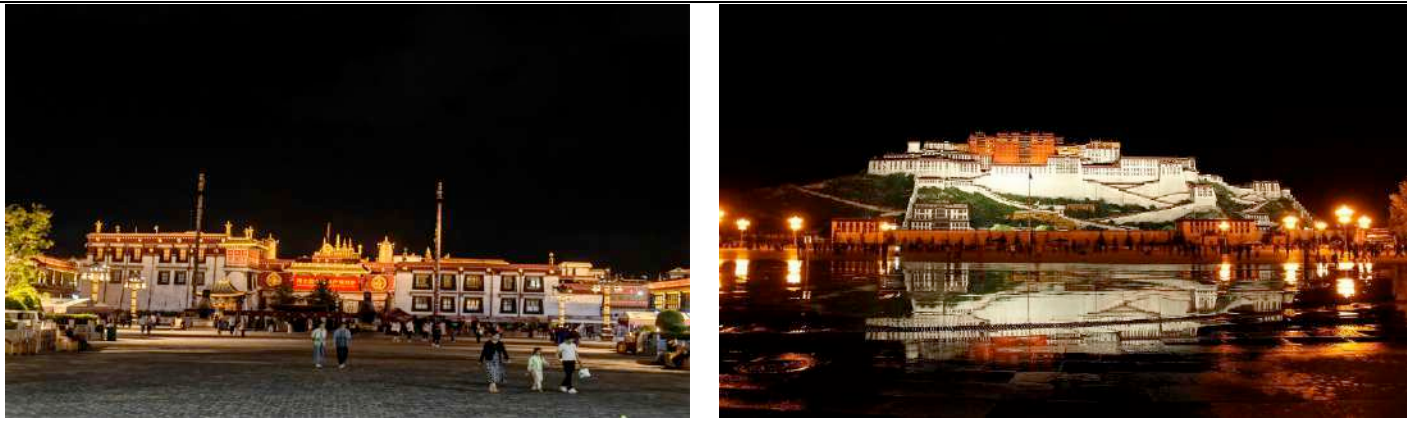


<b>2_CULTURAL &amp; HIKING TIBET TRIP in 8 days</b>	
	Itinerary
day 1	Arrival in Lhasa, pick up at Gongga Airport (or at Lhasa train station) and transfer to the hotel to check in and rest. After nightfall, guests can walk to Potala Palace or Jokhang Temple, to enjoy the night view.
Distance: 70KM // Today's driving time: 1 hour // Altitude of accommodation: 3650M	
<p><b>Summary of the Day:</b> After arriving in Lhasa, your guide will pick you up at Gongga Airport (or at the train station), and bring you to your comfortable hotel to check in, so that you can settle in, have a rest and relax. After nightfall, everyone can independently choose to go to Potala Palace to enjoy the charming scenery at night, or go to Jokhang Temple to experience a different kind of peaceful and beautiful night scenery.</p>	
	
day2	Thousand Buddha Cliff - Yaowang Mountain Viewing Platform - Potala Palace - Zongjiao Lukang Park
Distance: 100KM // Today's driving time: 1 hour // Altitude of accommodation: 3650M	
<p><b>Summary of the Day:</b> Our first visiting point today is the Thousand Buddha Cliff with its ancient, exquisitely carved Buddha statues, which carry profound historical and cultural heritage. Seeing these carvings make people feel as if they have traveled through time and space, feeling the sedimentation of time and the power of religion. Next, we head to the Yaowang Mountain view point to take a panoramic view of the beautiful scenery of Lhasa City, and appreciate the unique style of the city from a bird perspective. Then we continue to the magnificent Potala Palace, the world-renowned Tibetan palace standing on the top of the Red Mountain of Lhasa. Its majestic momentum, magnificent architecture, and rich cultural connotations make visitors feel easily touched, and turn speechless. We finish the day with a visit to Zongjiao Lukang, a peaceful and beautiful park with fresh air and pleasant environment. It is a good place for people to relax and experience the integration of nature and culture.</p> <p>The goal of today's program is to fully appreciate the unique charm of Lhasa, gather first, but lasting experiences and precious memories while adjusting to the altitude on this first visiting day.</p>	
<p><b>Additional site information:</b> The <b>Thousand Buddha Cliff</b> is situated in the north of YaoWang Mountains, which is located in the southwest of</p>	

Potala Palace. Several thousands of colorful Buddha statues of different sizes are carved one next to the other on the cliff. Very few tourists are coming to visit this place; mainly locals come here to worship and pray. The mountain is covered with carvings, and Tibetan praying flags in five colors are hanging everywhere, making visitors feel as if they are in a “Buddhist paradise”.

One can also describe this site as a Buddhist art world: The giant Sakyamuni carving, and the thousands of statues, big and small, arranged in good order on the cliff. Most of them are Guanying, Wenshu, Tara and Guarding Gods, it feels like a mysterious world of Buddhas, touching our soul deeply. Those delicate carvings done by Tibetan masters in several generations are still well preserved through several thousand years of erosion by wind and rain. After careful restoration work, the statues still have very vivid colors. They are a very important historical heritage for us to learn about Tibetan Buddhism and Tibetan culture.

**Potala Palace** is situated on the Red Mountain (MaBuRi Mountain) which is located in the northwestern part of Lhasa City. It was first built on the initiative of the 33<sup>rd</sup> generation of Tibetan kings in 631. When the Tibetan Kingdom was dismissed, the palace was seriously damaged by natural disaster and human destruction. In 1645, the 5<sup>th</sup> Dalai Lama rebuilt Potala Palace in order to strengthen the regime of Ganden Podrang (甘丹颇章) and its unity of state and religion. Later on it was enlarged and expanded gradually until today. Potala Palace was designed and built according to the structure of a Tibetan mandala, the area covers a total surface of 360,000 square meters, while the building covers 130,000 square meters, and the main building is 117m high and has 13 floors. It somehow takes on the role of a palace and a castle, combining under its roof a royal palace, a pagoda, a Buddhist hall, an administration office, a monk school and a monk dormitory with 1267 rooms. The main building is divided into the White House and the Red House. The first one is for preaching and living of the Dalai Lama, while the latter is the activity center and holy pagoda of the previous Dalai Lama. The Red House is surrounded by the White House, an indication of the social system of the unification of politics and religion in Old Tibet.

Potala Palace has been the winter residence for generations of Dalai Lama, and it has been also the ruling center of the Tibetan regime, starting from the 5<sup>th</sup> Dalai Lama. All important religious and political ceremonies were held here, as it is considered a highly important spiritual place. The architecture of Potala Palace and the collection of antique artifacts found inside the palace show the communication, exchange and melting of politics, economy and culture among all Chinese ethnic minorities over many generations. It is evidence that Tibet has been an integral part of China since ancient times.





day3	Jokhang Temple - Walk to Ramoche Temple & surrounding areas - Tangka Painting Academy
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Distance: 100KM // Today's driving time: 30min // Altitude of accommodation: 3650M

*Summary of the Day:*

Today we will explore Lhasa mainly by walking.

First we will step into the holy Jokhang Temple, where we will feel its uniqueness and devoutly pursue of the footsteps of faith, a place deeply filled with historical and religious atmosphere.

Next we will walk to Ramoche Temple and explore its surroundings, stroll along the quaint streets, and feel the tranquility and palpable peace of this area of Lhasa. Along the way, you can admire various traditional buildings, distinctive little shops, and people coming and going, a vivid picture of Tibetan daily life is slowly unfolding before your eyes.

Afterwards we will visit the Tangka Academy, where you can get a close look on exquisite and incomparable Tangka works, learn about the admirable skills of the artists and profound cultural connotations of the paintings, immerse yourself in the world of Tibetan Tangka art to appreciate its beauty and charm.

Today's program will allow us to experience the particular tradition and custom of Tibetan temples, while also gaining an understanding and insight into Tibetan daily life and its traditional art.

*Additional site information:*

**Jokhang Temple:** also called "ZuLaKang" or "JueKang" (which means "Buddhist Hall" in Tibetan language) is situated in the center of Lhasa Old District. Built by the Tibetan King Songtsen Gampo, in some ways we can say that Lhasa is called a "Holy Place" because of this temple. The temple was first called "ReSa", which later became the name of the city today: LhaSa. The initial building of Jokhang Temple was enlarged during Yuan, Ming and Qing dynasties to become the temple we can see today. It has a history of more than 1300 years, enjoying the highest position within Tibetan Buddhism. The temple is the building of the golden age of Tubo regime (吐蕃 also called "Tufan", the name of Tibet in 7<sup>th</sup>-11<sup>th</sup> century), and it is also the oldest soil and wood structure in Tibet, introducing at that time a new building style in the area. Inside the temple there is a full-size statue of Sakyamuni when he was 12 years old, which was brought to Tubo Kingdom by princess WenChen from ChangAn (today Xi'An) during Tang Dynasty.

The architecture of Jokhang Temple combines Tibetan style, Tang Dynasty style, Nepali and Indian styles, and is considered a model for Tibetan religious buildings. All year round incense fire and smoke can be seen in front of the temple, many worshippers have been coming on a daily basis to press their head down praying, leaving a visible pit on the stone ground. The constantly lit up yak butter lamp is evidence of ages of Buddhist pilgrimages.



**Ramoche Temple**, called in Tibetan “JiaDaRaMuQie”, is situated in 500m north of Balang Street in Lhasa. It began to be built in the mid-7<sup>th</sup> century, initiated in 641 by Tang princess WenChen. The total surface is 4000 square meters; inside the temple is a full-size statue of Sakyamuni when he was 8 years old.

Ramoche Temple suffered several fires over history, most parts of the temple we see today were rebuilt later on. Only the first floor of the temple still dates from the early age. From the pillars in the hall we can see the prosperity of the Tubo regime, we can see carved lotus, grass and flowers, clouds and jewelry, and the six-syllable Sanskrit mantra. The main building has 3 floors: the first floor is divided into front hall, scripture hall and Buddhist hall, surrounded by the passage of praying wheels with Buddhist paintings on the walls. The splendid roof is tiled in shining gold, which can be seen from any location in Lhasa.

The architecture of Ramoche Temple combines Han and Tibetan styles. Being one of the earliest temples in Tibet, it was managed by Han monks at the beginning. Initiated by the Tang princess, it is until today a symbol of friendship between Han China and Tibet.



day 4	Lhasa – Basong Lake Scenic Area – Xinco Lake
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Distance: 420KM // Today’s driving time: 6 hours // Altitude of accommodation: 3480M

*Summary of the Day:*

Today we will drive out from Lhasa, and enjoy the scenic view on the way until we arrive at a fairyland called Basong Lake, which is like a pearl embedded the vast land. The scenic spot comprises a large area of lakes, forest, valleys and mountains. Basong Lake is the name of the main lake, a clear green lake reflecting the hump of mountains around it, forming a beautiful painting for our eyes. After arriving at Basong Lake, we visit CuoZhong Gongba Monastery that is situated on a small island called Zhaxi, about 100m off the shore. Then we continue to explore the smaller Xinco Lake barely known to the outside world. We will do some light hiking of about 5km. Xinco Lake is hidden in the deep mountains, tranquil and mysterious. It is like a preserved place by nature for the explorers, waiting to reveal its charm to us.

*Additional site information:*

Also named “High Lake”, **Basong** means green water in Tibetan language. The lake is 18km long and has a surface area of about 27 square km, with a maximum depth of 120m. The lake lays at 3480m above sea level. It is hidden in the deep valley nearby the upper reach of Bahe river, about 36km away from Kongpo Gyamda county, and is regarded as a holy lake in the Nyingma religion. Nyingma is the oldest of the four major schools of Tibetan Buddhism, also called the “Red Branch”.

The forest here is dense, creating more oxygen, which gives the benefit that normally people do not feel unwell because of high altitude sickness around here. There are snow mountains, lakes, forest, waterfalls, meadows, and historical relics temples. The scenery is very diversified, and the experience is very rich at different times and seasons. A great variety of rare plants and animals live here together, it is like a paradise on earth that gets referred to as “Little Switzerland”.

The small island called Zhaxi is said to be a hollow island floating on the surface of the lake. The only building on the island is the CuoZhong Gongba Monastery, an important monastery of the Nyingma school. It was built in Tang dynasty and has a history of more than 1500 years. The monastery is a wooden structure with two floors, the main offerings inside the hall are lotus peanuts, Thousand Armed Guanyin, and golden boys and jade girls statues.

South of the temple are a peach tree and a pine tree growing tightly to each other. In springtime, they offer visitors a beautiful scene of pink peach flowers in harmony with the green pine tree perfectly complementing each other.



day5	Basong Lake – Qiuzi cave hiking to Jieba village
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Distance: 10KM // Today’s driving time: 30min // Altitude of accommodation: 3480M

*Summary of the Day:*

**Qiuzi Dong Hiking:**

Himalaya Basong Lake Resort Hotel – Bure village (7KM) – Qiuzi Dong (8KM) – Island (5KM) – Hotel (0.6KM)

Total distance about 20,6km; Hiking time about 3,5h. Hiking time can be reduced or extended, according to participants.

We will take a boat from the central island to Qiu Zidong pier (ferry ride 15-20 minutes), then hike along the north bank of the lake until we get to High Lake wetlands and Jieba Village. About 2km away from the pier, along the stream up the mountain, we first pass the mysterious and legendary cave called Qiu Zidong.

There are colorful praying flags and green pine trees all along the Basong Lake hiking route, with dense forest, meadow, and bushes. The lake view is so enjoyable that it makes one feel like being in a fairyland.

On the left side of Qiu Zidong is another cave called Xiaozai Dong with a lot of praying flags around. Nearby the cave there is Sanglong bridge and Sanglong river. Every spring, the local villagers bring their cattle here to feed on this fertile green meadow. The piles of Marnyi stone can be seen everywhere along the river, it is a symbol for the harmony between human being and nature.

During the hike, we can also hang some praying flags or make a pile of Marnyi stone, to show our respect to the land.

*Additional site information:*

The best time to visit **Basong Lake Scenic Area** is from April to October. Especially in autumn, all kinds of plants and leaves seem to be painted by the greatest artist of all, which is nature. The colorful and bright scenery makes the visitors feel enchanted and be captured by the charm of such a peaceful, natural place. The water is crystal clear like a mirror reflecting the surroundings. In the middle of the lake there is a solemn monastery with long history. One can feel the tranquility and deep respect from the bottom of their heart.

**QiuZi Cave** was once blessed by the master Guru Rimpoche, so the locals say that wishes pronounced here will become true. They come to pray for a child, and lightly tap the wall with a stone three times inside the cave.

**XiaoZai Cave:** It is said that the master Guru Rimpoche cultivated his mind here for 3 years, making it a rare and special place to practice meditation.

Today, we will explore and see from vast land to lake, from forest to snow mountain and glacier, and various deep valleys. We can enjoy the view of the magnificent Basong Lake, hike to the fairyland barely touched by human beings, get the experience of four seasons around the lake, different weather every 10 kilometers. Most visitors only stay at the first part of the Scenic Area and already feel amazed by seeing the Basong island. But we choose to hike deep into the center of Basong, to seek and explore its unknown parts, to feel its purity.

As a holy land of the red school Nyingma, Basong has always been a must-stop during the pilgrimage of Tibetan believers. It is considered the last land with pure earth, pure sky and pure water in Tibetan Buddhism.



day6 | Basong Scenic Area – Zayeba Temple – Lhasa

Distance: 380KM // Today's driving time: 5 hours // Altitude of accommodation: 3650M

*Summary of the Day:*

Today we leave Basong Scenic Area to drive to Zayeba Temple, which is hidden in a mysterious valley. It has a long history, and one can feel the pulse of ancient times with every step getting closer to it. The unique architectural style embodies the solemnity and sacredness of Tibetan Buddhism, and the many precious cultural relics and artworks in the temple emit endless charm. "The Holy Land of Tibet is in Lhasa, and the Holy Land of Lhasa is in Yeba." This place "Yeba" mentioned in the folk song is the Zhayeba Temple, which is also one of the four major hermits in Tibet.

Zhayeba Temple is a temple of the Nyingma school, and one of the four major places of seclusion in Tibet. It was built in the 7th century and has a history of more than 1500 years.



At last, we are heading back to the holy city of Lhasa.

*Additional site information:*

**Zayeba Temple:**

“Za” in Tibetan language means “cave”, “Yeba” means “cultivation”. The most special feature of this temple is that the building is inlaid in the gap of the rock on the cliff, the temple is in the cave, the building and the cave become one. It is called a “Temple built in the cave”, a place for great masters to practice meditation.

The Tibetan King Songtsen Gampo built this temple for his Queen Monsa Chizun. It is said that there are 108 caves in the cliff of Yeba, such as the Dharma King Cave where Songtsen Gampo practiced (with a small hall called "Zulakang" built outside), and other caves for important Tibetan masters to practice meditation. It is said that very important scriptures were even discovered here.

After being extended several times, the Zayeba Temple came into being inside the cliff. Different from the bare-landed mountains covered by only a thin coat of grass, Zayeba is full of natural life and vegetation.

The pine trees and cedar trees grow strong in this area, forest is lush and green, while the clear springs and streams flow gently at the foot of the mountain. The blossom is spread throughout the mountain in spring and summer, birds sing in unity. It really is a unique and comforting scenery.



day7 | Tibetan Handmade Incense experience - Sera Temple Scripture Debate

Distance: 100KM // Today's driving time: 1 hour // Altitude of accommodation: 3650M

*Summary of the Day:*

A cultural exploration of Tibet needs to include the unique experience of Tibetan handmade incense. In the morning we will go to the local Tibetan incense workshop and personally participate with the master in the production process. Making Tibetan incense is not only a traditional craft, but also a spiritual practice. In this process, you need to focus on the present, eliminate distractions, and feel inner peace and tranquility.

After completing the production of your own Tibetan incense, we will go to Sera Temple to watch the scripture debate. Sera Temple is one of the most famous temples in Tibet for its sutra debate, which has a long history and profound cultural heritage. The debate usually takes place in the afternoon, and we can arrive at the Sera Temple in advance to explore the temple and finally find the debate venue. There are many places worth visiting, such as the Tsochin Hall, Maizacang, and Abazacang. We can appreciate exquisite Buddha statues, murals, and architecture, and feel the solemnity and mystery of Tibetan Buddhism.

During the process of debating scriptures, monks will divide into two groups and engage in intense debates with each other. They explore Buddhist doctrine and philosophical issues through questioning, debate, and explanation. The scene of debating scriptures is very interesting, and the actions and expressions of the monks are rich and diverse, full of passion and vitality. Their debating voices echo loudly throughout the entire temple. When watching the debate, you need to remain quiet and respect the practices and studies of the monks.

Today's program is a very meaningful cultural experience to finish your visit in Tibet. By participating in the production of Tibetan incense, we can learn about the traditional culture and handicrafts of Tibetan people. By watching the Sutra Debate, we can gain a deeper understanding of the teachings and philosophy of Tibetan Buddhism. During this last day, we can round up the impressions of the last week, taking a lasting insight of Tibetan culture and religion back home with us.

*Additional site information:*

**Tibetan Handmade Incense:**

Before making Tibetan incense, it is necessary to clean hands and clean utensils to express respect to the gods. The raw materials for making Tibetan incense usually include cypress, elm, sandalwood, clove, and rhododendron pollen. Each raw material has its own specific ratio and function, for example, cypress helps with combustion, elm helps with bonding, sandalwood has a calming effect, cloves can help with sleep, and rhododendron pollen can purify the air.

Our teacher will show you how to mix your chosen ingredients together and then knead them into a paste by hand. Next step is to put the paste into the mold and squeeze them into straight Tibetan incense. This requires certain skills and strength, and may require multiple attempts to master.

**Sera Monastery:** Its full name is "Sera Mahayana Monastery", and it is one of the six major monasteries of Gelug school in Tibetan Buddhism. Together with Drepung Monastery and Ganden Monastery, they form the "Three Main Monasteries" in Lhasa. Sera is the latest one built among the three. Situated in Serawuzi mountain 3km north of Lhasa, surrounded by willow trees, it has been the place for the high monks and living Buddhas to teach and preach since ancient times. There are many small temples and nunneries around it.

Inside the temple are tens of thousands of Vajra statues, most of them are made locally. There are also many bronze statues brought from mainland China or India. In the main hall and scripture room numerous colorful fresco murals are well preserved. The most famous statue is the one of "Horse Head and Vidya". The buildings of Sera monastery are dense but not crowded, diverse but not chaotic. The architecture is tailored to local conditions, and the main building is outstanding, reflecting the unique style of Gelug monastery. We can say that it is in itself a religious city.





day8	End of itinerary - drop off at Lhasa Gongga Airport
Distance: 70KM // Today's driving time: 1 hour	
<i>Summary of the Day:</i> Our journey finally comes to an end, and you will be transferred to Lhasa Gongga Airport for departure. We hope that this journey has become a precious and lasting memory in your life, and we wish that you look forward to eventually meeting with this magical land of Tibet another time again.	

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