



The International Forum

Travels to Tibet

May 20-27, 2006

An unusual social order on the roof of the world - Tibet dazzles both the eye and the mind with its otherworldly natural environment, mountainous landscapes, sprawling Buddhist temples and ethnically diverse population.

Tibet is politically an integral part of the People's Republic of China, yet it shares a closer cultural bond with the peoples of the Himalayas. And while Chinese engineers are now building the world's highest-altitude railroad link on permafrost, between Tibet and western China, Tibet is bound to retain its separateness and uniqueness, the very qualities that made it the setting for Shangri-la, both real and fictional.

Through close encounters with Tibetan people, The International Forum engages in actively exploring how they live and work in their social environment – including the initiatives that are involving them with

those in other parts of the world in using their talents and skills. Tibet's present and future are considered with an understanding of its culture – drawing on its history, art, religion, and a society and economy in this remote part of the world.

The program engages participants in encounters such as:

- Meeting young entrepreneurs and those helping to develop small business enterprises in Tibet to understand the challenges they face and the progress they have made
- Meeting and speaking with people involved in and leading change in Tibet through education, health and business
- Exploring the principal temples and bazaars of Lhasa in the company of monks and pilgrims – to understand their ways, the traditions they are following and the flow of produce that contributes to their economy
- Visiting the vast Potala palace - Tibet's "forbidden city" and the finest example of religious architecture in Tibet - to consider the spiritual history of this remote society
- Walking in the footsteps of one of Tibet's first monks on his private meditation path in the hills far above Lhasa
 - Joining monks in a chanting ceremony at a small urban monastery
 - Encountering a Tibetan village where children learn Tibetan in private primary schools

SAMPLE ITINERARY

Throughout the program, in addition to encountering the spiritual and natural beauty of Tibet, participants meet with local leaders and those involved in small enterprises, orphanages, schools and healthcare.

Day 1: Beijing – Chengdu – Lhasa

The morning flight to central Tibet is spectacular as you fly towards the Himalayan range, dotted with bright turquoise lakes. From the airport, drive across the plateau (about seventy-five miles) and check into the Kyichu Hotel, set in the center of Lhasa and walking distance to the Jokhang temple and surrounding Barkor bazaar. Share a cup of tea with the owners of this successful family-run hotel and learn a little of their personal history during their struggle through uncertain times.

Day 2: Lhasa

Several businesses that have shown a creative approach to economic growth and development. We begin today with a visit to a manufacturing plant to tour the facility and meet with the two young entrepreneurs who have started this business. Meet with representatives from *Terma Foundation*, a small humanitarian organization whose creative programs combine indigenous and western knowledge to confront the health crisis now affecting 6 million Tibetans within China.



Day 3: Lhasa

Visit the monumental *Potala Palace*, an incredible architectural feat for its time. This 13-storey palace with over 1,000 rooms is full of treasures and history. Walk through the labyrinth of shrines, halls, and galleries containing some of the finest and oldest treasures of Tibetan art. In the afternoon, visit Sera Monastery to watch the monks debate. In the hills behind Sera, follow an old pilgrimage route marked with large devotional rock paintings and mountain shrines. Meet with a local entrepreneur and her American counterpart, working together in a small joint business venture in cashmere production. Informal discussion on the challenges they face as they compete in a global marketplace. In the late afternoon, a personal exchange with Tibetan government officials who will both answer and raise questions about Tibet's status as an autonomous region.

Day 4: Lhasa

Morning visit to the School of Traditional Medicine also known as the Mendzekhang Medical College. Drive to the countryside to see both the daily life and spiritual rituals in the traditional Buddhist community. See how the village life of nomadic peasants and yak herders has relevance far beyond the Tibetan Plateau. Visit the Ganden Monastery, once the largest monastery of the Gelugpa sect of Tibetan Buddhism. Although it was literally leveled by explosives, it is still considered a major pilgrimage center to Tibetans and is slowly being restored by local, volunteer efforts. Look into an inner realm of spirituality as monks perform a powerful tantric ceremony. Afterwards, a discussion with senior monks will provide insights into their unyielding faith in the cycle of life: birth, life, death, and rebirth and the role it plays in daily life.



Day 5: Samye Monestary, Tsedang

Join the local pilgrims on their way to Samye Monastery. The adventure begins by crossing the Brahmaputra river in a wooden boat propelled by a converted tractor engine, followed up with a rugged bus or truck ride across sand dunes to Samye, the first Buddhist monastery in Tibet. Temples and chortens (reliquaries and symbols of Buddha's mind) are configured around the main monastery as a geographic mandala. Walk in this three-dimensional model of the Buddhist universe, guided by local artists, in order to understand the symbolism found in the elaborate artwork and ritual objects. Discuss traditional monastic education and its relevance today in the community. In Tsedang, visit a Chinese model school that teaches both Chinese and Tibetan languages in addition to the

standard Chinese curriculum. Meet with headmaster and instructors to identify advantages and disadvantages of the students' potential success.

Day 6: Tsedang – Chengdu – Beijing

For more information on this program visit <http://www.internationalforum.com> or e-mail: Mail@internationalforum.com