

# EXPLORE!

## Ancient Kham and the Litang Nomadic Festival 15 days

China - Trip code SLT



## Ancient Kham and the Litang Nomadic Festival

The ancient region of Kham, situated on the edge of the Tibetan plateau, is a land of high mountain peaks and vast grassland plains. Nomads tend their flocks of Yaks as they have for centuries, and Buddhist monasteries and communities dot the hillsides. The people of Kham are as interesting as its landscape and we'll learn how they have kept their traditions alive to the present day. We spend a day at their Festival, where the nomads of the region gather to socialize and receive spiritual blessings and teachings from lamas and monks.

### Trip highlights

- ★ **Litang Nomadic Festival** - We'll be welcomed in to the yak-hair tents of the nomads with tea, sweets and yak meat.
- ★ **Remote monasteries** - See how Tibetan culture is practiced and maintained in the monasteries and villages of the region.
- ★ **Sertar Buddhist Institute** - Visit the monks and nuns at the world's largest centre of Buddhist learning.
- ★ **Chengdu Panda Research Centre** - Meet the pandas at Chengdu and see the efforts to bolster the population in the wild.

#### ACCOMMODATION GRADE:

##### Standard

Our standard, mid-range accommodation offers a good level of service, often with other amenities such as a restaurant, bar, garden or swimming pool. Generally rooms will be comfortable with en suite facilities.

**TRIP PACE:****Moderate**

Moderate pace tours are ideal if you want a holiday which combines exciting activities and experiences with plenty of time to relax and unwind. Typically you'll be active and busy for part of the day but then also have time to rest and recharge your batteries.

**GROUP SIZE:****10 - 16**

Maximum group size ranges from between 6 to 20 people, depending on the type of trip, the transport and accommodation used and activities included. We rarely have groups that are smaller than five or six people and the average is 12 people plus an Explore leader.

# Itinerary

Itineraries on some departure dates may differ, please select the itinerary that you wish to explore.

## DAY 1 - Join trip in Chengdu

With a history that stretches back nearly 2500 years, Chengdu marks the spot where the southern Silk Road began. The city boasts a rich cultural pedigree that has produced some of China's most famous poets, including the 'Chinese Shakespeare', Du Fu, who lived here in the 8th century and is survived by almost 1500 hugely influential poems. Chengdu is also famed for its cuisine, with chili being one of the main ingredients, and is considered to be home to the tea drinking culture of China.



**Accommodation: Wenjun Mansion Hotel** (or similar)



Standard Hotel



Single room available



Meals Provided: None

## DAY 2 - Visit the Panda Research Centre and Wenshu Temple, drive to Dujiangyan

This morning we head to the outskirts of the city to meet Chengdu's most famous residents, the giant pandas. The resident pandas are said to be China's spoilt children and they spend their days relaxing in large enclosures while the staff bring them bamboo by the bucket load. The centre works hard to breed the pandas with the ultimate aim of releasing them back in to the wild. We return to Chengdu to discover the Wenshu Temple. Built during the Tang Dynasty, the monastery is home to more than 500 paintings and calligraphy exhibits as well as over 300 Buddha statues, including a rare jade Buddha bought from Burma in 1922. We'll depart Chengdu in the afternoon for an hour's drive to Dujiangyan.



**Accommodation: Holiday Inn Express Dujiangyan Ancient City** (or similar)



Standard Hotel



Single room available

## DAY 3 - Discover Dujiangyan and the Two Kings and Dragon Taming temples. Drive to Ma Er Kang (2600m)

Set amongst beautiful landscape, the 2300 year old Dujiangyan irrigation project is one of the greatest engineering feats of the Qin Dynasty. Constructed to provide water to the region and control flooding, the system is still in use today. We also visit the nearby Two Kings Temple and the Dragon Taming Temple, impressive and ornate examples of traditional Chinese architecture, each with its own mysterious and ancient legend. Leaving Dujiangyan we head for Ma Er Kang, a drive of around six hours through beautiful countryside of rolling hills and grassland plains. We'll stop at a couple of villages and viewpoints along the way including Miyalu, where the red autumnal leaves of the trees provide an impressive sight, and Zhuokeji village which was built in the 18th century and has well preserved stone and wooden houses. The town of Ma Er Kang follows the Dge-lugs-pa or Yellow Hat sect of Tibetan Buddhism observed by the Panchen and Dalai Lamas and is known for its clear air and surrounding snow capped peaks.



**Accommodation: Markam Rongcheng Hotel** (or similar)

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Standard Hotel

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Single room available

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 Meals Provided: Breakfast

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## DAY 4 - Explore Songgang Watch Towers and drive to Rangtang (3280m) via the Dukehe River Valley

We start today with a visit to nearby Songgang where 17th century watch towers once signalled villagers of impending raids. We continue towards Rangtang, a journey of five to six hours through the Dukehe River Valley. There'll be several stops to enjoy the scenery and explore some of the villages and temples along our route including Kalong, a pretty mountain village, and Gejigu, which has a small ancient temple and several old watch towers. Once at Rangtang we visit the monastery that is the centre of the Jonang school of Tibetan Buddhism. Originating 900 years ago, the followers of Jonang believe that only the mind is real and everything we perceive is purely a product of the mind.



**Accommodation: Rangbala Hotel** (or similar)

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Standard Hotel

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Single room available

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 Meals Provided: Breakfast

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## DAY 5 - Drive to Sertar (3820m), the world's largest Buddhist settlement


A drive of four to five hours through more impressive scenery will bring us to the Larung Gar Valley and Sertar, the world's largest Buddhist settlement. On the way we pass through the Serqu River Gorge, which will be looking glorious with the colours of autumn, and we'll visit Xuri and Hexi villages, traditional Tibetan farming communities living in old wooden houses. Arriving at Sertar, we'll be met by an impressive sight of thousands of near identical red wooden huts sprawling across the hillside, before heading off to Sertar City, where we'll stay for the next two nights.




**Accommodation: Rangbala Hotel** (or similar)

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Standard Hotel

 Standard Hotel

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 Single room available

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 Meals Provided: Breakfast

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## DAY 6 - Explore Sertar Buddhist Institute, meet a lama at home and watch the public debating

After breakfast we start exploring the institute. We'll climb approximately 600 steps to the Mandala Temple for great views of the settlement and surrounding countryside before walking through the community where thousands of students attend teachings by prominent lamas. Monks and nuns come from all over the world to learn about Tibetan Buddhism and visitors are given a warm and friendly welcome. We'll spend most of the day here, meeting a lama in his home to gain an insight into his spiritual way of life and visiting classrooms to witness young students learning about Buddhism. We'll also watch the public debating that takes place in the square. The ability to debate and win over opinion through rational argument is an important part of Buddhism and a highly respected skill. Subjects generally include scripture and the Buddha's teachings, but in the past debates have taken place between different sects of Buddhism and even between Buddhists and followers of other religions.




**Accommodation: Shenglong Hotel** (or similar)

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 Standard Hotel

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 Single room available

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 Meals Provided: Breakfast

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## DAY 7 - Drive to Ganzi (3390m) and visit nomads on the grassland

A very short drive this morning will bring us to Dong Ga, a Tibetan Buddhist Monastery on a hillside which houses ancient Buddhist paintings and Tibetan Tangkas - paintings of religious subjects on cotton or silk. The monastery has wonderful views of the vast Jinma grasslands and Sertar city. We then depart for Ganzi, which translates as 'a pure white and beautiful place', a drive of around seven hours through landscapes of long mountain ridges and deep river valleys. On the way we'll pay a visit to the nomads on the grassland near Sertar and explore Shounig Monastery in Luhou. . There are over 200 lamas in residence and young people from the surrounding areas visit to learn from them. We also spend some time at Qiuran Tibetan village, visiting one of the traditional wooden houses that make up the village and learning about the Tibetan culture and way of life.




**Accommodation: Shenglong Hotel** (or similar)

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 Standard Hotel

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 Single room available

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 Meals Provided: Breakfast

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## DAY 8 - Explore Ganzi (3390m), visit the local market and Dajin Monastery

Situated in a large valley of grass-covered hills with snow-capped mountains in the distance, the friendly town of Ganzi is rich in Tibetan culture. We walk through the town for around an hour, making our way to Ganzi Monastery which is reached by almost 200 steps. Built in 1642 by Mongols who took control of the area, it was partially destroyed during the Chinese revolution and renovated during the 1980's, assimilating Chinese and Tibetan influences; it is now home to around 700 monks. We'll explore the temples, the kitchen and the Buddhist college that is attached to the monastery. On the way back we stop for a while at the local vegetable and food market in the town before a half hour drive to the small Dajin Monastery, set in spectacular countryside nearby.

Dajin means 'lucky and prosperous land' in Tibetan and the monastery was built 350 years ago as a copy of the Jokhang Temple in Lhasa. Once there were around 3000 lamas in residence but today it is just a few hundred. From the top of the three story structure we'll get views of snow-capped mountains and the glorious scenery of the area.



**Accommodation: Ganbo Konga Hotel** (or similar)



Standard Hotel



Single room available



Meals Provided: Breakfast

## DAY 9 - Ascend to Litang (4013m), one of world's highest towns

Today's drive to Litang is approximately eight hours, passing through ever more dramatic mountain scenery as we climb to an altitude of just over 4000 metres. We'll make frequent stops to enjoy the views and to visit some of the small monasteries along the route, choosing a pleasant spot for a picnic lunch. We stop for a while at Xinlong, a small Tibetan town on the banks of Yalong River which is surrounded by high mountains. The town has a collection of monasteries from all the different sects of Tibetan Buddhism, enabling us to get a sense of the different styles and teaching of each. We arrive in to Litang early evening. One of the highest towns in the world, it sits at the edge of wide grassland valley surrounded by tall green hills. The streets of the town are often busy with nomadic shepherds and Tibetan people that come to buy and sell their wares in the town.



**Accommodation: Ganbo Konga Hotel** (or similar)



Standard Hotel



Single room available



Meals Provided: Breakfast

## DAY 10 - Meet the nomads, lamas and monks at the Litang Nomadic Festival

At the end of the summer the Tibetan nomads of the Kham region gather on the expansive grasslands near Litang. They set up their elaborately decorated yak-hair tents and spend a few days meeting each other and praying for a good harvest. The lamas of Litang Monastery erect a huge tent which serves as a temple and they pray and chant throughout the festival, offering blessings and spiritual guidance to the nomads. We will spend a whole day at the festival and are likely to be the only Westerners there, and we'll be warmly welcomed. We will be able to watch the ceremonies in the temple tent and visit the tents of the nomads where we'll be offered yak butter tea, sweets and yak meat as we learn about nomadic life.



**Accommodation: Ganbo Konga Hotel** (or similar)



Standard Hotel



Single room available



Meals Provided: Breakfast

## DAY 11 - More time at Litang Nomadic Festival and discover Litang Monastery

We'll visit the festival again early this morning to see the nomads milking their yaks and spend some more time soaking up the

atmosphere before moving on to Litang monastery. The largest and oldest in the region, the monastery dates from 1580 and consists of elaborate buildings and temples. Nearby is the old part of Litang with traditional two story Tibetan houses, stupas and prayer wheels. It is the birth place of the 7th and 10th Dalai Lamas and today has a timeless feel with the elders of the community sitting outside chatting while children play together in the streets.



**Accommodation: Tianzhu Hotel** (or similar)



Standard Hotel



Single room available



Meals Provided: Breakfast

## DAY 12 - Visit Tibetan villages en route to the Tagong Grasslands (3700m)

The word Tagong means 'favourite place of one that has achieved enlightenment' in the local language and is famous for its massive grassland areas inhabited by tens of thousands of yaks and their nomadic herders. It will take us around seven hours to get there by road, passing through the modern town of Yajiang and stopping at the Tibetan villages of Weidicun and Bajiaoluoxiang. We'll pass by several magnificent mountain peaks including the highest mountain in Sichuan, Gongga Shan, at 7556m. We arrive at the Tagong grasslands in time to enjoy the sunset over the vast grassland area and Yala mountain in the distance.



**Accommodation: Tianzhu Hotel** (or similar)



Standard Hotel



Single room available



Meals Provided: Breakfast

## DAY 13 - Walk on the grasslands, visit Tagong Monastery and drive to Luding (1320m)

This morning we take a walk on the grasslands to experience the wide, expansive landscape and hopefully to meet some of the nomads that live there with their herds of yaks. After our walk we visit the Tagong Monastery, built during the Qing Dynasty to honour the journey of Princess Wencheng who stayed here on her way to Lhasa to marry the Tibetan king. The monastery houses sacred relics and statues and has a very impressive setting with snow-capped mountains providing a stunning backdrop to its golden roofs. Around midday we depart for Luding, a drive of around four hours. A small, bustling town, it is famous for its narrow century's old suspension bridge and the site of what is considered by many to be one of the most important events of the Long March, the Battle of Luding Bridge. The battle saw the Red Army taking the narrow bridge against superior numbers after a forced march of 120km in less than 24 hours. On arrival we'll take a walk through the town and along the Daduhe river to the bridge and the site of the battle.



**Accommodation: Luding Bridge Hotel** (or similar)



Standard Hotel



Single room available



Meals Provided: Breakfast

## DAY 14 - Drive along the ancient Tea and Horse Trail to Chengdu

Today we return to Chengdu via Ya'an, a drive of around seven hours. Ya'an is famous as a centre of the tea industry and was an important stop on the ancient Tea and Horse Trail, an ancient trading route from China to Tibet. We'll stop here for lunch and visit Ya'an museum to learn about the trail and the tea production of the area. Arriving in Chengdu in the late afternoon we'll have the opportunity to try some of the city's famous cuisine on our last night in China.



**Accommodation: Wenjun Mansion Hotel** (or similar)



Standard Hotel



Single room available



Meals Provided: Breakfast

## DAY 15 - Trip ends in Chengdu

Our trip ends this morning after breakfast.



Meals Provided: Breakfast



## Why book this trip

The northwest part of Sichuan, traditional known as Kham, marks the beginning of the Tibetan plateau and shares the culture of Tibet. On this trip we spend two weeks journeying through spectacular mountain scenery and meeting the monks, nomads and villagers of the region, learning about their way of life, culture and religion, and enjoying vast landscapes of mountains and grasslands.

# What's included?



## Included meals

Breakfast: 14



## Transport

Bus



## Trip staff

Explore Tour Leader  
Driver(s)  
Local Guide(s)



## Accommodation

14 nights standard hotel

# Trip information

## Country information

### China Holidays & Tours

#### Climate

China has primarily a temperate climate, with a wide spectrum of extremes due to its huge area. Summer months are hot and rainy though in the south the climate is tropical and we can experience rain at any time of the year, often falling in sharp tropical rain-storms which are heavy but short lived. Winter is colder and drier, temperatures in Beijing can be as low as -12c.

#### Time difference to GMT

+8

#### Plugs

3 Pin Flat

#### Religion

Mainly Buddhist

#### Language

Mandarin

## Budgeting and packing

### Clothing

It is best to pack lots of layers for this tour, as although day time can be warm, temperatures can fall to below zero at night and even during the day whilst at higher altitudes. It can rain at this time of year so a waterproof is useful.

### Footwear

Comfortable shoes that are good for walking are also recommended.

### Luggage

20kg



## Equipment

At altitude the chance of sunburn is increased so you should bring a sunhat and sunscreen.

## Tipping

### Explore leader

At your discretion you might also consider tipping your Tour Leader in appreciation of the efficiency and service you receive.

### Local crew

Although entirely voluntary, tipping is a recognised part of life in this region of the world. Some local staff will look to members of the group for personal recognition of particular services provided. Accordingly, you should allow £35 for tipping. In order to make things easier for you, the Tour Leaders may organise a group's tips kitty and if this is the case, they will account for it throughout the tour.

## Country Information

### China Holidays & Tours

#### Food and drink

The costs for meals may vary depending upon location, type of restaurant and number of courses eaten and so the prices given are an average guide. Local restaurants located off the beaten track may be less expensive, whereas an upmarket restaurant located in the centre of a major city may charge more.

##### Lunch price

£5

##### Dinner price

£6.00 - 10.00

##### Beer price

£2

##### Water price

£1.5

#### Foreign Exchange

##### Local currency

Renminbi/Yuan

##### Recommended Currency For Exchange

Either EUR, USD or GBP.

##### Where To Exchange

In all towns - your Tour Leader will advise you on arrival. When changing money ask for a receipt so you can change Yuan back into your own currency when leaving China.

##### ATM Availability

All major towns.

##### Credit Card Acceptance

Most major restaurants and stores.

##### Travellers Cheques

Travellers cheques can be changed in Hong Kong and at the Bank of China in all major cities but only during bank opening hours. Please note this is very time consuming and is not recommended.

## Transport, Accommodation & Meals

## Transport Information

Bus

## Essential information

### FCO Advice

We strongly recommend that you check your government's travel advisory for up-to-date information and advice about your destination: safety and security, entry requirements, health, local laws and customs. For UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office advice [click here](#).

For more information from Explore about travel advice, [click here](#)

#### Under 18 immigration guidance

Please note that some countries require proof of parental consent when travelling overseas with under 18s. Please check requirements with the relevant embassy or consular office well in advance of travel if this applies to your party.

### Essential Information

Once your booking has been confirmed we guarantee the price will not increase, whatever the circumstances. Before booking please ensure you have read our important tour pricing information. [Booking Conditions](#)

### Visa Information

China: A visa is required by all nationalities. A single entry visa should be arranged in advance of travelling. In order to apply for your Chinese visa you will need to submit supporting documents from our local supplier confirming your itinerary and travel arrangements, which we will obtain on your behalf. So that we can provide this for you, and to ensure all local arrangements are in place, we require a copy of your passport no later than 8 weeks before you are due to start your trip. Once we have your passport copy we shall process and pass on the documents you require 6-8 weeks before your trip, please be mindful of this when applying for your visa. If you require the supporting documents earlier than this, please contact Explore so we can arrange this. Passengers wishing to extend their stay in China should be aware that current visa regulations only allow foreigners to stay in the country for up to 30 days. Please consider this when planning your trip. You should confirm all visa related questions with the relevant Embassy prior to departure.

If you do require assistance in obtaining a visa then you may consider applying through Explore's recommended visa service in the UK, Travcour. See [www.travcour.com](http://www.travcour.com) to download the relevant visa application for your trip, if applicable (UK citizens only), along with details of how to apply for your visa through Travcour. The Team at Travcour will be happy to answer specific questions relating to visa applications, please call them directly on 0208 5431846.

### Booking conditions

Before booking your Explore trip, please ensure that you read both our [Essential Information](#) and [Booking Conditions](#).

### Transfers

[Find out more about Trip Transfer Terms and Conditions before you book.](#)

#### Booking a land only package with Explore

Customers who have chosen to book on the 'Land Only' arrangements of our tour, please ensure that you have checked your tour specific 'Joining Instructions' prior to booking your own travel arrangements. Your joining instructions can be found below in the dates and prices information.

You may also be eligible for the Free Explore Transfer.

#### Joining Tour Abroad

Customers booked on the 'Land Only' arrangements will now receive a Free Transfer, provided you arrive and depart on the tour only itinerary start and end dates. The transfers will be from the Explore designated airport or train station to the joining point of your tour, and then back from the ending point to the designated airport or train station. The exception to this rule is customers who are booked on a tour where the joining and ending point is at the designated airport or train station.

Free transfers are not available for Self-Guided, Tailormade or Tours for Churches customers.

If you are not eligible for the Free Transfer then you will need to make your own way through to the joining and ending point. On a majority of our tours Explore will be able to provide a private transfer at an additional cost. Please ask for a quote at the time of booking.

For more information regarding the Explore Free Transfer [click here](#)

### Insurance

It is a condition of booking with Explore that you have adequate valid travel insurance. It is your responsibility to arrange appropriate travel insurance and ensure you have read and understood the full terms and conditions of your travel insurance policy to ensure that you are covered for all activities you intend to undertake whilst on the tour, including all optional activities. Your Insurance Policy must fully cover you for medical expenses and emergency repatriation to your home country. Please ensure your policy includes medical emergency helicopter evacuation in the event of illness or injury and covers the entire duration of

your holiday. If you are trekking at altitude please ensure that there is no upper altitude limit which may limit or exclude cover for your trip. Medical and repatriation insurance cover is not mandatory for UK residents who are travelling on trips within the United Kingdom.

Read more information about what travel insurance is required.

## Flight information

Explore offers a wide range of flexible flying options to make joining and leaving our trips easy. Read more about them here.

### Flight Information

You are able to book this tour on a 'land only' basis or as a 'flight inclusive' package. Your flight inclusive package will be fully protected by the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) ATOL protection scheme.

### Booking a flight inclusive package with Explore

We have a good selection of flights not only from London but from many regional airports around the UK allowing us to compare fares between scheduled carriers as well as low cost and charter airlines. Our dedicated flights team will match the best flight options to your arrival and departure airport.

On our website we display a UK flight inclusive package guide price which is generally based on a London departure. To avoid paying supplements or to secure your preferred flight option, we recommend booking as early as possible, especially for peak travel dates.

## Altitude information

The maximum altitude on this trip is 4013m. At altitudes in excess of 3000m you may find that you get out of breath more quickly than usual and occasionally your sleep can be affected. You should ensure that your travel insurance covers you for travelling at this elevation.

## China Holidays & Tours

### Vaccinations

Nothing compulsory, but we recommend protection against malaria, infectious hepatitis, typhoid, tetanus and polio. Consult your travel clinic for latest advice on different prophylaxis available against malaria. Travellers may wish to take immunisation against Japanese Encephalitis. The above is not an exhaustive list. Further information regarding vaccinations and travel health advice can be found by following the NHS and NaTHNaC links at <http://www.explore.co.uk/Travelhealth/> and from your local healthcare provider. Visa and vaccination requirements are subject to change and should be confirmed before departure.

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