Tibet: Lhasa & Nyingchi

Nyingchi - Lhasa - 8 days / 7 nights

Sample itinerary - Subject to availability

Travel style: small group

Overview

The valley first, the holy city second - altitude done right.

The journey

Eight days across Tibet's two faces - the forested river valleys of Nyingchi at 2,900m first, then Lhasa's pilgrimage city at 3,650m. Routed low-to-high so acclimatisation works with the itinerary, with the overland day between them doing the arriving gradually.

Highlights

- Namcha Barwa viewpoint at Sejila Pass (weather permitting)
- Lulang Forest Plateau
- Basum Tso's island monastery
- The Potala Palace at timed entry
- Jokhang and the Barkhor pilgrim circuit
- Sera Monastery's monk debates
- Yamdrok Lake from the pass

Day by day



Day 1 - Arrive Nyingchi

Fly in low - Nyingchi's valley airport sits at 2,900m, a gentler door into Tibet than Lhasa's - and take the afternoon exactly as slowly as the itinerary says: the Niyang riverside walk, willow stands, an early night. The guide checks pulses and takes no chances; the pace tonight is the route's first feature, not a delay in it.

Meals: - - Hotel: Nyingchi, Bayi town

Day 2 - Sejila Pass and Lulang

Up to Sejila Pass (4,720m, crossed and down again the same day) for the view towards Namcha Barwa - visible when the cloud allows, and never promised. The road drops into the Lulang plateau's stone-pot-chicken village for lunch among the forests, then back over and down to the valley. Altitude today is a there-and-back exercise; the sleeping stays low, which is the point.

Meals: B, L - Hotel: Nyingchi, Bayi town



Day 3 - Basum Tso, overland to Lhasa

Basum Tso first: the turquoise lake with its island monastery reached by the log crossing pilgrims still use, photographed before the day boats. Then the highway west along the Niyang and Lhasa rivers, the valley widening into the plateau, into Lhasa by evening. The city's first sight - the Potala above the rooftops, lit - usually happens from the vehicle before anyone says anything.

Meals: B - Hotel: Lhasa, Barkhor old town

Day 4 - The Potala and the Barkhor

The Potala at its timed-entry slot - quota secured ahead, as noted - climbing with the pilgrims through the White and Red Palaces at the pace the stairs allow. Afternoon at the Jokhang, Tibet's holiest shrine, and the Barkhor circuit around it: prostrations, butter-smoke, prayer wheels turning, and the guide reading the pilgrim road properly rather than shopping it.

Meals: B - Hotel: Lhasa, Barkhor old town



Day 5 - Gardens and debates

A softer morning - Norbulingka's summer-palace gardens or the Tibet Museum according to interest - then Sera Monastery in the late afternoon for the debates: standing monks, hand-clap challenges, logic as public sport in the courtyard. It ends at the day's edge, which is when the sweet-tea houses fill; the guide knows one where the regulars out-number visitors.

Meals: B - Hotel: Lhasa, Barkhor old town

Day 6 - Yamdrok from the pass

A day trip south over Kamba La to Yamdrok, the turquoise lake laid out far below the pass road - the view everyone comes for, taken slowly with tea from a lakeside kiosk. Back to Lhasa by mid-afternoon with the evening free along the Barkhor; souvenir-bargaining lessons are available and considerably useful.

Meals: B, L - Hotel: Lhasa, Barkhor old town



Day 7 - A slow Lhasa morning

The city at its own pace on the last full day: the Ani Sangkhung nunnery where the nuns print prayer flags on woodblocks, a final circuit of the Barkhor with cameras unhurried, and whatever the tea houses and the marketplace suggest. The afternoon stays deliberately empty - packing, a last rooftop view, and the departure logistics set for the morning flight.

Meals: B - Hotel: Lhasa, Barkhor old town

Day 8 - Depart

Transfer to Gonggar airport for the flight out - most connections run through Chengdu, Chongqing or Xi'an, and the coordination team sees the group through to the onward boarding. Permits, quotas and pass weather were all subject to confirmation at booking; what was delivered was the route done at the altitude it deserves.

Meals: B - Hotel: -

What makes this journey different

- Nyingchi before Lhasa - two nights at roughly half Lhasa's altitude before the city, which is the single best altitude decision an itinerary can make.
- Basum Tso en route: the island-monastery lake reached before the day boats.
- The Potala with its timed-entry quota secured ahead, and the Barkhor explained by a guide who walks it with pilgrims.
- Sera Monastery's afternoon debates and a sweet-tea house among Lhasa regulars.

Where you stay

Comfortable four-star in Nyingchi (Bayi) and Lhasa near the Barkhor, both with oxygen support on request - simple plateau standard, and we say so before booking.

Food & local life

A Tibetan family table with tsampa and butter tea, Lhasa sweet-tea houses, Lulang stone-pot chicken and Nyingchi river fish - with honest fallbacks for low-appetite days at altitude.

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 processing
+ Oxygen cylinders in the vehicle and a pulse oximeter throughout

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

To be confirmed with suppliers

- Tibet Travel Permit and Alien's Travel Permit - apply 15-20 working days ahead with passport scan; the Chinese visa must be issued first
- Potala Palace ticket quota for the dates (daily cap; sells out weeks ahead May-September)
- Sejila Pass road status and Namcha Barwa visibility - weather, no guarantee
- flight times into Nyingchi Mainling and out of Lhasa Gonggar

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.