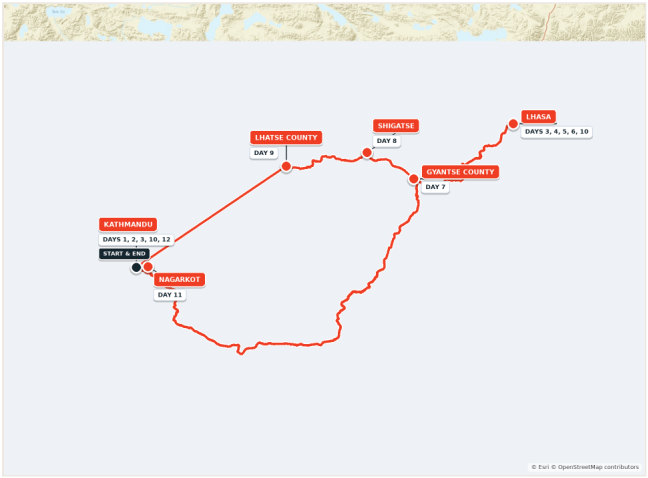
ENCOUNTERS TRAVEL

Your passport to adventure

Himalayan Discovery

COUNTRY(IES)	Nepal , Tibet , China
TOUR TYPE	Private
TRANSPORT	A/C 4x4 vehicle & flight
GROUP SIZE	Min: 2 | Max: Any
DURATION	12 days
STARTS	Lhasa, Tibet
ENDS	Kathmandu, Nepal
MEALS	Breakfasts - 11, Lunches - 0, Dinners - 0

TOUR ROUTE MAP **12 Days**



ROUTE: **Kathmandu** (Start) → **Lhasa** → **Gyantse County** → **Shigatse** → **Lhatse County** → **Kathmandu** → **Lhasa** → **Nagarkot** → **Kathmandu** (End)

HIGHLIGHTS

Bustling Kathmandu, mystical Lhasa, famous Tashilhunpo Monastery, spectacular mountain scenery of the Himalayas, views of Mount Everest, the beauty of Nagarkot, wooden architecture of Durbar Square in Bhaktapur

Itinerary

DAY 1 Arrive in Kathmandu, transfer to hotel

Land at Kathmandu Airport and travel to your hotel in the city. Once checked in, the remainder of the time is free with no organised sightseeing scheduled. You can recover from the journey or take a short independent walk nearby, making this a relaxed first introduction to Kathmandu before the more structured cultural visits and regional travel begin.

ACTIVITIES

- **Arrive at Kathmandu Airport**
  Arrive at Kathmandu Airport where our representative greets you and assists with formalities. Begin your journey in Nepal's vibrant capital city.
- **Drive from Kathmandu Airport to Kathmandu City Hotel**
  Transfer from Kathmandu Airport to your hotel in the Thamel district. Settle in and get your first feel for the

bustling streets of Kathmandu.

- **Free Time in Kathmandu**
  Enjoy free time in Kathmandu to relax at your hotel, browse the lively lanes and shops of Thamel, or explore the surrounding area independently at your own pace.

OVERNIGHT	MEALS	EXTRAS
Kathmandu hotel	None	Extra day in Kathmandu - pre-tour, Single room supplement (TITMHD)

DAY 2 Kathmandu, full day city tour

Spend part of the day visiting Kathmandu’s historic and sacred landmarks, including sites associated with royal history and important hilltop places of worship. The guided sightseeing provides context to the city’s religious and architectural traditions before the schedule opens into free time. You can then explore independently, revisit nearby areas or simply relax, balancing formal sightseeing with a more personal experience of the capital.

ACTIVITIES

- **Explore Kathmandu Durbar Square**
  Explore Kathmandu Durbar Square with its intricately carved temples and royal palaces. Learn about Newari architecture and the history of the ancient kingdom.
- **Explore Swayambunath Stupa in Monkey Temple**
  Visit Swayambunath Stupa on a hill overlooking Kathmandu. Spin prayer wheels and enjoy sweeping views while watching the resident monkeys.
- **Free Time in Kathmandu**
  Enjoy free time in Kathmandu to relax at your hotel, browse the lively lanes and shops of Thamel, or explore the surrounding area independently at your own pace.

OVERNIGHT	MEALS	EXTRAS
Kathmandu hotel	Breakfast	Everest Mountain Flight

DAY 3 Fly to Lhasa, Tibet

Transfer directly from your Kathmandu hotel to the airport and prepare for the scheduled international departure. The day is centred on travel logistics rather than organised activities, allowing you to leave the capital without additional stops. Arrival at the airport marks the end of the Nepal portion of the journey and provides the connection to the next destination on your wider travels.

ACTIVITIES

- **Drive from Kathmandu City Hotel to Kathmandu Airport**
  Transfer from your Kathmandu hotel to the airport. Say goodbye to Nepal as you head for your departure flight.

- **Travel from Flight Kathmandu to Lhasa**
  Fly from Kathmandu across the high Himalayas to Lhasa. Enjoy spectacular mountain views as you cross into Tibet.

Arrival in Lhasa

Drive from Lhasa Airport to your hotel in the city and take in the expansive scenery surrounding Tibet's capital along the way. No major sightseeing is included during this arrival period, giving you time to get comfortable, rest after the journey and begin acclimatising to the altitude before visiting Lhasa's important cultural and religious sites.

ACTIVITIES

- **Drive from Lhasa Airport to Lhasa City Hotel**
  On arrival in Lhasa you are met and driven into the city. Check in to your hotel and start acclimatising to the altitude.

OVERNIGHT	MEALS
Lhasa hotel	Breakfast

DAY 4 Lhasa, full day city tour

A guided tour of the fascinating city of Lhasa has been arranged for you today, and the day starts with a visit to its cardinal landmark, the Potala Palace. One of the great wonders of world architecture, it was the former winter home of the Dalai Lama and is probably the image of Lhasa that most people have in their minds when they think of Tibet. Learn more about its eventful history as you explore the countless richly decorated rooms, halls and palaces, while pilgrims bring silk scarves, coins and yak butter to the shrines as offerings. Continue to the Barkhor, perhaps similar to the Kathmandu area around Durbar Square and Freak St, where monks sit cross-legged on the streets with alms bowls and the low murmur of prayers can be heard in the air while nearby stall owners offer jewel encrusted daggers with enthusiasm. Away from the square you can begin the Barkhor circuit, including Mani Lhakhang (huge prayer wheel) and Nangtse Shar (former jail and dungeons), before arriving at Jokhang Temple, the spiritual centre of Tibet. In contrast to the Potala, Jokhang Temple is buzzing with activity, and pilgrims from every corner of Tibet arrive here to worship. The temple is the product of Han, Tibetan and Nepalese architectural styles and is, quite simply, the most revered religious structure in the whole of Tibet and a "must" on any Lhasa or Tibet itinerary. The aroma of yak butter mixed with incense, and the murmur of prayer, drift throughout the temple, whilst at the entrance there are always prostrations being made by pilgrims. Inside the temple you pass statues of the four guardian kings before reaching the exposed inner courtyard, or Dukhang, and the former throne of the Dalai Lama. The inner prayer hall houses six large statues including Guru Rinpoche, Avalokiteshvara (sometimes referred to as the Bodhisattva and well known to any student of Tibetan Buddhism) and Jampa (Future Buddha), and a holdings of chapels encircles the statues, with pilgrims walking around this courtyard, always in a clockwise direction, visiting the various chapels along the way.

ACTIVITIES

- **Explore Potala Palace in Lhasa**
  Tour the iconic Potala Palace, former winter residence of the Dalai Lama. Wander through richly decorated halls and chapels filled with murals and statues.
- **Visit Barkhor Circuit and Jokhang Temple – Lhasa**
  Walk the Barkhor pilgrim circuit and visit Jokhang Temple, Tibet's most sacred shrine. Experience the atmosphere of prayer wheels, incense and prostrating pilgrims.

OVERNIGHT	MEALS
Lhasa hotel	Breakfast

DAY 5 Lhasa, full day city tour

Spend time visiting major religious and historical locations around Lhasa, including substantial monastery complexes associated with Tibetan spiritual life and former centres of governance. The surviving architecture and sacred spaces provide context to the capital’s long religious history. The available source is truncated, so no additional named sites or activities have been added beyond the information provided.

ACTIVITIES

- **Explore Norbulingka Palace in Lhasa**
  Explore Norbulingka, the former summer palace of the Dalai Lama. Stroll its gardens and learn how it combined religious, administrative and leisure functions.
- **Explore Drepung Monastery in Lhasa**
  Visit Drepung Monastery, once the largest in Tibet. Walk through its courtyards and temples while enjoying wide views over Lhasa.
- **Explore Sera Monastery in Lhasa**
  Continue to Sera Monastery, known for its lively monastic debates. Watch monks engage in traditional question-and-answer sessions in the debating courtyard.

OVERNIGHT	MEALS
Lhasa hotel	Breakfast

DAY 6 Lhasa to Gyantse

Travel from Lhasa to Gyantse and cross mountain passes and open sections of the Tibetan Plateau along the way. Stop to see Yamdrok Tso and take in the lake’s striking colour against the high-altitude surroundings before continuing through increasingly rural country. The overland journey introduces landscapes beyond Lhasa and provides a scenic connection to the historic town of Gyantse.

ACTIVITIES

- **Drive from Lhasa to Gyantse**
  Travel by road from Lhasa towards Gyantse across the Tibetan plateau. The drive reveals changing landscapes of villages, rivers and high meadows.
- **Scenic Stops via Kamba-La Pass and Yamdrok-Tso Lake**
  Enjoy dramatic views from Kamba-La Pass and the turquoise waters of Yamdrok-Tso Lake. Photo stops showcase some of Tibet's classic mountain scenery.

OVERNIGHT	MEALS
Gyantse hotel	Breakfast

DAY 7 Gyantse to Shigatse

Overland travel between Gyantse and Shigatse crosses the Tibetan plateau through historic towns and monastic centres. Visits to sacred complexes along the route introduce examples of Tibetan religious architecture and artistic traditions, while the surrounding landscape provides context for the important role Buddhism has played in shaping culture and community life across the region.

ACTIVITIES

- **Drive from Gyantse to Shigatse**
  Drive between Gyantse and Shigatse, two of Tibet's most historic towns. The route passes rural settlements and open plateau views.
- **Explore Tashilhunpo Monastery in Shigatse**
  Explore Tashilhunpo Monastery, traditional seat of the Panchen Lamas. Wander cobbled lanes, chapels and prayer halls within the vast complex.
- **Explore Shalu Monastery in Tibet**
  Stop at Shalu Monastery, famed for its ancient murals and scholarly history. Learn how it became an important centre of learning in central Tibet.
- **Visit Gyantse Kumbum, Dzong and Pelkor Chode Monastery**
  Discover Gyantse's tiered Kumbum chorten, hilltop Dzong and Pelkor Chode Monastery. Together they offer a rich insight into local religious life and fortress architecture.

OVERNIGHT	MEALS
Shigatse hotel	Breakfast

DAY 8 Shigatse to Lhatse

Travel from Shigatse towards Lhatse through the open plateau country of central Tibet. Along the way, visit Sakya Monastery and spend time within a major centre of Tibetan Buddhist history and scholarship. The day is focused on overland movement and a single cultural visit, with the surrounding valleys and high-altitude scenery illustrating the scale and remoteness of the region.

ACTIVITIES

- **Drive from Shigatse to Lhatse**
  Continue overland from Shigatse to Lhatse through wide valleys and mountain scenery. Watch everyday Tibetan life in the roadside villages.
- **Explore Sakya Monastery in Tibet**
  Visit Sakya Monastery, ancestral seat of the Sakyapa school of Tibetan Buddhism. Its fortress-like architecture and murals reflect influences from Tibet, Mongolia and beyond.

OVERNIGHT	MEALS
Lhatse hotel	Breakfast

DAY 9 Lhatse to Nyalam

Travel by road from Lhatse to Nyalam and cross a series of high mountain passes on the way towards Tibet's southern frontier. The journey is focused on overland travel rather than formal sightseeing, with the surrounding peaks, valleys and wide plateau providing the main interest. The changing altitude marks a clear geographical movement towards the edge of the Tibetan Plateau.

ACTIVITIES

- **Drive from Lhatse to Nyalam**
  Travel from Lhatse towards Nyalam along the Bhote Kosi valley. The road climbs towards high passes with ever-broader mountain views.
- **Scenic Drive via Nyalam and Lalung La Passes**
  Cross high passes such as Nyalam and Lalung La with views of Himalayan giants. On clear days you may glimpse peaks like Shishapangma, Cho Oyu and Everest.

OVERNIGHT	MEALS
Nyalam hotel	Breakfast

DAY 10 Nyalam to Nagarkot

Drive from Kathmandu Airport to Bhaktapur and spend time exploring the old city before continuing to Nagarkot. Bhaktapur introduces Nepal through historic streets, courtyards and traditional buildings, while the later drive climbs into the surrounding hills. Reaching Nagarkot brings a change of pace and scenery, with a quieter setting away from the more densely populated parts of the Kathmandu Valley.

ACTIVITIES

- **Drive from Kathmandu Airport to Bhaktapur**
  From Kathmandu Airport you drive directly to historic Bhaktapur. The short journey brings you into the heart of

the old Newari town.

- **Bhaktapur Activity in Ancient City**
  Explore Bhaktapur's ancient centre on a guided Activity. Visit temples, courtyards and traditional Newari homes.
- **Drive from Bhaktapur to Nagarkot**
  Drive from Bhaktapur to the hilltop village of Nagarkot. Arrive to sweeping views over the Kathmandu Valley.

Lhasa Airport Departure

Transfer from Lhasa for your onward flight and conclude the Tibet section of the trip. The day is focused on departure rather than organised sightseeing, allowing you to leave the high-altitude capital and continue with the next stage of your travels. The airport connection marks the end of the supported time on the Tibetan Plateau after exploring its cultural and mountain landscapes.

ACTIVITIES

- **Travel from Flight Lhasa to Kathmandu**
  Fly back from Lhasa to Kathmandu, retracing your route over the Himalayas. This marks your return from the Tibetan plateau to Nepal's capital.

OVERNIGHT	MEALS
Nagarkot hotel	Breakfast

DAY 11 Kathmandu valley

Walk from Nagarkot towards Changu Narayan and spend time at the historic temple before continuing by road to Kathmandu. The morning combines rural paths and traditional architecture, while the later visits to Pashupatinath and Boudhanath introduce two active religious centres associated with different faith traditions. The change from hilltop walking to major sacred landmarks provides a varied day across the Kathmandu Valley.

ACTIVITIES

- **Walk from Nagarkot to Changu Narayan Temple**
  Walk downhill through forest and terraced farmland towards Changu Narayan. Visit one of Nepal's oldest and most important temples.
- **Drive from Changu Narayan to Kathmandu**
  Return by vehicle from Changu Narayan to Kathmandu. Re-enter the lively capital after your time in the hills.
- **Explore Pashupatinath Temple in Kathmandu**
  Visit Pashupatinath, Nepal's most important Hindu temple. Observe ceremonies along the Bagmati River and learn about its spiritual significance.
- **Explore Boudhanath Stupa in Kathmandu**
  Explore the massive Boudhanath Stupa, a major centre of Tibetan Buddhism. Walk around the stupa with pilgrims and monks.

OVERNIGHT	MEALS
Kathmandu hotel	Breakfast

DAY 12

Transfer to the airport for departure

Spend some free time in Kathmandu before travelling from your hotel to the airport for departure. No formal sightseeing is included during the final period, leaving you able to use the available hours according to your own interests. At the appropriate time, make the airport transfer and complete the supported portion of your Nepal trip as you prepare for your outward flight.

ACTIVITIES

- **Drive from Kathmandu City Hotel to Kathmandu Airport**
  Transfer from your Kathmandu hotel to the airport. Say goodbye to Nepal as you head for your departure flight.
- **Depart from Kathmandu Airport**
  Check in for your international flight at Kathmandu Airport. Complete departure procedures before your onward journey.

OVERNIGHT	MEALS	EXTRAS
N/A	Breakfast	Bardia National Park Extension, Trisuli white water rafting, Extra day in Kathmandu - post-tour

INCLUDED

- Twin sharing accommodation with breakfast
- All necessary transportation by private 4 WD Toyota Landcruiser with driver
- Sightseeing tours as per the itinerary
- An English speaking guide
- Monastery entrance fees
- Tibet entry permit (obtained in Kathmandu)
- Kathmandu to Lhasa flight

EXCLUDED

- International Flights to Nepal
- Nepal Visa Fees
- Travel insurance (compulsory, get a quote here)
- Meals not indicated in the itinerary
- Entrance fees to sites not listed above
- Camera tickets at monument sites if applied
- Drinks, snacks, tips and other personal expenses (e.g. laundry)
- Any other items not mentioned above

Tour Options

Our tours are designed to include all that you need to enjoy a really special time in the destination you're visiting. However, we do also offer some extra options to complement the tour and add some additional sightseeing or

activities, or some extra time at either end of the tour.

All accommodation based options (e.g. Single supplements, extra nights, cruise upgrades) should be booked and paid for in advance so that we can make the appropriate arrangements. Other options may either be booked and paid for in advance or while you are on the tour, though we recommend booking in advance to ensure there are no issues with availability.

Many options are priced the same throughout the year, but some may incur single or high season supplements , full details are given on the tour reservation form or on request.

No additional options available for this tour.

Important Notes

1 Accommodation

We use good quality hotels rated at the local 3 and 4-star level on this tour. Accommodation is based on twin, triple or double en-suite rooms with air conditioning. Please visit the accommodation tab of this tour for examples of the hotels normally used on this tour. If you have any specific accommodation requests please let us know and we'll be happy to provide you with a customised quotation.

2 Transport

Private vehicles are used for all sightseeing tours and most of the journeys throughout the tour. A short international flights between Kathmandu and Lhasa is also included on this tour.

3 Transfers

The tour includes a 24-hour airport meet & assist service in Kathmandu airport, your arrival and departure airport-hotel transfers and all other transfers. All transfers are also included during your time in Tibet.

4 Group Size/Tour Leaders/Guides

As we don't offer guaranteed group departures on this tour we can run the itinerary for however many people you happen to be travelling with, starting from 1 upwards. The prices given for this tour are based on a minimum of 2 passengers travelling, so if you have a different number of passengers in your group please contact us for a customised quotation.

In Nepal and Tibet we provide fully trained, local English-speaking guides for all of the sightseeing tours. At Encounters Travel we only use local guides and reps. We feel this gives you the best experience of the country and the sites you are seeing. Please check our website for more details and profiles of some of our most famous guides.

5 Entrance Fees

The tour price includes entrance fees to all the tourist sites mentioned in the itinerary. You will need to cover the cost of entrance to any other extra sites that you may wish to visit.

6 Dates & Prices

This tour is designed as a sample tailor-made tour itinerary. As such we do not offer set group departure dates that you can join. Rather, the tour is available for you to do privately starting on any date of the year. Guideline seasonal prices are given below, based on 2 people travelling. If you would like to adjust the tour itinerary, or there will be more or less people travelling, please contact us and we will customise a price for you.
For many people planning a trip to Tibet, the weather will be a determining factor in choosing when to travel. Tibet is one of the toughest places in the world for people to live, and visiting there also has its challenges. In general, the months from April to October are the best time to visit, to avoid the extreme cold of the winter, when many roads in parts of the country are also blocked with heavy snow. The further north in the country you travel, the weather is cooler and the winter longer, resulting in a shorter peak season for visiting in the summer months.

The heaviest rains fall in the south between June and September, though mainly at night, and this is when the country looks at its best and most festivals are held.

The central areas of Tibet which are visited most by tourists, including Lhasa, Gyantse, Shigatse and Tsedang, generally have good mild weather between April and November, with by far the most rain in July and August.

Temperatures in the country vary widely, partly because of the thin air at this altitude which cannot retain or radiate much heat. As a result there are big differences in temperatures between day and night-time.

If you are combining a tour to Tibet with time in Nepal or China, then it is also worth taking account of the best time to visit those places. The overland route from Kathmandu in Nepal to Lhasa is generally in good condition all year round, though the winter weather causes some problems from December to February. August also often has problems with landslides caused by heavy rains.

Note: We generally do not take bookings for travel to Tibet during March as the Chinese authorities generally always close the Tibetan borders to tourists for the whole of March and re-open the country to visitors at the start of April. However, sometimes the borders are kept closed for longer or at other times during the year, very little if any advance notice being given.

Please speak with our reservations team who will be happy to help you in selecting an appropriate time for your tour.

7 Booking & Payment

If you would like to book a place on this tour, please complete the online reservation form on our website (via the Dates & Prices tab on the tour page). You may make a deposit or full payment online, or just hold a reservation if you prefer (full payments are due 8 weeks before departure). We will then contact you with more details about how to complete your booking. Payments may be made by debit or credit card (subject to a card processing fee), or by making a bank transfer, or posting us a cheque/bank draft. Full details will be provided in your booking

confirmation email. Please contact us if you would like any more information or have any questions before making a booking.

8 Financial Security

We are a UK registered company and are committed to providing our customers with financial protection to provide peace of mind and to allow you to book with confidence.
We have therefore partnered with Trust My Travel Ltd., which provides financial protection services to over 2000 partners around the world. Funds paid to us by our customers are protected via an Insurance policy held by Trust My Travel. Each traveller and the description of services sold is declared against Trust My Travel's insurance policy directly against our financial failure. In the event of our insolvency, you will be refunded for any unfulfilled products and/or repatriation to the UK (where applicable). Please see our website or booking conditions for more information.

9 Responsible Tourism

It is impossible not to have an impact on the local environment, cultures and eco-systems when you travel. However, it is very possible to try and ensure that these impacts are as limited, or positive as possible. We are committed to ensuring that we try to leave our host countries in a better state than we found them and encourage and assist our travellers to help us with this.
The following are a few simple tips that require very little effort on your part but which will help ensure that any effect you have on the locations you visit is positive rather than negative.

- Don't prejudge: Things in different countries will almost certainly be different. That doesn't make them worse or inferior, just different.
- Communicate: Don't expect locals to speak your language. Take the trouble to learn a few words or phrases of the local language. Don't worry about sounding silly. Most locals are patient and accommodating and appreciate you making the effort to communicate in their language.
- Conserve energy: Be careful not to waste valuable resources. Use local resources sparingly. Switch off lights, air-conditioning and fans when you leave the hotel room and don't waste water. Remove superfluous packaging. Many countries have far less efficient waste disposal systems than ours. Remove packaging from newly acquired items before leaving home.
- Don't litter: No matter how untidy or dirty the country you're travelling in may look to you, avoid littering, as there is no need to add to the environment's stress. Many of the countries we visit have a tough challenge dealing with rubbish and waste. Please consider taking home as much plastic waste as you can (e.g. water bottles).
- Choose environmentally friendly products: By using environmentally friendly (bio degradable) sun creams, shampoos and detergents you can help reduce pollution.
- Respect local customs and traditions: As you are a guest in these countries, you should also comply with the local customs. If you are friendly and well mannered, the locals will reciprocate and it will only enhance your experience. It's important to follow dress and behaviour guidelines especially when visiting religious or sacred sites (your tour leader will advise you how best to do this).

- If a client commits an illegal act the client may be excluded from the tour and Encounters Travel shall cease to have responsibility to/for them. No refund will be given for any unused services.

All porters are employed and equipped following guidelines set by the International Porter Protection Group (IPPG).

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10 Follow Us Online

You can stay in touch with us online by following us on Facebook and Twitter. We post updates on relevant travel news in our destination countries, special offers and discounts and other interesting travel related news and information.

www.facebook.com/encounterstravel

https://x.com/encounterstravl (yes, without the 'e')

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11 Travel Insurance

Travel insurance is compulsory on all of our tours and needs to cover personal accident & liability, medical expenses and repatriation, travel delay & abandonment. We also strongly recommend that you take out cover against cancellation and lost/stolen baggage. Personal medical insurance does not normally provide sufficient cover and is generally not suitable for travel on our tours. You will not be able to join your tour if you have not provided us with details of your insurance or if you arrive without cover in place (no refunds will be due in this event).

Considering travel insurance for your trip? World Nomads Travel Insurance offers coverage for more than 150 adventure activities as well as emergency medical, lost luggage, trip cancellation and more.

If your tour includes car hire, or if you plan to arrange a hot air balloon flight locally or do some scuba diving during your tour, you should check the small print in your policy to make sure these are covered (these are covered in our policy). Please also check the maximum altitude that you will be reaching and that full cover including emergency evacuation is provided up to this altitude.

If you are taking expensive camera gear or other electronic equipment with you then please check the coverage and the fine print of your policy to ensure that you have sufficient cover.

IMPORTANT: We must have your travel insurance details (policy number and type of insurance) before you depart or you may not be allowed to join the tour. If you haven't told us already, please let us know the details when you can. You should take a paper copy of your insurance policy with you as you may be asked to show this at the start of the tour.

Covid-19

Before purchasing any travel insurance, please check the coverage provided for situations related to Covid-19, and for the rules about government travel advice. Your normal policy may not be suitable.

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12 Before you travel

It is important when considering and preparing to travel anywhere in the world that you have a good understanding of the country you are visiting, its laws and customs, and the possible risks and situations that may occur. This

includes specific risks related to your itinerary (eg. does it involve water & can you swim, are you fit enough for the activities included), as well as more general risks such as terrorism and natural disasters.

General details and links to more information about health risks, visa requirements, money, and travel insurance are given in these tour notes. We recommend that you re-read all these before your departure as well as the small print of your travel insurance policy so you know exactly what is covered and what is not.

You should take copies of your important travel documents with you and ideally also store them online securely as a backup. Make sure that you have given us your emergency contact details and told that person where and when you are travelling. Ensure you take enough money with you and that you have access to emergency funds.

Finally, you should read through and stay updated with the current official government travel advice for your destination. We are registered partners with the UK Foreign Office's 'Travel Aware' campaign which provides further useful and invaluable information.

travel aware
gov.uk/travelaware

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13 **Reduce Plastic Waste with Water-to-Go Filter bottles**

Traveling responsibly means minimizing plastic waste, but staying hydrated on the go is essential. At Encounters Travel we are committed to reducing single-use plastics, which is why we've partnered with Water-to-Go. Their portable filtration system removes over 99.9% of contaminants from any non-saltwater source, turning even questionable water sources into safe drinking water.

Given that tap water is un-safe to drink in many of the countries in which we operate, we recommend purchasing a Water-to-Go bottle prior to departure. This will help you avoid the use of single use plastic bottles and keep you hydrated on the go.

Save big! Get a huge 25% off your Water-to-Go bottle and other Water-to-Go products (such as filters, lids, and carriers). Use code **ENCOUNTERS25** at checkout (valid in the UK, USA and Canada).

How Water-to-Go Technology works:

- Their reusable, BPA free water bottles contain their own unique 3-in-1 filtration technology effectively providing clean safe drinking water from any non-salt water source around the world.
- Three different (1 traditional and 2 nano) technologies are combined in one filter cartridge to remove up to 99.9999% of microbiological contaminants in water.

The three technologies used in a Water-to-Go filter are:

- Mechanical filtration – A tiny pore size, so small contaminants can’t fit through.
- Electrical – A positive charge reduces the pore size even further and attracts contaminants like a magnet, trapping them inside the filter.
- Activated Carbon – Unlike most carbon based filters, instead of using adhesives to glue the carbon particles together, (which vastly reduces the carbon’s efficiency) it is contained within the membrane, helping to

reduce contaminants whilst eliminating bad tastes and odours. Try filtering water from your tap at home and taste the difference!

Water-to-Go filter bottles deliver safe, healthy water worldwide

- Water-to-Go filters remove bacteria, viruses, waterborne disease, protozoa, heavy metals such as lead as well as harmful chemicals.
- Their filters remove Chlorine and Fluoride from tap water.
- The filter will eliminate harmful contaminants from the water but allow beneficial minerals such as sodium and magnesium to pass through leaving you with the healthiest water possible.
- Water-to-Go filters have been independently tested against internationally recognised standards by industry specialists including The London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine (UK), BCS Laboratories (USA), Bangalore Test House (India) and IMI (China).

Use Water-to-Go products and you'll be healthier, wealthier and helping to make the world a better place!

- Depending on filter size, each Water-to-Go filter is able to replace 260 or 400 single-use plastic water bottles!
- They ensure you have access to safe water anywhere in the world without ever having to buy environmentally damaging bottled water.
- Their water bottles deliver safe, clean drinking water at just 5p per litre.
- The filter membrane is biodegradable and the shrouds are recyclable.
- The water bottles are used and approved by everyone from backpackers to commuters, gym users to expecting mums. Perfect for everyday, outdoor and travel.

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14 Private & Tailor-made Tours

While our group departures offer a fantastic way to explore with like-minded travellers, we understand that some guests prefer a more exclusive experience. Most of our group tours can be booked on a private basis, allowing you to enjoy the same expert-led routes with your own dedicated party. The primary advantage of choosing a private arrangement is the flexibility it provides; we can easily customise the itinerary to include your preferred style of accommodation or adjust the pace to suit your needs. Private tours can be run on the same start days as our group tours, or on other dates. However, some activities within our trips are restricted to particular days of the week - we will advise you on anything like this that we need to work around. Pricing will be based on the number of travellers in your party, and any customisations you may like to make.

For those seeking something truly unique, our specialist sales team is available to collaborate with you on a completely tailor-made tour, designed from the ground up to match your specific interests, accommodation level and requirements.

To request a quotation for a private or tailor-made tour, please contact us.

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15 Tipping - Nepal

While an accepted part of the culture and customs in Nepal, tipping is always optional, and any amounts paid should reflect excellent service. Tipping in Tibet and Bhutan is less prevalent though it is still normal practice to tip your guide and driver at the end of the tour.

We support and follow international guidelines for the employment of any trekking porters we use, including those of the IPPG (International Porter Protection Group). We therefore pay all our porters a higher than average wage, but an additional tip is still normal practice at the end of your trek.

It is normal and accepted for people to tip differently, and you should not feel under any pressure to tip any particular amount. We are often asked for advice on common amounts however, and suggest that you consider around US$ 5-10 per person per day for guides, US$ 3-7 p/p/day for assistant guides or tour leaders, and US$ 2-5 p/p/day for porters and drivers.

Haggling or bargaining is also prevalent throughout Nepal and Tibet, particularly in Kathmandu, and is still done in markets in Bhutan though to a lesser extent in other shops. More often than not the start price is at least double the actual price the vendor will be happy to accept. Do not take offence, but be prepared to bargain if you want to, consider your budget (and what you'd be happy to pay for things at home), pay fairly and enjoy this as part of the experience. Note: if you do offer a price, then you are expected to purchase – do not start bargaining unless you really want to buy.

While you are out in rural/hill areas, we recommend that you should stick to published price lists and pay fair prices for local food, accommodation and services, as this aids local economies (bear in mind that when you are trekking, nearly everything you eat or buy will have been carried there by porters or donkeys).

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16 Health and Vaccinations

You should ensure you are fully insured for medical emergencies including emergency evacuation and repatriation.

Recommended vaccinations and other health protection measures vary according to the country you are visiting and where you are travelling from. We recommend you contact your GP/medical practitioner or a travel clinic for current information on vaccinations needed for your destination. You should ensure that you are up to date with vaccines and boosters recommended for your normal life at home, including for example, vaccines required for occupational risk of exposure, lifestyle risks and underlying medical conditions. In addition, additional courses or boosters normally recommended for the countries in this region are:

Nepal: Additional vaccinations: Diptheria, Hepatitis A, Tetanus, Typhoid. Malaria map. Yellow Fever certificate: Required if arriving from or having transitted through an infected area.
Bhutan: Additional vaccinations: Hepatitis A, Tetanus, Typhoid. Malaria map. Yellow Fever certificate: Required if arriving from or having transitted through an infected area.
India: Additional vaccinations: Diptheria, Hepatitis A, Tetanus, Typhoid. Malaria map. Yellow Fever certificate: Yellow fever rules for India are quite complicated and lengthy. Please read the WHO guidance.
Tibet: Additional vaccinations: Hepatitis A, Tetanus, Typhoid. Malaria map. Yellow Fever certificate: Required if arriving from or having transitted through an infected area.

Malaria: Vaccinations are not available against Malaria, which is a disease transmitted by mosquitoes that can be very serious and sometimes fatal. You should avoid mosquito bites by covering up bare skin with clothing such as long sleeves and long trousers and applying insect repellents to exposed skin. When necessary, sleep under a mosquito net. Mosquitoes are most active during and after sunset. You should consult with your GP/medical practitioner/travel clinic about the most appropriate malaria prophylactic medication to take for the regions you are visiting. In general the lowland regions Bhutan are considered malarial zones, while higher altitudes including central Bhutan including Paro, Thimphu, Punakha and Bumthang are not. Nepal is considered mainly low risk with prophylactics not normally required.

Yellow Fever: This disease is spread by infected mosquitoes that bite during the day. A Yellow Fever Certificate of vacinnation may be required as a condition of entry depending on which country you are arriving from, or that you have travelled or transitted through recently (including connecting flights with stopovers of over 12 hours). You can view this US CDC information about where the virus is present and follow the links to further information detailing which countries need you to have a Yellow Fever vaccination as part of their entry requirements. Please ensure you have this certificate with you and to hand if necessary. Please inform us of any pre-existing conditions such as diabetes or asthma and any prescription medicine you may be taking. We also need to know about any food allergies or physical disabilities that you may have.

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17 Passports and Visas - Nepal

Passports should be valid for at least six months after your departure from the country. Please do not bring an almost full or almost expired passport. Visa arrangements are the responsibility of the traveller, and requirements are subject to change by the local authorities. Full details of current visa on arrival procedures are given on the Nepal immigration department website.

Many nationals can obtain their Nepalese visa in Kathmandu airport upon arrival (including UK, EU, US, CA, AU, NZ, SA citizens). The costs for a multi entry visa are currently:

- up to 15 days - US$ 30
- 16 to 30 days - US$ 50
- 31 to 90 days - US$ 125

The visa is obtained in the immigration area at the point where your passport is stamped. Forms to fill in are available at kiosks in the immigration hall and may also be given out on your flight (if so, do fill them in before you land as it will reduce your queuing time). You may also need to fill in an arrivals card. Once your paperwork is completed, head to the payment/bank desks to pay and get a receipt, and then to the immigration desk and hand over your forms, your payment receipt and passport. The visa fees are set in US Dollars, but you can also pay in other currencies, but don't rely on getting given change.

To reduce queuing time you can also complete most of this process online in advance. First fill in the Visa on arrival form on the government website, and take a photo or print out your completed application form. You can only do this within 15 days of arrival, or you will need to repeat the process. You can then either pay online or pay on arrival at the airport. When you get to the airport, show your printed/photographed form, and the payment receipt if you have paid, and your visa will be issued and stamped into your passport.

Passport Photos: If you are doing any trekking, rafting or visiting a National Park you may be asked for passport photos, as some of the permits we may need to get require these. So please bring at least 2 standard passport photos with you just in case - they will always come in useful later if you don't need them.

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18 Voltage

In Nepal, India and Sri Lanka, sockets are mainly two round pronged and 230 volts (Type C,D,M). In Bhutan a range of different sockets can be found, including two and three round pronged and three flat pronged (Type D,F,G).

Universal adaptors are available in most airport shops if you don't have one already. Standard UK-European adapters will work fine, though sometimes they may feel a little loose in the sockets. All hotel rooms have electrical sockets where you can re-charge cameras, phones etc. Hair dryers are sometimes available on request from the hotel reception if not in your room already but cannot be guaranteed.
If you have US appliances (110 volts) you will need a voltage converter as well as a plug adapter.

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19 Time

The time in India and Sri Lanka is GMT plus 5 1/2 hours.

The time in Nepal is GMT plus 5 3/4 hours.

The time in Bhutan is GMT plus 6 hours.

The time in Tibet is GMT plus 8 hours.

Daylight saving adjustments are not applied.

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20 What to take

Luggage: Whatever you're doing in Nepal, Tibet or Bhutan, you'll find that large rigid wheeled suitcases are cumbersome - you may be able to wheel them inside the airport and your hotel, but due to the condition of roads and pavements that's often about it. As many of our tours involve a degree of adventurous activity, we strongly advise you to bring a more practical bag for these i.e. a rucksack or holdall. These are easier for both your porters, and yourself to carry around. Suitcases are OK for our cultural tours in Nepal, Tibet and Bhutan though, but please aim to bring small or medium sized ones rather than very large. If you are trekking or rafting, or doing a lot of travel throughout the country, then as little as possible is the basic message. A rucksack or holdall (50-70 liter approx.) for your main luggage, and a daypack for you to use during the day should be plenty. While rafting we only take essential kit on board the rafts, and your main luggage will travel by bus to the take-out point. While trekking your porters (Nepal) or ponies (Bhutan) will carry your main luggage, leaving you with just a daypack with things you'll need during the day. You can also leave some luggage locked safely in the pre-trek hotel if you wish. We recommend that couples plan to leave one main bag behind, and pool their remaining luggage in their other bag for the porter to carry.

Luggage limits: Most international airlines allow 20-23kg per person of hold luggage. Domestic flights often have smaller allowances around 15kg. As airline rules vary we recommend that you take no more than 20kg of luggage if your tour just includes international flights, and no more than 15kg if there are any domestic flights included in

your itinerary. Please ask us for details if you are unsure. Any excess baggage fees will be your responsibility to cover. Most airlines allow between 5kg and 10kg for hand luggage so we suggest that you take no more than 5kg unless you have confirmed that your airline(s) will allow more than this.

If you are trekking with us, we ask that you keep the weight of your main bag that the porter will carry to a maximum of 12.5kg. This then allows the porter to carry up to 2 bags, and a maximum of 25kg (the International Porter Protection group's advised limit for Nepal is 30kg, which then leaves a little more weight for their own kit). This weight allowance includes your sleeping bag if you are hiring it from us and not carrying it with you to Nepal
If you are doing an Everest trek and flying from Kathmandu to Lukla, then flight luggage limits are 10kg for your main bag and 5kg for hand luggage - total 15kg. You can re-arrange that after you arrive in Lukla. Please keep to these limits as while you can pay for extra weight, it may be held back until the next flight which may then be delayed or cancelled.
Treks in Bhutan follow the same weight limits for your ponies.
You may leave other luggage securely locked in your hotel during the trek. If you are travelling as a couple then we suggest you leave one main bag in Kathmandu and share the other main bag that the porter will then carry.

Clothing & Climate: Nepal and Bhutan have a climate that ranges widely depending on when you visit, and where you are visiting.
- Autumn - late Sep-Nov: The weather is good and very warm, with lots of sunshine, getting quite hot during the day in lowland regions. It will still be cold at night at higher altitudes if you are trekking. Shorts & T-shirts are fine while you are walking, but you should still bring warmer clothes for the evenings. There is a good chance of rain in September and early October, so bring a waterproof.
- Winter - Dec-Feb: It will be pleasant in lowland regions with very little rain, but will be cooler at night. Long trousers and shirts are advised during the day, and you will need warm clothes in the evenings. If you are trekking, then it will be cold during the day, and extremely cold at night, particularly at higher altitudes. Several warm layers are recommended so you can regulate your comfort as you walk, including a waterproof, even if only to protect from cold winds. We include thick down jackets in our optional trekking packs for comfort in the evenings at higher altitudes.
- Spring - Mar-May: The weather is very pleasant during the spring, and again shorts & t-shirts are fine while you are walking. There is a higher chance of rain as the season progresses, so a thin waterproof is recommended in case. It gets very hot and humid in the lowlands from May onwards.
- Monsoon - Jun-mid Sep: It will be hot and sticky during these months, with lots of rain, so come prepared accordingly if you are visiting during these months - gaiters are highly recommended if you are trekking to keep out leeches.

A huge variety of cheap trekking gear is available in Kathmandu (fleeces, waterproofs etc.) and buying some here can save you carrying it with you, and support the local economy. However, you should definitely bring your own walking boots.

Modesty rates highly in Nepal and Bhutan especially for women, so please ensure all clothes are loose fitting and not too revealing. You'll find the Bhutanese dress fairly smartly or in national dress, so you will stand out even more if you look scruffy.

Whilst rafting:

On the raft: Shorts, Tevas (sandals) or trainers, baseball style cap to keep the sun off your face, sunglasses with a strap to keep them on your head, swimwear, sarong for women, sun-cream, lip balm, water bottle, several t-shirts. Note: All footwear on a raft should be rubber soled, and of the type that will not come off easily.

Off the raft: Long trousers, warm sleeping bag (provided, but you may want to bring a sheet sleeping bag as well), petzel type head torch, warm jacket/fleece, dry shoes, boots, warm socks, towel, warm long sleeved shirt, toiletries.

Cameras: You can take cameras on the raft, and we endeavour to keep that sort of kit dry in waterproof bags. But there is always an element of risk of getting the camera wet.

What you shouldn't take on the raft: All the rest of your kit and you're your valuables. We will make arrangements for their transport to your take-out point.

Whilst trekking:

Suggested Clothing and equipment: Strong hiking boots or walking shoes that you have broken in; Good sized rucksack or holdall; 3 to 4-season sleeping bag (only if you want to use your own rather than the one provided in our optional trekking pack); silk or cotton sleeping bag liner; lightweight waterproof and windproof jacket; (waterproof gaiters, waterproof over trousers - these are only necessary on some treks in some seasons - contact us for further info if required); 3 or 4 t-shirts; small day pack; several pairs of light socks; 2 pairs of heavier woollen socks; underwear including thermals; warm hat and gloves; swimwear; pair of lightweight trousers; pair of shorts; 1 fleece or warm jumper and 1 sweatshirt. Also, sunglasses, torch and batteries, toiletries (include a lighter to burn toilet paper), bring biodegradable shampoo & soap, towel, blister kit, money belt and any personal medication you might require. Remember, Lots of layers are the key to staying warm and comfortable. Also, keeping your feet comfortable and healthy makes a huge difference to how you enjoy your trek. So, bring waterproof boots/walking shoes and plenty of pairs of socks so you can change them regularly.

Day Packs and Main luggage: You will want a sturdy and comfortable daypack to carry your day-to-day items with you while you are walking (clothes you may change in and out of regularly, drinks, snacks, camera). You will also need a sturdy holdall or backpack for your main luggage. Your porters or ponies will carry this for you, so suitcases are not appropriate. They may leave earlier than you, and may not walk with you throughout the entire day, so bear in mind that you won't have access to this luggage all the time - you need to ensure you are carrying everything you require during the days walk in your daypack. You can leave luggage behind in storage at your hotel so you don't need to take everything with you on the trek.

Whilst in the game parks:

You should bring long trousers and long-sleeved shirts for jungle walks and travel within the park. Please ensure these are of drab colours to avoid drawing attention. Sunglasses and sun-hats are advisable for hot and bright days. Mosquito repellent is highly recommended. Binoculars are extremely useful at any of Nepal's National Parks, and are not generally available for hire locally. Don't forget fast film for those jungle shots and moving animals/birds. A good cleaning kit is essential as these items are unavailable once at the park. It is also better to take quality film, either from home or Kathmandu into the parks, and to ensure you have a spare fully charged battery and memory card.

All tours: We recommend that you bring a sun hat, sunscreen, sunglasses, a basic first aid kit, toiletries, money belt, small torch, camera & charger.

21 Passports and Visas - Tibet

Passports should be valid for at least six months after your departure from the country. Please do not bring an almost full or almost expired passport.

All Encounters Travel tours to Tibet use Kathmandu as a hub to either travel overland or fly into Tibet and whilst in Kathmandu our local team will make arrangements for your Tibet Entry Permit. Our local office do require your passport in hand to be able to arrange this so you'll need at least 1 full day in Kathmandu before departing for Tibet to obtain the Visa. The Chinese/Tibet Embassy in Kathmandu is only open Monday to Friday and is closed on weekends and all public holidays so we'll need to consider this when planning your travel date. For most nationalities we include the cost of obtaining this visa in our tour prices - we'll advise you if this is not the case for your nationality.

Note: The Chinese authorities generally always close the Tibetan borders to tourists for the whole of March and re-open the country to visitors at the start of April. However, sometimes the borders are kept closed for longer or at other times during the year, very little if any advance notice being given. If you are not able to travel to Tibet for this reason then we will arrange a revised itinerary for you in Nepal or Bhutan for that section of your tour. We will arrange a partial refund or extra charge if the Nepal/Bhutan sections work out cheaper/more expensive than your original Tibet itinerary.

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22 Group Size / Age Restrictions / Tour Leaders / Guides

The group size on our budget China tours is min 5, max 20. Due to the nature of the way the trip runs, we set a minimum age of 18, and a maximum age of 55 to join this trip.

Each trip is accompanied by a mixture of western and local tour leaders who are all bilingual in Mandarin and English. Local tour leaders are often young professionals who work for a couple of seasons after graduating university. They are highly educated and thoroughly trained, but as they are doing it more for personal experience rather than to make money, they are cheaper, helping to keep the tour cost down, and some may argue, are more enthusiastic than the ‘career tour guides’ used by most tour companies in China.

Tour leaders tend to be specialists in their own local region and generally do not accompany the group between the main cities of locations on the tour. Instead they will look after you throughout your time in each main hub and then get you settled onto the train to the next location where you'll be met by your next tour leader.

This tour is run in conjunction with our friends at The Dragon Trip, so you will be joining travellers booked with them.

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23 Passports and Visas

Passports should be valid for at least six months after your departure from the country. Please do not bring an almost full or almost expired passport. Visa arrangements are the responsibility of the traveller, and requirements are subject to change by the local authorities.

If you renew your passport between the time you book and your final travel date, please let us know as soon as possible. When purchasing your train tickets in China, we must have the details of the passport that you will be carrying while you are on the trip.

In general, all nationalities (except Singapore, Brunei & Japan) need to apply for and obtain a China tourist visa before entering Mainland China **(Please take note of the May 2025 update to UK applications explained below).** Most nationalities are not required to have a visa for travel solely to Hong Kong. If your flight into Hong Kong connects in mainland China (for example, in Beijing or Shanghai), you will need to tell the Immigration officer in the airport NOT to cross out a single-entry visa, as you are only transferring. If the Immigration officer crosses out a single entry visa, you will encounter difficulties when you start your trip with us and need to cross the border from Hong Kong back into mainland China.

In order to apply for your China tourist visa to travel on this tour, you will need the following:

- 2 passport photos
- an invitation letter (which we will provide)
- an itinerary (you can download and provide these tour notes for this)
- photocopy of your passport
- a completed visa application form
- a confirmed flight/train ticket with entry and exit dates shown clearly

Please send us a scanned / photographed copy of your passport identity pages as soon after booking as possible so that we can start to arrange your invitation letter. We also need a copy of your passport in order to book your accommodation and train tickets in China, so please ensure we get it as quickly as possible. We'll send your visa invitation letter to you together with a detailed itinerary as soon as its ready. You should then apply for your visa within three months of your travel start date.

Visa application form assistance:

You can download a copy of the official China visa application form.

Please note the following when completing the form:

- You must print the form off as double-sided. This is an embassy requirement.
- Please fill the form out using black capital letters.
- In Chinese culture dates are written in the order of year / month / day, so please follow this on your form.
- 1.9 - Leave this blank, it is not referring to your passport number.
- 2.1 - Tick the Tourism box.
- 2.2 - Unless you plan to enter Mainland China again before or after your tour with us, you will require a single entry, 3-month visa.
- 2.4 - Please write the number of days of how long your tour in Mainland China will be. For example: China on a Shoestring - 25 days, please input 24 days here (Day 25 is in Macau and Hong Kong, both of which are not in Mainland China). Highlights of China should be 15 days, and Beijing to Shanghai Expres should be 9 days.
- 2.5 Please enter the following addresses and phone numbers in the ‘Detailed Address’ column according to your itinerary.

    1. Yangshuo 11 international Hostel NO. 11 Lian Feng Xiang West, Street YangShuo GuiLin GuangXi, Yangshuo

    2. Mr Panda Guesthouse 75 2nd Ring Road North Chengdu Tel: +86 028 8662 8336

    3. Shuyuan Youth Hostel No. 2 West Shuncheng Road Xian Tel: +86 029 8728 7720

    In the fourth row, just write the following note: “please see detailed itinerary for further accommodation

details”

- 2.8 Please enter the following:

  Name of Inviter: Shanghai Zhonglei Travel Service Co. Ltd.

  Address of Inviter: 822 Zhennan Road, Shanghai, China

  Contact Telephone Number of Inviter: +86 21 6150 3200

  Relationship with applicant: Tour Operator

May 2025 Update to UK based Chinese Visa applications:

Key Changes to the Visa Process (UK-based Applications):

- **Online Pre-Approval Application** – Clients must now first complete an online application, which is sent to Beijing for approval. This stage takes approximately 2–3 weeks.
- **Approval Document** – If approved, the client will receive an official approval document. If the application is rejected, they must reapply, restarting the 2–3 week process.
- **Submission at Visa Centre** – Once approved, the client must submit their approval document & passport to the Chinese Visa Application Service Centre
- **Visa Collection** – The visa will be ready 4 days later, and must be collected in person from the centre.

This updated process means that obtaining a visa can now take a minimum of 3–4 weeks, and potentially longer if reapplication is necessary!

We strongly recommend that you allow sufficient time for the full process when planning travel to China.

Further details are available via the official Chinese Visa Application Service Centre UK website:

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24 Money

The Chinese currency is Renminbi, shortened to ‘RMB’ (‘the people’s coins’). RMB is also referred to as ‘yuan’ or ‘kuai’. You can generally withdraw money in RMB from ATM machines all over China using your home debit/credit cards – just make sure you’ve told your bank that you’ll be travelling there in advance and be prepared to pay a percentage conversion / commission fee. Alternatively, you can carry cash round with you and convert into RMB in banks in in Honk Kong or mainland China. Travellers cheques also remain widely accepted.

Food in China is very cheap. We advise you to budget approximately 80 RMB per day for food in great local restaurants your tour leader will suggest which they know are safe and tasty. If you want to eat cheaper than this you can by eating more simple dishes like fried rice/noodles which come in at less that 10 RMB per meal. As an example of prices of everyday items:

- Small bottle water- 2 RMB
- Basic Chinese meal- 35 RMB
- Drink in a night club- 70 RMB
- Beer in a restaurant/hostel 10-20 RMB
- Coke/soft drink - 6 RMB

- Taxi- 10 minutes- 20 RMB (taxi prices vary depending on the city, but are very cheap compared to Europe/North America)

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25 Trains

Due to the huge size of China and the excellent quality of the public rail network, we use train journeys extensively on our Shoestring tours in China. Typical train times are given below, though these are subject to change:

- Guilin to Chengdu is from 12:50 – 13:30 the following day
- Xi'an to Beijing is from 19:30 – 9:00
- Beijing to Hangzhou is from 19:30 – 8:30
- Shanghai to Fujian (day train) 10:00 – 18:00
  Fujian to Guangzhou 22:00 – 7:00

You will have your own sleeper seat on each overnight train journey (full flat bed). We try to ensure that all our travellers are booked in the same compartement so you can have fun getting to know each other better, play some games, and share a few drinks.If you or a fellow traveller have a seat that is not with the rest of the group, the tour leaders have a process in place to try to switch seats. In some stations they will be able to board the train and arrange a seat swap with another passenger. In other cases you can make use of the emergency phone that we provide to accompany every group, and the tour leader will then use this to speak in Mandarin to the conductor or directly to another passenger to help arrange a seat swap. This normally works very smoothly and without incident.

Upgrades to a four-berth soft sleeper are also available (you must book this with us at least 1 month before departure). Please contact us for details and prices if required.

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26 Airport transfers

Airport transfers are not included in the price of the tour. However, they are available on request if required. Prices are given per vehicle (up to 4 people), and if you would like a bilingual guide to meet you and travel with you from the airport to your destination (or vice-versa) this can also be arranged for an extra fee (generally GBP 20 / US$25) each way. This airport transfer service is available from and to the following airport locations: Guilin, Chengdu, Xian, Beijing, and Shanghai.

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27 Tipping

Tipping in China is not customary and is not necessary. Of course, voluntary tipping is completely up to you, but in places like restaurants, bars or taxis it is extremely rare.

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28 Internet & Communication

Language: While there are nearly 300 living dialects in China, today's modern mainland China has a dominant dialect which is Mandarin. All schools teach in Mandarin, politics, business and the national media all use Mandarin and the entire middle class and above speak it fluently. There remain many people who don't speak or understand it well though, but if you're going to learn some 'Chinese', then Mandarin is the dialect to go for. You will find that

Chinese people will love you if you do try and speak in their language - your efforts will definitely be rewarded. You don't need to read Mandarin to get by (which is a relief!), but learning some words and phrases is very useful. If you are struggling, then most public places (eg. stations) have an official English speaker on hand to help, and 12-18 year old school children are also a great help as they learn English at school and are invariably delighted and keen to help out. You can also check out Pleco: This is a great tool - a free dictionary to help you communicate in China. You can download it from the Android Market or App Store.

Internet: Wi-Fi and computers are available for use in all hostels used on our Shoestring tours. Some websites are blocked in China, including Google, Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and YouTube. If you would like to use a VPN while in China to access the internet it is much easier to do this before you leave. Two examples of free options you can access via your device are Betternet or ExpressVPN.

Phone: You can use your mobile phone in China, as long as it has been unlocked for international usage. If you want to use your phone while in China, we recommend bringing an unlocked handset and then buying a cheap prepaid SIM card from one of China's main 3 mobile phone providers (these are China Telecom, China Mobile and China Unicom). You can buy these directly from their retail outlets, but in order to do so you will need to show your passport. SIM cards can then be recharged at most convenience stores and roadside newspaper stands (for around 100 RMB). Most SIM cards can be used for 3G/4G data, texting and domestic calls. Your tour leader can help you with this.

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29 Joining instructions

Hong Kong:

The joining point is the Yes Inn @ Causeway Bay (hostel). The address is 2nd Floor, Nan Yip Building, 472 Hennessy Road, Causeway Bay. The building entrance is nearby the Stanley mini bus station on Tang Lung Street. Click here for directions to Yes Inn.

The meeting time is 7.00 am sharp in the lobby. Please check out at the front desk and have your bags packed and ready to go in the lobby before 7.00 am. If we haven't seen you or heard from you by 7.00 am, then we do need to leave without you. Please note that we will return to Yes Inn for 10.30 am to pick up anyone who missed the 7.00 am departure time. At 10.30 am, we must leave in order to cross the border with mainland China and board the train to Guilin. This is the last chance to meet your group in Hong Kong – if you miss this, it will be your own responsibility to catch up with the group in mainland China.

Please bring details of your travel insurance along with you to the pre-departure briefing so that we can contact your insurance company on your behalf in the event of an accident.

If you miss the 7 am meeting time, please immediately contact us by calling us on any of the emergency telephone numbers on your tour confirmation voucher.

Beijing:

The joining point is the Beijing Heyuan Courtyard International Hostel. The address is 1 Zhiqiang Beiyuan, Wenhuiyuan Road, Hai ian, 100088 Beijing. Tel. +86 10 6227 7138. If you are travelling from the airport by subway, take the airport express to DongZhiMen metro station, then get on the subway line 2 and get off at JiShuiTan metro station. From Jishuitan station A exit, turn right and go to north on XinJieKou WaiDaJie. Cross the street at the first intersection. Continue north on XinJieKouWaiDaJie, then turn left at the large Chinese-style gate,

on to WenHuiYuanLu, shortly after passing the China Film Art Research Center, turn right when you see the red sign for ZhiQiangYuanXiaoQu. Our hostel is ahead on your left.

If you have spent the previous night in the hostel, please check out at the front desk and have your bags packed and ready to go in the lobby by 10.45am. The meeting time is 11.00am in the lobby. Please bring details of your travel insurance along with you to the pre-departure briefing so that we can contact your insurance company on your behalf in the event of an accident.

If you miss the meeting time, please immediately contact us by calling us on any of the emergency telephone numbers on your tour confirmation voucher.
