

Southwest China & Tibet

→ **September 20 - October 6, 2009**

Hong Kong Extension

→ **October 5 - 7, 2009**

Experience the magnificent mountains, the mild climate, and the mysterious beauty of Yunnan Province and the Tibetan Plateau of China, a land that has long had a hold on the imagination of the world as "Shangri La," or "The Roof of the World." Learn about a part of China that has one third of all the ethnic minorities, more than half of the country's plant and animal species, and is also a World Heritage area as the source of the three great rivers of Asia, including the Yangtze and Mekong. You will meet and learn about the Tibetan and Naxi people, visit the former home of Joseph Rock, the Austro-American botanist and ethnologist, and see the Pandas in Chengdu. Extended time in Lijiang and in Tibet will enable you to more fully experience and learn about the history, people, food, and culture of this remote part of the world that was connected by the ancient Tea-Horse old road.

(As Lhasa, Tibet is over 11,000 ft above sea level this program itinerary was specially designed to gradually acclimate yourself to the effects of high altitude. You will be going to progressively higher altitudes from Kunming at almost 6,000 ft to Zhongdian at 7,000 ft above sea level in Yunnan Province over a seven day period of time before flying to Tibet. This will help to assure that you more fully enjoy your Tibetan experience by not feeling the ill effects of high altitude.)

People to People Experiences: A home visit with the Naxi and a meal at one of Lijiang's small Naxi family restaurants. A home visit with a Tibetan family and a visit to a Tibetan Traditional Hospital in Lhasa.

Sample Lectures: "Shangri La: Myth and Reality," "China's Ethnic Groups and Cultures of Yunnan," "The Doctrine and Culture of Tibetan Buddhism," "China/Tibet: Clash of Cultures," "Tea-Horse Old Road - China's forgotten Silk Road."

UNESCO World Heritage Sites: South China Karst (Shilin Stone Forests), Old Town of Lijiang, Three Parallel Rivers of Yunnan (Yangtze, Mekong, Saiween), Historic Ensemble of the Potala Palace, Lhasa

Food: An Insight Into Culture

Celebrating food as another way to gain an understanding of a culture, you will visit local food markets, enjoy meals in select authentic local restaurants, and hear Chefs talk about some of their favorite dishes.

Day 1 - September 20th - Sunday

USA/International Date Line

Depart from the U.S.

Day 2 - September 21st - Monday

Arrive in Shanghai

Arrival and overnight in Shanghai. **Rainbow Hotel**

Day 3 - September 22nd - Tuesday (B, L, D)

Shanghai/Kunming

Early morning flight to Kunming, the capital city of Yunnan Province and known as the "City of Eternal Spring" because of its year-around mild weather and flower blossoms. Visit the Western Hills and view Huating Temple with its fine statues and excellent gardens. Continue up to the summit and visit two famous Taoist Temples before reaching the Dragon Gate Grotto overlooking Lake Diane below. **Harbour Plaza Hotel**

Day 4 - September 23rd - Wednesday (B, L, D)

Kunming

Excursion to the legendary Shilin Stone Forest, a geologic wonder consisting of 30 million year old karst formations that are the highest single-body limestone structures in the world. When seen from a distance, the vast area of jagged stones dotted with green trees and colorful flowers presents the look of a unique forest. Viewed up close, the oddly shaped rocks seem to take on a life of its own and you get a sense of "Time" as the world's greatest sculptor. Tour Sani Minority Village and explore the "Yi" ethnic minority's colorful customs and unique life styles. Enjoy a specially arranged dinner of special local dishes including fabled Cross-bridge Noodles and Steam-pot Chicken. **Harbour Plaza Hotel**

Day 5 - September 24th - Thursday (B, L, D)

Kunming/Dali

Early morning flight to Dali, a small city with cobble stone streets and traditional stone architecture on the western edge of Erhai Lake at an altitude of 6,000 ft with mountains rising over 12,000 ft behind the town. Learn about the main inhabitants of Dali at the Bai Ethnic Minority State Museum and stroll through the bustling local bazaar. Visit the South Gate in the Old Town and make a photographic stop at the legendary Three Pagodas. Enjoy a boat cruise on scenic Erhai Lake and visit a functioning Catholic Church complete with Chinese decorations. **Asia Star Hotel**

Day 6 - September 25th - Friday (B, L, D)

Dali/Lijiang

Explore the Xizhou Ethnic Minority Village and a "Bai" minority's bazaar. Observe a "Three Course Tea" show and "Bai" people's song and dance. Shop on your own for the famous wax print articles and other ethnic handicrafts. Take a scenic ride through lush grassland, dense forest, and mountains to Lijiang, the "Venice of the Orient." With a history of more than 800 years, Lijiang Old Town lies on the high plateau in Northwestern Yunnan Province. To the north of town is Jade Dragon Snow Mountain which remains snow-capped all year round and provides the constant flow of water through the arteries of crystal clear canals running in front of and through the compounds of black-tiled and white-walled houses with square courtyards throughout this first World Heritage City of China.

Grand Hotel (Ideally located at the entrance to the Old Town)

Day 7 - September 26th - Saturday (B, L, D)

Lijiang

Visit the spectacular snowcapped Jade Dragon Snow Mountain. Take a cable car to the yak meadow of Yunshaping and visit Yufeng Temple which commands a magnificent view of green grasslands, tall firs, and the glittering snows of the mountain. Visit the home of Joseph Rock, an Austro-American who lived a good part of his life in Lijiang devoted to researching Naxi culture and collecting the flora of the region He also wrote for National Geographic Magazine in the early 1900's. Explore the Baisha Naxi Village and learn how the Naxi people used written records and pictographs to preserve their culture from generation to generation. Also view the Baisha Murals that are a reflection of various religious influences. Enjoy a home visit with the Naxi and a meal at one of Lijiang's small Naxi family restaurants. Dinner is followed by a rare chance to hear Chinese music, as it must have sounded in classical China. Listen to faithful renditions of music from the Song and Tang Dynasties played on original instruments by the traditional Naxi Folk Music Orchestra.

Grand Hotel

Day 8 - September 27th - Sunday (B, L, D)

Lijiang

A free day to explore Lijiang on your own. The streets and lanes of the Old Town are paved with cobble stones and together with streams and bridges provide hours of leisurely walking to enjoy the simplicity of architecture and the customs and life of the people. You will marvel at the great variety of national costumes, ornaments, and languages of the people walking in the streets and in the varied shops including numerous Teahouses and coffee shops. This ancient town has always been noted for its numerous handicraftsmen and the arts and crafts stores of the town attract tourists with their glistening displays of paintings, batik garments, wood and stone carvings and ceramics. **Grand Hotel**

Day 9 - September 28 - Monday (B, L, D)

Lijiang/Shangri La (Zhongdian)

A scenic coach ride takes you through beautiful highlands and mountains on the great Yunnan/Tibet Highway. View the upper reaches of the mighty Yangtze River (here called Jinsha Jiang) and stop at the giant bend of the river at Shigu town or "Town of Stone" which channeled the river to the northeast and ultimately to its mouth near Shanghai. Also visit Tiger Leaping Gorge and experience the "thundering might" of the river as it drops nearly 1,000 ft over a 12 mile stretch in a series of 34 rapids through a narrow cleft with near vertical cliffs soaring directly up from either side of the stream for 7,000 ft. Travel to the grasslands of Shangri-la (Zhongdian). This is the exact place commonly believed to have been depicted as the mythical Shangri-la in James Hilton's novel "The Lost Horizon" (The Presidential hideaway Camp David in Maryland was once named Shangri-La by President Franklin D. Roosevelt.) **Paradise Hotel**

Day 10 - September 29th - Tuesday (B, L, D)

Shangri La (Zhongdian)/Lhasa, Tibet

A late morning flight to Lhasa (in Tibetan, "The Land of the Gods"), the heart and soul of Tibet and capital since 1642..Check in at the VIP section of the centrally located superior first-class Tibet Hotel. Time to relax and acclimate to local topography and the weather. **Tibet Hotel (VIP Section of hotel)**

Day 11 - September 30th - Wednesday (B, L, D)

Lhasa/Yamdruk/Gyantze/Shigatze

Travel to beautiful Yamdrok Yumtso Lake, one of three holy lakes in Tibet.

Enjoy a picnic lunch on the side of this tranquil lake at the south foot of the Himalaya mountains and then continue on to Gyantze to visit Baiju Monastery famous for its Wanfo Tower (10,000 Buddhas). It is a monastery that embraces all sects of Buddhism, which is rare in Tibet. Built in 1414, its walls are filled with tens of thousands of strikingly beautiful murals and scriptures combining Tibetan, Indian and other traditional art. Continue to Shigatze, (in Tibetan, "The Estate that Fulfills One's Wishes") the biggest city in southern Tibet and the seat of the Panchen Lama, a reincarnation of Amitabha (Buddha of Infinite Light), who ranks close to the Dalai Lama. **Shigatze Hotel**

Day 12 - October 1st - Thursday (B, L, D)

Shigatze/Lhasa

Visit the well-known Tashilunpo Monastery, located on the slopes of Nesei Mountains. It is once the home of Panchen Lama, one of the three most powerful Living Buddhas in Tibet. Built in 1444 by a nephew of Tsong Khapa, the monastery once housed over 4000 monks, but now there are only about 600. In the Grand Scripture Hall, a sitting Buddha statue is enshrined with 6,700 ounces of gold and 115,000 kilograms of copper. It is the biggest copper statue in the world. The monastery is also famed for its Great Hall with the opulent tomb (containing 85 kg of gold and masses of jewels) of the 4th Panchen Lama. Travel through vast and scenic mountain terrain on your way back to Lhasa. **Tibet Hotel**

Day 13 - October 2nd - Friday (B, L, D)

Lhasa

Explore the magnificent Potala Palace, once the center of Tibetan government and the winter residence of the Dalai Lama. One of the architectural wonders of the world, this immense construction has thousands of rooms, shrines, and statues, holding relics of previous generations of Dalai Lama. Visit the Red Palace where religious functions were held and also the White Palace, which were the living quarters of the Dalai Lama. Visit the holy Jokhang Temple and take in the magnificent interior carvings & paintings. Stroll the bustling Bakhor Street, where the traditional way of life still endures. You will find pilgrims dressed in colorful traditional Tibetan robes, chanting and circling the holy site with their prayer wheel in hand. You can also view the striking variety of Tibetan arts and crafts in the local stores. **Tibet Hotel**

Day 14 - October 3rd - Saturday (B, L, D)

Lhasa

Take an excursion to Deprung Temple and Sara Monastery, two of the most sacred grounds in Tibet - both were once home to over ten thousand Lamas and were regarded as the senior religious education body. Observe the rarely seen ritual of Monk debate - hundreds of monks debate on Buddhist articles and philosophy, using unique forms of body and arm movements to present their points. Also explore the famed Norbulinka - Dalai Lama's exquisite summer palace with its beautiful architecture and serene garden settings. Take in the amazing wall paintings in his living quarter, where all furniture was kept exactly the same from the very moment his holiness left Tibet. The clock on the wall was stopped. The radio was set at the last station his holiness listened the night before he left. Also visit a local Tibetan family and learn firsthand about Tibetan local life. **Tibet Hotel**

Day 15 - October 4th - Sunday (B, L, D)

Lhasa/Chengdu

Morning flight to Chengdu, the capital of Sichuan Province and the largest and most populated province of China. Visit China's biggest Panda Propagation Center, which houses quite a number of giant pandas. Over the years, dozens of pandas were born through artificial breeding. Here you will have chance to take pictures with the pandas or even the cubs at your own cost. Enjoy a special Sichuan Cuisine Banquet Farewell Dinner. **Yinhe Dynasty Hotel**

Day 16 - October 5th - Monday (B, L)

Chengdu/Shanghai

Visit the Bamboo Garden where you can mingle with the locals and enjoy a cup of tea while watching people passing by before taking a flight back to Shanghai. **Rainbow Hotel**

Day 17 - October 6th - Tuesday (B)

Shanghai/USA

Transfer to the airport for your flight back to the USA.

Optional Hong Kong Extension

Day 16 - October 5th - Monday (B)

Chengdu/Hong Kong

Visit the Bamboo Garden where you can mingle with the locals and enjoy a cup of tea while watching people passing by before taking a flight to Hong Kong and transfer to your hotel. **Grand Metropark Hotel on Hong Kong Island**

Day 17 - October 6th - Tuesday (B)

Hong Kong

A comprehensive half-day tour of the major sites in Hong Kong, including Victoria Peak, Aberdeen floating village, Stanley Market and Repulse Bay. Enjoy rest of the day at leisure to explore on your own.

Grand Metropark Hotel on Hong Kong Island

Day 18 - October 7th - Wednesday (B)

Hong Kong/USA

Enjoy free morning at leisure to further explore Hong Kong and transfer to the airport for a flight back home.

PROGRAM FEATURES

* All air and land transfers with assistance. Airport departure taxes throughout the programs are not included. All specially arranged lecture/seminars and field experiences as indicated in the itinerary.

* Deluxe, first-class and best available accommodations throughout the program as indicated in the itinerary. Three meals daily within China.

* All professional English-speaking guides are personally selected for you from firsthand experience by our China coordinator.

* Please note that this program is more adventurous and good physical health is required.

PROGRAM PRICE

\$3,895 per person double occupancy Land Only - Plus Airfare

(does not include international airfare, giving you the flexibility to use frequent flyer miles or search the internet for the best airfares available.)

\$795 single-room supplement

HONG KONG EXTENSION PRICE

\$525 per person double occupancy

\$195 single-room supplement

Visas are required for all U.S. citizens. Information will be mailed upon registration.

B - Breakfast

L - Lunch

D - Dinner

Drinks are not included.