

WILD FRONTIERS



Himalayan Journey from Lhasa to Kashgar Tibet and Xinjiang (Wild Expedition)

For centuries Tibet remained the inaccessible goal of numerous intrepid, determined and hardy explorers. While Lhasa is no longer a secret city, it remains mystical, and the ancient route west along the top of the Himalayas to the desert oasis of Kashgar is hardly ever travelled beyond the sacred Mountain of Kailash - the source of four great holy rivers. It is remote and wild with some fascinating sights and truly spectacular scenery. The long forbidden and desolate Aksai Chin, a corner of the high plateau annexed by China from India, almost without them noticing, has remained a political barrier for years. It is now traversable, and this land of ancient kingdoms where herds of wild ass (Kiang) roam and eagles soar high above the immense landscape is waiting to be explored.

"Without fail, one of the delights of WF trips is the company of fellow travellers who all bring their particular local knowledge and enthusiasm in addition to that already offered by the tour leaders" *John Evans*

HIGHLIGHTS

- The Mystical City of Lhasa
- Everest base camp
- Circumambulation of the Sacred Mountain of Kailash
- The Lost Himalayan Kingdom of Guge
- Kashgar, ancient hub of the Silk Road
- Wild Asses of the Tibetan Plateau

Duration: 26 Days

Average group size: 5 - 12

Start: Thu 30 August 2012

Finish: Mon 24 Sep 2012



WILD FRONTIERS Adventure Travel Ltd Tel: 00 44 (0) 20 7736 3968 Fax: 00 44 (0) 20 7751 0710

Email: info@wildfrontiers.co.uk Website: www.wildfrontiers.co.uk

Why Wild Frontiers?

As a young, innovative company, Wild Frontiers is delighted to have been voted one of the 'Top 10 Tour Operators' by the readers of both Wanderlust and National Geographic Adventure. We are frequently asked what makes us different from other tour operators, and feel that the factors below answer this important question.

The Traveller's Ethos: WF is a company that has been set up by travellers for travellers, and our ethos is to help adventurous souls get to incredible and inaccessible places in safety and as much comfort as local conditions allow. We are firm believers that travelling is all about the experience and it's the details that make the trip - we specialise in drawing on our own extensive local knowledge and array of contacts to give our clients the very best experience possible.

Personal Service: Our London office is manned by experienced expedition leaders and every trip we run stems from their extensive knowledge - in short, we run the kind of trips that as passionate travellers, we like to do ourselves! When you ring our office, you can be guaranteed to chat to someone that knows the trips and the terrain, and is able to offer sound and practical advice.

Authentic Experiences: Our unique, original itineraries allow our clients to take journeys that venture beneath the surface of the region. Unlike the plethora of 'world specialists' out there who purport to know a hundred destinations, we concentrate on the locations we know and love. We don't run the same tour over and over, thus running the risk of creating a 'tourist circuit' and spoiling untouched regions. Instead, we rarely run any tour more than a couple of times a year and they are on routes we have discovered for ourselves, meaning we are able to give a truly authentic, off-the-beaten-track experience.

Be the First: Our style of travel is all about exploration, and nothing excites us more than opening up new routes to genuine travellers. We keep abreast of new destinations and are often the first to return to places that have vanished from the tourist map. We were the first back into Pakistan after 9/11, the first to return to Kashmir after a decade of tourist isolation, and the first to run a commercial travel trip to Afghanistan for almost 30 years. Since then we have helped bring Colombia, Yemen and Georgia back into the tourist fold, specialising in groundbreaking reconnaissance trips and imaginative expeditions.

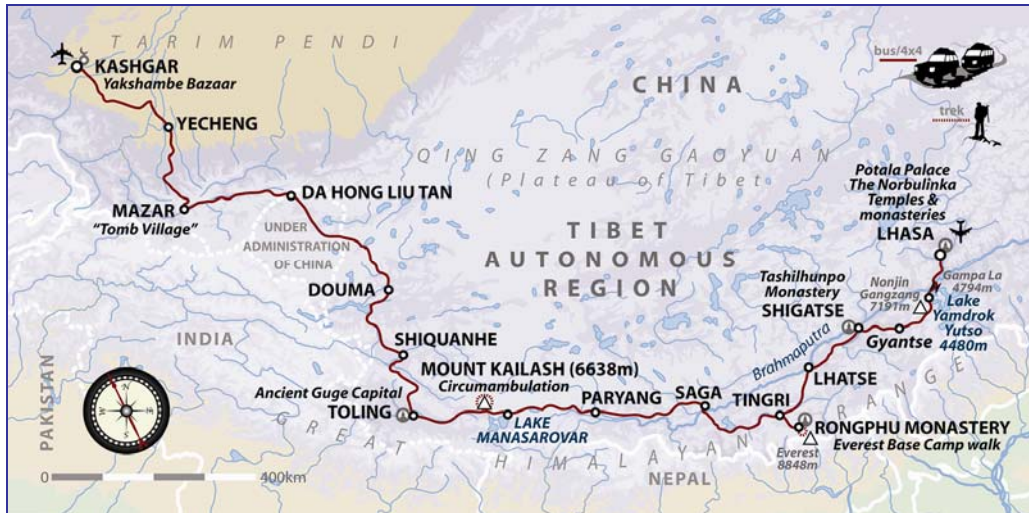
Small Group Size: We believe it is imperative to keep the group sizes small. Most trips are limited to a maximum of approximately 12 travellers, thus giving you more access to fragile cultures, better opportunities to interact with local people, and the knowledge you are making less of an impact while there.

Cost of Tours: We believe in an honest, upfront pricing system so you know exactly what the tour will cost before you book. We avoid local payments, 'optional extras' or forcing our clients to split every meal bill. Our tours are provided on a predominantly full board basis, with mineral water, government permits, entrance fees and transport all included.

Added Value: We aim to give our clients the very best (not the least expensive) experience through whatever facilities are available to us. We always try to provide accommodation that is interesting, characterful and convenient, and transport - another important part of any tour - that is as varied and comfortable as possible.

Our clients: Your companions can make or break a trip, and it's lucky therefore that our clients are our greatest asset. Travelling to remote regions is not for everyone, and as such we tend to attract open-minded travellers looking for genuine experiences, and a desire to reach those hard to get to places.

Responsible Travel: Awarded 5 star status by AITO (Association of Independent Tour operators), responsible tourism has always been an integral part of our company ethos and our adventures are designed with the local people, culture and eco-system in mind. For further details please refer to the RT section on this dossier.



Day 1: Lhasa: Starting in Lhasa (altitude 3600m/11800ft) we will meet our local Tibetan guide and today we take it easy allowing for acclimatisation. If you are already more accustomed to the thin air, you can take the rest of the day to wander through the fabulous market of Barkhor or surrounding sites.

Hotel (D)

Day 2: Lhasa: Today we have an early start as we head to the Potala Palace, the former residence of the current Dalai Lama who now lives in exile in Dharamsala, northern India. Later we'll head on to The Norbulinka, or "Jewel Park" - the former summer palace of successive Dalai Lamas since 1755. The 40 hectare park is divided into three areas: the palaces, the opera grounds and former government buildings. After lunch we'll head to the cultural and spiritual part of the city - the Barkhor (Pilgrim Circuit), which surrounds the Jokhang temple.

Hotel (B, L, D)

Day 3: Lhasa: Today we head out to Drepung. The monastery was founded in 1416 by Tsongkhapa's foremost disciple, Jamyang Choje and named after the sacred abode of Shridhanyakataka. It is known that Tsongkhapa himself taught at the monastery. In the early years of the 16th century, Dalai Lama II took possession of the Ganden Phodrang, (south-western part of Drepung), which was later to become an important centre of political power in Tibet. During the time when Dalai Lama V assumed spiritual and temporal power in 1641, Drepung had

over 10,000 monks, making it the largest monastery in the world. After lunch we travel to the north-eastern suburbs of Lhasa to visit two more famous monasteries: Sera and Phabonkha. We reach Sera in time for the 3pm debates. Sera was founded in 1419 by Tsongkhapa's disciple Jamchen Choje. The monastery is famous for its Tantric teaching and there are three major tantric colleges within it. Phabonkha lies to the west of Sera and was the preeminent meditation site during Songsten Gampo's rule. It contains a plaque commemorating the first Tibetan script and it's said that in the early days of the Buddhism, Tibet's Original Seven Trial monks lived here for some time in the Tsechu Lhakhang Cave. The original structures at Pawangka may well predate the Jokhang.

Hotel (B, L, D)

Day 4: Lhasa - Shigatse: Today we drive south, about 100km to Yamdrok Yutso. This sacred lake lying at 4480m serves as a talisman, supporting the life-spirit of the Tibetan nation. It is said that should its waters run dry, Tibet will no longer be habitable. By far the largest lake in South Tibet (754 square km) the pincer-shaped Yamdrok Yutso has nine islands, one of which houses a monastery and a Padmasambhava stone footprint. As we approach the Lake from Lhasa we cross the Gampa La (4794m) from where there is a wonderful view of its turquoise water, with the mysterious Mount Donang Sangwari (5340m) on the peninsula beyond and the snow peaks of Nojin Gangzang (7191m) in the distance. The

road descends to the northern lakeshore and thence to the fortress town of Gyantse. After lunch we'll visit the magnificent Tashilhunpo Monastery at Shigatse.

Hotel (B, L, D)

Day 5: Shigatse - Shelkar: Drive to Ngamring County, sometimes referred to as the gateway to Mt. Kailash and far-western Tibet. This is a dramatic barren area, which divides the Raga Tsangpo and the Brahmaputra River. The main road runs northwest from Lhatse, crossing the Brahmaputra via the Lhatse Chakzam Bridge or the Drapu ferry, to enter the county. It then passes through Gekha and Zangzang townships to rejoin the river at Saga. The most important historical sites are located at Chung Riwoche and Zangzang Lhadrak.

Hotel (B, L, D)

Day 6: Shelkar - Rongphu Monastery: This morning we leave the westbound route, head south along the Friendship Highway to Mt. Everest Base Camp via Rongbuk. We head south over Lalung La (5050m) to arrive at Rongbuk. For 13 years after it was found to be the highest mountain in the world, Peak XV had no European name. In 1865, the then Surveyor General of India suggested that it be named after his predecessor, Sir George Everest, the man who was responsible for the remarkable Great Trigonometry Survey which ultimately determined the mountain's height.

Guesthouse (B, L, D)

Day 7: Rongphu - Everest Base Camp - Rongphu: Today we'll have time to make the walk (approx 2 hrs each way) up to base camp (EBC) to have a look around. There is a memorial mound of rocks here at the foot of the Rongbuk Glacier, to the climbers who have died on the mountain. Also (weather permitting) there are some extraordinary views to be had of Everest's north face and the nearby mountains of Pumori, Lhotse and Nuptse.

Guesthouse (B, L, D)

Day 8: Rongphu - Pekhutso Lake: It is not a long drive to Tingri back on the Friendship Highway. The town itself has, in recent decades been rebuilt to accommodate a military camp, which lies to the south of the highway. There are memorable views of the entire Everest

Range; if visibility is good we should be able to observe Everest, Lhotse and Cho Oyu. We take the scenic, southern route to Pekhutso Lake.

Camping (B, L, D)

Day 9: Pekhutso Lake - Saga: Today we leave the environs of Everest and head north again to cross the Yarlung Tsangpo to rejoin the westbound route towards Kailash.

Camping (B, L, D)

Day 10: Saga - Paryang: Our route continues today largely along the broad valley of the Yarlung Tsangpo and we start to feel the remoteness of this part of the world. The horizons open up and the feeling of wilderness begins to grow.

Camping (B, L, D)

Day 11: Paryang - Manasarovar Lake: Today we visit Lake Manasarovar. Near Mt. Kailash lie the twin lakes of Manasarovar and Rakshas Tal, shaped respectively like the sun and moon, and which are said to have associations respectively with the forces of light and dark. Further south, just on the edge of the Tibetan plateau and near the Himalayas is another snow-capped peak, Mount Nemo Nanyi, one of the highest inside Tibet. Its three peaks and ridges form a swastika, an ancient symbol of the universe's infinity.

Camping (B, L, D)

Days 12 - 15: Mount Kailash: A rare opportunity to undertake the Mt. Kailash circumambulation or Pilgrim's 'Kora'. This extraordinary mountain is regarded as the 'heart of the world', the 'axis Mundi', the centre of Asia, by Buddhists, Hindus, Jains and followers of other spiritual traditions. Of all the special destinations for the traveller to reach, Mount Kailash (6700m) is surely one of the most sublime and sacred. Its geographical position as the watershed of South Asia is unique and it is this that gives it a cosmic geomantic power. From its slopes flow four great rivers in the four cardinal directions - the Indus north, the Brahmaputra east, the Karnali into the Ganges south, and the Sutlej west. The walk is 53km and rises to a maximum altitude of 5630m. Please see the "Fitness" section for more details.

Camping x 4 nights (B, L, D)

Day 16: Kailash - Tsadapuri Hot Spring: After our 4-day trek today we will have the opportunity to relax and explore the Tsadapuri Hot Springs.
Camping (B, L, D)

Day 17: Tsada/Zanda (Guge): Drive Toling. We will see far down below in the valley floor the capital of the ancient Kingdom of Guge. From various vantage points on the descent into Toling, there are some of the most spectacular views in Tibet. The vast sweep of the Himalayas is discernible, as the range turns northwest from Nepal and along the Indian border as far as Ladakh and Kashmir, spanning several hundred kilometres. One of the marvels of this vista is the awareness that you are apparently looking down on the Himalayas. We must leave early because it will take a full day to reach Toling.
Guesthouse (B, L, D)

Day 18: Around Tsada/Zanda (Guge): We spend a full day in Toling; the temples and religious buildings are among the most significant in far-west Tibet. They were constructed under the guidance of the great Tibetan translator Rinchen Zangpo (985-1055), around 1014-25, although some sources suggest an earlier date (996). During his lifetime he is said to have built 108 temples throughout far-west Tibet and Ladakh, and although few still exist, those at Toling and Tsaparang are considered to be the finest repositories of the Guge style of Buddhist art.
Guesthouse (B, L, D)

Day 19: Tsada/Zanda - Shiquanhe/Ali: The route from Tsada runs almost to the Indian border as we follow the upper most head waters of the Indus. No longer can we follow this old silk route along the river into Indian Ladakh, where after a long journey between the Ladakh and Zaskar ranges it would finally arrive at Leh. The journey here to Yecheng is long and spectacular.
Camping (B, L, D)

Day 20: Shiquanhe/Ali - Duoma: Named after the river that runs through it, Shiquanhe is a long and narrow town on a wild Gobi Desert, surrounded by Mt. Gangdise and Mt. Kunlun. It is the political, economic, cultural and communication centre in Nagari. Much of

the town was built recently (it's only 20 years old).
Camping (B, L, D)

Day 21: Duoma - San Shi Ling Fang: In this wilderness now as the plains open out and the white peaks recede into the distance to the south west we should keep our eyes open for the Tibetan Wild Ass or Kiang. Here, if we are lucky, we'll see not just the odd few but herds of them.
Camping (B, L, D)

Day 22: San Shi Ling Fang - Yecheng: Leaving our camp this morning, we'll spend the day driving to Yecheng. If we have time, we'll make a stop at Mazar village or "Tomb Village", the centre of Tuyugou, which lies in a valley of the Huoyan Shan (The Mountain of fire). The population is under 1000. Yecheng is the name of both the oasis and the town. The rich loess terraces of the oasis are watered by the Tiznaf River and several smaller streams.
Hotel (B, L, D)

Day 23: Contingency Day in case of any unforeseen delays between EBC and Yecheng.

Day 24: Yecheng - Kashgar: Kashgar is an oasis city with approximately 350,000 residents. Kashgar's Old City is a traditional Islamic city, though much of it has sadly now been destroyed by the Chinese. The huge Id Kah Mosque, the largest mosque in China, is located in the heart of the city.
Hotel (B, L, D)

Day 25: Kashgar: Today we'll have a chance to experience the famous Yakshambe Bazaar, the Sunday Market. We will first visit the animal market where we can spend the morning watching the locals trade everything from woodwork and iron wear to sheep, donkeys, cattle, horses and camels before progressing onto the covered bazaar, believed to be the biggest in Central Asia. The afternoon will be free for you to spend at your leisure.
Hotel (B, L, D)

Day 26: Kashgar: Tour ends after breakfast.
(B)

Wild Extensions:

Arrive early to adjust to a new time zone or just to get a feel for the country before your tour starts. Explore the country after your tour on a bespoke Wild Extension or just allow a few days to relax afterwards. Maybe choose all of the above and get cheaper flights mid-week?

A sample of what you could do...

Spend a few days in Beijing before or after the tour to see the Forbidden City and the Great Wall.

Arrive early in Lhasa to give yourself more time to acclimatise and take one of a number of day trips to the surrounding countryside to areas that you will not have time to visit on the tour.

If you'd like to spend more time in Kashgar at the end you might like to consider extending your trip by a day or two.

Contact the office for extension specifics.

TOUR DETAILS

Tour Code: LTG/D

Tour price: All our tours are priced on a LAND ONLY basis, giving you maximum flexibility when deciding how to get to and from your tour.

Single Supplements: These are NOT compulsory for any Wild Frontiers tour. Where single supplements are available please note that a single room cannot always be guaranteed for every night of the tour as depending on the destination, rooms may be limited. On this tour we are happy to offer an optional single supplement that will cover you for all hotel nights of the tour and most guest house nights, but there may be occasions when you should be prepared to share.

NB: for those nights when we are camping you will get a single tent.

Flights: If you would like us to send you a quote for the suggested tour flight (see GETTING THERE) or on any alternative flight that may suit you better, please let us know.

In all cases, for the latest prices, please refer to our website or contact the office.

Please remember that all Wild Frontiers tour prices mean NO hidden extras, NO local payments or kitty and NO compulsory single supplements.

Special Note on Tibetan Permits: Please note that it is much easier if everyone arrives in Lhasa together on the same flight and thus on the same permit. If you would like to use different flights it can be arranged, but we will need to arrange for a separate endorsed copy of the permit to be sent to you at an extra cost of £30.

WHAT IS INCLUDED?

- Full services of a Wild Frontiers Tour Leader with local guides and drivers.
- Meal plan as detailed in the itinerary (B=Breakfast, L=Lunch, D=Dinner) with mineral water as required.
- All transport as outlined in the itinerary.
- All accommodation
- All entrance fees, as per itinerary

WHAT IS NOT INCLUDED?

- Visas (if applicable)
- Local airport taxes
- Tips
- Beverages & any costs of a personal nature.
- International Flights
- Airport transfers (unless booking suggested flights through WF office)
- Any accommodation required in Beijing to connect with international flights

GETTING THERE

For this trip our suggested flights (subject to change) are:

28AUG CA938 LHR-PEK 20:25/13:30 +1
30AUG CA4112 PEK-LXA 09:00/15:00
24SEP CZ6885 KHG-URC 12:00/13:40
24SEP CZ6903 URC-PEK 14:45/18:15
25SEP CA937 PEK-LHR 13:30/17:45

Key:
LHR - London Heathrow
PEK - Beijing

LXA - Lhasa
KHG - Kashgar (Kashi)
URC - Urumchi

CA - Air China
CZ - China Southern

NB. Please note that the group flights require a stopover in Beijing on both the outbound and inbound journeys. We can arrange the necessary transfers and accommodation for you.

If you wish to arrange your own flights you are completely free to do so and in this case we can arrange any transfers or supplementary accommodation that you may require. Please also see the Special Note on Tibetan Permits below the Tour Details section.

Please note that if you are making your own flight arrangements, we recommend that you only purchase flights that are totally flexible and refundable as due to the nature of adventure travel, itineraries can change at any time. For more information, please refer to our booking conditions.

PRACTICALITIES

Accommodation will be in hotels, community owned guesthouses and camping. One or two of the guest houses are extremely basic!

Any hotels mentioned in the itinerary are subject to availability and if not available substitutes will be of a similar quality.

Transport on this tour includes Toyota Land Cruisers.

Trip Grading:

Adventure Rating ❖❖❖❖❖❖

Comfort Grade ❖❖❖❖❖

Fitness Level ❖❖❖❖❖

Cultural Interest ❖❖❖❖❖

Please note that this grading is an indication only and should you have any concerns please contact the office.

The Mt Kailash "Kora" Trek

Recent History: Following the Chinese army entering Tibet in 1950, and political and border disturbances across the Chinese-Indian boundary, pilgrimage to the legendary abode of Lord Shiva was stopped until 1980. Thereafter, a limited number of Indian pilgrims have been allowed to visit the place.

Practicalities: The circumambulation or "kora" usually takes 3 days of trekking but we have allowed 4 days to enable us to go at a slower pace.

Day 1 - Darchen (4600m) - Diraphuk Gompa (4800m). Approx 6-8hrs. NB, it is possible to be driven for the first half of this day's walk

Day 2 - Over the Drolma Pass (5630m) to Shapje Datok (5250m). Approx 8-9 hrs. This is the toughest day of the trek.

Day 3 - To Zutul Puk Gompa (4690m). Approx 6hrs.

Day 4 - To Darchen (4600m). Approx 4hrs.

Trek Fitness: This is a demanding high altitude trek although you will have had plenty of time to acclimatize. All clients on the 2010 trip (the first time we ran this itinerary) completed the kora successfully. You should be in a good state of health and be fit but of equal importance is that you have an open mind and a sense of adventure. It is a challenging part of a challenging trip but utterly worthwhile and memorable for years to come.

Fitness: See the above section for specific details of the 4-day Mt Kailash kora but for the rest of the trip, a good general level of health is required to be able to cope with this trip due to the tiring nature of this unique journey and the altitude.

Wild Expeditions: As many of you will be aware, Wild Frontiers is a company that has been set up by travellers for travellers and the company ethos has always been to help adventurous souls get to incredible places that would otherwise remain inaccessible. With many members of the WF team cutting their teeth in real adventure travel - as travel writers, polar explorers and expedition leaders - we are keen to return to our roots, to get out there into the wilds of this incredible earth, and take some of you with us.

So while we have always prided ourselves on running cutting edge, innovative trips, our Wild Expeditions truly take adventure travel to the next level. These often-groundbreaking tours, which investigate new destinations and rarely used routes, revert back to the golden age of explorative travel. These trips are unpredictable and conditions are often basic, so participants must be open-minded and prepared for all eventualities - and a sense of adventure (and humour!) is essential. Much more demanding than normal tours, they aren't for everyone and as such we strongly recommend you call the office to discuss the trip before booking.

It may sound obvious but...

Wild Frontiers tours are not always for everyone and it is important to us that the tour you choose is the most suitable. Please therefore take time to read the dossier carefully. All our tours are graded to give an overall picture of the trip but these are only guidelines and you should check the daily itinerary. Should you have any concerns about your ability to partake in any aspect of the tour then please contact the office.

Insurance: Insurance that provides cover for emergency repatriation in case of a medical emergency is compulsory for all tours. You should be aware that many standard insurance policies may not cover you adequately for all aspects of a Wild Frontiers trip and so we strongly recommend that you purchase a suitably designed insurance policy. One such policy is the "Wild Frontiers" policy underwritten by Travel & General Insurance Company plc, which is available to UK and Republic of Ireland residents through our website or via the insurance company direct on 0845 408 0583. Under this policy there are two different levels of cover available and for this trip the minimum requirement would be the Standard policy.

Cover explained:

Standard policy: a comprehensive travel insurance policy that provides cover for all Wild Frontiers activities, including trekking up to 6,000m. This policy does not provide cover for travel to areas

where the FCO is advising against all or all but essential travel.

Elite policy: provides the same comprehensive level of cover as the standard policy. In addition the Elite policy also provides cover for travel to areas where the FCO is advising against all or all but essential travel. The policy will not provide cover for any claims arising from or relating to the reasons why the FCO is advising against travel.

If purchasing the Elite policy you also have the option to **extend the cover** provided by the policy to include cover for claims arising from a terrorist act in an area where the FCO is advising against travel. You can add this cover to your policy when purchasing online or over the telephone.

These policies are only available to those travelling on a Wild Frontiers holiday.

For more information and to purchase your policy online please visit the Insurance section of our website.

The cover is underwritten by the International Insurance Company of Hannover Limited (IICH), who are authorised and regulated by the Financial Services Authority (FSA). Wild Frontiers Limited is an Introducer Appointed Representative of Travel & General Insurance Company plc, details of which can be found at the FSA's website www.fsa.gov.uk.

If you do decide to purchase alternative insurance, then you must ensure that it covers you for every aspect of this trip. Please pay particular attention to ensuring that you are covered for trekking at altitudes of up to 5700m.

Visas: Visas are necessary for many of the destinations we travel to and while we aim to provide you with the most up-to-date information, requirements frequently change and as such we advise that you check with the relevant embassies or contact our recommended visa agency, Travcour (020 7223 5295) www.travcour.com for the latest advice. For this tour, UK passport holders will need to apply for Chinese visas.

Non-UK passport holders should contact the relevant embassies for individual requirements.

All passport holders will also need **SUBSEQUENTLY** to apply for Tibetan permits **THROUGH THE WILD FRONTIERS OFFICE**.

Further details will be sent out to you on booking, however ensuring that correct and valid visas are obtained remains the sole responsibility of the client.

Responsible Travel: Responsible travel and sustainable tourism are fundamental ideas that Wild Frontiers has been committed to since our birth. It is our strong belief that these words should not be simply 'tagged on' to dossiers and websites but should be at the very core of each trip, and our adventures are therefore designed with the local people, culture and eco-system in mind. We believe that a successful trip not only delivers a unique and unsurpassable journey for our clients, but that it also benefits the peoples whose lands we are privileged to visit.

The Wild Frontiers Foundation: In order to facilitate an enduring support structure for the communities we visit, and to show a commitment to these values, Wild Frontiers has set up a charitable foundation through which we can channel funds to both existing NGOs and our own development projects. In addition to organising ethically sensitive tours, having our own charitable foundation allows us to raise money - through the cost of our tours, charity trips and fund raising events - which can then be used to fund various projects in education, sanitation, reforestations and a number of other important issues facing developing communities. Wherever possible we are happy for our clients to visit these projects to see for themselves where and how this money is being spent. For a full list of partner NGOs please visit our website. Should you wish to donate to the foundation please contact the office for details.

The Environment: Trying to do our bit for the environment, in 2005 we were among the first UK-based travel companies to automatically offset every client's international flight (if booked

with us) with a payment to Carbon Clear to help promote sustainable energy.

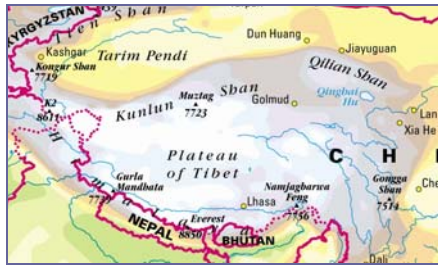
Climate: On the Tibetan plateau, anything can happen weather-wise. Some days are scorching hot, the sun burning in the pure thin air, but it can also rain, although September is considered a good month for travel. The route goes over a number of high passes where there might be snow on the ground and the air can be extremely chilly (especially on the Kailash trek), so bring lots of layers, which can be put on and discarded as the temperature changes. Kashgar should be clear and warm at night and hot (early 30s) during the day.

Foreign & Commonwealth Office (FCO): The FCO travel advice highlights potential hazards people might experience when travelling abroad. Given the nature of destinations offered by Wild Frontiers it is inevitable that from time to time some itineraries contravene this advice. Whilst WF takes the safety and security of its clients extremely seriously, we will not necessarily cancel a trip because of the FCO advice. It is recommended therefore that clients check this advice before booking and contact us if they have any queries or concerns. Please see our website for further information.

Further information:

When you make a confirmed booking with Wild Frontiers we will send you our confirmation pack with complete pre-departure information giving you details on visas, health and vaccinations, packing lists, suggested reading on the region, insurance, photography and other useful tips to make your trip more enjoyable.

TIBET & XINJIANG - THE FACTS



The overland journey from Lhasa to Kashgar is one of the most spectacular anywhere in the world and perhaps the greatest Himalayan Journey. It begins in Tibet's capital Lhasa, high on the Himalayan Plateau at 3650m. From here we follow the impressive spine of the High Himalaya west, crossing numerous high passes as we progress through the religious centres of Gyantse and Xigatse, across the Tingri plain and up to Everest Base Camp. The next leg leads us to Mount Kailash and then into the barely visited vastness beyond. As we progress to the remote and desolate Aksai Chin we will stop off to visit the old Ladakhi kingdom of Guge. The final stretch leads us down into the thick warm air of the desert oasis of Kashgar, where fresh and exquisite flavours of juices of fig, grape and melon will assault our weary palates.

Tibet is known for its extraordinary Buddhist monasteries. Equally, the views (en route you may see five of the world's fourteen 8000m peaks: Makalu, Lhotse, Everest, Xixiapangma and Cho Oyu), the exquisite high and clear light, the local people and customs, the rugged geology, and the demanding nature of travel up on the roof of the world, all contribute to making any visit a wonderful experience.

Keep in mind that Tibet can be an uncomfortable, remote and hard destination. But, it also offers glimpses into one of the most fascinating ancient civilizations and one of the most dramatic mountain lands. It is truly a 'last frontier' for discovery and exploration. All trips here are of an expeditionary nature but, if you travel with an open mind, Tibet will be a unique and rewarding experience.

History: Songtsen Gampo's Empire (7th - 11th Century) extended from Northern India into the depths of Asia. He married Princess Wencheng of China and also Brikuti of Nepal, both Buddhists, a religion that he then adopted, making Buddhism compulsory throughout his kingdom. Chinese and Indian culture brought science and literacy to Tibet. By 800AD the Tibetan empire reached across Turkestan, the Hindu Kush, Gansu and Sichuan, then across to Xian, the old Chinese capital (where the terracotta warriors were uncovered), and a peace treaty was drawn up between the Chinese and Tibet. The nation forged by Songtsen Gampo still bears many of the hallmarks of his rule; the language and writing of his time survives, as does the Tibetan form of Buddhism. Also the laws governing marriage, land ownership and justice are still practised and respected widely. By 1949 only the reduced kingdom of the Dalai Lamas was known as Tibet but to Mao, Tibet still stood as the strategic heart of Asia and in his maiden speech he swore to 'liberate' Tibet.

The People: The Tibetans are people of great stature, strength and character, through living in such harsh conditions. But they are a people of great good humour and generosity.

Their staple diet is tsampa, finely ground roasted barley grown in the uplands. Tibetans carry this grain in a pouch and when hungry, they use brick tea stewed with water, to which yak butter and salt is added, and then mixed into the grain to form balls of dough. They also eat lumps of yak cheese, sun-dried yak meat and occasionally mutton. Tibetans will not eat fish or fowl. Chang is the local beer made from fermented barley, which is sometimes then distilled to make arak, a spirit similar to whisky.

At these high altitudes, averaging around 4,200m (13,780ft), water boils at a very low temperature (a soft-boiled egg takes about 10 minutes to cook). It's not hot enough to burst the starch grains of potatoes, rice and beans, so cooking with such ingredients take a very long time indeed, especially over a yak-dung fire. The Tibetan metabolism like that of the native Andean populations is specially adapted to cope with the altitude - in particular they have a different type of

haemoglobin which is better able to carry oxygen.



Lhasa: Capital of Tibet and traditionally the home of the Dalai Lama, the city is home to 257,400 people (2004 census estimate). Its altitude is 3,490m (11,450ft) and the air only contains 68% of the oxygen level found at sea level, that is, roughly 14.3% oxygen instead of the usual 21%. As the centre of Tibet's economy, politics and culture, Lhasa literally means "place of the gods", although ancient Tibetan documents and inscriptions demonstrate that the place was called Rasa, which means "goat's place", until the early 7th century.

The Potala: The Palace was originally built by King Songsten Gampo in 637AD on Mount Marpori, although the present structure dates from 1645. In terms of global perception, it is this relic of Tibet's past, present and future national aspirations. This 13-storeyed edifice was among the world's tallest buildings prior to the advent of the 20th century skyscraper and the grandest building in Tibet. You will have time to explore the myriad of rooms and assembly halls.

The Jokhang and Barkhor: The Jokhang is Tibet's most sacred shrine, the focal point for a fascinating variety of pilgrims from the entire Tibetan plateau. The Newari queen of Songsten Gampo had the temple built in 767AD. From the roof there are some wonderful views of the market below and the Potala Palace in the middle distance over the roof-tops of Lhasa. The Barkhor is one of the three principal sacred circumambulation routes around Lhasa followed by pilgrims and traders alike and is packed with a busy bazaar.

Shigatse: The Tashilhunpo Monastery: This Monastery is the seat of the Panchen Lamas, was founded in 1447 by Dalai Lama I: Gendun Drub. At its peak, this monastery housed 4,700 monks, and it has the appearance of a monastic city. You might like to walk the 3km pilgrimage circuit around the monastery, with views of the Dolmari ridge. The original structure was built over a sacred sky-burial site, the stone slab of which is still to be seen on the floor within. The building in the west part of the complex Jamkhang Chenmo houses the world's largest gilded copper image, 26 metres in height. This massive Matreya Buddha, embodying loving kindness, contains 6700 steels of gold and 150 metric tons of copper and was constructed in WW1. At the centre of the monastery is a courtyard that was used as a theatre for religious dances. Just off the courtyard is the chanting hall.



The reconstructed castle (dzong) of Shigatse, 2007: The imposing castle, Samdrubtse Dzong or "Shigatse Dzong", was built in the 15th century, when it looked something like a smaller version of the Potala. At the instigation of the Chinese, in 1961 it was totally dismantled, rock by rock, by hundreds of Tibetans. It was previously the seat of the kings of Ü-Tsang and the capital of the province of Ü-Tsang or Tsang. Between 2005 and 2007, the building was reconstructed, using old photographs. It will become a museum on Tibetan culture. Xigatse was previously known as Samdruptse. In the 19th century the "Tashi" or Panchen Lama had temporal power over Tashilhunpo Monastery and three small districts, though not over the town of Shigatse itself, which was administered by two Dzongpön (Prefects) appointed from Lhasa. Before Chinese invasion of Tibet, the Tibetan territory

was divided into 53 prefecture districts called Dzongs. There were two Dzongpöns for every Dzong—a lama (Tse-dung) and a layman. They were entrusted with both civil and military powers and are equal in all respects, though subordinate to the generals and the Chinese Amban in military matters. However, there were only one or two Ambans representing the Chinese emperor residing in Lhasa, directing a little garrison, and their power installed since 1728, progressively declined to end-up as observer at the eve of their expulsion in 1912 by the 13th Dalai Lama. At the time of the Chinese occupation in 1952, Shigatse had a population of perhaps 12,000 people, making it the second largest city in Tibet.



Everest Base Camp and Rongbuk: Everest, known as Chomolangma (or Qomolangma) in Tibetan, was first summited by the team of Tenzing Norgay and Edmund Hillary in 1953. Since then, the mountain has been summited nearly 4000 times. The top of Everest sits at 8848m/29,028ft. The base camp of Everest on the Tibet side sits at 5200m/17,060feet and sits in a sheltered spot at the foot of the Rongbuk glacier. The awe inspiring north face of the mountain dominates the head of the valley, rising an incredible and almost vertical three kilometres from the valley floor.

Rongbuk monastery: The Rongbuk monastery lies at 5,100m above sea level, the highest monastery in the world; it is only 200m lower than base camp. The monastery is now accessible by vehicle; previously, explorers had to walk for five weeks from Darjeeling, in the Indian foothills of the Himalaya. The journey to Rongbuk passes over La lung La (pass) from where there are magnificent views

of Xishapangma, Mount Everest, Cho Oyu, and Gyachung Kang.

Mt Kailash: Manasarovar Lake and Dechen village: Mount Kailash lies near the source of some of the longest rivers in Asia: the Indus River, the Sutlej River (a major tributary of the Indus River), the Brahmaputra River, and the Karnali River (a tributary of the Ganges River). It is considered a sacred place in five religions; Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, Ayyavazhi and the Bön faith. In Hinduism, it is considered to be the abode of Lord Shiva. There have been no recorded attempts to climb Mount Kailash; it is considered off limits to climbers in deference to Buddhist and Hindu beliefs. Every year, thousands make a pilgrimage to Kailash, following a tradition going back thousands of years. Pilgrims of several religions believe that circumambulating Mount Kailash on foot is a holy ritual that will bring good fortune. The circumambulation is made in a clockwise direction by Hindus and Buddhists but counter clockwise by Jains and Bönpo. The path around the mountain is 52km (32 miles) long. Some pilgrims believe that the entire walk around Kailash should be made in a single day, which is no easy feat.



Lake Manasarovar: At 4,556m (14,948 ft) above sea level, Lake Manasarovar is one of the highest fresh-water lakes in the world. It has a circumference of 88 kilometres (55 miles); a depth of 90m (300ft) and its surface area is 320 square km (120 sq miles). Despite its size, the entire lake freezes over in winter and is connected to nearby Lake Rakshastal by the natural Ganga Chhu channel. In Hindu theology, Lake Manasarovar is the abode of purity, believed to cleanse the sins committed over a hundred lifetimes. One who touches the earth of Manasarovar is

believed to go to the paradise of Brahma and drinking the water from the lake will ensure your passage to the heaven of Lord Shiva.

Guge (at Tsada/Zanda): Guge, an ancient kingdom in Western Tibet was centred in present-day Zanda County, in the Ngari Prefecture of Tibet. At various points in history after 10th century AD, the kingdom held sway over a vast area including south-eastern Zanskar, Upper Kinnaur, and Spiti valley either by conquest or as tributaries. The ruins of Guge are located 1,200 miles (1,900km) westwards from Lhasa within the Tibet Autonomous Region of China, not far from Mount Kailash.



Aksai Chin: Aksai Chin was historically part of the Himalayan Kingdom of Ladakh until Ladakh was annexed from the rule of the local Namgyal dynasty by the Dogras and the princely state of Kashmir in the 19th century. One of the main causes of the Sino-Indian War of 1962 was India's discovery of a road China had built through Aksai Chin, shown as Chinese on official Chinese maps. Though India had no military or other occupation of the area, from 1954 official Survey of India maps showed a definite boundary line awarding Aksai Chin to itself. Now, the China National Highway 219 - connecting Tibet and Xinjiang - passes through the middle of Aksai Chin, and though there are still no towns there is now a Military base and a few truck stops. Aksai Chin is currently administered by the People's Republic of China as a part of Kargilik County in Kashgar Prefecture in the Xinjiang Autonomous Region. What little data exists suggests that the few true locals in Aksai Chin have Buddhist beliefs, although some Muslim Uyghurs may also live in the area because of the trade between Tibet and Xinjiang. India claims the area as a part of the Ladakh district

of the state of Jammu and Kashmir. Both sides in the dispute have agreed to respect the Line of Actual Control.

Ye Cheng: Ye Cheng, also known as Chokkuka, is a city in Xinjiang, China. During the Han Dynasty it was known as Karghalik. During the Former Han period it was described as having 350 households, 4,000 people, and 1,000 men able to bear arms. While in the Later Han period it is recorded (in the Hou Hanshu - circa 125CE) as having 2,500 households, more than 10,000 people, and 3,000 men able to bear arms. The people were said to make an arrow poison from a local bush (probably a species of aconite). Ye Cheng is situated on the southern rim of the Taklamakan desert, and is the name of both the oasis and the town. The rich loess terraces of the oasis are watered by the Tiznaf River and several smaller streams. In earlier times it was important as the usual starting-point for caravans to India, through the Pamirs, via Tashkurghan, or through Ladakh by the Karakoram passes. Today there is a small town with a market, some shops and a bank.



Kashgar: During the heyday of the Silk Road, Kashgar was a sanctuary for travellers heading to or from the dangerous lands of the Taklamakan Desert, immediately to the east. It wasn't just from China and Europe that the travellers came; Kashgar sits at a natural junction with the ancient trade routes through the Karakoram Mountains to India and the southern seas. From here, the traders also journeyed carrying fine cloth, cashmere, spices, jade, coral, pearls and precious gems. A great market resulted. The geography hasn't changed and though Kashgar's importance may have waned in recent times, the bazaars still thrive today- especially the famous

Yakshambe Bazaar or the Sunday Market - for which, farmers from the surrounding fertile lands come into the city to sell a wide variety of fruit and vegetables.



Kashgar is a tale of two cities: that of the modern Han and the ancient Uyghur. Wide, tree-lined streets, bordered by modern stores, hotels and supermarkets are peopled by Han migrants from the east, but if you cut down the narrow alleyways that lead into the old town you'll soon find yourself in an exclusively Uyghur world, so evocative of the heady days of the old Silk Road, echoing that of the Arabian Nights. Kashgar's Old Quarter is a traditional Islamic City. Unfortunately, as of 2009, in the name of earthquake safety, the government began to demolish the majority of the old buildings replacing them with new, relocating most of the Old City's 13,000 resident families. The plans have been widely criticized for destroying cultural history and eliminating Kashgar's main tourist attraction, Mahmud al-Kashgari.

Some highlights include the huge Id Kah Mosque, the largest mosque in China, located in the heart of the city, the tomb of Abakh Khoja in Kashgar, considered the holiest Muslim site in Xinjiang. Built in the 17th century, the tiled mausoleum 5 km (3.1 mi) northeast of the city centre also contains the tombs of five generations of his family. Abakh was a powerful ruler, controlling Khotan, Yarkand, Korla, Kucha and Aksu as well as Kashgar. Among some Uyghur Muslims, he was considered a prophet, second only to Mohammed in importance.

The Silk Road: Almost 2000 years old, the Silk Road is the most culturally important trade route in the world. The name itself is misleading because there was never one 'road', but a labyrinth of tracks and trails treading their way from Xi'an in

central China, across the mountains and deserts of Central Asia, and on to the great markets of Byzantium and Rome. The need for strong horses and the desire to be clothed in the mysterious Chinese fabric were what gave birth to the trade route, but it soon developed into a thriving thoroughfare of people and commerce, carrying all manner of things along its path. As well as silk from the east came porcelain, paper, tea, lacquerware, perfumes and medicinal herbs; while from the west came gold, silver, ivory, jade, wool, horses, coloured glass, walnuts, cucumbers, grapes, wine and spices. But it wasn't only goods the caravans carried; just as importantly, through the traders and their escorts' ideas, religions and technologies were spread across the world.



Caravans seldom travelled the road's entire length, but instead carried their goods only a certain stage of the overall journey before handing them on to others. As a result, great cities sprang up, such as Samarkand, Bukhara, Kashgar and Merv, where agents, contract makers and brokers - the Silk Road's middlemen - became rich on the trade. The opening of the sea routes, with their quicker, safer and ultimately cheaper, means of transport caused the great Silk Road's demise. That said, since the break-up of the Soviet Union and the thawing in relations between China and the newly-formed Central Asian states, the route is once again being plied and it is not unusual to see trucks from Turkey, Iran and even Italy thundering down the road between Samarkand and Bukhara where once the languorous camels wandered.

How to book:

In order to confirm your booking we need to have a completed signed booking form for each client together with a £400 deposit per person. You can either return your booking form to us by post or by booking online at www.wildfrontiers.co.uk.

You can contact the office by email to info@wildfrontiers.co.uk or we are very happy to take your call on 020 7736 3968.

Wild Frontiers is a fully licensed and bonded tour operator and our ATOL number is 5975. You can book your holiday with Wild Frontiers in complete confidence that all monies you pay to us for your tour are fully protected.

We are also bonded with the Association of Independent Tour Operators (AITO). AITO members comply with the highest standards of consumer protection. Every AITO holiday is backed not only by AITO's Quality Charter but also by full financial protection.

We do recommend that you take out adequate travel insurance at the time of booking in the event that you are no longer able to travel as all deposits are non-refundable - full booking conditions can be found on the booking form and online at our website.