Lhasa to the Nepalese border, via Shigatse, Everest Base Camp (EBC) and Tingri costs about Y1400 per person. It's also possible to bus and hitchhike along the Friendship Hwy. Public transport runs as far as Shegar (sometimes called New Tingri) and the occasional bus runs all the way from Shigatse to Zhāngmù.

When travelling from Nepal to Lhasa, foreigners must arrange transport and permits through travel agencies in Kathmandu (see Travel Restrictions, p916). Be very careful with whom you organise your trip – the vast majority of complaints about Tibet have been about travel agencies in Kathmandu.

Whatever you do, when coming from Nepal do *not* underestimate the sudden rise in elevation; altitude sickness is all too common.

At the time of writing, travel agencies in Kathmandu were offering budget tours to Lhasa from US\$130 to US\$150 for a five-day overland bus/jeep trip. Seven-day trips via EBC cost roughly US\$400 per person. For a flight to Lhasa you need to buy a three-day tour for US\$360. This includes the flight ticket (US\$273), airport transfers in Kathmandu and Lhasa, Tibetan Tourism Bureau (TTB) permits and dormitory accommodation for three nights in Lhasa.

## QINGHAI ROUTE

A rail network connecting Lhasa to Qinghai is up and running and offers a modern alternative to buses. For more information see p924.

The monotonous 1754km road that connects Xining with Lhasa via Golmud crosses the desolate, barren and virtually uninhabited northern Tibetan plateau. The highest point is the Tanggu-la pass (5180m).

The Xining bus station staff won't deal with walk-in tourists. Most travellers must first head to Golmud, where China International Travel Services (CITS; p906) has an iron grip on foreign bus tickets from Golmud to Lhasa – all travellers must buy their tickets through the travel agency, and they pay dearly for it. The trip costs more than Y1700 (which doesn't include entrance fees into Lhasa).

Buses depart from the **Tibet Bus Station** (Xizang lu) at 3pm and take anywhere from 20 to 25 hours (though 30 isn't unheard of), assuming the weather, traffic and bus engine cooperate. The other option is to hang around the regular bus station and make a deal with one of the drivers. They ask for about Y600 (bus) or Y800 (jeep), which includes a bribe for the Public Security Bureau (PSB). There's definitely a risk involved, and there's no way to guarantee that you won't be fined and sent back – or worse. Ideally the bulk of the payment should be made only once you've arrived.

Take supplies and warm clothing. It can easily get down to -10°C or lower in those mountain passes at night; although the buses are heated, you could be in serious trouble if you are ill equipped and there is a breakdown. Keep an eye on your possessions. Some travellers buy oxygen canisters (Y30) from the CITS office. Diamox is a better bet.

In Lhasa you are free to purchase a ticket to Golmud or Xining without the need for any travel permits.

Things do change, right? The **Lonely Planet Thorn Tree** (<http://thorn.tree.lonelyplanet.com>) online forum is a good way to stay up to date.

### OTHER ROUTES

Between Lhasa and Sichuān, Yúnnán or Xīnjiāng provinces are some of the wildest, highest and most dangerous routes in the world. They are also still very closed to foreigners.

The lack of public transport on these routes makes it necessary to hitchhike, but that is also officially prohibited. The authorities sometimes come down very heavily on truck drivers giving lifts to foreigners, particularly on the Yúnnán and Sichuān routes in or out of Tibet, so don't expect to find a ride easily. More importantly, be aware that if you ask a truck driver for a lift, you are putting him at risk of being fined and losing his licence. In 2006 the US embassy was warning that more than one traveller had been physically assaulted by authorities for attempting to cross into Tibet from Sichuān.

A few travel companies in Yúnnán have started to run overland trips from Kūnmíng (p696) or from Zhōngdiàn (p726) to Lhasa, but prices are stratospheric.

### TRAVEL RESTRICTIONS

Current regulations (which could change tomorrow) state that all foreigners wanting to visit Tibet must be part of a group (though a 'group' can be only one person!). Then you must obtain the TTB permit required to buy an air ticket into Tibet. In the high season (July to September) you may also need a return ticket to either Kathmandu, Chéngdū or Golmud, and perhaps a few nights' accommodation. Check at guesthouses listed in this guide, online at Lonely Planet's Thorn Tree, and with other travellers to find out current restrictions.

### THE IMPERMANENCE OF TRAVEL

In 2006 the hottest rumour around was the possible scrapping of the asinine travel-permit system (TTB), mostly due to the effect of the Qinghai-Tibet Railway. We'll believe it when we see it – there's too much money to lose by eliminating this cash cow!

More likely is a relaxing of the system – perhaps a permit will still be necessary to get in and another to travel around Tibet but permits will (finally) be easier to obtain for independent travellers, who can then use public transport.

The reality is that most travellers buy a package through a budget travel agency. The cheapest way into Tibet is an air 'package' to Lhasa from Chéngdū for around Y1900, which includes the flight (Y1250), the semimythical TTB permit (which you'll never see) and, usually, transfer to Chéngdū airport. On arrival in Lhasa these temporary 'groups' disband. It's now also possible to fly to Lhasa from Zhōngdiàn in Yúnnán by first arranging the ticket and permits through a travel agency in Kūnmíng. See p696 and p755 for more info.

From Kathmandu, you will have to sign up for a tour to Tibet (p915) to get the TTB permit that will allow you to cross the border at Zhāngmù. Moreover, it's currently impossible to enter Tibet from Nepal on an independent visa, even if you have one in your passport. Travellers will have their Chinese visa cancelled and be put on a group visa, which comes as a separate piece of paper rather than a stamp in your passport. It is possible to get your own personal group visa, which is well worth asking for as you are then free to travel independently after the tour ends for the duration of your group visa without the considerable hassle of having to split from a group visa. It is possible to extend a group visa, and some have tried changing a group visa to an individual visa. However, you cannot do this in Tibet. For this you need to go to Chéngdū or Xining and possibly Kūnmíng, and even that might not work. Ah, the Chinese catch-22!

Once in Tibet, entry to anywhere outside the Lhasa prefecture and the cities of Shigatse and Tsetang (ie to places such as EBC, Samye, Sakya and Mt Kailash) requires you to procure a travel permit. To get a permit you again have to be a member of a tour group arranged through an authorised travel agency. At the time of research, Shigatse's PSB was *sometimes* issuing travel permits (Y50) to individual travellers for independent travel along the Friendship Hwy to Nepal, but generally only if travellers fibbed a bit.

### Getting Around

Transport can cause a headache if you want to explore the backwaters.

Minibuses run around Lhasa prefecture, from Lhasa to the main towns of Shigatse, Tsetang and Ali, and along the Friendship Hwy as far as Shegar. Beyond this, Land Cruisers are the most common form of transport. It's pricey, but not impossible for a nonbudget traveller group splitting costs.

In 2006 the government was beaverishly upgrading the entire Friendship Hwy and linking roads. There were constant closures and bottlenecks yet nothing really seems to be paved!

As for cycling – it's possible, but not without its hazards. Aside from hassles with the PSB, cyclists in Tibet have died from road accidents, hypothermia and pneumonia. Tibet is not the place to learn the ins and outs of long-distance cycling – do your training elsewhere. For experienced cyclists, the Lhasa-Kathmandu trip is one of the world's great rides. Check out *Tibet Overland: A Route and Planning Guide for Mountain Bikers and Other Overlanders*, by Kym McConnell, and [www.tibetoverland.com](http://www.tibetoverland.com).

### LHASA 拉萨

☎ 0891 / pop 120,940 / elev 3700m

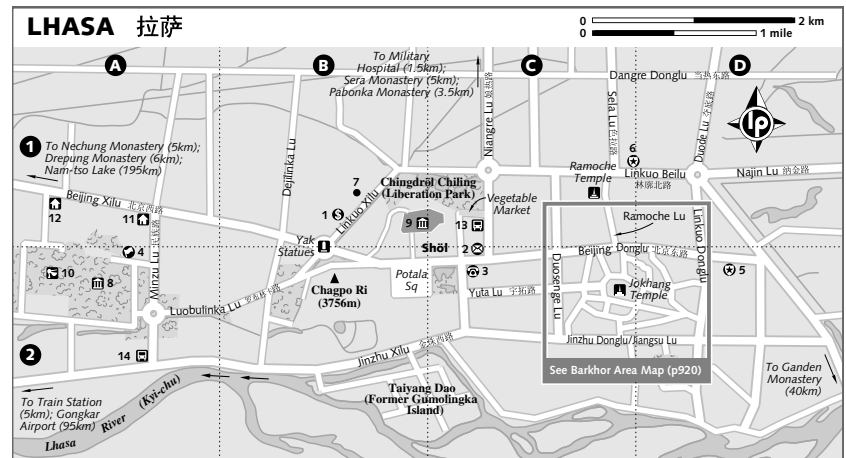
Lhasa. It's the sacred city and spiritual centre of the Tibetan world – perhaps even the real 'Forbidden City'. In 1950, when the PLA came marching in, the city dropped from world view. Still, a mystical Shangri-la can't be held down forever. Beginning in the 1980s the

Chinese government, likely tired of foreigners banging on the door (or sneaking in the symbolic window), finally 'opened' Tibet to outside travellers.

In they trickled – paying dutiful tithings to the Chinese government for the privilege – to discover that this utopia had developed a Han complex. A modern city had swallowed the old: karaoke bars and brothels sat side by side with temples; rice had replaced *tsampa* (roasted barley meal), runway-esque thoroughfares ploughed alongside holy sites; and taxi drivers didn't speak Tibetan.

That was just the beginning for Lhasa. With the arrival of the Qinghai-Tibet Railway, Lhasa will experience what the rest of China

INFORMATION	
Bank of China 中国银行	1 B1
China Post 中国邮政	2 C2
China Unicom 中国联通	3 C2
Nepalese Consulate 尼泊尔领事馆	4 A2
PSB (Travel Permits) 公安局	5 D2
PSB (Visa Extensions) 公安局外事科	6 C1
Wind Horse Travel	7 B1
SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES	
Norbulingka 罗布林卡	8 A2
Potala Palace 布达拉宫	9 B1
Zoo 动物园	10 A2
SLEEPING	
Lhasa Hotel 拉萨饭店	11 A1
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TRANSPORT	
Airport Bus Departures 机场班车发车处	13 C1
CAAC 中国民航	(see 13)
Long-Distance Bus Station 汽车站	14 A2



### A TIBETAN GAZETTEER

Most travellers have little trouble making themselves understood when wandering about. If not, show this to your driver!

Lhasa	ལྷ་ས་
Drepung Monastery	འདྲུང་གསལ་གླང་མ་
Sera Monastery	མེ་རུ་དགོན་པ་
Ganden Monastery	དགའ་འགྲུབ་
Nam-tso Lake	གཤམ་མཚོ་
Yarlung Valley	ཡུལ་ཀྱང་གཞུང་
Samye Monastery	བསམ་མེས་དགོན་པ་
Tsetang	ཚེང་གར་
Yumbulagang	ཡུམ་བུ་གླང་མ་
Yamdruk-tso Lake	ཡང་འདྲུང་མཚོ་
Gyantse	རྒྱུ་མཚོ་
Shigatse	ཤེང་ཀའ་ཚེ་
Sakya	ས་སྐྱུ་
Rongphu Monastery	རོང་པོ་ཚེ་དགོན་པ་
Everest Base Camp	ཇོ་མོ་གླང་མའི་གཤམ་འོག་
Tingri	ཐིང་རི་
Zhāngmù (Dram)	འབྲུག་

has: tens of years of development compressed into a few heart-stopping calendar turns. This city at the centre of a land known for its isolation will have to deal with the coming touristic free-for-all.

The devastation to Tibetan culture is tragic, yet Lhasa will forever be a city of wonders. No ugly office tower could ever overcome the powerful vista of the Potala Palace, a vast white and ochre fortress soaring over one of the world's highest cities. This will always give Tibetans a secret, unvanquishable strength against their occupiers; it will ever retain a captivating pull on those intrigued outsiders who still feel that certain something toward the city.

### Orientation

Lhasa divides clearly and somewhat abruptly into a Chinese section in the west and an increasingly fragile but immensely more interesting Tibetan old town in the east. The main

east-west artery is Beijing Lu, with Potala Palace Sq smack in the middle. To the west is Chinatown. To the east, the colourful Tibetan part of town, the Barkhor area, envelops the Jokhang Temple and is home to the best hotels and restaurants.

### Information

The best place for the latest on individual travel in Tibet these days is in the courtyards of the popular hotels, where you'll see travellers gazing at notice boards, taking down numbers or putting up signs for shared rides.

### INTERNET ACCESS 网吧

Internet access is available around the place for Y3 to Y5 per hour.

**Summit Fine Art Café** (Dǐngfēng Měiyìshù Kāféidiàn; Map p920; ☎ 691 3884; Danjielin Lu; per hr Y3-5) This great café has wireless internet access.

### LAUNDRY

The Kirey and Banak Shöl Hotels offer free laundry for guests.

**Snowlands Laundry** (Map p920; Xuèyù Xiyidiàn; Mentsikhang/Zangyi Lu) Next to Snowlands Hotel, this laundry charges Y3 per piece and it ain't quick.

### MEDICAL SERVICES

**Military Hospital** (Xìzàng Jūnqū Zhōngyiyuàn; ☎ 625 3120; Nangre Beilu) Near the Sera Monastery, this is the best option (if you have one).

### MONEY

In addition to the bank ATMs here, others are popping up along Beijing Lu and around Potala Palace.

**Bank of China** (Zhōngguó Yínháng) Potala Palace (Map p917; Lingkuo Xilu; ☎ 9am-6.30pm Mon-Fri, 10am-3pm Sat & Sun); Barkhor (Map p920; Beijing Donglu; ☎ 8.30am-1.30pm & 3.30-5.30pm Mon-Fri) The Potala Palace branch is the main branch – turn right at the yak statues and look for it on the left. Come here for credit-card advances, bank transfers and foreign exchange. It also has a 24-hour ATM. The Barkhor branch is located between the Banak Shöl and Kirey hotels. It also has an ATM.

### TIBET INTERNET RESOURCES

[www.atc.org.au/travel](http://www.atc.org.au/travel) Travel overview and other information from the Australia Tibet Council.

[www.tibetmap.com](http://www.tibetmap.com) Downloadable maps from the Tibet Map Institute.

[www.tibet-tour.com](http://www.tibet-tour.com) Shanghai branch of Tibet Tourism Bureau, with information on flights, festivals and more.

[www.tibetinfo.net](http://www.tibetinfo.net) Pro-Tibetan news-gathering service with a section on tourism.

[www.tibet.com](http://www.tibet.com) Background information on Tibet from the government in exile.

### VISITING MONASTERIES & TEMPLES

Most monasteries and temples extend a warm welcome to foreign guests, and in remote areas will often offer a place to stay for the night. Please maintain this good faith by observing the following courtesies:

- Always circumambulate monasteries, chapels and other religious objects clockwise, thus keeping shrines and *chörten* (Tibetan stupa) to your right.
- Don't touch or remove anything on an altar and don't take prayer flags or *mani* (prayer) stones.
- Don't take photos during a prayer meeting. At other times always ask permission to take a photo, especially when using a flash. The larger monasteries charge photography fees, though some monks will allow you to take a quick photo for free. If they won't, there's no point getting angry, as you don't know what pressures they may be under.
- Don't wear shorts or short skirts in a monastery, and take your hat off when you go into a chapel.
- Don't smoke in a monastery.
- If you have a guide, try to ensure that he or she is Tibetan, as Chinese guides invariably know little about Tibetan Buddhism or monastery history.

### POST

**China Post** (Zhōngguó Yóujú; Map p917; Beijing Donglu; ☎ 9am-8pm Mon-Sat, 10am-6pm Sun) East of the Potala Palace. Buy stamps from the counter in the far left corner as you walk through the main door. Staff wince when they see parcels.

### PUBLIC SECURITY BUREAU

Neither of the **Public Security Bureau** (PSB; Gōngānjū) offices in Lhasa really wants to see you or, thus, is worth your time. The office (Map p917) at the eastern end of Beijing Donglu issues travel permits, but not to you; you will instead be referred to a travel agency.

The office (Map p917) on Linkuo Beilu occasionally grants visa extensions of up to seven days in an emergency (then only maybe). If you require a longer extension contact one of the travel agencies.

### TELEPHONE

**China Unicom** (Zhōngguó Liántōng; Map p917; Beijing Donglu; ☎ 9am-8pm) Offers the cheapest long-distance rates.

**Telecom Booths** (Map p920; ☎ 10am-11pm) Several private phone booths near the Kirey and Banak Shöl Hotels offer cheap international calls.

### TRAVEL AGENCIES

To trek or visit remote areas, you need to visit a travel agency to secure a permit, transport and (possibly) a guide. Previously, solo travellers were required to do this through Foreign & Independent Travellers (FIT) agencies.

However, at our last visit, things had been reversed, with every private agency clamouring for business. In case Big Brother reverts to old habits, the FIT agencies below are long-standing (we've had a couple of complaints about the Kirey Hotel's FIT branch).

**China Workers International Travel Service** (CWTS; Zhīgōng Guóji Lǚxíng Shè; ☎ 632 0833; 83 Beijing Zhong Lu) The super friendly Tibetan staff here have competitive prices and they gave us a great trip.

**FIT** Snowlands Hotel (Map p920; ☎ 634 9239; Danjielin Lu); Banak Shöl Hotel (Map p920; ☎ 634 4397; Beijing Donglu) The two branches operate independently and offer different prices.

### Sights

In addition to the main sights listed here, numerous modest temples (there's even a Muslim neighbourhood with a mosque) lie within the maze of Lhasa's back streets and alleys.

### BARKHOR 八廓

One cannot help but be swept up in the wondrous swell of humanity that is the **Barkhor** (Bākùò; Map p920), not a sight per se but a *kora* (pilgrim circuit) that proceeds clockwise around the periphery of the Jokhang Temple. You'll swear it possesses some mystical spiritual gravity, as every time you approach within 50m, you somehow get sucked right in and gladly wind up making the whole circuit again! Spiritual wares and tourist baubles are hawked

along every centimetre: prayer flags, block prints of scriptures, turquoise jewellery, Tibetan boots, Nepalese biscuits, yak butter and juniper incense plus a lot of *Yak, Yak, Yak – Tibet!* T-shirts. Start your haggling engines.

The Tibetan travellers here – indeed, most are actually pilgrims – are captivating. Braided-haired Khambas from eastern Tibet stride around with ornate swords or daggers; and Goloks (Tibetan nomads) from the northeast wear ragged sheepskins or, for women, incredibly ornate braids and coral headpieces.

### JOKHANG TEMPLE 大昭寺

The 1300-year-old **Jokhang Temple** (Dàzhāo Sì; Map p920; admission Y70; ☎ inner chapels 8am-noon &

sometimes 3-5.30pm) is the spiritual centre of Tibet. The waves of awestruck pilgrims prostrating themselves outside and the distinctive golden dome are mesmerising – planes could use the dome for navigation.

Commemorating the marriage of the Tang princess Wencheng to King Songtsen Gampo, the temple was built atop a pool that the princess thought was a witch's heart. The temple houses a pure gold statue of the Buddha Sakyamuni brought to Tibet by the princess, along with extraordinary Tibetan religious art treasures (though some are duplicates).

The Jokhang Temple is best visited early in the morning; during the afternoon you'll have to enter via the side door to the right of the main entrance, and interior chapels may be shut. There are often prayers led by monks on the roof at about 6.30pm. The outer halls and the roof are open from sunrise to sunset.

### POTALA PALACE 布达拉宫

What can one say about the magnificent and justifiably world-famous **Potala Palace** (Bùdálā Gōng; Map p917; admission Y100; ☎ 9.30am-3pm before 1 May, 9am-3.30pm after 1 May, interior chapels close 4.30pm), once the seat of the Tibetan government and the winter residence of the Dalai Lamas? You can't miss it – it's the one touching the sky.

An architectural wonder even by modern standards, the palace rises 13 storeys from 130m-high Marpo Ri (Red Hill) and contains more than a thousand rooms. Pilgrims murmuring prayers shuffle through the rooms to make offerings of *khatak* (ceremonial scarves) and liquid yak butter.



INFORMATION		Tibet Gorkha Hotel		Tromsikhang Market .....20 A1	
Bank of China 中国银行.....	1 B1	西藏廓尔喀饭店.....	11 B2		
CWTS 职工国际旅行社.....	2 B1	Yak Hotel 亚客旅社.....	12 A1	<b>TRANSPORT</b>	
FIT.....	3 A1	<b>EATING</b> 🍴		Gang Gyen Hotel	
FIT.....(see 5)		Dunya Restaurant.....	13 A1	轻工宾馆.....21 B1	
Snowlands Laundry.....(see 3)		Nam-tso Restaurant.....(see 5)		Minibus to Drepung Monastery	
<b>SIGHTS &amp; ACTIVITIES</b>		Potala Traditional Snack Bar	(see 5)	到哲蚌寺的小车.....22 A2	
Jokhang Temple 大昭寺.....	4 A2	布达拉风情餐馆.....	14 A1	Minibus to Ganden Monastery	
<b>SLEEPING</b> 🛏		Summit Fine Art Café		到甘丹寺的小车.....(see 22)	
Banak Shöl Hotel		顶峰艺术咖啡店.....	15 A1	Minibus to Samye	
Banak Shöl International Youth		Tashi I Restaurant.....	16 A1	到桑耶寺的小车.....23 A2	
Hostel 东措国际青年旅馆.....	7 B1	Tashi II Restaurant.....(see 10)		Minibus to Tsetang	
Flora Hotel		<b>DRINKING</b> 🍷		到泽当的小车.....(see 23)	
哈达花神旅馆.....	8 B2	Dunya.....(see 13)		Minibuses to Sera Monastery	
Hotel Kyichu		Anglamedo 冈拉梅朵.....	17 A1	到色拉寺的小车.....24 A1	
拉萨吉曲饭店.....	9 A1	<b>SHOPPING</b> 🛍		Minibuses to Shigatse and Nagqu	
Kirey Hotel 吉日旅馆.....	10 B1	Droplenging.....	18 B2	到日喀则和那曲的小车.....25 A1	
		Outlook Outdoor Equipment		Snowlands Hotel (Bike Hire)	
		看风云变幻远景.....	19 B1	雪域旅馆.....(see 3)	
				Ticket Office for Yarlung Valley	
				雅鲁流域售票处.....26 A2	

The first recorded use of the site dates from the 7th century AD, when King Songtsen Gampo built a palace here. Construction of the present structure began during the reign of the fifth Dalai Lama in 1645 and took divisions of labourers and artisans more than 50 years to complete. It is impressive enough to have caused Zhou Enlai to send his own troops to protect it from the Red Guards during the Cultural Revolution.

The layout of the Potala Palace includes the White Palace (the eastern part of the building), used for the living quarters of the Dalai Lama, and the Red Palace (the central building rising above), used for religious functions. The most stunning chapels of the Red Palace house the jewel-bedecked *chörten* tombs of previous Dalai Lamas. The apartments of the 13th and 14th Dalai Lamas, in the White Palace, offer a more personal insight into life in the palace. The roof – off-limits for reconstruction at the time of writing – proffers commanding views of Lhasa.

Grand aesthetics and history aside, one can't help noticing that today it is essentially an empty shell, a cavernous memorial to what once was.

At research time foreigners had to enter via the northwest entrance, accessible by road, and exit via the southern settlement of Shöl. Pilgrims visit in the other direction, and are most numerous on Monday, Wednesday and Friday when they're admitted free of charge. Photography isn't allowed inside the chapels.

Tickets are limited. You must line up around 5pm the previous day with your passport (one person can take several) to register. Get a receipt, then go back the next morning. Alternatively try sweet-talking the gatekeeper! Note that ticket prices look set to rise to Y300.

### NORBULINGKA 罗布林卡

About 3km west of the Potala Palace is the **Norbulingka** (Luóbùlínkǎ; Jewel Park; Map p917; admission Y60; ☎ 9am-1pm & 2.30-6pm), the former summer residence of the Dalai Lama. The pleasant park contains several palaces and chapels, the highlight of which is the **New Summer Palace** (Takten Migyü Potrang), but it's hard to justify the high Norbulingka entry fee.

### Festivals & Events

Tibetan festivals are held according to the Tibetan lunar calendar, which usually lags at

least a month behind the West's Gregorian calendar. Following is a brief selection of Lhasa's major festivals:

**Losar Festival** (New Year Festival) Taking place in the first week of the first lunar month, there are performances of Tibetan drama, pilgrims make incense offerings and the streets are thronged with Tibetans dressed in their finest. The next dates for this festival are 18 February 2007, 8 February 2008 and 25 February 2009.

**Lantern Festival** Held on the 15th day of the first lunar month, huge yak-butter sculptures are placed around Lhasa's Barkhor circuit. The next dates for this festival are 3 March 2007, 21 February 2008 and 11 March 2009.

**Mönlam** (Great Prayer Festival) This is held midway through the first lunar month (officially culminating on the 25th). An image of Maitreya from Lhasa's Jokhang Temple is borne around the Barkhor circuit. Start dates for Mönlam are 14 March 2007, 2 March 2008 and 21 March 2009.

**Saga Dawa** (Sakyamuni's Enlightenment) The 15th day of the fourth lunar month (full moon) is an occasion for outdoor operas, and also sees large numbers of pilgrims at the Jokhang Temple, on the Barkhor circuit and climbing Gephel Ri, the peak behind Drepung Monastery. The next dates for this festival are 31 May 2007, 19 May 2008 and 7 June 2009.

**Worship of the Buddha** During the second week of the fifth lunar month, the parks of Lhasa, in particular the Norbulingka, are crowded with picnickers. The festival will be held late June 2007, mid-June 2008 and late June 2009.

**Shötun Festival** (Yoghurt Festival) This is held in the first week of the seventh lunar month. It starts at Drepung Monastery and moves down to the Norbulingka. Operas and masked dances are held. The next dates for this festival are mid-August 2007, early August 2008 and late August 2009.

**Palden Lhamo** The 15th day of the 10th lunar month has a procession around the Barkhor circuit bearing Palden Lhamo, protective deity of the Jokhang Temple. The next dates for this festival are 24 November 2007, 12 December 2008 and 2 December 2009.

### Sleeping

Backpacker hotels we mention here have (lower-end) midrange rooms that are decent for a small budget-traveller splurge.

### BUDGET

**Banak Shöl Hotel** (Bángxuélú Lǚguǎn; Map p920; ☎ 632 3829; 8 Beijing Donglu; 北京东路8号; dm Y25, s/d Y60/80, d with bathroom Y100-160) This stand-by sees droves of travellers but the staff keep the place up pretty well; bonuses include a free laundry service (no socks or undies please!) and a superb rooftop restaurant. Rooms vary, so take a look; the midrange doubles remain the best value in Lhasa.

**Kirey Hotel** (Jírì Lǚguān; Map p920; ☎ 632 3462; 105 Beijing Donglu; 北京东路105号; dm Y25, d with/without bathroom Y120/60; 📺) Pretty much always near capacity is this buzzing hotel, also with a harried but up-to-snuff staff. The Y60 doubles offer the best value; those with bathroom are a bit aged but sport fresh paint replete with lovely Tibet motifs. It has reliable hot showers and a free laundry service. Travellers will also find the consistently good Tashi II (opposite) restaurant/hang-out and a reliable internet café here.

**Yak Hotel** (Yàkè Bīngguān; Map p920; ☎ 632 3496; 100 Beijing Donglu; 北京东路100号; dm/d/tr Y30/100/150, s/d with bathroom Y280-380; 📺) The granddaddy of Lhasa's budget hotels remains loyal to budget travellers even after a face-lift. Spartan but well-kept dorms are popular, and there's a laundry list of rooms thereafter, all the way to excellent twins with Tibetan-style décor. A new rooftop patio has commanding views of Potala. Internet access is good.

**Dongcuo International Youth Hostel** (Dōngcuò Guóji Qīngnián Lǚguān; Map p920; ☎ 627 3388; tibetyouth hostel@163.com; 10 Beijing Donglu; 北京东路10号; dm Y30, s/d without bathroom Y60/80, with bathroom Y160; 📺) This newish hostel has worked out the kinks and is a decent place to stay, overall. Staff are friendly and rooms are smallish but well maintained. Korean-style rooms are a nice option.

## MIDRANGE

**Hotel Kyichu** (Làsà Jīqǔ Fāndiàn; Map p920; ☎ 633 1541; fax 632 0234; 18 Beijing Zhonglu; 北京中路18号; s/d Y200/280, deluxe d Y320, all with bathroom; 📺) This hotel tops the list for many repeat travellers to Lhasa – crackerjack management really keeps things ship shape. Rooms are spotless, and the nice garden restaurant is a tranquil spot to dine.

**Flora Hotel** (Hādáhuāshén Lǚguān; Map p920; ☎ 632 4491; floraht@hotmail.com; Hobaling Lam; dm Y35, d/tr with bathroom Y188/228) Drifting off to sleep to the haunting sounds of evening prayers isn't what you'd associate with Lhasa, yet this friendly and extremely well-run (rooms are kept up fabulously) Nepalese-operated place sits smack in the middle of the quiet Muslim quarter. Decent three-bed dorms out the back offer a quiet alternative to Lhasa's backpacker hotels.

**Dhood Gu Hotel** (Dūngù Bīngguān; Map p920; ☎ 632 2555; dhodgu@public.ls.xz.cn; 19 Shasarsu Lu; 敦固宾馆; s/d with bathroom Y320/480; 📺) At this Nepalese-

run hotel the buzzing crowds in the alley below are as much a sight as that of the Potala from the rooftop patio. Rooms – many sporting Tibetan décor – come with modern bathrooms, though the singles are cramped.

**Tibet Gorkha Hotel** (Xizàng Guòèrkā Fāndiàn; Map p920; ☎ 627 1992; tibetgorkha7@hotmail.com; 45 Linkuo Nanlu; 林廓南路45号; s/d Y388, tr Y280; 📺) Rave reviews – with good reason – come in for this place, in a quiet location south of Barkhor Sq. Staff are solicitous, rooms are exceedingly well appointed, and the central garden courtyard may be Lhasa's best sanctuary from the crowds.

## TOP END

**Lhasa Hotel** (Làsà Fāndiàn; Map p917; ☎ 683 2221; fax 683 5796; 1 Minzu Lu; 民族路1号; tr Y980, d Y1020-1328, Tibetan ste Y1555; 📺) Standards have dropped considerably since the Holiday Inn – its erstwhile owner – pulled out in 1997, but it's still a group-tour (and cadre) favourite. A discount of 30% is standard.

**Tibet Hotel** (Xizàng Bīngguān; Map p917; ☎ 683 9999; fax 683 6787; 64 Beijing Xilu; 北京路64号; old block d/tr Y880/980, discounted to Y580/680; 📺) Ask for the four-star rooms in the old block which are well worth the extra Y100. The location is fairly inconvenient though.

## Eating

The staple diet in Tibet is *tsampa* and *bö cha* (yak-butter tea). Tibetans mix the two in their hands to create doughlike balls. *Momo* (dumplings that are filled with vegetables or yak meat) and *thukpa* (noodles with meat) are also local comfort food. Variations include *thanthuk* (fried noodle squares) as well as *shemre* (rice, yoghurt and yak-meat curry).

Tibetans consume large quantities of *chang* (a tangy alcoholic drink derived from fermented barley). The other major beverage is *cha ngamo* (sweet milky tea).

**Summit Fine Art Café** (Dīngfēng Měiyìshù Kāféidiàn; Map p920; ☎ 691 3884; Danjielin Lu; coffee Y15) Cosy sofas and easy chairs, soft music, wireless internet, melt-in-mouth desserts, killer coffee and smoothies. 'Nuff said.

**Tashi I Restaurant** (Map p920; cnr Danjielin Lu & Beijing Donglu; dishes Y8-15) Ah, it's so good to see this tireless budget haunt still whipping out its famed *bobi* (chapatti-like unleavened bread), which comes with seasoned cream cheese and fried vegetables or meat.

**Tashi II** (Map p920; ☎ 632 3462; 105 Beijing Donglu; dishes Y8-15) Located in the Kirey Hotel, this has the same menu and food as Tashi I, but friendlier service.

**Nam-tso Restaurant** (Map p920; ☎ 632 1895; 8 Beijing Donglu; mains Y20, set breakfast Y20) Found on the rooftop of the Banak Shöl Hotel, prices here are a little higher than at other budget eateries, but the chicken sizzler (Y20) is the linchpin of a splendid menu.

**Dunya Restaurant** (Map p920; ☎ 633 3374; www.dunyarestaurant.com; 100 Beijing Donglu; dishes Y25-40) With sophisticated décor, excellent, wide-ranging food and interesting specials, this foreign-run eatery is pricey, but it's popular with travellers who aren't on a shoestring. The homemade bread and soups, daily buffet breakfast and Saturday brunch (Y25), served 11am to 2pm, are popular.

**Potala Traditional Snack Bar** (Bùdálá Fēngqīng cǎnbā; Map p920; ☎ 633 6664; 127 Beijing Donglu; dishes Y8-50). A modest new little eatery, this friendly place's name says it all. A telephone-directory-sized menu features real-deal Tibetan and Nepalese (and a smattering of great Western) dishes – yak tongue anyone?

## Drinking

**Dunya** (100 Beijing Donglu; bottled beer Y12) At Dunya Restaurant (Map p920), the upstairs bar is popular with local expats and tour groups. The happy hour offers a Y2 discount between 7pm and 9.30pm.

**Ganglamedo** (Gānglā Méiduò; Map p920; 127 Beijing Donglu; beer Y10) This lovely café-bar has great décor, atmosphere and music. It sports one of the Barkhor area's best selections of imported beers and spirits. The walls are a gallery showcasing local artists.

## Shopping

Whether it's prayer wheels, *thangkas*, sun hats or muesli, you shouldn't have a problem finding it in Lhasa. The Barkhor circuit is especially good for buying souvenirs. Most of this stuff is mass-produced in Nepal. Haggle, haggle, haggle.

**Dropenling** (Map p920; ☎ 633 0898; www.tibetcraft.com; 11 Chaktsal Ganglu; ☎ 10am-7pm) Wander through the Tibetan old town to this excellent new initiative established by the Tibet Artisans' Fund to support local handicrafts. Quality and prices are top end, and well worth a look because you can watch local craftspeople at work on site.

Dozens of shops in Lhasa sell Chinese-made Gore-Tex jackets, fleeces, sleeping bags, stoves, tents, mats and so on. **Outlook Outdoor Equipment** (Kān Fēngyūn Biānhuān Yuǎnjīng; Map p920; ☎ 634 5589; 11 Beijing Donglu) is probably the best and most convenient place, and it also rents out equipment.

## Getting There & Away

### AIR

Lhasa has flights departing for Kathmandu (Y2511, two or three times weekly); Chéngdū (Y1590, three times daily); for Xī'an (Y1740, four times weekly); Zhōngdiàn (Y1450, twice weekly); Kūnmíng (Y2120, twice weekly); Chóngqīng (Y1450, weekly); and also for Xíníng (Y1450, four times weekly). Flight connections continue to Běijīng (Y2520), Shànghǎi (Y2880) and Guǎngzhōu (Y2500). These tickets are often discounted by up to 20%. More direct flights are always being instituted, so check before you purchase tickets.

No matter where you fly in from, all tickets to Lhasa have to be purchased through a travel agency, which will arrange your TTB permit (see p916). Air China won't sell you a ticket without a permit.

Leaving Lhasa is a lot simpler, as tickets can be purchased (and changed) without hassle from the **Civil Aviation Administration of China** (CAAC; Zhōngguó Mínháng; Map p917; ☎ 633 3446; 88 Niangre Lu; ☎ 9.30am-8pm).

### BUS

Tickets for buses from Lhasa to Golmud (Y200 sleeper bus, 24 to 30 hours) can be bought at the long-distance bus station in the southwest of town, near the Norbulingka. There are also sleeper buses that continue all the way to Xíníng (Y340, two to three days), the capital of Qinghǎi. Hard-core masochists might be attracted by the epic nonstop 3287km sleeper bus to Chéngdū (Y500, three days and four nights), via Golmud, and Xī'an (Y480, three-plus days), though most sane people will take the plane.

One bus every Friday runs to Kathmandu (Y580, three days). Foreigners are able to go; you need your passport to get a ticket.

Destinations around Tibet are a little trickier, as the long-distance bus station ticket sellers vary on whether they'll sell tickets to foreigners. There are minibuses every 30 minutes to Tsetang (Y22 to Y40, three or more

hours) and Shigatse (Y55 to Y100, six to seven hours), and daily departures to Nagqu (Y63 to Y100, six to seven hours). You can often buy tickets direct from drivers.

Private minibuses to Shigatse (Y50, seven hours) and Nagqu sometimes depart from the junction of Ramoche Lu and Beijing Donglu at around 7am (often earlier), though some travellers have been refused tickets because these buses are not officially allowed to take foreigners. There is also a bus at 8.30am from the lot next to the Gang Gyen Hotel on Beijing Donglu; drivers seemed willing to take anyone. The easiest way to get to Gyantse is to change buses in Shigatse; there is very little public transport via Yamdrok-tso Lake.

Buses leave around 6.30am for Ganden Monastery (Y20 return, 1½ hours), 7am for Samye (桑耶; Y40, 3½ hours) and 7.30am for Tsetang (advertised as Shannan, 山南, the Chinese name of the county; Y30, three hours) from the west side of Barkhor Sq. Buy tickets on the south side of Jokhang Temple in a little kiosk.

#### CAR HIRE

The most popular way around Tibet in recent years is with a hired car. One of the best routes is a leisurely and slightly circuitous journey down to Zhāngmù on the Tibetan–Nepalese border, taking in Yamdrok-tso Lake, Gyantse, Shigatse, Sakya, Tingri and EBC on the way. A six- to seven-day trip of this sort in a Land Cruiser costs around Y6000, including all necessary permits, driver, guide and car, and can be divided between four (five at a pinch) passengers. Look for trips advertised on the notice boards at the main backpacker hotels.

Other popular trips include Mt Kailash (17 to 21 days), Nam-tso Lake (three days) and various options in eastern Tibet.

For trips around Lhasa prefecture (which require no permits) there is nothing to stop you talking directly to a driver or any travel agency.

#### TRAIN

The Lhasa Express (our moniker, official name be damned) is up and running. The train station, 5km southwest of the city, is noted for its energy-saving construction and for its design, which limits the amount of walking passengers must do in the thin air. Its architecture, emulating the Potala Palace, is sacrilege to some. (The new bridge lead-

ing to it represents a Tibetan prayer scarf.) Another station on the city side of the river is purportedly in the works.

At the time of writing, foreigners still needed a Tibet travel permit in order to buy a train ticket, though this could well change soon. You also have to fill out a health card. All passengers have access to piped-in oxygen through a special socket beside each seat or berth. The train is completely nonsmoking between Golmud and Lhasa. It's nonsmoking within the carriages throughout the journey, but, from Běijīng to Golmud, you can smoke at the ends of carriages. Soft-sleeper berths come with individual TVs.

#### Getting Around

##### TO/FROM THE AIRPORT

Gongkar airport is 65km from Lhasa. Airport buses (Y25, 90 minutes) leave at 6.30 or 7am (depends on the day), and at several other times of day, from the courtyard in front of the CAAC building. Tickets are sold on the bus, so show up early to guarantee a seat. Buses greet all incoming flights.

If you need to get to or from the airport more quickly, taxis cost around Y200 (the driver may ask you for Y350), but you might find a shared taxi for Y25 per seat.

#### BICYCLE

The best option is to hire a bike. Bikes can be hired from the Banak Shöl and the Snowlands Hotel for Y2 to Y3 per hour (Y20 per day) and a couple of other places around Barkhor Sq.

#### MINIBUS

Privately run minibuses travel frequently on and around Beijing Lu. There is a flat Y2 charge. Minibuses 402, 200 and 204 run to the Norbulingka and the long-distance bus station. Minibuses 301 to 303 run to Drepung Monastery from Beijing Donglu (there are also, at peak periods, monastery minibuses from the west side of Barkhor Sq), and minibuses 503 and 502 run to Sera Monastery from the junction of Duosenge Lu and Beijing Donglu.

#### TAXI

These charge a standard fare of Y10 to anywhere within the city. Few Chinese drivers know the Tibetan names for even the major sites. Bicycle rickshaws – the ones that nearly

#### TRAINS TO TIBET

Train number	From	To	Departure time	Duration
T27	Běijīng West	Lhasa	daily 9.30pm	47½ hrs
T22/23	Chéngdū	Lhasa	daily 6.18pm	48 hrs
T222/3	Chóngqīng	Lhasa	daily 7.20pm	47 hrs
T264/5	Guǎngzhōu	Lhasa	daily 10.29am	57½ hrs
K917	Lánzhōu	Lhasa	daily 4.45pm	30½ hrs
T164/5	Shànghǎi	Lhasa	daily 4.11pm	51½ hrs

#### Fares

Route	Distance	Hard seat/Hard sleeper/Soft sleeper
Běijīng to Lhasa	4064km	Y389/813/1262
Chéngdū to Lhasa	3360km	Y331/712/1104
Chóngqīng to Lhasa	3654km	Y355/754/1168
Guǎngzhōu to Lhasa	4980km (approx)	Y451/896/1434
Lánzhōu to Lhasa	2188km	Y242/552/854
Shànghǎi to Lhasa	4373km	Y406/821/1314

#### Train Titbits

- Laptops and MP3 players can malfunction on the trip due to the altitude.
- 120km of bridges were built over the permafrost and sections of cooling pipes were inserted to keep the boggy ground frozen.
- The highest point of the trip is 5072m – the highest point you can reach by train.
- A luxury joint-venture train, the Tangula Express, is due to start in 2007 complete with glass observation cars and luxury cabins – see [www.tgzpartners/projects](http://www.tgzpartners/projects).
- By 2009 the line will extend a further 270km to Shigatse, just a few hundred kilometres from the Indian border.

run you down all day – start at Y5 around the Barkhor Sq area.

#### AROUND LHASA

##### Drepung Monastery 哲蚌寺

A preternaturally spiritual 1½-hour-long *kora* around this 15th-century **monastery** (Zhébàng Sì; admission adult/student Y55/45; ☞ 9am–5pm), 7km west of Lhasa, is among the highlights of a trip to Tibet. Along with Sera and Ganden Monasteries, Drepung functioned as one of the three 'pillars of the Tibetan state' and this one was purportedly the largest monastery in the world (around 7000 monks once resided here).

Kings of the Tsang and the Mongols savaged the place regularly, destroying some 40% of the structures; oddly, the Red Guards pretty much left it alone during the Cultural Revolution. With concerted rebuilding, this village – its name means 'rice heap' due to the white build-

ings dotting the hillside – once again resembles its proud former self. Around 700 monks reside here and in nearby **Nechung Monastery** (admission Y5; ☞ 9am–4pm), a 10-minute walk downhill. Try to catch the lunch break when the monks feast on *tsampa* and yak-butter tea. In the afternoons you can often see them debating in Tibetan. Some hardy souls have hiked into surrounding hillsides and slept in hermitages (bring food and prepare for cold).

Drepung Monastery is easily reached by bike, although most people take minibuses 301 to 303 (Y2, around 20 minutes) from Beijing Donglu, or the monastery minibuses from the west side of Barkhor Sq. There is a Y20 charge per chapel for photography.

##### Sera Monastery 色拉寺

About 5km north of Lhasa, this **monastery** (Sèlā Sì; admission adult/student Y55/35; ☞ 9am–5pm) was

**HEAD IN THE CLOUDS – PRIDE & PROPAGANDA** *Calum Macleod*

The Kunlun Mountains: backbone of Asia. Yuzhu Peak: where China's climbing team train. Tuotuohe: source of the Yellow River. 'Quick, quick, the Tuotuohe tape!' shouts broadcaster Wang Lirui to her colleague in the propaganda cabin, as Tuotuohe station flashes by. 'We've only done this once,' Wang apologises, watching the sparse scenery to guess when to play her 19 introductions to natural highlights between Golmud and Lhasa.

Wang need not panic. The record-shattering, yak-scaring Qinghai-Tibet Railway (QTR) may be the world's highest, but there is no single must-see sight en route. You are already so high that the snowy mountains glimpsed at the edge of the plateau rarely look like world-beaters. And with four trains a day headed for Lhasa since July 2006, Wang and her fellow Han Chinese train attendants, plus thousands of tourists and job-seekers, will soon get used to visiting a once forbidden land.

Some journeys shouldn't be too easy. Flying into Lhasa always felt like cheating – as well as robbing the visitor of time to acclimatise. The hazardous roads dug by Chairman Mao's army in the 1950s remain hazardous. Now a third option awaits. With a little paperwork, and a pioneering spirit, you can traverse miles of permafrost, over towering mountain passes, right to the heart of this beautiful, tragic region.

The train itself is an upmarket, oxygen-pumping version of the new carriages rattling China's rails nationwide. Just US\$50 will buy you a hard seat all the way from Beijing to Lhasa, plus change for a bottle of warm Bud in the restaurant car. This is a political project, resigned to operate at a loss for years to come. Buy a bed instead (US\$100 to US\$158). There are 48 hours and 2500 miles (4000 kilometres) to go. And alcohol won't help your head come day three.

While away the hours chatting to other passengers and you'll hear the mixed emotions this engineering marvel has inspired. 'The Chinese people are truly incredible,' says Buddhist and Communist Party member Chang Qiming, leaning against a framed propaganda poster by Hu Jintao, China's president. 'This train is like a dragon, climbing up the slope and bending this way and that.' Fellow soft-sleeper Ge Honggui, a martial arts master, declares 'only the Chinese people would dare to do what others don't even dare think of!'

Down in the hard-seat section, Tibetan students pass the time watching DVDs on laptops. 'It used to take me seven days to get home from Beijing; now it's only two and a half,' says Puchong, 23. The railway is so revolutionary that in June 2006 authorities issued a list of 28 new and standardised Tibetan terms for train-related words like 'platform', 'tickets' and 'soft sleeper'. But progress exacts its price. 'I worry many Chinese workers will come to Lhasa on the train,' says Puchong. 'I know that has happened in [Muslim] Xinjiang. And there must be environmental damage too.'

Some 33 passageways have been built under and over the railway to allow animals to follow annual migration routes – or end up as rail-kill. The train's windows are sealed to prevent littering of Tibet's fragile ecosystem. But there is no defence against the wave of Han Chinese-led commerce and migration that has provoked the Dalai Lama to warn of 'cultural genocide' following the first mass-transit link between his mountainous homeland of 2.8 million people and China's seething 1.3 billion.

founded in 1419 by a disciple of Tsongkhapa and was, along with Drepung Monastery, one of Lhasa's two great Gelugpa monasteries.

About 600 monks are now in residence, well down from an original population of around 5000 monks. Debating (in Tibetan) takes place from 3.30pm to 5pm in a garden next to the assembly hall in the centre of the monastery. Like Drepung, there's a fine *kora* path around the monastery. Note that women may be refused entry to certain chapels.

Minibuses 502 and 503 run to Sera for Y2, or it's approximately a 30-minute bicycle ride from central Lhasa. There is a Y30 fee per chapel for photography, and it's Y850 for video.

From Sera Monastery it's possible to walk northwest for another hour to **Pabonka Monastery**. Built in the 7th century by King Songtsen Gampo, this is one of the most ancient Buddhist sites in the Lhasa region and is well worth the walk.

**Ganden Monastery** 甘丹寺

About 40km east of Lhasa, this **monastery** (Gāndān Sì; admission Y45; ☎ dawn-dusk), founded in 1417 by Tsongkhapa, was the first Gelugpa monastery. Still the heart and soul of this sect, it's the one out-of-Lhasa sight to choose if your time is limited. Two *kora* are spread through the splendid 4500m-high Kyi-chu Valley (it's all visual eye candy) and you'll likely meet more pilgrims here than anywhere else.

Some 400 monks have returned and extensive reconstruction has been underway for some time now. There is a Y20 fee per chapel for photography, and it costs Y1500 for video.

Pilgrim buses leave for Ganden Monastery (Y20 return) at 6.30am (and often at 7am) from the west side of Barkhor Sq. They return around 2pm. Buy tickets a day ahead if possible from a ticket kiosk on the south side of Jokhang Temple.

**NAM-TSO LAKE** 纳木错

The water of sacred **Nam-tso** (Nāmùcuò; Y40), 195km north of Lhasa is of a turquoise-ish blue so transcendent, shimmering in the rarefied air of 4500m, as to defy an artist's colour charts. Geographically part of the Changtang Plateau, bordered to the north by the Tangula Shan range and to the southeast by 7111m Nyenchen Tanglha peak, the scenery around it is equally breathtaking.

But the view is not as breathtaking as the altitude. Nam-tso is 1100m higher than Lhasa so do *not* rush here. Count on a week in Lhasa at the minimum to avoid AMS; see p982.

**Tashi Dor Monastery** (elevation 4718m), which is on the edge of the lake, is one of your basic lodging options or you can camp nearby. Two **guesthouses** (dm Y25-50, tents Y100-160) are replete with karaoke machines but no toilets

so bury your waste and burn all your toilet paper after use.

The closest public transport to Nam-tso Lake takes you to Damxung (Dāngxióng), a small town with a couple of guesthouses and Sichuanese restaurants, but the lake is still another 40km or more. Some hotel travel agencies do arrange two-day trips (Y200 to Y300) to the lake, but these depend on gathering enough travellers. The quickest – and most popular – option would be to organise a Land Cruiser in Lhasa, which should cost Y1200 to Y1600 for a two- or three-day trip.

Permits and guides are not necessary for the area.

**YARLUNG VALLEY** 雅鲁流域

About 170km southeast of Lhasa, the Yarlung Valley (Yālù Liúyù) is considered to be the birthplace of Tibetan culture. Getting around is a pain in the rear.

A new tourist bus has recently started a peak-season daily service from Barkhor Sq to the following three sights listed as well as a couple of others during a 13-hour odyssey. Again, if your driver suspects or cares that you don't have a permit, you might not get on, but drivers were perfectly happy selling us a ticket at last check. The whole trip costs Y80 (excluding admission tickets); you can buy tickets from a small kiosk on the west side of Barkhor Sq.

**Samye Monastery** 桑耶寺

About 30km west of Tsetang, on the opposite bank of the Yarlung Tsangpo (Brahmaputra) River, this **monastery** (Sāngyē Sì; Y40) was founded in AD 775 by King Trisong Detsen as the first monastery in Tibet. Famed for its mandala design, its main hall represents Mt Meru, the centre of the universe, and many of the

**GANDEN TO SAMYE TREK**

The most popular – but not the easiest – trek in Tibet is the four- to five-day hike from Ganden Monastery to Samye Monastery, an 80km spiritual cleansing connecting two of Tibet's most important monasteries. It begins less than 50km from Lhasa and takes you over Shuga-la pass (5250m) and Chitu-la pass (5100). Along the way are myriad vistas of lakes, alpine forests and meadows but also quite a bit of strenuous (medium to difficult) exertion, so it shouldn't be underestimated.

Obviously, know before you go. This means the land and the capabilities of mind and body. And, of course, Big Brother – the big issue is getting a permit, which is not easy for individual travellers. Eminently helpful is **Wind Horse Travel** (☎ 683 3009; jampa\_w@hotmail.com; 48 West Lingkhör Xilu, Lhasa; per day \$120), one of the best agencies in Lhasa.

buildings are designed to represent Tibetan cosmology. It's difficult to get there, but you cannot beat the solitude, beauty and history and many travellers have stayed longer than they planned.

Buses from Barkhor Sq leave at 7am, cost Y40 and drop you at the Samye ferry crossing; other buses have begun to run directly, using a bridge east of Tsetang. Some travellers have been refused tickets (but not of late). Police sniffing about at the ferry crossing for permit-lacking travellers isn't unknown, though these have become rarer and rarer.

Obviously, before you leave Lhasa, ask around about the current situation. Even the FIT agencies' advice is to just go and if stopped or fined (upwards of – ouch – Y500) sheepishly and obsequiously plead ignorance.

The ferry leaves when full. The crossing costs Y3 but foreigners are often charged Y10. From the far shore, a bumpy lift in the back of a truck or tractor (Y3) will carry you the 9km to Samye Monastery.

Simple accommodation is available at the **Monastery Guesthouse** (dm Y30-40, d/tr Y100/150) or the **East Friendship Hotel** (d Y40), a cosy and basic family guesthouse outside Samye's east gate. The monastery restaurant serves cheap dumplings and noodles, but a better option is the **Friendship Snowland Restaurant** (meals Y8-18), also outside the east gate, which serves Chinese dishes, banana pancakes and mugs of milky tea.

## Tsetang 泽当

☎ 0893 / elev 3550m

Ho-hum Tsetang (Zédāng), about 180km from Lhasa, is a mostly Chinese town used as a jumping-off point for exploration of the Yarlung Valley area. You don't need a permit for the town itself but you do to venture into the surrounding area, which can only be done by arranging a Land Cruiser and guide. The omniscient Tsetang PSB are notoriously ill-humoured; perhaps out of sheer boredom, they seem to enjoy harassing foreigners. Keep a low profile if you don't have a permit.

Accommodation for foreigners is restricted to way-overpriced hotels.

## SLEEPING

**Postal House Hotel** (邮电公寓; Yóudiàn Gōngyù; ☎ 782 1888; Naidong Lu; 乃东路; d Y188-318, ste Y666, extra bed Y88) Dingy and a bit embarrassing considering the price, but the cheaper doubles are

probably the best deal you'll get in Tsetang (foreigners pay a 50% surcharge). At least if you choose a Tibet-style room, you get free yak-butter tea.

**Tsetang Hotel** (泽当饭店; Zédāng Fàndiàn; ☎ 682 9364; fax 683 2604; 21 Naidong Lu; 乃东路21号; s/d/tr/ste Y888/1680/1320/Y2200, extra bed Y300) This is the town's premier lodging. For the price you get – and you should get – a laundry list of extras such as a tea house, bowling alley, billiards room and nice, if small, gardens.

## GETTING THERE & AWAY

Buses for Tsetang leave Lhasa at 7.30am from Barkhor Sq and every 30 minutes from Lhasa's long-distance bus station. Buses and minibuses heading back to Lhasa (Y22 to Y40, three to four hours) depart from the bus station every hour from 8.30am (the 8.30am bus travels nonstop) until about 5pm.

## Yumbulagang 雍布拉克康

About 12km southwest of Tsetang on a dirt road, **Yumbulagang** (Yōngbùlākāng; admission Y15) is the legendary first building in Tibet. At first glance, it underwhelms, yet climb around and you'll soon realise it soars in splendour and offers commanding valley views.

On your way to Yumbulagang it's well worth stopping at **Trandruk Monastery** (昌珠寺; Chāngzhū Sì; admission Y30), 7km from Tsetang and 6km from Yumbulagang, one of Tibet's oldest Buddhist monasteries and a popular destination for pilgrims.

Bus 2 runs from the Tsetang roundabout to Yumbulagang and Tranduk; or some people hike and hitch a ride on a tractor.

## YAMDROK-TSO LAKE 羊卓雍错

On the old road between Gyantse and Lhasa, dazzling Yamdrok-tso Lake (4488m) can be seen from the summit of the Kamba-la pass (4794m). The lake lies several hundred metres below the road, and in clear weather is a fabulous shade of deep turquoise. Far in the northwest distance is the huge massif of Mt Nojin Kangtsang (7191m).

Nangartse is a small town along the way that has some basic accommodation and a couple of restaurants. No public transport, though, runs to the lake from the town.

A 20-minute drive or a two-hour walk from Nangartse brings you to **Samding Monastery** (admission Y10), a charming place with scenic views of the surrounding area and lake.

## GYANTSE 江孜

☎ 0892 / elev 3950m

Gyantse (Jiāngzī) is one of the least Chinese-influenced towns – more of a village – in Tibet and is worth a visit for this reason alone. Historically, it was noted for its wood and wool production, especially the latter, from which it made legendary carpets.

Most people visit Gyantse as part of an organised tour down to the Nepalese border, but it's also possible to visit independently. Permits are normally available from Shigatse's PSB (right) for Y50, but many travellers risk going without one.

## Sights

The **Pelkhor Chöde Monastery** (admission Y40; ☎ 8.30am-7pm), founded in 1418, is notable for its superb **Kumbum Chörten** (10,000 Images Stupa), the largest chörten in Tibet, which has nine tiers and, according to the Buddhist tradition, 108 chapels. Take a torch (flashlight) to see the excellent murals.

**Dzong** (Old Fort; admission Y30; ☎ 8.30am-8.30pm) towers above Gyantse, and has amazing views of the neighbouring sights and surrounding valley. Entry is via the large gate at the main intersection.

In the middle of the fourth lunar month (mid-July), the town hosts a great **horse-racing & archery festival**.

## Sleeping & Eating

**Jianzang Hotel** (建藏饭店; Jiànzàng Fàndiàn; Yíngxióng Nanlu; 英雄南路; ☎ 817 3720; d/Y180-200, tr with/without bathroom Y150/120) Operated by an English-speaking Tibetan doctor, this hotel gets our vote as the best in town. The balcony is particularly cosy. Staff are friendly (they'll do laundry for Y3 per piece).

**Wutse Hotel** (乌孜饭店; Wūzī Fàndiàn; ☎ 817 2909; fax 817 2880; Yíngxióng Nanlu; 英雄南路; dm Y40, s/d/tr with bathroom Y220/286/320) This is a popular place set around a courtyard. Dorms are in musty quads and shared toilets are a bit rough, but there are clean showers and a decent restaurant. Midrange doubles are better; discounts of 20% are available.

**Zongshan Hotel** (宗山饭店; Zōngshān Fàndiàn; ☎ 817 5555; 10 Weiguo Lu; 卫国路10号; s/d Y150/288) This place is the newest in town and hasn't degraded yet! The clean, carpeted rooms have 24-hour hot water and there are some unadvertised cheaper rooms without bathrooms, so ask. Discounts of 20% (or more) are standard.

**Restaurant of Zhuang Yuan** (庄园餐厅; Zhuāngyuán Cāntīng; Yíngxióng Nanlu; dishes Y15-35) Not the cheapest place in town, it nonetheless has cheery proprietors. Prices are flexible and portions are large. The sweet and sour chicken (Y35) is legendary; make sure you are in the kitchen to see the pyrotechnics.

## Getting There & Away

The easiest way to Gyantse is via Shigatse, which gives you the chance – emphasise chance – to get a travel permit first. A minibus leaves every 30 minutes or so from in front of Shigatse's bus station (Y28, 1½ hours). Minibuses circle the main intersection in Gyantse looking for passengers.

## SHIGATSE 日喀则

☎ 0892 / elev 3900m

Shigatse (Rìkǎzé) is the second-largest city in Tibet. The vast majority of residents are Tibetan, unlike in Lhasa, and there's a palpably unhurried pace of life here. As the traditional capital of the central Tsang region, it has long been a rival with Lhasa for political control of the country. The Tsang kings and later governors exercised their power from the once imposing heights of the Shigatse Fortress – the present ruins only hint at its former glory. Since the Mongol sponsorship of the Gelugpa order, Shigatse has been the seat of the Panchen Lama, who is traditionally based in Tashilhunpo Monastery, Shigatse's foremost attraction.

## Information

**INTERNET ACCESS** 网吧

**China Telecom Internet Bar** (Zhōngguó Diànxīn Wǎngbā; Shāndōng Lu; per hr Y4; ☎ 24hr) A handful of others are located on both sides of Shāndōng Lu downtown.

## MONEY

**Bank of China** (Zhōngguó Yínháng; Shānghǎi Zhōnglù; ☎ 9am-1pm & 3.30-6.30pm Mon-Fri, 10am-5pm Sat & Sun, until 5pm in winter) A bit south of the Shigatse Hotel, changes travellers cheques and cash and supposedly gives credit-card advances. There's a 24-hour ATM outside.

## POST

**China Post** (Zhōngguó Yóujú; cnr Shāndōng Lu & Zhufeng Lu; ☎ 9am-noon & 4-7pm) This building was slated for renovation and may temporarily be closed or relocated.

## PUBLIC SECURITY BUREAU

Shigatse itself is an open town, so a permit is not required to visit. If you want to travel in the



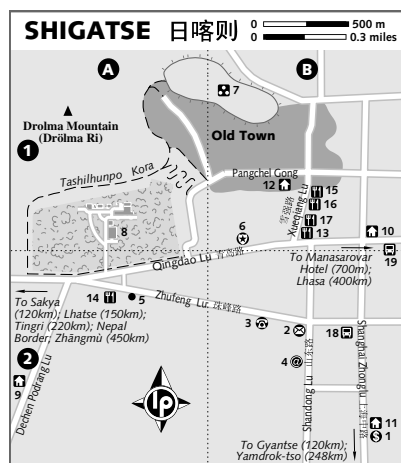
closed areas of Tsang without the cost of a tour and Land Cruiser, you can ask for a permit at the Shigatse **PSB** (Gōngānjū; Qingdao Lu, signposted West Qingdao Lu; ☎ 9:30am-12:30pm & 3:30-6:30pm Mon-Fri). If you're lucky you might catch it open on the weekend also. It does not normally extend visas but may do so in an emergency.

Previously it had been issuing 10- to 15-day permits for all towns along the Friendship Hwy to the border (including EBC), and for Gyantse and Shalu Monastery. However, a steady stream of solo travellers has made the PSB waver of late. Rates vary – some travellers have been charged Y50, some Y100; others have been denied. Still others have gotten them only through a bit of, er, verbal subterfuge.

### TELEPHONE

The cheapest places to make calls are the many private telephone booths around town.

**China Telecom** (Zhōngguó Diànxìn; Zhufeng Lu; ☎ 9am-6:30pm) You can send faxes and make international phone calls here.



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## Sights

**Tashilhunpo Monastery** (Zhāshílūnbù Sì; admission Y55; ☎ 9am-noon & 3:30-6:30pm) is the seat of the Panchen Lama and one of Tibetan culture's six great Gelugpa institutions (along with Drepung, Sera and Ganden in Lhasa and Kumbum and Labrang in Amdo – modern Gansu and Qinghai provinces). Built in 1447 by a nephew of Tsongkhapa, the monastery once housed over 4000 monks, but there are now only 600.

Apart from a giant statue of Jampa (Maitreya) Buddha (nearly 27m high) in the Temple of the Maitreya, the monastery is also famed for its Grand Hall, which houses the opulent tomb (containing 85kg of gold and masses of jewels) of the fourth Panchen Lama. Photography inside the monastic buildings costs a whopping Y75 per chapel.

Little remains of the skyline-obscuring **Shigatse Fortress**. In 2006, though, the hillsides were sheathed in bamboo rigging to start a mammoth reconstruction effort. Expect ersatz antiquity and a hefty admission fee when work is done. The best way to see it is to follow the *kora* around the monastery (clockwise) and then continue to the *dzong* (fortress) for good views of the town.

## Sleeping

**Shambhala Hotel** (Xióngbālā Fāndiàn; ☎ 882 7666; cnr Qingdao Lu & Shanghai Zhonglu; 青岛路上和中海路口; dm Y25, d with/without bathroom Y120/Y60) The friendly staff dither and the place is a bit chaotic but it's a good back-up lodging option to the excellent Tenzin Hotel. The dorms are clean and spacious (the 4th floor is quietest) with communal squat toilets and sinks; hot showers cost Y5.

**Tenzin Hotel** (Tiānxīn Lǚguǎn; ☎ 882 2018; fax 883 8080; 10 Pangchal Gong; dm/tr Y35/40 per bed, s without bathroom Y100, d with/without bathroom Y200/120, de-luxe Y260) The budget traveller's dream spot,

with spotless dorms and clean facilities (the top-floor triples are quieter for almost the same price). The comfortable doubles with bathroom are often discounted to Y160. The shared bathrooms are excellent and usually have 24-hour hot water. The restaurant is pricey, but is a good place to hang out.

**Qomolongma Friendship Hotel** (Zhūfēng Yōuyī Bīnguǎn; ☎ 882 1929; 14 Dechen Podrang Lu; dm Y35, d Y200-258, tr Y288) This place is often used by budget tour companies from Nepal, so it's best used as a last resort. (That said, the hotel often gives a 50% discount, which makes the doubles pretty much worth it. And the restaurant is decent.) The dorm block at the back is basic, with pit toilets. Public showers (Y5) are just outside the hotel's front door, to the left.

**Manasarovar Hotel** (Shénhú Jiǔdiàn; ☎ 883 9999; www.hotelmanasarovartibet.com; 20 Qingdao Lu; 青岛路20号; ordinary/superior d Y280/480, tr Y320) This relatively new three-star option is the best mid-range place in town. Rooms are spacious and spotless, with nice Tibetan detailing, and the services offered are actually available! Discounts of up to 50% are on offer.

**Shigatse Hotel** (Rìkǎzē Fāndiàn; ☎ 882 2525; fax 882 1900; 13 Shanghai Zhonglu; 上海中路13号; d/tr Y500/600) This is a three-star tour-group palace in the south of town. The Tibetan-style rooms are cosy, though the bathrooms are decidedly average. Doubles are often discounted to Y240.

## Eating

**Galgye Tibetan Restaurant** (Xueqiang Lu; dishes Y10-15) A decent Tibetan restaurant serving dishes such as Tibetan noodles, curry potatoes and Lhasa beer (Y6).

**Kailash** (☎ 899 5923; Zhufeng Lu; mains Y15-35) Great ambience and food. Another Nepali-run place, this friendly operation has spacious interiors with comfy tables and a lengthy list of Nepalese, Tibetan and Western dishes. Eat your yak while gazing at Tashilhunpo Monastery!

Hole-in-the-wall Chinese eateries with foreign menus sit on Xueqiang Lu around the corner from the Tenzin Hotel. Names and owners change regularly, but the menus don't. The English-version menus in these restaurants are 25% more expensive. Places include **Tianfu Restaurant** and the **Yuanfu Restaurant**. Further down is the **Zhengxin Restaurant**, which is good and has some breakfast foods, such as pancakes and banana yoghurt.

## Getting There & Away

### BUS

Private buses to Lhasa (Y50, six to seven hours) leave from around 8am from a dusty parking area on Qingdao Lu on the eastern side of Shigatse. The bus station on Zhufeng Lu has a similar service as well as express buses (Y65, five to six hours). Taxis do the trip for around Y70 per person.

Minibuses to Gyantse (Y28, 1½ hours) run when full from outside the bus station from 10am until 8pm daily, but drivers can be reluctant to take foreigners. Taxis also run when full for Y20 per seat or Y80 for the taxi; taxi drivers love to take you (even when the PSB is standing right there hassling them about it!) but will likely start negotiations at Y35 per seat.

There are daily west-bound morning minibuses to Lhatse (Y38, five hours) and Tingri (Y69) and occasional buses to Zhangmu. Those aiming for the Nepalese border may be better off inquiring at the Tenzin Hotel about minibuses or Land Cruisers heading out to the border to pick up tour groups (around Y250 per person). Otherwise, some people hitch from Lhatse or Tingri.

### CAR HIRE

Next to the carpet factory, the **FIT** (☎ 883 8068, 899 0505; Zhufeng Lu) branch office can arrange Land Cruiser hire along the Friendship Hwy (only). Sample prices are Y3400 per vehicle for a three-day return trip to Rongphu Monastery, or Y3300 for a three- to four-day trip to the Nepalese border.

You could also try to hire a Land Cruiser unofficially by talking to the drivers who park outside the Tenzin Hotel. Renting vehicles in Shigatse is more difficult than in Lhasa. Expect to pay Y2500 to Y3000 for a vehicle to Rongphu Monastery and the Nepalese border, but you'll have to arrange your own permits with the PSB.

## SAKYA 萨迦

☎ 0892 / elev 4280m

The monastic town of SAKYA (Sājia) is one of Tsang's most important historical sights. Even more than Gyantse, SAKYA is very Tibetan in character, making it an interesting place to spend a day or so. (Note the distinctive local colouring of buildings – ash grey with red and white vertical stripes, symbolising both the Rigsum Gonpo, the trinity of Bodhisattvas,

and Sakya authority.) You need a permit, but the formerly strict PSB hasn't been hassling travellers much of late.

Sakya's principal attractions are its northern and southern monasteries on either side of the Trum-chu (Trum River). The imposing southern **monastery** (gompa; admission Y50; ☎ 9.30am-1pm, 4pm onwards) is of interest. The original, northern monastery has been mostly reduced to picturesque ruins, though restoration work is ongoing.

### Sleeping & Eating

**Sakya Guesthouse** (萨迦招待所; Sàjiā Zhāodàisùǒ; ☎ 824 2233; dm Y15-20) The rooms are more bearable if you have a sleeping bag (hold your nose in the common toilets), and there's a certain timeless feel about the place. Look for the English sign saying 'Hotel'.

**Manasarovar Sakya Hotel** (神湖萨迦宾馆; Shénhú Sàjiā Bīnguǎn; ☎ 824 2555; 1 Kaisang Xilu; dm Y30-40, d Y280, tr Y220-280) Rooms range from basic but clean to mostly comfy. One of the dorms comes with toilet and shower; the others have no access to a shower. Rooms are clean and there are superb views from the roof. Discounts of 33% are available. Its restaurant (mains Y15 to Y25) is the best place for Western dishes.

**Sakya Monastery Restaurant** (☎ 824 2267; dishes Y7-12) This restaurant belongs to the southern monastery and serves cheap Tibetan-style dishes.

### Getting There & Away

There are daily minibuses departing from Shigatse's bus station to Sakya (Y36 to Y43, four to six hours) at around 8am and possibly at 3.30pm. Minibuses return from the Sakya Guesthouse at around 11am. Another option is to take a Lhatse-bound bus to the Sakya turn-off and then hitch the remaining 25km. You'll most likely have to pay the full fare to Lhatse, though.

Most people arrange to see Sakya as an overnight stop when hiring a Land Cruiser to the border or to the EBC.

## RONGPHU MONASTERY & EVEREST BASE CAMP 绒布寺、珠峰

Before heading to the border, many travellers doing the Lhasa-Kodari trip take in Rongphu Monastery and Everest Base Camp (EBC; also known as Mt Qomolangma, or Chomolungma Base Camp; 5200m), where the vistas are far superior to those in Nepal.

You'll freeze your buns off and be slap-happy giddy from the heights. Yaks take up residence in the putrid, overflowing latrines. Too cold to sleep? It doesn't matter because the Tibetans in surrounding tents will be singing all night.

But sunrise at Everest makes it all worth the trouble.

Before you set off you'll need to stop in Shegar (or Tingri if coming from Nepal) to pay the Qomolangma National Park entrance fee of Y405 per vehicle, plus Y65 per passenger.

Later, as vehicle traffic to Rongphu Monastery and environs is now strictly limited, you must stop off at a new 'entrance' and fork over yet another Y80 for an 'eco-bus' – ironically, a pollution-spewing Dodge Ram – for the last two hours or so to Rongphu Monastery.

The walk from Rongphu Monastery to EBC takes about two hours, or it's 45 minutes in a horse cart (Y60). The route is obvious, going past a glacial moraine and across a sandy plain. In May there are usually dozens of tents belonging to various expeditions. The China Post kiosk here is the world's highest post box.

There is a **guesthouse** (dm Y25) next to Rongphu Monastery. It has a restaurant that also sells simple supplies. A new two-star hotel nearby is laughably expensive. It's possible to stay in **tent guesthouses** (dm Y20-25) at EBC; you'll find loads of blankets, but very basic food.

### TINGRI 定日

☎ 8054 / elev 4390m

Tingri (Dingri) is a huddle of Tibetan homes that overlooks a sweeping plain bordered by the towering Himalayan peaks of Mt Everest (8848m) and Cho Oyu (8153m). It's where many travellers spend their first or last night in Tibet en route to/from Nepal.

Ruins on the hill overlooking Tingri are all that remain of the **Tingri Fortress**. This fort was destroyed in a late 18th-century Nepalese invasion. Many more ruins on the plains between Shegar and Tingri shared the same history.

All the budget hotels have the same layout – a quad of rooms set around a dusty courtyard. Of these, the **Amdo Hotel** (Y25 per bed) is popular with budget Land Cruiser trips and has a hot shower.

The all-brick rooms at the **Snow Leopard Guest House** (☎ 826 2711; d Y80-160) are the most comfortable in town. Its solar shower block (hot water 7pm to midnight) is spotless.

There's also a cosy restaurant (dishes Y25) and a sitting area/reception. It's about 400m east of the other hotels.

From Tingri it's four or five spectacular hours to the Nepalese border – up, up and up to the views from Tong-la pass (5120m) and then down, down, down via the town of Nyalam to Zhāngmù.

## ZHĀNGMÙ 樟木

☎ 0892 / elev 2300m

Zhāngmù (Khasa in Nepalese, Dram in Tibetan) is a remarkable town – everything is incredibly green and luxuriant, the smells of curry and incense in the air are from the subcontinent; and the babbling sound of fast-flowing streams that cut through the town is music to the ears.

The **Bank of China** (Zhōngguó Yínháng; ☎ 9.30am-1.30pm & 3.30-6.30pm Mon-Fri, 11am-2pm Sat & Sun) will change cash and travellers cheques into yuán, and also yuán into US dollars, euros or UK pounds if you have an exchange receipt (ie the receipt you get when you change foreign currency into yuán). (Note: rupees are not accepted.)

Moneychangers change every combination of US dollars, yuán and Nepalese rupees.

The **Gang Gyen Hotel** (轻工宾馆; ☎ 874 2188; dm Y40-50, d Y150) is just up the street from Chinese immigration. Not precisely Shangri-la here, but the dorms are at least a bit spacious. Communal bathrooms are about as good as they get in town. The rooftop shower is decent and has hot water 24 hours. The restaurant adjacent is pricey but its food is recommended.

Just five minutes uphill from the Gang Gyen Hotel is the dirt cheap but good value **Zhangmu Hongqiao Hotel** (樟木红桥宾馆; Zhāngmù Hóngqiáo Bīnguǎn; ☎ 874 2261; dm Y20-25, d Y100-120). Not much English is spoken here but the rooms and shared facilities are decent.

## ZHĀNGMÙ TO KODARI

After you pass through **Chinese immigration** (☎ 9.30am-6.30pm, sometimes closed 1.30-3.30pm), access to Nepal is via the Friendship Bridge and Kodari, around 8km below Zhāngmù. It's generally no problem to get a lift across this stretch of no-man's-land (Y10). Occasional landslides mean that travellers may find themselves scrambling over debris in the places where vehicles can't pass.

It is possible to get a Nepalese visa at the border for the same price as in Lhasa (US\$30 cash, plus one passport photo), though it would be sensible to get one beforehand in Lhasa just in case. There are a few hotels that offer rooms on the Nepalese side. For those planning to continue straight on to Kathmandu, there are a couple of buses a day from Kodari that leave when full. If you can't find a direct bus, you'll have to change halfway at Barabise. The other option is to hire a vehicle from near Nepalese immigration. A ride to Kathmandu (four to five hours) costs Rs 1500 to Rs 2000 per car, or around Rs 500 per person. There are currently around a dozen military checkpoints along the road. Bus passengers have to disembark at many of these, causing the trip to last around seven hours.

Nepal is 2¼ hours behind Chinese time.

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