

Long Trek Catalog 2016

These long treks are organized for groups of 4-8, and include our highest level of service. Yaks pack our encampment across the high grasslands and passes, while we are free to ride horses (and sometimes walk) without encumbrance. We feast each night around a low candlelit table near the campfire. Full translation is provided from airport pick-up to drop off to allow for storytelling as well as aiding smooth handling of logistics.

Sacred Zhakra Lhatse and Nomad Lands Ride

This is a 10-day horse ride across nomad lands and to local sacred places. We will ride for 5-6 hours most days. We also will attend a traditional horse race and village festival. This trek is ideal for people who love riding, and who really want to spend time getting to know Tibetan nomad culture through people. We spend 10 days with our guides, and getting to know them is a main aspect of the fun! We also visit both more modern and older-fashioned temples, to get a sense of nomad life now.

Day 1 – 15 July

Arrival in Chengdu, capital of the Sichuan Province. Chengdu is nicknamed the 'City of Hibiscus' and is an historic and richly cultural city with over 2300 years of written history. Dinner with guides. Overnight at the BuddhaZen Hotel.

Day 2 – 16 July

Fly to the Kangding airport, high on the pass above the ancient trading town of Dartsedo.

Drive to Dartsedo (Kangding) and spend the night there. This is an ancient trading and cultural border town famous for its yak hide and tea trading. See the Sino-Tibetan fusion temple in the middle of town, and have your first Tibetan meal.

Day 3 – 17 July

Drive to Puksum, a pure Tibetan farming village, and stay here tonight in a Swiss-Tibetan run guesthouse. This day is mainly for acclimatization, along with enjoyment of the beauty of the lush potato and barley farms, and walks in the forested hills.

Day 4 – 18 July

Travel 20 minutes up the road to Lhagang in time for the horse festival today. Lhagang is a small Tibetan town built around the Lhagang monastery, surrounded by high grassland. Mt. Zhakra Lhaste majestically overlooks the mountains and green plains. Visit the monastery. Built in the 7th century by King Songtsen Gampo of Tibet, is the oldest of all the former province of Kham. For Khampa, this is equivalent to the Jokhang in Lhasa.

Today, experience the annual Lhagang Horse Race Festival. The horses are blessed with the smoke of juniper to give them the courage to race. There are many charges of galloping horsemen and, although the Tibetan horses are small, the ground shakes. It is also an opportunity for the Tibetan nomads to show their wealth. Participants wear colorful clothes and hats, with women displaying shiny jewelry of jade, amber, coral, ivory, silver and gold. The festival also offers a taste of the warmth of Tibetan hospitality. The night is spent in a family guesthouse.

Day 5 – 19 July

After visiting the Lhagang temple in the morning, ride to the nunnery of Gyergo, one of the main temples in the valley, approximately two hours. This nunnery originated 20 years ago, when the hermit of the Gyergo Valley died. He was a much-respected man who dressed in rags and ate only handouts, living in a cave on the grasslands. His task was to carve mani stones (inscribed prayer stones). About to die, he asked that a reincarnate lama be placed at the site, and this wish was granted. The site has since become a lively nunnery, and now a monk's school is being built nearby. His work of mani stones has also been continued, and the stones have been stacked into a pile resembling a fair-sized temple.

Gyergo is the main temple for the nomad families near Lhagang, and they gather there in winter. It is also a sky burial site. The night is spent at the nunnery.

Day 6 – 20 July

Ride to the hot springs (3800m) at the foot of Zhakra. Ascend the Griffon Pass at 4800 m (the highest point of the hike). We go down by foot, horse in hand, into the valley. Camp at the foot of the sacred mountain of Zhakra.

Day 7 – 21 July

Ride to Lake Turquoise Yimtso Zhakra. Traditional kora walking around the lake. Descend into the valley bottom to join your camp, nestled in a protected forest, offering spectacular views of glaciers.

Day 8 – 22 July

Today we will ride in the vast pastures of the so-called "empty valley," punctuated by settlements of nomadic families. Back on horseback to the nunnery of Gyergo. Second night at the nunnery.

Day 9 – 23 July

We cross the highlands of Lhagang on horseback, open pastures that stretch more than 80km wide in front of us. Many nomadic families move here every summer with their herds. We encounter only a few nomad tents, sacred lakes and small isolated Buddhist temples before arriving at the camp of a nomadic family where we will spend the next two nights.

Day 10 – 24 July

We enjoy a day alongside the family of herders in the camp of Dashika. We have the opportunity to immerse ourselves in the daily life of nomadic gathering of yaks and calves, watching and taking part in the manufacture of butter and cheese. No riding today.

Day 11 – 25 July

Back on horseback we ride through the wildest part of the highlands to the camp of the nomadic Gepshima, near one of the most famous sacred lakes. These lakes appear to be bottomless, and legends about nomadic camps that disappear and reappear on other shores abound.

Day 12 – 26 July

Today we ride across high marshland, rife with waterfowl, to an overlook from which we see 100 miles to the west. From there, we drop down to Ragni Lake, another sacred lake, said to be rich in minerals and sacred to the Le, the merman-like water gods of Tibet.

Day 13 - 27 July

To contrast with the previous day we cross the most populated highlands of Lhagang by horseback. Arrive at Genup Gompa, a beautiful grassland temple located on a ridge top above a deep river valley. Home to only about 20 monks, and far from a road, Genup Gompa has the feel of a traditional Tibetan grassland monastery.

Day 14 - 28 July

Last ride. Drop down into the valley to the first areas accessible by vehicle where you will meet your transport and leave the horses behind. Lunch in the village of Warmet before driving to the Rongmi (Danba) valley where you will stay the night in a village family guesthouse.

Day 15 - 29 July

Drive back to Chengdu, a journey of around 12 hours but an experience not to be missed!
Dinner in town.

Day 16 - 30 July

A day to explore Chengdu, perhaps visit the pandas, the opera or an acupuncture massage.

Day 17 - 31 July

Transfer to the airport for your flight home.

Price per person: \$3360, single supplement \$435.

Price includes 3 meals per day, in-country transport, all lodging, full translation and guiding, 10 days riding, horse equipment and tents.

Shamalong Horse Race and Nomad Lands Ride and Photo Tour

This 12-day ride crosses high nomad land, visits sacred places, and gives time at a nomad horse race. Along for the ride will be Kottie Gaydos, an art photographer and photography instructor. Kottie will provide daily photography lessons, and help with photo work along the way. Her work can be seen at gaydos.org and on her blog at kottiegaydos.tumblr.com. Kottie spent 3 summers working on her art-based photography in the Lhagang area. She holds a BFA from the Maryland Institute College of Art, and is working on her MFA at the .

This trek offers serious riders a chance to enjoy their skills in a stunning environment, an opportunity to get to know traditional nomadic people through days spent together, and instruction in photography, for whatever purpose best suits your interests!

Day 1 – 7 August

Arrival in Chengdu, capital of the Sichuan Province. Chengdu is nicknamed the 'City of Hibiscus' and is an historic and richly cultural city with over 2300 years of written history. Dinner with guides. Overnight at the BuddhaZen Hotel.

Day 2 – 8 August

Fly to the Kangding airport, high on the pass above the ancient trading town of Dartsedo.

Drive to Dartsedo (Kangding) and spend the night there. This is an ancient trading and cultural border town famous for its yak hide and tea trading. See the Sino-Tibetan fusion temple in the middle of town, and have your first Tibetan meal.

Day 3 - 9 August

Drive to Puksum, a pure Tibetan farming village, and stay here tonight in a Swiss-Tibetan run guesthouse. This day is mainly for acclimatization, along with enjoyment of the beauty of the lush potato and barley farms, and walks in the forested hills.

Day 4 - 10 August

Drive 20 minutes to Lhagang is a small Tibetan town built around the Lhagang monastery, surrounded by high grassland. Mt. Zhakra Lhaste majestically overlooks the mountains and green plains. Visit the monastery. Built in the 7th century by King Songtsen Gampo of Tibet, it is the oldest of all the former province of Kham. For Khampa, this is equivalent to the Jokhang in Lhasa. Settle into a small family guesthouse for the night.

Day 5 – 11 August

Ride to Shamalong Dewa nomadic area, for the clan's yearly horse festival. The ride is about 5 hours long high above the deep Lhagang river canyon, and we camp near the festival on the high grassland.

Day 6 – 12 August

Experience the annual Shamalong Horse Race Festival. The horses are blessed with the smoke of juniper to give them the courage to race. There are many charges of galloping horsemen and, although the Tibetan horses are small, the ground shakes. It is also an opportunity for the Tibetan nomads to show their wealth. Participants wear colorful clothes and hats, with women displaying shiny jewelry of jade, amber, coral, ivory, silver and gold. The festival also offers a taste of the warmth of Tibetan hospitality.

Day 7 – 13 August

Ride to the nunnery of Gyergo, one of the main temples of the area, about 5 hours. This nunnery originated 20 years ago, when the hermit of the Gyergo Valley died. He was a much-respected man who dressed in rags and ate only handouts, living in a cave on the grasslands. His task was to carve mani stones (inscribed prayer stones). About to die, he asked that a reincarnate lama be placed at the site, and this wish was granted. The site has since become a lively nunnery, and now a monk's school is being built nearby. His work of mani stones has also been continued, and the stones have been stacked into a pile resembling a fair-sized temple.

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