

Itinerary Program in Brief

B. = Breakfast L. = Lunch D. = Dinner

Day 1. Arrival at Chengdu Airport (CTU) with a group transfer to FuRong (Hibiscus Hotel) or similar. Chengdu, at only 1,640 feet of altitude, is the capital of the Sichuan province, located in southwest China. It's known as the 'land of abundance,' the hometown of the Giant Panda, and the city of Brocade. Enjoy a welcome dinner at a local restaurant. (D.)

Day 2. Following breakfast, enjoy a full day in Chengdu. We first visit the world's largest breeding center for the giant panda—with more than 150 giant pandas. It is a 40-minute drive to reach the research center, located on the north side of the city. Enjoy two to three hours at the center, strolling through its bamboo forest. Then visit the Wenshu Monastery (Manjushri Temple), one of China's most famous and best-preserved Buddhist temples. Lunch at a local dumpling restaurant. Later walk through city streets to visit People's Park for a glimpse of Chengdu's daily life and visit the excellent Chengdu (history) museum. After enjoy an early dinner at a local hot pot restaurant. (B. L. D.)

Day 3. Drive to Barkham (population 50,000), the capital city of Ngawa prefecture at just over 8000 feet. The drive is only about 220 miles, but it will take about six or seven hours. On the way, stop to visit the Choktse chieftain's five-story stone palace, and if there is time, visit Barkham Dargyeling as well. The Sichuan part of Amdo lies within Aba/Ngawa Tibetan and Qiang Autonomous Prefecture in far northern Sichuan province. Ngawa is about the same size as the state of South Carolina. It has a population of 900,000, with Tibetans making up about 55% of the community. Until the 1950s, there were four traditional provinces of Tibet, Amdo in the north-east, Ü-Tsang in the South (Lhasa and the current-day Tibet Autonomous Region), Kham in the East and Ngari (including the former Guge kingdom) in the north-west. Amdo was traditionally a place of great learning and scholarship. Today, ethnic Tibetans predominate in the area, many of whom are nomadic. This area is very diverse, including high snow mountains, seemingly endless grasslands, deep gorges and canyons, and evergreen forests. Overnight in the Barkham Gyarong Grand Hotel. (B. L.D.)

Day 4. Morning drive to Tujichenpo town to visit the Tujichenpo monastery, which is a reconstructed Nyingmapa monastery. This impressive site formerly had over 300 monks and is revered as one of the significant power-places in Gyarong. After sightseeing at the monastery, we continue driving to Dzamtang. If time allows, we will visit the Sirin Khar Gon on the way (about 15 miles before the town). It belongs to the Karma Kagyu school and has intricately designed temples, three nine-storied towers, and a cluster of stupas. It was founded quite recently in 1954. Overnight in the Dzamtang ShanglaDorjee Hotel at 10,500 feet. (B. L.D.)

Days 5 & 6. Two full days in Dzamtang to visit, study and experience the most famous Jonang monasteries in this valley, Dzamtang Chode Gompa, Tsechu Gon, and Dzamtang Tsangpa Gon. Before the arrival of Drung Kashe Rinchen Pel, the Dzamtang area was a stronghold of the Bon religion. The Jonangpa ascendancy was secured by Ming imperial patronage when Rinchen Pel visited Beijing in 1419, and his successors, including Gyelwa Zangpo (1419-1493) and Gyelwa Senge (1508-1568), who further developed these ties. The original monastery Dzamtang Chode Gon had 300 monks, while Tsechu Gon, which was the smallest, had only 100 monks. In these monasteries, you can enjoy the surviving early murals, woodblocks, and a three-dimensional mandala of Kalachakra. Now the local government is developing the area, so there are lots of new buildings in town. Overnight at the same hotel. (B. L.D.)

Day 7. Drive from Dzamtang to Ngawa (10, 500 ft.) in about three hours. Since it is a short drive today, we can stop for a picnic on the way and share food with local herdsman in their yak tent. On arrival in the afternoon, visit the Ngawa Kirti Gompa, a Gelugpa monastery founded in 1472. Overnight at the simple hotel of the Nangzhik Gompa, an 800-year-old Bon monastery. (B. L.D.)

Day 8 & 9. Two full days to enjoy Ngawa (population 20,000). The hills around the town are dotted with more than 30 monasteries of the Nyingma, Sakya, Gelug (Amchok Tsenyi Gompa), and Jonang (Setenling Gompa) schools of Buddhism, also as well as Bon (Nangzhik Gompa). Overnight at the same simple monastery hotel. (B. L. D.)

Day 10. A four-hour drive brings us to Gurgou, where we'll have time to relax and enjoy the Gurgou Holy Peak Hot Springs. The 140-degree water contains 17 trace elements such as lithium, selenium, and germanium, which are considered good for human health. The spring water is used for bathing, drinking (locals-only, not us!), and medicinal purposes — overnight Impression Hotel or similar. (B. L. D.)

Day 11. An easy three-hour drive to Chengdu. Time to relax in the afternoon, then a final farewell dinner. Optional evening excursion to Jinli Walking Street, a network of alleys housing dozens of food and gift vendors. Overnight at FuRong (Hibiscus Hotel) or similar, Chengdu. (B. L. D.)

Day 12. Departure Day. Airport transfer provided. (B.)