CHINA’S BORDERLANDS - YUNNAN & TIBET
Saturday 1 - Friday 21 June 2019
20 nights

TOUR OVERVIEW
Yunnan and the Tibetan borderlands aren’t well known outside of China. Historically this rugged and remote region was viewed as an unknown place of barbarians, kingdoms and exile. Now it is seen as a magical realm of beautiful landscapes, rich history and diverse minorities. While many Chinese domestic tourists head south seeking blue skies and fresh air, few foreigners know much about the province of Yunnan. Those overseas visitors who do discover this corner of China are often on their second or third visit to the country. Tibet is even more remote, more mountainous and more strikingly different from anything you’ve seen before. Requiring a special permit to visit, it really is off the beaten track.

We start in ethnically diverse Yunnan, China’s southwestern province that nudges into Myanmar, Laos and Vietnam. Based in the picturesque towns of Dali and Lijiang and the village of Shaxi, local guides will help you discover the stories behind the tourist postcards. You’ll meet cormorant fishermen, artisans, tea growers and merchants. You will see quaint villages, temples, unique stone houses, monasteries and markets. The dramatic scenery will include snow-covered mountains more than 5,500 metres high, deep gorges, rushing rivers and calm lakes. You will have free time to relax, further explore and shop in local markets.

And then to the fabled Shangri-La, still in Yunnan but ethnically Tibetan. Join the crowds of people dressed in their finest clothes, gathering from all around for the highlight of the festival calendar — the annual Shangri La horse festival. Watch horse races and archery competitions, before joining the locals in the old town for traditional dancing.

We fly from Lijiang to Qinghai province, then climb to the mighty Tibetan plateau on the world’s highest railway to reach Lhasa, centre of the Tibetan world and a place of remarkable religiosity. A couple of days here will leave you spellbound with Tibetans’ deep devotion, and the strict life of the thousands of monks.

Beyond Lhasa we experience stunning scenery of high plateaus backed by Himalayan peaks. The towns of Gyantse and Shigatse display more of Tibetan culture and rich Buddhist heritage. On the way home a brief stay in Chengdu gets you up close to pandas and will allow you to sample some fiery Sichuan cuisine.

This tour will be a very memorable experience. We have partnered with a local guiding company, established by a New Zealander, who are the southwest China experts. They work with multilingual local ethnic minority guides who are deeply knowledgeable about local places and traditions. The company is committed to sustainable tourism and supporting local communities. Our trip will support this social enterprise by donating solar energy products to bring light and energy to a remote mountain village.

Andrew Matheson’s last tour to China sold out quickly, so early registration is advised to secure your place on this adventure. Extra time is also needed to secure the travel permits foreigners require before visiting Tibet.
TOUR HIGHLIGHTS

• See the widest range of minority cultures in China
• Ascend snowy mountains and travel down into steep and spectacular gorges
• Get right off the tourist trail and explore ancient towns and villages, with multilingual ethnic minority guides eager to share their culture and traditions
• Experience the mesmerising way Buddhism is woven into every fabric of Tibetan life and culture
• Take a cooking class, pick tea leaves, see artisans at work and consult a Chinese herbal medicine doctor
• Participate in a spectacular annual Tibetan folk festival in Shangri-La
• Enjoy local music, dance and handcrafts
• Make a difference to the lives of villagers in the remote Tibetan borderland

IS THIS TOUR FOR ME?

This tour is for people who want to experience remote and fascinating parts of China. It involves walking on uneven surfaces and climbing steps, so you will need to be reasonably fit and confident with walking for several hours at a time. Beyond that the programme is not physically very demanding. The biggest challenge, though, will be the effects of altitude. The Yunnan leg of the tour reaches 3,300 m above sea level (with one excursion up to 4,500 m), and Lhasa is at about 3,700 m. The train journey reaches 5,000 m. The effects of altitude will be noticeable, and you should discuss preparations for this with your doctor before committing to the journey. Oxygen will be available on the trip, and the itinerary is designed for slow acclimatisation to the higher altitudes.

TOUR EXCLUSIONS

• Airline taxes
• Travel insurance
• Fee for Chinese Visa
• Personal expenses
• Meals not specified in the itinerary
• Beverages during included meals, unless specified
• Hotel or airport porterage

TOUR INCLUSIONS

• The services of an experienced New Zealand based Calder & Lawson tour manager
• Tours with English speaking local guides as detailed in the itinerary
• Economy class airfares
• 18 nights accommodation in China (one on a train)
• Breakfast daily
• Other meals as specified in the itinerary
• Water and snacks
• All group transfers as detailed in the itinerary
• Admissions as detailed in the itinerary
• Activity fees
• Donation to cultural or ecological project, such as solar equipment in villages
• All tips for local guides and other service providers
• Pre-tour material
• Permit for travel to Tibet

Jade Dragon Snow Mountain, Yunnan

Potala Palace, Lhasa, Tibet
TOUR MANAGER
Your tour manager is Andrew Matheson, who lived in Beijing for three years while he was Deputy Ambassador at the New Zealand Embassy. During that time Andrew travelled extensively throughout China, both on official business and for holidays. His family holiday in Yunnan and business travel in Tibet were among the highlights.

Andrew is a keen and adventurous traveller who enjoys exploring off the beaten track in different countries. His careers as a diplomat and an international development consultant have seen him travelling widely, and working in remote places on pretty much every continent in the world.

Andrew applies his keen organisational skills to make sure the trip runs to plan and delivers the best for all tour members. He enjoys making tours a special and memorable experience for group members, and looks forward to sharing Yunnan and Tibet with you.

TOUR PRICE
Ex Auckland
Share twin per person NZD$10,959
Single supplement (limited availability) NZD$ 1,089

Please contact Calder & Lawson Tours if you are interested in a single occupancy place.

GROUP SIZE
Minimum 10, maximum 18

VARIATIONS IN TRAVEL
We can make arrangements for any travel you would like to do before or after this tour, or book business class seats for the flights. Please contact us.
Saturday 1 June 2019
Depart Auckland
Meal: In flight
Flight: 12 hours

Sunday 2 June
Guangzhou – Dali (Yunnan province)
Meal: In flight/D
Overnight: Dali

Monday 3 June
Dali
Meal: B/L/D
Overnight: Dali

Tuesday 4 June
Dali – Shaxi
Meal: B/L/D
Coach: 2 hours
Overnight: Shaxi

Wednesday 5 June
Shaxi
Meal: B/L/D
Overnight: Shaxi

Thursday 6 June
Shaxi – Shangri-La
Meal: B/L/D
Coach: 3.5 hours
Overnight: Shangri-La

Friday 7 June
Shangri-La
Meal: B/L/D
Overnight: Shangri-La

In the evening depart Auckland for an overnight flight to China.

Arrive in Guangzhou in the morning and transfer to a domestic flight to Dali (2,000 m), your base for two nights. Transfer to the hotel, and enjoy free time to explore the atmospheric old town at leisure — once the centre of the Nanzhou kingdom on the Tea Horse Road or Southern Silk Route, and one of China’s best-preserved ancient towns.

Despite many visitors Dali remains a relaxed destination and the local Bai minority, as well as some Yi and Hui people, are very much part of daily life. We will walk around the beautiful old town that is situated at the base of a mountain overlooking a large lake, visiting its morning market, city walls, a church and a local park. Passing the Three Pagodas, we head out on Er Hai lake with fishermen who use cormorant birds to catch the fish. Then we wander around the old merchant town of Xizhou, renowned for the traditional Bai architecture of large courtyard homes that once belonged to prosperous merchants who traded jade, silver and tea. Later we visit a tea plantation and learn about the processing of leaves into the sought-after pu’er tea, the only tea that improves with age. After our first full day in Yunnan, we enjoy a welcome banquet.

We take a cable car up Cangshan mountain, the pine-clad range behind Dali made up of 19 peaks up to 4,100m high and known for its interesting cloud patterns. Up there we will visit a temple and one of the clear streams that flows through Dali below. Then we visit the craft village of Zhoucheng, famed for its batik, where we watch the process of creating tablecloths and clothes using sewing rather than wax (tie-dying). After lunch we leave behind Dali and its lake and head to the quaint village of Shaxi (1,900 m), a tranquil spot in a peaceful farming valley and our base for two nights.

Our local hosts will help us discover the old town of Shaxi, once listed as one of the 100 places around the world in danger of being lost but now lovingly restored by Swiss and local governments. We will explore its temples, theatres and houses, before ranging out into the surrounding fertile valley with its rice and tobacco fields. Then to Shibaoshan, the Stone Treasure Mountain, with its many temples and grottoes spread out among the hills and ridges, including one cave featuring primitive worship of a female symbol which may pre-date Buddhism’s spread from India to China.

We leave Shaxi, stopping at the main town Jianchuan, with its old quarter and skilled wood carvers. Then we head north reaching first the upper reaches of the Yangtze river, then climbing up to the Tibetan area at the eastern end of the Himalayas, stopping at the Yi mountain area and Xiao Zhongdian Tibetan area to catch our breath. Our destination is the Tibetan town of Shangri-La (3,200 m), which changed its name in 2001 to reflect Tibetan legends about a paradise named Shambala and clues in James Hilton’s novel The Lost Horizon.

Today is the first day of the annual Shangri-La horse festival, which attracts Tibetans and minorities from all over Eastern Tibet for several days of events including horse races, archery, dancing competitions and Tibetan mastiff dog displays. Festivities spread across the grasslands and the old town and new town centres. This is the highlight of the local calendar, and attendees wear their finest ethnic costume in this show of Tibetan identity and prowess. We’ll spend most the day at this unique event, enjoying the spectacle and the hospitality. Later there will be dancing in the old town square, and the lively atmosphere will continue into the night.
We first explore the old town of Shangri-La, part of which was burnt down earlier this decade but has since been rebuilt in local style. After visiting the Shangri-La market we head out to the Songzhalin monastery, the largest in the region, which is made up of many halls, temples, courtyards and quarters. Later we go to the grasslands, visiting Tibetan villages and taking the opportunity to go inside a Tibetan house and sample yak butter tea, a staple of Tibetans, often drunk with barley flour. If time permits, we’ll go back to the horse festival, and in the evening we’ll be able to take part in a large Tibetan circle dance of young and old.

Today we head from the high elevations and Tibetan borderlands to the most picturesque places in southwest China, via two incredible natural features. The Pink and White Terraces in New Zealand were destroyed in an eruption, but the white terraces of Baishuitai are a reminder of what they looked like — a cascade of silica terraces set among forest. We take the back road to Lijiang, through Yi minority territory and even a Muslim stone-wall village in the mountains, dropping down to one of the deepest gorges in the world. Tiger Leaping Gorge is a rugged scenic highlight on any visit to northwest Yunnan. As part of the Three Parallel Rivers world heritage site, here the mighty river that starts further up in the Tibetan plateau narrows and drops dramatically in the river canyon, with nearly 4,000 metres altitude change from the top of the highest peak on Jade Dragon Snow Mountain down to the raging waters of the river. We take in the scale of the gorge at the end and then go along the gorge road to a viewing area, where we can walk on a staircase down to the narrowest point of the Yangtze river, where the Tiger Leaping Gorge stone lies mid-river, before continuing to Lijiang (2,400 m).

Lijiang is the main destination in Yunnan, and its lovely old town with UNESCO world heritage status is the chief attraction. Although the old town is now quite commercialised and crowded with domestic tourists, exploring the cobbled lanes with swift-flowing streams punctuating the townscape is an unforgettable activity. You will see Naxi people in their traditional clothing, walking the streets and trading as they have done for centuries. Exploring this in your free time, and perhaps letting yourself get lost, is all part of the experience, but our knowledgeable guide will take us to places you couldn’t find by yourself, including the lively daily market and a tea merchant family compound. We will also visit quieter villages outside Lijiang, including the ancient capital of Baisha where we might meet a 94-year-old Taoist medicine doctor, and then to the village of Yuhu, the last village in the valley, known for its unique stone houses and the residence of National Geographic explorer Dr Joseph Rock.

Dominating Lijiang is the impressive (and impressively-named) Jade Dragon Snow Mountain, rising up to 5,600 m above sea level. A short drive from Lijiang, we’ll first take in the spectacular ‘Impression Lijiang’ multimedia show with 500 local performers (and horses) before exploring the mountain by taking a cable car to the glacier (4,300 m) or yak meadow (3,000 m) depending on conditions. After returning to Lijiang you have the afternoon at leisure. A relaxing day at Lashi lake not far from Lijiang, which is popular for horse riding, boat trips and hikes to sacred springs and Yi mountain villages. The lake and wetland area is home to many bird species, some which migrate from afar to winter over. We will also have free time in the afternoon in Shuhe village, where we may be able to listen to a village orchestra play ancient music heard by Confucius that has been lost elsewhere in China. In the evening we fly to Xining (2,300 m).
After an easy morning to rest and recover from the previous day’s travel, it is time to explore Xining, the eastern gateway to the Tibetan plateau. Situated on the upper reaches of the Yellow River, the city has an interesting mix of Hui, Salar and Uighur Muslims, Tibetans and Han Chinese. First stop is the 14th-century Dongguan grand mosque, one of the largest Islamic buildings in China. Then we visit the provincial museum and Nanshan park with its flower gardens, temples and views. After trying the famous local hand-made noodles, we board the early evening train for the 1,960 km journey across the Tibetan plateau. Our journey on the highest railway in the world is timed to give the best view of the vast Jinyintan green prairie and sunset over the largest inland saltwater lake in China. We have comfortable sleeping berths with large windows to enjoy the views. (Note that berths do not have ensuites.)

After a night on the train, climbing up in elevation and through mainly uninhabited mountain ranges, we continue on the ‘route to the sky’, reaching over 5,000m as we pass through Golmud, the city of the Gobi desert and its salt lake plains. Oxygen is pumped into the train at higher altitudes, and there are also individual oxygen outlets for those requiring more direct oxygen. We pass through close to the source of the Yangtze river and through the Kekexili nature reserve, home to Tibetan antelope, wild yak and Tibetan donkeys. After the Tanggula mountains we drop to Nagqu with its large freshwater lake and vast pastures, and finally in the afternoon arrive at our destination. At Lhasa (3,600 m) we transfer to the hotel and enjoy our first night in the Tibetan capital.

Lhasa is the centre of the Tibetan world, making it a special place for pilgrims and visitors alike. Lhasa, literally the ‘place of the gods’, offers an absorbing, photogenic and enthralling insight into traditional Tibetan life. The overt and deeply-felt religiosity of Tibetans reaches its peak in the 1,300 year old Jokhang temple, where flickering butter lamps, smoking incense and prostrating pilgrims will leave you awestruck. We will spend the day in central Lhasa, exploring the symbol of the city, the landmark Potala palace (former seat of the Dalai Lama), the atmospheric Jokhang and the encircling Barkhor pilgrim circuit, as well as the nearby Barkhor market.

Today we explore more of Lhasa and its surrounds, visiting two of the main university monasteries in Tibet to gain a wider impression of the Tibetan heart. Drepung is a Gelug monastery just west of Lhasa, once home to over 10,000 monks and still the largest of all Tibetan monasteries. Founded over 600 years ago, the powerhouse of Tibetan Buddhism and former residence of the Dalai Lama was closed following riots in 2008 and re-opened only in 2013. At Drepung and Sera, a little north of Lhasa, we might observe monks debating. Sera, which celebrates its 600th anniversary in 2019, is made up of assembly halls, hermitages, nunneries and a printing press. Usually visited in a clockwise pilgrimage circuit, gestured debating sessions are held each day in the morning, at noon, in the afternoon and evening as part of the monks’ training. The day is completed with a visit to the current Dalai Lama’s summer residence and palace, the peaceful park Norbulingka, now a UNESCO world heritage site.

Today we head out of Lhasa to Gyantse (or Gyantze), experiencing stunning Himalayan scenery of sweeping panoramas, high passes, pastures and turquoise lake waters as we climb over three high passes on the Friendship Highway which continues all the way to Kathmandu in Nepal. We visit the sacred Yamdroktsao lake at 4,441m, an important migratory bird habitat as well as being holy to Tibetans. This is one of the highest freshwater lakes in the world, and its colour changes from jade to turquoise depending on the light. On the road to Nepal and close to Bhutan and Everest Base Camp, we stop to get close to the spectacular 5km-long Karola Glacier. From the glacier we continue through pastures with yaks and fields with flowers to Gyantse (4,000 m), one of the most authentic Tibetan towns. A historic market town, its golden topped tiered-temples and monastery chambers feature murals and statues. We stay overnight in this atmospheric town, with its large stupa, walls and fortress.

Thursday 13 June
Xining
Meals: B/L/D
Overnight: Railway sleeping compartment

Friday 14 June
Lhasa (Tibet Autonomous Region)
Meals B/L/D
Train: Approximately 20 hours
Overnight: Lhasa

Saturday 15 June
Lhasa
Meals: B/L/D
Overnight: Lhasa

Sunday 16 June
Lhasa
Meals: B/L/D
Overnight: Lhasa

Monday 17 June
Lhasa – Gyantse
Meals: B/L/D
Coach: 5-6 hours
Overnight: Gyantse
HOW TO SECURE YOUR PLACE ON THIS TOUR
A deposit of $1,000 is required to secure your place on the tour. When minimum numbers are reached, the tour will become a ‘confirmed departure’. At that point we will advise when the full tour payment will be due.

- Click here to complete the online registration form, pay the $1,000 deposit and your spot in this tour is secured.
- Or you can complete a paper registration form. You can download one from the website www.calderandlawsontours.co.nz, or give us a call and we will email or post one to you.

TERMS & CONDITIONS
Can be found on the website www.calderandlawsontours.co.nz, on the back of the paper registration form or on the summary page when you complete an online registration.

VARIATIONS
This itinerary is Version 1 dated 06/08/2018 and is subject to change. Exchange rate fluctuations may result in a change to the tour price.