

# EXPLORE!

**The Tagong Horse Festival of Ancient Kham**  
18 days

China - Trip code STH

## The Tagong Horse Festival of Ancient Kham

The south-eastern part of the Tibetan Plateau, known as Kham in ancient times, is a region of stunning high mountain scenery and fascinating people. Travelling through this incredible part of the world, we'll discover immense monasteries and settlements devoted to Tibetan Buddhism, and journey to the Tagong grasslands for the annual Horse Festival. Here, nomads demonstrate their amazing equestrian skills with races and challenges, and celebrate their culture with singing, dancing and nomadic sports. They'll welcome us with the hospitality that they are famous for as we join people from all over the region to watch the spectacle.

### Trip highlights

- ★ **Tagong Horse Festival** - Meet the nomads as they demonstrate their equestrian skills and celebrate their way of life
- ★ **Dege Printing House** - Explore this 'encyclopaedia of Tibetan culture' and learn about the Tibetan perspective on geography, medicine, arts and religion
- ★ **Ancient Kham** - Travel through dramatic high mountain passes, vast grassland plains and small villages
- ★ **Yarchen Gar Monastery** - Visit the impressive 'city of nuns'
- ★ **Panda Research Centre** - Meet the pandas at Chengdu and see the efforts to bolster their 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:

##### Full on

Full on paced trips are for travellers who like their holidays packed with activities and experiences, moving on quickly from place to place with lots of early starts and long, busy days. Some may find them tiring, but others get a buzz from packing their precious holiday-time as chock-a-block full of new experiences as possible!

#### 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 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. 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



Meals Provided: Breakfast

## DAY 3 - Discover Dujiangyan, the Two Kings Temple and the Dragon Taming Temple. 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. Nearby, we also discover the 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 Zhuokeji village which was built in the 18th century and has very 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)



Standard Hotel



Single room available



Meals Provided: Breakfast

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

We start today at nearby Songgang where 17th century watch towers which 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 mountain scenery and explore some of the villages and temples along our route including Kalong, a beautiful mountain village, and Zengke Temple, a small ancient Tibetan Buddhist temple with 50m high towers and over 1100 stupas.



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



Standard Hotel



Single room available



Meals Provided: Breakfast

## DAY 5 - Rangtang Monastery and Tibetan village.

An hour's drive takes us to Rangtang Monastery which is the centre of the Jonang school of Tibetan Buddhism. Originating over 900 years ago, the followers of Jonang believe that only the mind is real and everything we perceive is purely a product of consciousness. We'll meet the lamas and learn something of the fascinating Jonang tradition. The monastery itself consists of three temples which were all built in different eras, with the oldest being the Querji Temple which dates from the 14th century. There is a small village near the monastery and we'll wander through its streets getting a first hand experience of the way of life of the Tibetan Buddhists that live there.

On the way back to Rangtang we stop at Bangtuo Monastery. The name means 'monastery on the grassland' and it is built on hillside facing the Zequhe River in a beautiful natural setting. It is famous for its 300 year old stone carved Tibetan Scriptures which took over 60 lamas nine years to finish.



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



Standard Hotel



Single room available



Meals Provided: Breakfast

## DAY 6 - Drive to Ganzi (3390m)

We drive to 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 Shounig Monastery in Luhou. Shounig Monastery, a yellow hat sect Buddhist monastery, first built in 1650, moved the location for three times in the history, and the present one is finished in 1988, 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)



Standard Hotel



Single room available



Meals Provided: Breakfast

## DAY 7 - Walk around Ganzi and the local food market

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, the monastery was partially destroyed during the Chinese revolution and renovated during the 1980's assimilating both Chinese and Tibetan influences; it is now home to around 700 monks. We'll explore the temples, the kitchen, and the Buddhist college before stopping for a while at the local vegetable and food market in the town.



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



Standard Hotel



Single room available



Meals Provided: Breakfast

## DAY 8 - Drive to Baiyu (2360m) via the Zhuodala mountain pass (4600m) and the Yarchen Gar Viddiyana Meditation Monastery

Today's drive takes us through Zhuodala Tunnel and via spectacular scenery of mountains, lakes and expansive grasslands. We stop for a couple of hours at the Yarchen Gar Viddiyana Meditation Monastery, a large monastery settlement situated at 4000m. It is home to more than 10,000 lamas, monks and nuns, with a majority of nuns. The monastery is dedicated to the Nyingma tradition of Buddhism. This is the most ancient of the four schools of the religion and its teachings are derived from the first translations of Buddhist scriptures from 8th century Sanskrit sources. The lamas and nuns spend eight months of the year teaching, and four months practicing meditation.

Our drive takes around eight hours including the stops, and just before arriving in to Baiyu we'll pass through a large grassland area which is carpeted with a wonderful variety of different coloured flowers, before following the river valley in to the town.



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



Standard Hotel



Single room available



Meals Provided: Breakfast

## DAY 9 - Visit Baiyu Monastery and drive to Dege along the Yangtze River

After breakfast we set out to walk through the town of Baiyu and up to the monastery that overlooks it, reached by around 150 steps. We'll continue up to the Mandala Temple for great views across the monastery and the town, and spend some time at the Buddhist college where we can meet the lamas that teach the principles of the religion to devotees.

Our three hour drive this afternoon follows the course of the mighty Yangtze River, stopping at several traditional villages along the way, until we reach the town of Dege.



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



Standard Hotel



Single room available



Meals Provided: Breakfast

## DAY 10 - Explore Dege and its famous Tibetan printing house

Dege means 'land of mercy' in Tibetan and is one of three ancient centres of Buddhism. We take a short walk through the small town and spend a couple of hours visiting the renowned printing house. Often described as an 'encyclopaedia of Tibetan culture', Dege Printing House contains more than a quarter of a million wooden printing blocks of text and images. They cover all aspects of culture including geography, medicine, arts and religion, and provide a unique insight in to the view of the world of the region's people. The collection also includes some of the rarest Tibetan texts in existence. The block printing process still practiced here has remained unchanged for the past 300 years and we'll be able to witness it in progress while we are there.

In the afternoon we visit the Gengqing Monastery which was built in 1448 and has a collection of seven smaller monasteries attached to it. They follow the Sakaya school of Buddhism, with a particular focus on scholarship and teaching the Lamdre, or 'path with its fruit', meditation. We'll also spend some time at the workshop of a local Tangka painter where we'll learn how these elaborate, and sometimes enormous, works of Buddhist art are created for decorative and ceremonial purposes.



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



Standard Hotel



Single room available



Meals Provided: Breakfast

## DAY 11 - Drive through the mountains to Dzogchen Monastery, visiting villages and Xinluhai Lake en route

Our eight hour journey today will take us through spectacular high mountain scenery. We'll stop at some of the small Tibetan villages that we pass through and take time to enjoy the beautiful 4000 metre high Xinluhai Lake. The last part of the journey takes us across vast grasslands where we will stop to meet the nomads with their huge herds of Yak before reaching Dzogchen Monastery, where we will be spending the night in the Monastery's guest house. Run by the monks and nuns, our fellow guests are likely to be monks or lamas visiting from other parts of China.

(Note that if the monastery decides to hold a festival then the rooms will be required for lamas and monks travelling from other parts of China and we will stay in nearby Zhuqing village instead. In both cases the facilities are simple with shared bathrooms)



**Accommodation: Dzogchen Monastery Guesthouse** (or similar)



Standard Hotel



Single room available



Meals Provided: Breakfast

## DAY 12 - Explore Dzogchen Monastery and drive to Ganzi

This morning we take a tour of the Dzogchen Monastery. Set in stunning scenery at an altitude of 4000m, it was one of the six great monasteries of the earliest sect of Buddhism known as Nyingma. We'll see the temples of the monastery, its Buddhist college, and

meet the Lamas who come from both the Tibetan region and other parts of China. We'll be able to take part in a walking meditation with the locals, circumnavigating the monastery in the Buddhist style.

In the afternoon we take a drive of four hours to Ganzi. Just before we arrive, we visit the small Dajin Monastery, set in spectacular countryside just outside the town. 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: Shenglong Hotel** (or similar)



Standard Hotel



Single room available



Meals Provided: Breakfast

## DAY 13 - Drive to Tagong via Daofu and the Lingque Monastery

We have a leisurely eight hour drive to Tagong along mountain roads and passing through more incredible scenery. On the way we'll stop for a while at Lingque Monastery in Daofu. The monastery follows the Gelug tradition of Buddhism that is led by the Dalai Lama and is famous for its butter sculptures, a tradition that arose from the practice of nomads donating the first butter from each yak as an offering to the Buddha. Over time the sculptures became larger and more elaborate and now the biggest can be several storeys high.

We will also take the opportunity to stop at some of the nomadic communities that we are likely to pass. Renowned for their hospitality, they welcome visitors and will offer us sweet treats and butter tea as we learn a little bit about their ancient, wandering lifestyle.



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



Standard Hotel



Single room available



Meals Provided: Breakfast

## DAY 14 - Experience the Tagong Horse Festival

In the local tongue the word Tagong means 'favourite place of one that has achieved enlightenment' and is famous for its massive grassland areas inhabited by tens of thousands of yaks and their herders. Visiting the Tagong Horse Festival offers one of the best opportunities to witness authentic Kham culture and mix with the nomads. Held every year on the 15th day of the fifth lunar month of the Tibetan calendar, the nomads gather to race horses, enjoy other nomadic sports, and traditional singing and dancing. Events include various horse races, horsemanship competitions such as picking up an item from the ground while travelling at speed, and performing gymnastics on horseback. The festival attracts local people from the surrounding villages, and takes place in a beautiful setting with a backdrop of towering mountains.



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



Standard Hotel



Single room available



Meals Provided: Breakfast

## DAY 15 - More time to enjoy the events at the Tagong Horse Festival

We'll spend more time at the festival today and enjoy some of the other events such as tug of war and the sandbag carrying competition. We can also witness the lamas chanting and offering prayers for the wellbeing of all the local population.

Later, we take the opportunity to 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 king of Tibet. 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.



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



Standard Hotel



Single room available



Meals Provided: Breakfast

## DAY 16 - Drive to Luding (1320m) and explore the town

This morning there will be a performance of traditional Tibetan Guozhuang dancing. The dance reflects themes in daily life and is often performed at festivals. An equal number of men and women form a circle around a lead dancer, following their steps and singing folk songs. After the dance, we depart for Luding, a drive of around four hours. A small, lively town, it is famous for its narrow centuries 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 17 - 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 known 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 renowned cuisine on our last night in China.



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



Standard Hotel



Single room available



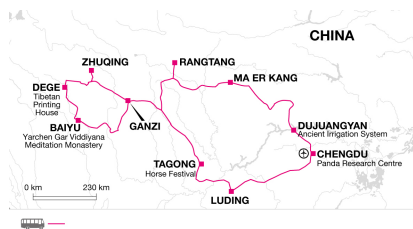
Meals Provided: Breakfast

## DAY 18 - Trip ends in Chengdu

Our trip ends this morning after breakfast.



Meals Provided: Breakfast



## Why book this trip

The Tagong Horse Festival provides a great opportunity to experience authentic nomadic culture in the beautiful mountain region of ancient Kham. The three day event attracts people from all over the area to watch and take part in the celebrations. Horse races and displays of equestrian skill take centre stage, while there are nomadic challenges such as carrying the sandbag and tug of war, and singing and dancing performed by the people of the town. Monks and nuns from the nearby monasteries also attend, not only to watch but also to offer prayers for the participants.

## What's included?



**Included meals**

Breakfast: 17



**Transport**

Bus



**Trip staff**

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



**Accommodation**

17 nights standard hotel

# Trip information

## Country information

### China

#### 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, sometimes heavily, at this time of year so a waterproof is useful.

### Footwear

Comfortable shoes that are good for walking are recommended.

### Luggage

20kg

### Luggage: On tour

One main piece of baggage and daypack. Remember you are expected to carry your own luggage so don't overload yourself.

### 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

#### 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.

### Price Guarantee

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 and Passport 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.

It is your responsibility to ensure that you are in possession of a full passport, with the correct validity for your chosen destination.

## 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, Polar, 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. The cost of many of our Polar Voyages will exceed the capped amount covered by standard insurance premiums and you will be required to pay an additional premium to cover the full value of your trip. Please ensure that you are covered for the full amount of your holiday cost, as insufficient cover could invalidate a claim under the policy. 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 5050m. 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**

### **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. Please check the latest requirements with your travel clinic or doctor prior to departure. 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 [Explore Travel Health](#) and from your local healthcare provider. Visa and vaccination requirements are subject to change and should be confirmed by you before travelling.

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