

PRAYERS IN THE PLATEAU

西藏

*Tibetan Culture
Immersion through
Qinghai & Gansu*



INFORMATION PACK

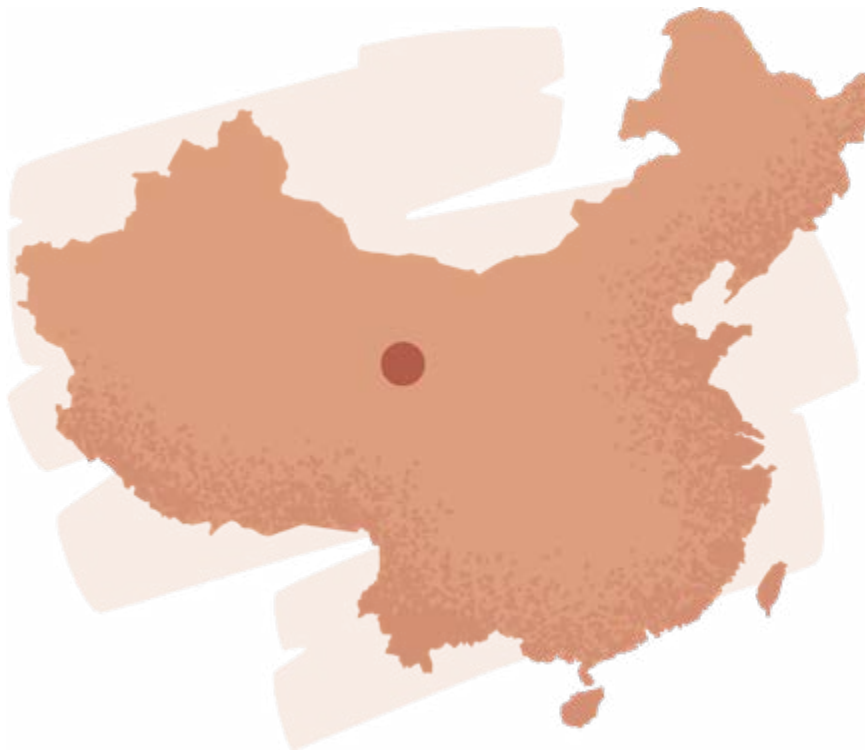
July 12 to July 19, 2021

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Introduction
The Tibetan Plateau

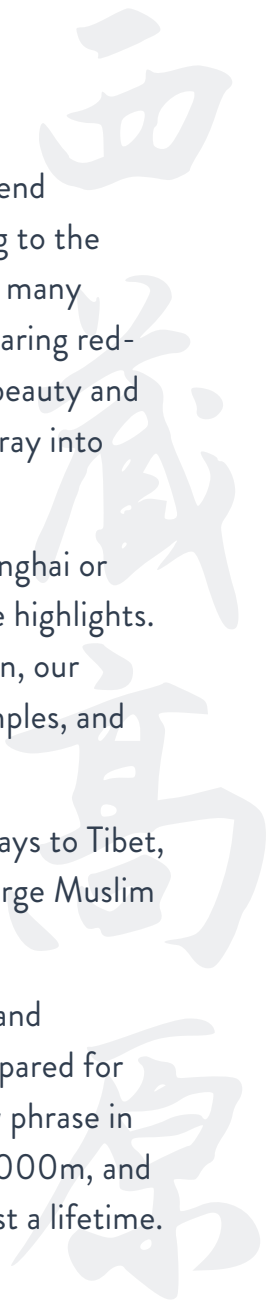


Home to thousands of yaks and the nomads that tend them, Qinghai and Gansu provinces used to belong to the Tibetan kingdom. Their history still breathes in the many monasteries that dot their windswept plains and soaring red-rock mountains, offering both astounding natural beauty and exceptional cultural windows for those willing to stray into China's more remote regions to find them.

Our week-long trip can't possibly cover all that Qinghai or Gansu have to offer, but we will certainly enjoy the highlights. A cross between wilderness and cultural exploration, our journey will take us to national parks, secluded temples, and village stays in a quest for authentic immersion.

While Qinghai and Gansu are known as the Gateways to Tibet, the area's unique culture is also influenced by its large Muslim population and proximity to Mongolia.

Still undisturbed by the furor of tourism, Qinghai and Gansu offer the chance for true adventure. Be prepared for challenges of every kind, whether picking up a new phrase in Tibetan or breathing at an altitude of more than 4000m, and also for the chance to create memories that will last a lifetime.



Qinghai & Gansu

Map & Details



DEPARTURE DATE

12th July, 2021
(Monday)

RETURN DATE

19th July, 2021
(Monday)

PRICE

RMB 10,600
(does not include airfare)

SIGN-UP PROCESS

To express your interest and reserve your space, please email travel@thehutong.com.

Our team will provide a registration form to complete, give updated travel information, and answer any questions you may have.



Qinghai & Gansu

Destinations at a Glance

The Hutong's Tibetan New Year trip gives travellers the chance to experience choice locations of these amazing provinces. We will visit the following places:

Rebkong

Rebkong sits on the edge of the Tibetan Plateau in a region historically known to its nomadic inhabitants as Amdo. The town's origins stretch back several hundred years when it emerged around the establishment of the Longwu Monastery. Rebkong's elevation is 2,600 meters (8,530 ft) and the town is surrounded by several mountains and large expanses of nomadic pasture land. Rebkong is famous for its Tibetan traditional arts, cultural heritage preservation, and festivals. Here, we will experience the colorful dances and ceremonies for an intense insight into the deep spirituality of Tibetan Buddhism.

Labrang

Stand on the corner of the monastery pilgrimage and allow the smells of burnt juniper and grain offerings to fill your nose. Listen to the creaking of spinning prayer wheels and bells tinkling in the wind as you enter Labrang monastery. Here, as you amble around the world's longest stretch of prayer wheels, you will encounter Tibetan pilgrims who have come to pray for their friends and family. The monastery, with 1,600 monks, 18 temple halls, and six separate institutes of learning, is a small city in and of itself and dominates the western part of Labrang town. The white walls and gilded roofs and endless alleys offer limitless opportunities to glimpse monastic life in action.

Qinghai & Gansu Itinerary

DAY 1 // Xining

You will arrive in Xining airport in the mid morning, where you will be met by your guides and driver. In the afternoon, we will visit the Tibetan Medical Museum and the largest Thangka painting in the world. This painting is a fitting introduction to our journey, telling the story of the Tibetan people. After our first authentic Tibetan dinner, we will settle into our cozy hotel in Xining.



DAY 2 // Rebkong

Rebkong (known in Chinese as Tongren) is famous across Tibet for its artists and handcrafted paintings. We will spend the afternoon exploring the backalleys of Longwu Monastery - Qinghai's largest monastery - to find out what life as a monk is really like. Here, we will explore the origins of Tibetan Thangka art as many of the Thangka across Tibet are produced in this very monastery.

In the evening, we will eat a Tibetan style dinner and explore the town's Tibetan district.



DAY 3 // Ganjia Grasslands

In the morning, we will drive one hour to the Ganjia Grasslands, the heartbeat of Amdo Tibet. These are some of the largest and lushest grasslands in the Eastern Tibet region and we will get a chance to see many traditional Tibetan tents here. We will then set off on a beautiful hike starting at 3,200 meters through the scenic Ganjia Gorge to explore rivers and incredible craggy mountains. We'll finish the day with a Tibetan dinner in Labrang and a good night's rest in a local Tibetan boutique hotel.



DAY 4 // Labrang Monastery

In the morning we will walk to see the famous Labrang Monastery, the most influential Gelugpa monastery outside of the Lhasa region, with over 1000 resident monks.

After lunch in town, including some freshly made yak yoghurt, the afternoon is free with an optional hike behind Labrang monastery in the grasslands to 3000 meters. Alternatively, you can walk the streets of Labrang and buy souvenirs in the market or hike.

At night, we will enjoy a personalized Thangka painting workshop where you will have a hands on chance to create Tibetan art.





DAY 5 // Langmusi

Early morning we will head over to the Labrang Thangka wall for pictures overlooking the monastery. Then we will drive through lush grasslands for three hours to Langmusi, a town on the Gansu and Sichuan border at 3,200 meters.

We'll stop in the grasslands to see if we can see black-necked cranes nesting in the high wetlands of the Tibetan Plateau near Gyanthan Lake, a high altitude alpine lake. We'll arrive in Langmusi in the late afternoon and explore the town on our own before dinner.



DAY 6 // Langmusi Gorge

This is our biggest and most adventurous hike of the whole trip and we will be trekking for about eight hours. Less hiking is also possible for kids or those looking for a more relaxed pace; in this case, there are plenty of rivers and springs to stop at in along the way. After hiking above the Langmusi Monastery for an excellent view of the town, our hike takes us through jagged rock cliffs up unto a high mountain peak at 4,200 meters.

We will return to Langmusi town and transfer to a Tibetan nomad tent stay where we will spend the night sleeping under the stars with a nomadic family. With the opportunity to stay with local Tibetan nomads, we'll have insight into their daily routines and appreciate the richness of their culture.

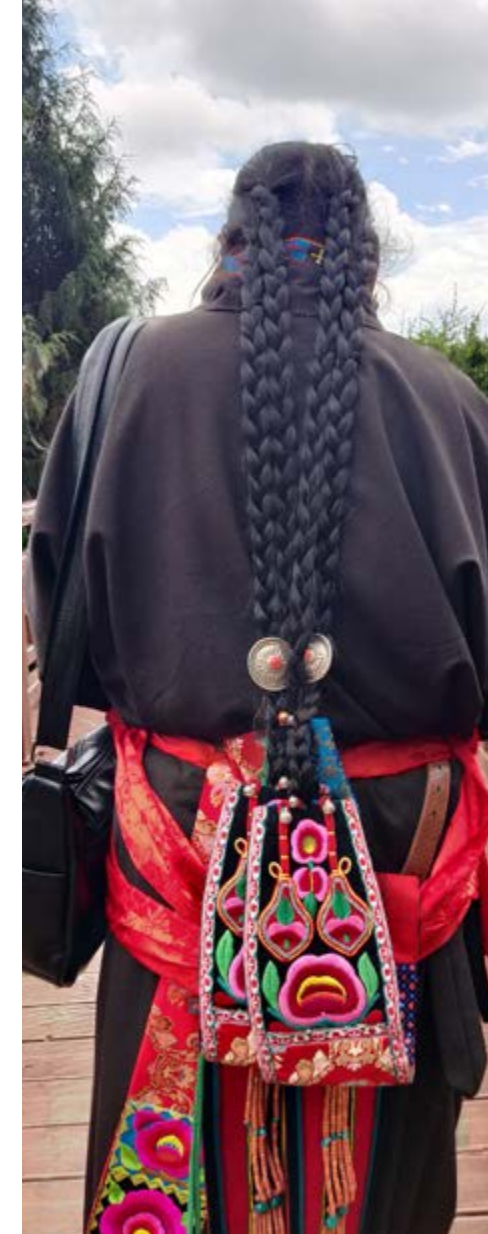


DAY 7 // Hezuo

After some morning grassland activities, we start making our way back to Lanzhou, the capital city of Gansu Province and a key stop along the ancient Silk Road. As we make our way back towards the capital, we will stop along the road and breathe in the fresh air and take in the high, verdant pastures that mark this section of southern Gansu.

In the afternoon, we will spend some time before dinner seeing the nine story temple of Milarepa in Hezuo town. This temple tells the story of one of Buddhism's greatest saints.

We'll enjoy a celebratory dinner together before calling it a night at our hotel in Hezuo.



DAY 8 // Lanzhou

In the morning we will drive to Lanzhou, dropping you off at the airport for flights back to Beijing or Shanghai. Please look to book an afternoon or evening flight.

Important Information

Fitness, Altitude & Difficulty

While we're not preparing for a marathon hike, Qinghai's rugged terrain and steep altitude will still provide plenty of opportunities for physical challenge. Flying into Xining will bring us immediately to a height of 2,275 metres (~7,500 ft) above sea level and our day trip to the Ganjia Grasslands summits at around 4,000 metres (~13,000 ft). While there is always a risk of mild altitude sickness, we have built the itinerary specifically to ensure that with good health, things should go smoothly. Every effort is made to ensure your wellbeing and safety; as long as you are in good health, stay hydrated, and get enough sleep, you should experience little discomfort due to altitude.

Apart from your physical condition (training beforehand is not essential, but would help as we'll be spending plenty of time on our feet), it is important to note the packing requirements for this trip. Qinghai is known for its variable weather conditions, so bringing suitable gear will keep you happy and comfortable in the mountains. If you have any questions about equipment or would like recommendations on what to bring or buy, please don't hesitate to contact us.

Above all, keep in mind that we'll experience one of the more remote destinations in China, a neighbour to Tibet and Mongolia and far off the beaten track. Amongst everything else you'll pack, a wide smile and open heart are the most important items on the list. At The Hutong, we care about going the extra *lǐ*, because that one step further makes the rewards all the sweeter.



Trip Leader: Ben Cubbage

Ben has lived on the Tibetan Plateau in Xining's Qinghai Province since 2010. He has a Bachelor's degree in Environmental Science and has spent considerable time teaching organic agriculture and sustainable development in Ghana and Liberia. He has extensive trekking experience, having completed the 4,240 km Pacific Crest Trail from Mexico to Canada, involving 32 km per day through 1,125 km of desert, over six months.

Ben has also thru-hiked the 3,440 km Appalachian Trail along the east coast of the US, and he has hiked extensively in Tibet and Nepal, guiding trips to the base camp of Mt. Everest, the headwaters of the Yellow River, and the base of Amnye Machen.

Ben has traveled extensively across the Tibetan Plateau and wants to share his passion for local culture and stunning scenery with you.

Cultural Tidbits

Qinghai, literally translating to "Blue Sea", draws its name from the immense salt-water lake at its centre, the largest of its kind in China. The province is also home to the origins of the Yellow, Yangtze, and Lantsang Rivers, cascading from fountainheads of more than 6,000 meters (~21,000 ft) above sea level.

Its population includes almost forty ethnic groups, with national minorities accounting for nearly 50% of the five million who live there. Both Buddhism and Islam are very alive in the province, as witnessed by the many temples and mosques that draw devotees and tourists alike.



Flights

The Hutong will recommend flights, and can help purchase tickets upon request, though we find it's often easiest for participants to book on their own. If we do help you purchase your ticket, we will not mark up flights. Please let us know your preference. If you have to cancel your flight or change your schedule, the terms and fees of the final booking will ultimately be the responsibility of the traveler.



Arrival & Departure

This trip will begin in Xining and end in Lanzhou. We will arrange a pick-up at Xining airport and a drop-off service at Lanzhou airport, as well as provide necessary details if you are arriving a day or two earlier by train or plane.



Meals & Snacks

We will be enjoying local cuisine throughout our journey, often prepared in a villager's home in a cosy family environment. Given the nomadic culture of the people, sheep and yak products, including meat, milk and yoghurt, form staples of the local diet. Some meals during the hiking parts of our journey will be served picnic-style, including sandwich staples and basic Western food, however there will be plenty of opportunity to explore a variety of snacks and local delicacies.



To keep up your energy on the hikes, we recommend you bring along some of your personal favourites as well, such as granola bars.

Serendipity

Hutong trip leaders travel regularly to destinations to develop relationships with local contacts to provide the most authentic cultural experiences possible. As such, trip itineraries are subject to change, pending the discovery of an even better activity or destination. Itineraries may also be subject to change due to weather, traffic, or government policies.



Accommodation

We'll be staying in a nice comfortable hotel in Xining on the first night of the trip. The rest of the time, we have more varying standards, mostly Tibetan boutique hotels with lots of charm and local flavor in Rebkong, Labrang, Langmusi, and Hezuo.

We will be spending one night with Tibetan nomads in the grasslands of Langmusi.




Hiking & Elevation

Given Qinghai's average altitude of 3,000 metres, it's best to be prepared for altitude sickness. We recommend that you visit a travel medical doctor and ask about possible medication to combat its effects. Hikes can range between 3,000 to 4,000 meters in elevation and can be tailored to be easy or more challenging depending on the preferences of the group. If you feel any discomfort, you can always opt out of hiking or activities on that day.



Tibetan Nomadic Culture




Our program takes participants through the remote regions of Amdo Tibet into the high grasslands and monasteries that are the heartbeat of Tibetan nomadic culture. Eat a cup of tart yak yoghurt, walk under the tall golden spires of monastery halls and giant Buddhas, and trek through rugged mountains to discover how nomads have kept their ways alive for centuries in the midst of an often unforgiving high-altitude environment.

Summer Weather

Most of the areas we travel to are between 2,500 meters and 3,500 meters in elevation. Xining, the capital of Qinghai at 2,300 m is generally clear and springy in the summer with daytime temperatures of 15 to 20 Celsius, depending on the elevation. The high altitude sun can be pretty intense so make sure you have lots of sunscreen, a sun hat, and sunglasses.



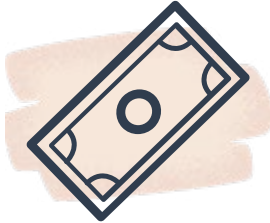
Health & Covid-19



We recommend that you visit a travel medical doctor or consult with the CDC and ask about the following vaccinations: typhoid, polio, tetanus and Hepatitis A.

A Covid-19 test may be required prior to trip departure depending on current travel guidelines. We will notify you in advance of the trip if this is the case.

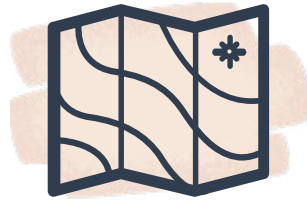
Money & Extra Expenses




ATMs are plentiful in Xining, but hard to find in the smaller villages and towns. In most places you won't need money, except for snacks or drinks. There will be several stops along the way for local keepsakes, in which case you may wish to have a little bit of money; no more than a few hundred RMB should be sufficient, unless you'd like to stock your tea collection (in which case, you can spend as much as you like). Of course, you can always pay with Wechat or Alipay, too.

Guides

Our Tibetan New Year Adventure comes fully-equipped with English-speaking guides who are familiar with the terrain and extremely knowledgeable about the area's culture, industry, and history. We also work very closely with amazing local guides who know and love the area; they help to provide all kinds of wonderful experiences.



People



Tibetan people have their own distinctive cultural traditions. Along our route, you'll meet many of our knowledgeable local partners who'll happily share with you their cultures and traditions, meaning we're all sure to learn a lot and have some great conversations along the way.

I recently enjoyed a multi-day trip filled with amazing scenery, inspiring hiking, delicious food and cultural immersion. The itinerary was a modified version of the package trip called “Tibetan New Year” and I highly recommend it for anyone desiring to get out of the hustle and bustle for a few days.

Our guide was very knowledgeable, while remaining flexible and adaptable in accommodating our needs and wishes. We enjoyed some amazing spontaneous moments that I will never forget. Thanks for a great trip!

Danielle W.
Trip Participant (2020)





The Hutong
**A Bit
About Us**

The Hutong creates unforgettable travel experiences throughout China for students from International Schools, and for people of all ages from around the world. Since 2009, we have run educational, and adult-travel, programs to off-the-beaten-track destinations across China. From the rainforests of southern Yunnan to the grasslands of the Mongolian steppe, all of our programs are meticulously researched and planned to optimize cultural exchange and to offer fun, innovative, and immersive experiences.

As well as being a licensed travel operator across Greater China, The Hutong is at heart a transformative education company. We partner with leading schools to build programs that incorporate learning objectives and life skills, all the while maintaining absolute professionalism and an impeccable safety record. From our team of international educators to our travel specialists, each and every Hutonger shares a passion for providing exceptional learning experiences.

Hutong programs engage with global issues and leave participants with broadened horizons, a renewed sense of their strengths and abilities, and incredible memories. No matter where we go, we aim to make a positive impact on the communities we visit and on the groups we lead.



The Hutong
Sharing Culture, Sharing Knowledge



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