China & Nepal: Tibet to Kathmandu

Lhasa - Gyantse - Shigatse - Kathmandu - Pokhara - 10 days / 9 nights

Sample itinerary - Subject to availability

Travel style: tailor made

Overview

The overland Himalaya crossing, with both capitals' holy cities.

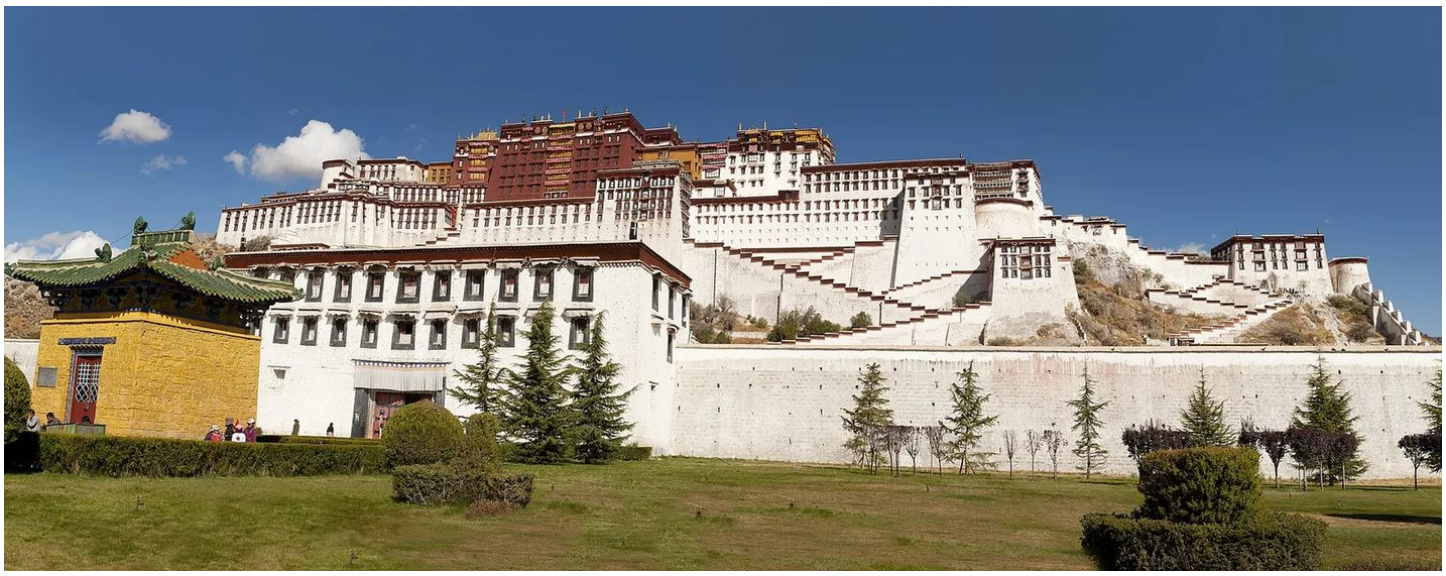
The journey

Ten days down the old Friendship Highway - Lhasa's pilgrimage city, the Yamdrok turquoise, Gyantse's nine-tiered kumbum and Shigatse's monastery seat, then across the Himalaya at Gyirong into Nepal: Kathmandu's durbar squares and Pokhara's lake under the Annapurnas. Two countries, one road, paced for the altitude.

Highlights

- The Potala and Jokhang at timed entry
- Yamdrok Lake and the Karo La glacier in one day
- Gyantse's nine-tiered kumbum
- Tashilhunpo Monastery, Shigatse
- The Himalaya crossing into Nepal at Gyirong
- Boudhanath and Kathmandu's durbar squares
- Pokhara's Phewa Lake under Machhapuchhre

Day by day



Day 1 - Arrive Lhasa

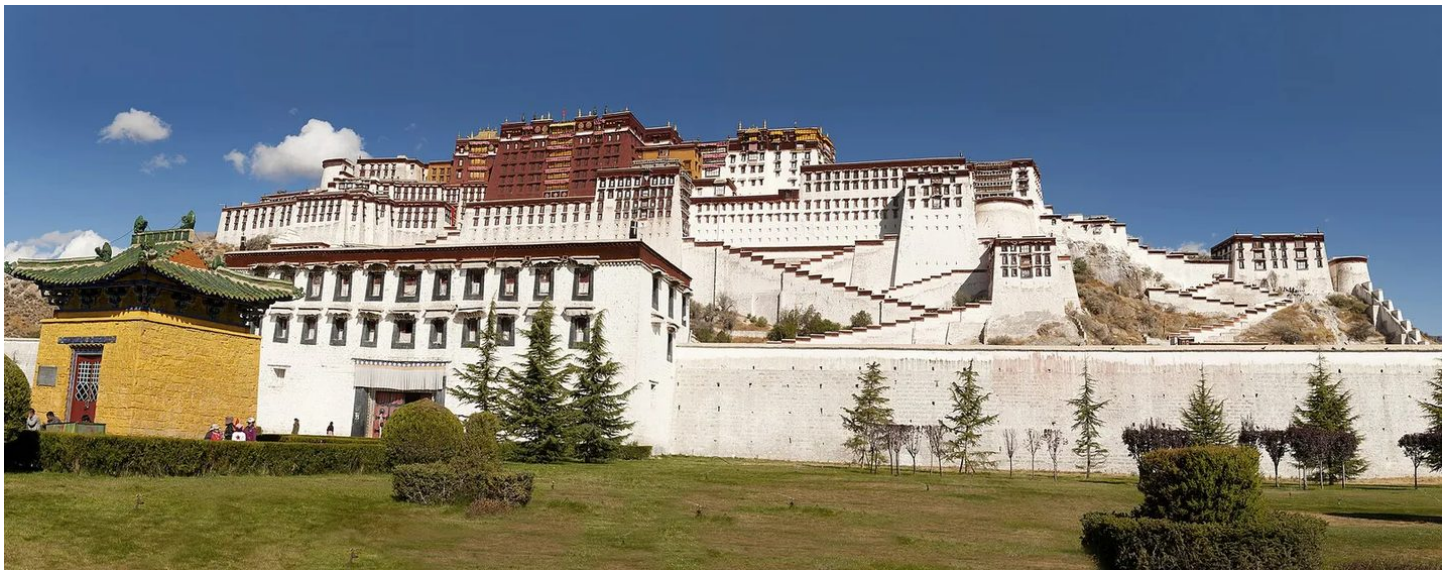
Fly in via Chengdu or Chongqing and take the altitude seriously from the first hour: met at Gonggar, across the river, and an afternoon that asks nothing - the hotel's rooftop, the Barkhor's upper lanes seen from a distance, tea. The guides watch pulses, not schedules; tonight is for sleeping at 3,650m, which is itself the day's achievement.

Meals: - - Hotel: Lhasa, Barkhor old town

Day 2 - The Potala and the Barkhor

The Potala at its timed-entry slot - quota confirmed ahead, as noted - the climb through the White and Red Palaces taken at stair pace. The afternoon belongs to the Jokhang and the circuit around it: prostrating pilgrims, butter smoke, prayer wheels, and the guide reading the pilgrim road properly. The evening is a sweet-tea house among the regulars.

Meals: B - Hotel: Lhasa, Barkhor old town



Day 3 - Debates, then the highway

Sera Monastery's debating courtyard in the late morning - the hand-clap challenges, the logic as theatre - and a free afternoon for whatever Lhasa still owes the group: the nunnery's printing room, the market, the last rooftops. Bags staged tonight; the highway west starts early and the passes are taken by daylight, as the route's altitude notes promise.

Meals: B - Hotel: Lhasa, Barkhor old town

Day 4 - Yamdrok, Karo La, Gyantse

The big scenic day: over Kamba La for the Yamdrok view laid out far below, along its shore, then the Karo La glacier wall hanging over the road before the drop into Gyantse. The afternoon is Palcho Monastery's nine-tiered kumbum - tiers of chapels, paintings layering a thousand years - and the old town beneath Gyantse's fort walls. The best small-town night of the route.

Meals: B, L - Hotel: Gyantse, old town

Day 5 - Shigatse and Tashilhunpo

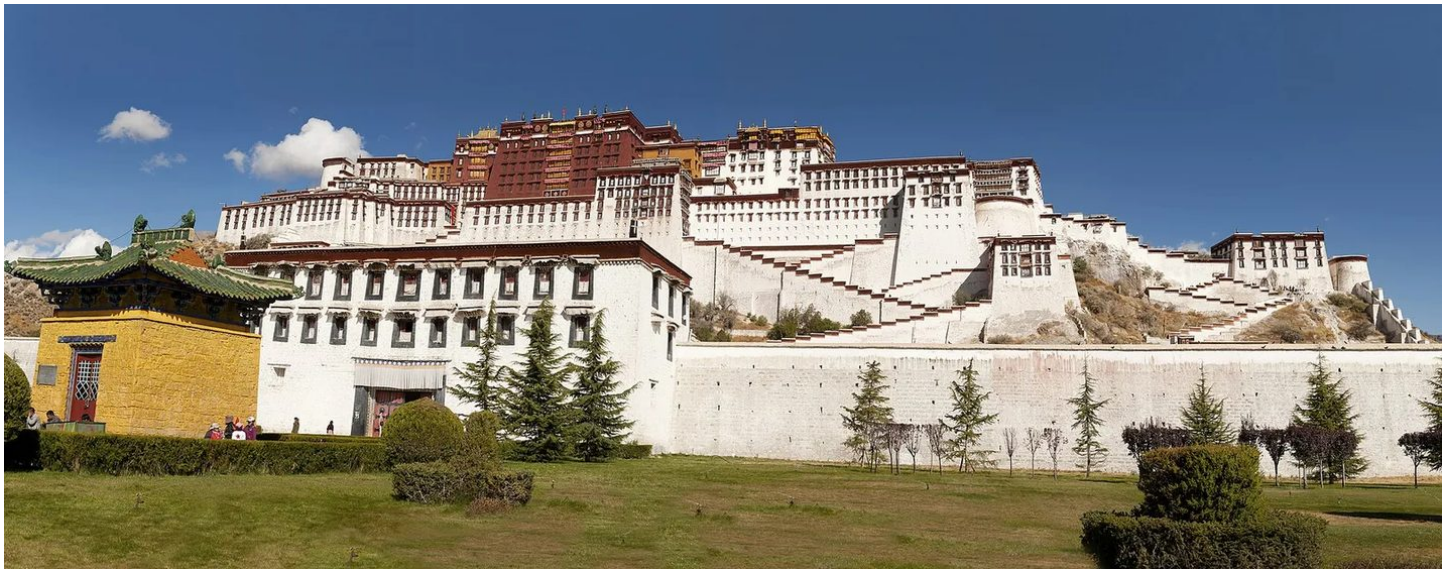
Over the short pass to Shigatse by late morning, then Tashilhunpo: the seat of the Panchen Lamas, its gold-roofed chapels stacked against the hillside, the future Buddha statue standing taller than the trees it is carved from, and the monks' kitchen running on donated butter. The afternoon sorts permits and packing for the border; the evening is the town's own noodle shops.

Meals: B - Hotel: Shigatse, city centre

Day 6 - Down to Gyirong

The long drive south as the plateau lets go: the road falls out of the high country through the gorge country, birch replacing grass, the air thickening by the hour - the route's whole altitude design has been walking towards this descent. Gyirong town by late afternoon, low and green on the border; an early night before the crossing.

Meals: B - Hotel: Gyirong, border town



Day 7 - Across the Himalaya

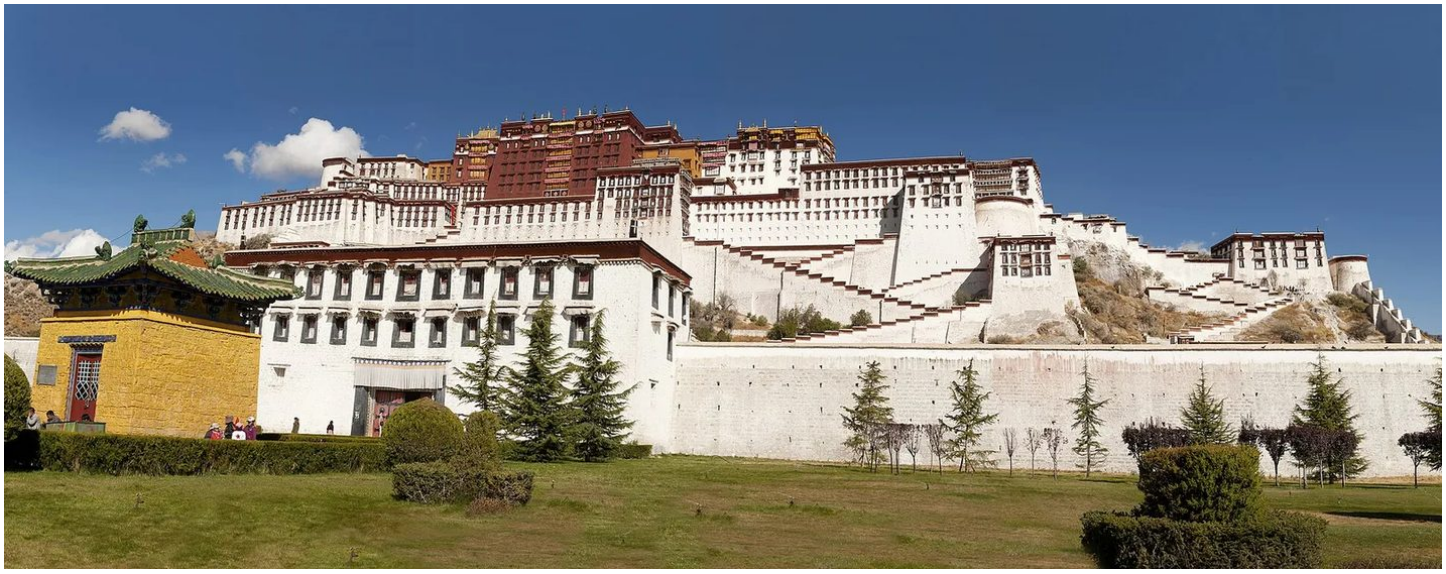
The border at opening: Chinese exit formalities, the river bridge on foot, and Nepali entry stamps the other side - assistance both ends, as guaranteed. Then Nepal's own road, dramatic and slow, switching down the Trishuli valley towards Kathmandu; most groups reach the city by late afternoon with Thamel's lanes for dinner and the first Everest-size day complete.

Meals: B - Hotel: Kathmandu, Thamel

Day 8 - Kathmandu valley

Boudhanath at the morning kora, the stupa's prayer wheels turning with the crowd; Pashupatinath's riverside ghats respectfully at a distance; and Patan's durbar square in the afternoon - Newari woodcarving at a density nowhere else matches. The evening is the group's own: Thamel's rooftops, or the quiet courtyard restaurants the guide keeps for exactly this night.

Meals: B - Hotel: Kathmandu, Thamel



Day 9 - Pokhara under the fishtail

The short mountain hop to Pokhara (about 25 minutes, schedule permitting - weather can reshuffle it, as noted). The day is the lake: Phewa's rowboats, the Peace Pagoda viewpoint across the water, and Sarangkot for the Annapurna sunset if the skies allow. Dinner at a lakeside grill with the fish-tail peak holding the horizon; few itineraries end softer.

Meals: B - Hotel: Pokhara, lakeside

Day 10 - Depart

The midday flight back to Kathmandu timed against the international departure - where the schedule does not allow the connection, an extra Kathmandu night is added at cost rather than risked. The coordination teams stay reachable through both borders, and this framework returns cleanly into China via Lhasa for groups who want the loop rather than the line.

Meals: B - Hotel: -

What makes this journey different

- The crossing done properly - three nights in Lhasa first, the passes crossed by daylight, and the route's highest nights spent descending, not ascending.
- Yamdrok from the Kamba La pass and the Karo La glacier wall beside the road, on the same day.
- Gyantse's Palcho kumbum and Shigatse's Tashilhunpo taken on the way, not as day trips.
- Nepal handled end to end: border formalities at Gyirong, the Kathmandu valley squares, and a Pokhara morning under Machhapuchhre.

Where you stay

Four-star in Lhasa and Kathmandu, the best available in Gyantse and Shigatse, a simple border-town hotel in Gyirong, and a lakeside hotel in Pokhara facing the fish-tail peak.

Food & local life

Tsampa and butter tea at a Tibetan table and sweet-tea houses on the Barkhor, then Nepal: dal bhat, Newari tables in Kathmandu and lakeside grills in Pokhara.

Included

+ Accommodation in the agreed grade, with breakfast
+ Private guide and private vehicle on touring days
+ All internal transport between cities as stated - high-speed rail, internal flights and transfers
+ Entrance fees for the sites named in the itinerary
+ Meals as stated (B = breakfast, L = lunch, D = dinner)
+ Drinking water in the vehicle, and a 24-hour emergency contact while the group is in China
+ Tibet Travel Permit and Alien's Travel Permit processing
+ Border-crossing assistance at Gyirong
+ Flights Kathmandu-Pokhara return

Not included

- International flights to and from China
- Chinese visa or visa-application costs
- Travel insurance, including medical and cancellation cover
- Meals not marked in the itinerary, drinks and personal spending
- Anything listed under subject to confirmation until it is confirmed
- Nepal visa fee (on arrival, USD cash)
- Everest Base Camp extension - quoted separately

To be confirmed with suppliers

- Tibet Travel Permit and Alien's Travel Permit - 15-20 working days ahead; the Chinese visa must be issued first; Nepal runs visa on arrival
- Gyirong immigration hours and road state on the Nepal side
- Potala quota for the dates (daily cap)
- Kathmandu-Pokhara flight schedule (weather-disrupted regularly; the road fallback takes about 6h)
- Everest Base Camp extension (+2 days): road conditions and accommodation standard

Customisation

Every framework can be re-built around your client's dates, party size, hotel grade, pace and interests - or combined with scheduled small group departures where budget matters. Send us the brief and we will quote in writing.