

Earthbound Expeditions

Lhasa and Everest Base Camp Tibet Tour

12 days, from US$3,687 per person

Duration **12 days**	Grade **Moderate**	Max altitude **5,236 m**
Start and end **Kathmandu**	On foot **Up to 1 hour a day**	Best season **Apr to Oct**
Accommodation **Hotels**	Meals **All meals on the trek**	Group size **Up to 4**
Getting there **Drive in, fly out**		

Lhasa and Everest Base Camp Tibet Tour Overview

An overland journey from Kathmandu across the Tibetan plateau to the north face of Everest, then east through Shigatse and Gyantse to Lhasa. This is the only Everest Base Camp that can be reached by vehicle.

Tour overview

This trip crosses the whole width of southern Tibet by road, from the Nepali border to Lhasa, visiting the north side of Everest on the way. You drive over the Himalaya on day 4, spend a night at Rongbuk below the north face, and then travel east through Shigatse and Gyantse to Lhasa over two 5,000 m passes. Six of the twelve days are driving days, which is what crossing a plateau the size of western Europe involves.

Everest by road

This is the only Everest Base Camp that can be reached by vehicle, and the view is very different from the Nepal side. On the south side you walk for ten days to reach the moraine at 5,364 m below the icefall, where the summit is not visible. Here a road takes you up the Rongbuk valley to 5,200 m, and Everest stands at the head of the valley with a clear view of its three and a half vertical kilometres, framed by the valley walls. It is the classic view of the mountain, and it requires no trekking.

Who this trip is for

Travellers who want to experience Tibet rather than go trekking. There is very little walking: an hour at Rongbuk, the stairs at the Potala and a circuit of the Barkhor. Instead, the trip requires you to be comfortable with long days in a vehicle at altitude, and to have an interest in monasteries, as after Everest the trip focuses largely on them. It also suits people who cannot walk for ten days to Base Camp but still want a full view of Everest.

Why we travel west to east

We drive in and fly out, which is the better direction for two reasons. It gains altitude gradually by road over three days, rather than taking you straight to 3,656 m on a flight into Lhasa, which is significantly safer. It also places Everest on day 5, before the monasteries, so the highest and coldest night comes while you are fresh rather than at the end of the trip.

Key highlights of the Lhasa and Everest Base Camp Tibet Tour

- Rongbuk and the north face of Everest, reached by road
- The Potala Palace and Jokhang Temple in Lhasa
- Tashilhunpo at Shigatse and the Kumbum at Gyantse
- Two 5,000 m passes and the whole width of the plateau

Itinerary

Day	Route	Hours	Distance	Altitude
1	Arrive Kathmandu	-	-	1,400 m
2	Kathmandu valley sites	-	-	1,400 m
3	Drive to the Kerung border	7–8 hrs	-	2,800 m
4	Over the Gyatso La to Tingri	5–6 hrs	-	4,300 m

5	Rongbuk and the Everest viewpoint	3–4 hrs	-	5,200 m
6	Rongbuk to Shigatse	7–8 hrs	-	3,900 m
7	Tashilhunpo, then Gyantse and the Kumbum	2 hrs	-	3,977 m
8	Over the Karo La and Kamba La to Lhasa	7–8 hrs	-	5,010 m
9	Potala Palace and the Jokhang	-	-	3,656 m
10	Drepung, Sera and the Norbulingka	-	-	3,656 m
11	Fly Lhasa to Kathmandu	1h 35m	-	1,400 m
12	Fly home	-	-	-

Day 1

Arrive in Kathmandu

We meet you at the airport and take you to your hotel. In the evening we brief you on the trip and, most importantly, the paperwork: your group visa is collected in Kathmandu, and the permits have already been issued in your name.

Altitude: 1,400 m On foot: None, arrival day Night: Hotel, Kathmandu Meals: Dinner

Day 2

Kathmandu Valley sightseeing

You visit the hilltop stupa at Swayambhunath, the river temples and cremation ghats at Pashupatinath, the great dome at Boudhanath, and the carved squares of Patan. Boudhanath is particularly relevant today, as you will spend the next week among the Tibetan people who built it.

Altitude: 1,400 m On foot: Easy walking, 2–3 hrs Night: Hotel, Kathmandu Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

Day 3

Drive to the border at Kerung

The drive heads north out of the valley and up the Trishuli and Bhote Koshi gorges to Rasuwagadhi, then through the border formalities and up the far side to Kerung. The drive takes seven to eight hours, mostly climbing, and you finish the day 1,400 m higher than you started.

Altitude: 2,800 m On foot: Drive, 7–8 hrs Night: Hotel, Kerung Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

Day 4

Drive over the Himalaya to Tingri

Today the landscape changes completely. The road climbs out of the last green valley over a pass at 5,236 m and descends onto the plateau. From the top, on a clear day, you can see Shishapangma, Cho Oyu and Everest together. Tingri is a windswept village on a high plain, with the north side of the range on the skyline.

Altitude: 4,300 m On foot: Drive, 5–6 hrs Night: Hotel, Tingri Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

Day 5

Drive to Rongbuk and the Everest viewpoint

A morning drive up the switchbacks of the Rongbuk valley to the highest monastery in the world, at 4,980 m, followed by a short eco-bus ride to the base camp viewpoint. Everest stands at the head of the valley with a clear, unobstructed view, which is not possible from the Nepal side. We sleep at Rongbuk, which is cold and basic.

Altitude: 5,200 m at the viewpoint On foot: Drive, 3–4 hrs, then a short walk Night: Guesthouse, Rongbuk Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

Day 6

Drive to Shigatse

A long drive east across the plateau, descending to 3,900 m, which feels much easier after a night at Rongbuk. Shigatse is Tibet's second city and the seat of the Panchen Lama.

Altitude: 3,900 m On foot: Drive, 7–8 hrs Night: Hotel, Shigatse Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

Day 7

Tashilhunpo Monastery and drive to Gyantse

The morning is spent at Tashilhunpo, a working monastery of some six hundred monks with a twenty-six metre gilded Maitreya statue. A short drive then takes you to Gyantse to visit the Kumbum, a tiered stupa containing more than seventy chapels, and the finest single building on this route.

Altitude: 3,977 m On foot: Drive, 2 hrs Night: Hotel, Gyantse Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

Day 8

Drive to Lhasa over two passes

The most scenic driving day of the trip. You cross the Karo La at 5,010 m, passing a glacier that reaches almost to the road, and the Kamba La at 4,794 m above Yamdrok Tso, a turquoise, scorpion-shaped lake that fills the valley below. The road then descends into Lhasa.

Altitude: 3,656 m On foot: Drive, 7–8 hrs Night: Hotel, Lhasa Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

Day 9

Potala Palace and Jokhang Temple

In the morning you visit the Potala Palace, which has a thousand rooms and stands on a hill. Entry is by timed ticket, and there are many steps at 3,656 m. In the afternoon you visit the Jokhang, the holiest temple in Tibetan Buddhism and a far busier place of worship than the Potala, followed by the Barkhor circuit around it.

Altitude: 3,656 m On foot: Easy walking, 2–3 hrs Night: Hotel, Lhasa Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

Day 10

Drepung Monastery, Sera Monastery and the Norbulingka

In the morning you visit Drepung, once the largest monastery in the world with around ten thousand monks. In the afternoon you visit Sera to see the debating courtyard, where the monks debate doctrine with a clap on every point. If time allows, you also visit the Norbulingka, the summer palace.

Altitude: 3,656 m On foot: Easy walking, 2–3 hrs Night: Hotel, Lhasa Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

Day 11

Fly to Kathmandu

A morning flight of one hour and thirty-five minutes over the Himalaya, with the range you drove through visible from the left-hand windows. The rest of the day is free in Kathmandu, with a farewell dinner in the evening.

Altitude: 1,400 m On foot: None, flight day Night: Hotel, Kathmandu Meals: Breakfast, Dinner

Day 12

Departure

We take you to the airport. If you are continuing on a trek, we hand you over to the trekking team at this point.

Altitude: 1,400 m On foot: None, departure day Night: No overnight Meals: Breakfast

What's included

- Airport transfers & ground transport
- Licensed English-speaking guide
- Accommodation throughout the trip
- All permits & national park fees
- Meals as per the itinerary

Not included

- International flights
- Travel & rescue insurance
- Personal trekking gear
- Tips & personal expenses
- Nepal entry visa (on arrival)

Permits and other costs

Permit	Fee	Issued by
Tibet Travel Permit (TTB). We apply for it against a confirmed, paid itinerary that names your hotels and guide. Allow 15 to 20 working days, longer in the peak season. You cannot obtain one yourself.	Inside the trip price	Tibet Tourism Bureau, through a licensed agency
China group visa, issued in Kathmandu. This is not a standard Chinese visa, and it cancels any Chinese visa already in your passport. It takes five working days, or three with urgent processing. Current practice requires a party of at least five on one visa.	$51 for most nationalities, $140 for US citizens	Chinese Embassy, Kathmandu
Alien's Travel Permit. No longer required for the Shigatse prefecture, which covers Everest and Rongbuk, since June 2025. Some operators still list it for Tibet Everest tours.	Not required	-
Qomolangma nature reserve entry. Charged per person and again per vehicle, and also charged for the guide.	CNY 160–180, plus CNY 405–605 per vehicle	At the reserve gate, inside the trip price

Other cost	Amount	Note
China group visa, Kathmandu	$51–140	$140 for US citizens, $85 Canadian, $51 for most others
Tibet Travel Permit	$70–120	Applied for by us against a paid itinerary

Qomolangma nature reserve entry	$25–30	CNY 160 to 180 per person, and the fee is also charged for the guide
Reserve vehicle fee	$60–90	CNY 405 for a 4WD, CNY 605 for a coach, charged once
Rongbuk eco-bus	$18	Private vehicles stop short of the viewpoint, so all visitors use the bus
Land Cruiser and driver, 9 days	$900–1,300 a head at 4	The largest single cost, and it stays the same for a small party
Licensed Tibetan guide, 9 days	$45–60 a day	Required for the whole time you are in the region
Lhasa to Kathmandu flight	$380–460	One way, on Himalaya or Sichuan Airlines
Hotels in Tibet	$60–130 a night	Four-star in Lhasa, three-star at Shigatse and Gyantse, basic at Tingri
Rongbuk guesthouse	$45–70	Basic, shared and unheated, and the only accommodation at 4,980 m
Monastery entry fees	$110–150	The Potala alone is CNY 200 with a timed ticket, plus Tashilhunpo, the Kumbum, Drepung and Sera
Full board	$35–50 a day	Included from day 3
Travel insurance to 5,500 m	$120–180	Must cover evacuation, as there is no helicopter rescue in Tibet
Tips for guide and driver	$120–180	Per traveller, paid at the end of the trip

Packing list

Luggage carried by vehicle

A vehicle carries your luggage for the whole trip, so there is no weight limit to observe. The one bag that matters is a daypack for the hour at Rongbuk and the Potala steps. Bring your own sleeping bag for the unheated night at 4,980 m.

For the night at Rongbuk

- A sleeping bag rated to -15°C. The guesthouse has quilts but no heating at 4,980 m
- A down jacket, to wear indoors that evening as well as outside
- A warm hat, and thermal base layers to sleep in
- Earplugs and an eye mask. The room is shared, and the clock is on Beijing time
- A head torch. Power at Rongbuk is unreliable

Clothing

- Layers rather than one heavy coat. The vehicle is warm, the passes are cold, and you will be getting in and out all day
- Two fleeces, or a fleece and a light insulated jacket
- A waterproof shell, more for wind than for rain
- Comfortable walking shoes. Shoes are sufficient on this trip; you do not need boots
- Modest clothing for the monasteries, covering shoulders and knees, and a hat you can remove

Sun and dry air protection

- Category 4 sunglasses. The light on the plateau at 4,300 m is the strongest of any of our trips
- SPF 50 sunscreen and lip balm with sun protection, in generous quantities
- A buff, for the dust on the Rongbuk road
- Moisturiser and a nasal spray. The air on the plateau is very dry, and nosebleeds are common

Health

- Diamox if your doctor agrees, plus all your regular medication, in its original packaging
- Painkillers, rehydration salts and medication for an upset stomach
- A broad-spectrum antibiotic if your doctor will prescribe one
- Hand sanitiser and wet wipes, for the one night without a shower

Documents and money

- Passport valid six months with two blank pages, plus three photocopies
- Four passport photographs for the group visa
- Your permit paperwork, printed, carried separately from the passport
- Travel insurance certificate covering 5,500 m and repatriation
- Chinese yuan in cash, and Alipay or WeChat Pay set up before you fly
- A VPN installed on every device before you leave Nepal

Altitude profile

Day	Place	Sleep at	Highest point
1	Kathmandu	1,400 m	-
2	Kathmandu	1,400 m	-
3	Kerung	2,800 m	-
4	Tingri	4,300 m	5,236 m
5	Rongbuk	4,980 m	5,200 m
6	Shigatse	3,900 m	-
7	Gyantse	3,977 m	-
8	Lhasa	3,656 m	5,010 m

9	Lhasa	3,656 m	-
10	Lhasa	3,656 m	-
11	Kathmandu	1,400 m	-

Travel, border crossing and permits

You cross a land border on a group visa collected in Kathmandu, and the permits require fifteen to twenty working days to process. This lead time is set by the authorities, not by us.

Overland entry and why we travel this way

On day 3 you drive from Kathmandu to the Kerung border at Rasuwagadhi, and on day 4 you cross the Himalaya over the Gyatso La at 5,236 m onto the plateau. Climbing by road over two days from 1,400 m to 4,300 m is significantly gentler than flying into Lhasa at 3,656 m, and it is the main reason we run the trip in this direction rather than the reverse.

The Kerung road in the monsoon

The Nepali side of the road runs up the Trishuli and Bhote Koshi gorges and is prone to landslides between June and September. The crossing has also closed at short notice for political and administrative reasons more than once in the past decade. We monitor it, and if it closes we fly the group into Lhasa and run the itinerary in reverse. This works, but it is harder on your body.

Flying out from Lhasa

Himalaya Airlines and Sichuan Airlines fly from Lhasa to Kathmandu on weekdays in about one hour and thirty-five minutes. Sit on the left: the whole Himalaya is visible from that side, and you will recognise the ground you drove across. On a clear day it is one of the finest commercial flights in Asia.

Permit lead time of fifteen to twenty working days

The Tibet Travel Permit is issued against a paid, confirmed itinerary and takes fifteen to twenty working days, and the Kathmandu group visa takes a further five. This is the real lead time for this trip. We need passport scans six weeks before departure, preferably eight, as the government office cannot be made to process them faster.

No helicopter rescue in Tibet

This is the most important logistical fact about this trip, and the main difference from travelling in Nepal. If someone is seriously ill at Rongbuk, they are evacuated by vehicle on a long drive down. This is why the itinerary spends two nights climbing to Tingri instead of one, and why we would rather cancel the Everest night than take someone through it while unwell.

Accommodation

Where	Nights	Type	Room	Bathroom
Kathmandu	3	Three-star hotel	Twin or double	Private, hot water
Kerung	1	Simple border-town hotel	Twin	Private, hot water when available
Tingri	1	Basic hotel on the plateau	Twin	Private, water supply intermittent

Rongbuk	1	Monastery guesthouse, the highest overnight stop of the trip	Multiple-share, basic	Shared, no shower, no heating
Shigatse	1	Three-star hotel	Twin	Private, hot water
Gyantse	1	Three-star hotel	Twin	Private, hot water
Lhasa	3	Four-star hotel	Twin or double	Private, hot water

Heating
Available in the Lhasa, Gyantse and Shigatse hotels. Heating is not reliable at Tingri and there is none at Rongbuk, which at 4,980 m is by far the coldest night.

Hot shower
Available everywhere except Rongbuk, so there is only one night without a shower, which is fewer than on any of our treks.

Charging
Available in the hotels, and from the vehicle on the road. There is no reliable power at Rongbuk, so charge everything at Tingri.

Wifi
Available in the Lhasa, Shigatse and Gyantse hotels. Most Western services are blocked in China, so install a VPN before you leave rather than on arrival.

Phone signal
China Mobile covers the whole route, including Rongbuk. Roaming on your home SIM is expensive, and the guide can arrange a local SIM in Shigatse.

Water
Bottled water is carried in the vehicle and included. Tap water is not safe to drink anywhere on this route.

Oxygen
Bottled oxygen is carried in the vehicle for the whole plateau section, particularly for the Rongbuk night.

Bedding
Provided everywhere. At Rongbuk there is a mattress and heavy quilts in a shared room, and you should bring your own sleeping bag to use on top of them.

Meals

Meal	Time	What it is like
Breakfast	7:00–8:00	In the hotels: eggs, bread, congee, tsampa, tea or instant coffee
Lunch	12:30–13:30	On driving days, a roadside restaurant or a packed lunch: noodles, momo, fried rice
Dinner	19:00–20:00	Tibetan and Sichuanese: thukpa, yak curry, stir-fried greens, rice. Lhasa has very good restaurants
Tea	constantly	Sweet milk tea, jasmine tea, or salted butter tea, which is worth trying once but does not suit everyone

Diet	How we manage it
Vegetarian	Straightforward. Chinese and Tibetan kitchens both cook vegetables well, and the guide orders ahead.

Vegan	Possible with notice. Butter, yoghurt and other dairy are used widely in Tibetan cooking, so please tell us when you book.
Gluten free	Rice and most Sichuanese dishes are suitable. Noodles, momo and tsampa are not, and soy sauce contains wheat.
Halal	There are Muslim Chinese restaurants in Lhasa and Shigatse, and the guide knows them. Between these towns, vegetarian food is the practical option.
Meat	Yak, mutton and pork are served throughout. On this route the meat is refrigerated, unlike on a trek, so it is safe to eat.

A typical day

Time	What happens
7:00	Breakfast in the hotel. On driving days it is early, as the days are long
8:00	On the road. Checkpoints are frequent, and your guide handles the paperwork at each one
10:30	First stop at a pass, a viewpoint or a village
12:30	Lunch at a roadside restaurant, or a packed lunch
13:30	Two to four hours more, depending on the day
16:30	Arrive, check in and rest. At altitude, the afternoon is for resting and drinking water
18:00	Oxygen saturation and pulse checked on the plateau days
19:00	Dinner, and a briefing from the guide on the next day
21:00	Bed. The clock runs on Beijing time, so it is often still light

Difficulty and preparation

Difficulty 3 of 5

Very little walking, but significant altitude.

- There is no trekking on this itinerary, only an hour of walking at Rongbuk, the stairs at the Potala and a circuit of the Barkhor.
- Six of the twelve days are driving days of five to eight hours, at between 3,600 m and 5,200 m.
- You sleep at 4,980 m at Rongbuk on day 5, which is higher than any overnight stop on the Everest Base Camp trek except Gorak Shep.
- All of that height is gained in a vehicle, which your body handles less well than gaining it on foot.
- The Potala Palace has several hundred steps at 3,656 m, and it is the most physically demanding part of the visit to Lhasa. It is often underestimated.

Getting ready

Before you book: Consult your doctor
This is particularly important if you are over sixty or have any heart, lung or blood pressure condition. You will sleep at 4,980 m on the fourth day out of Kathmandu, having driven there, in an unheated room, with no helicopter rescue available. Please have this conversation before paying the deposit.

6 weeks before: Light cardiovascular exercise
Two or three sessions a week of any aerobic exercise. It will not protect you from altitude sickness, but it makes the Potala steps and the walk at Rongbuk more comfortable. Six weeks of training will not achieve more than this.

4 weeks before: Prepare your documents
On a trip like this, preparation replaces training. Send us your passport scans, install a VPN on your phone and laptop, buy travel insurance and send us the certificate, and fill any prescriptions with enough to spare.

2 weeks before: Rest
Arriving well rested matters more on this trip than on any of our treks, because you cannot acclimatise effectively when you are exhausted and the altitude is gained quickly by vehicle.

The week before: Do not travel with a chest infection
A cold that would be a minor nuisance at home is a serious problem at 4,980 m and significantly increases your risk of altitude illness. Please tell us rather than travelling anyway; we would much rather move you to a later departure.

Altitude and safety

Altitude is the main difficulty of this trip, and it is easy to underestimate because a vehicle does the climbing. In four days you go from 1,400 m in Kathmandu to 4,980 m at Rongbuk, crossing a 5,236 m pass on the way, without walking any of the ascent. By comparison, the Everest Base Camp trek takes ten days to reach a slightly lower overnight stop and includes two acclimatisation days. Acute mountain sickness is common on this itinerary, and mild cases are to be expected at Tingri and Rongbuk. Two things make it manageable: the overland approach, which gives you two graded nights at 2,800 m and 4,300 m, and the fact that after day 6 you are descending.

What to watch for

- A headache that does not improve with water and paracetamol
- Nausea, or loss of appetite when you would expect to be hungry
- Dizziness, or feeling drunk without having drunk alcohol
- Breathlessness at rest, not only on the stairs
- Poor sleep at Tingri or Rongbuk, or waking short of breath
- Loss of coordination, which means you must descend immediately

How to prevent it

- Drink four litres a day from day 3. The plateau is drier than any other region we visit, and the symptoms of dehydration are the same as those of altitude sickness.
- Rest at Tingri. The night at 4,300 m is there for acclimatisation rather than for the village itself.
- Avoid alcohol from the border to Shigatse, and avoid sleeping pills at any altitude.
- Take the Potala steps slowly. Several hundred steps at 3,656 m on day 9 can affect people who have felt well for a week.
- Discuss Diamox with your doctor, particularly for this itinerary, as all the height is gained in a vehicle.

- Tell your guide about any symptoms at Tingri rather than waiting until Rongbuk. Tingri is where the decision is easiest to make.

What we do

1. Daily health checks
Your guide carries a pulse oximeter and records your oxygen saturation and pulse every evening from day 3, and again on any morning you feel unwell. On a trip where altitude is gained faster than the body adjusts, a written record over four days is more reliable than an individual impression.

2. Oxygen in the vehicle
Bottled oxygen is carried with the group for the whole plateau section, particularly for the Rongbuk night. It is a temporary measure that gives time to descend, not a treatment.

3. Cancelling the Rongbuk night
This is our own protocol and differs from that of most operators. If someone is unwell at Tingri, we visit the Everest viewpoint as a day trip and return to sleep at 4,300 m, or at Shigatse. You see the same mountain from the same place without sleeping at 4,980 m. Several travellers have been glad of this arrangement.

4. Serious symptoms
Descent is the only effective treatment, and here it is quick: Shigatse at 3,900 m is a long day's drive from Rongbuk, and Kerung at 2,800 m can be reached from Tingri. Travelling by road is the main advantage this trip has over a trek.

5. No helicopter rescue and distant hospitals
Helicopter rescue is not available to tourists in Tibet. The nearest adequate hospital is at Shigatse, seven to eight hours from Rongbuk. This is why our protocol cancels the Everest night rather than continuing with it.

Weather by month

The season is long, with one fixed exception: no tours run in March, for administrative reasons rather than because of the weather.

Month	Day at Shigatse	Night at Shigatse	Night at Rongbuk	Conditions	Note
January	3°C	-12°C	-22°C	Hard	Clear, very cold and quiet. The road is usually open, but the Rongbuk guesthouse is closed.
February	5°C	-10°C	-20°C	Hard	Similar to January, becoming warmer late in the month. Losar, the Tibetan new year, falls in February or March, and many places close for it.
March	9°C	-6°C	-16°C	We do not run it	The region routinely closes to foreign visitors for the month. No departures are scheduled.
April	13°C	-2°C	-12°C	Best	The season opens, and this is the clearest month for views of Everest from the north. Rongbuk is cold.

May	17°C	2°C	-9°C	Best	Warm and stable. This is the pre-monsoon climbing season, so Base Camp below Rongbuk is a busy camp of expedition tents.
June	20°C	6°C	-5°C	Good	The warmest month, with cloud building in the afternoons. Landslides begin on the Nepali side of the Kerung road.
July	21°C	8°C	-3°C	Good	The monsoon reaches the Himalayan rim. The plateau stays largely dry, but Everest is often in cloud.
August	20°C	8°C	-3°C	Good	Similar to July. The main risk is the border road rather than conditions on the plateau.
September	18°C	3°C	-8°C	Best	Clearing, warm and stable. Our preferred month for this trip.
October	13°C	-3°C	-14°C	Best	Cold, exceptionally clear and quiet. The last good month of the season, and often the best view of Everest of the year.
November	8°C	-8°C	-18°C	Hard	Clear and very cold. A night at Rongbuk becomes demanding, and some accommodation closes.
December	4°C	-11°C	-21°C	Hard	Cold, bright and quiet. Possible with the right equipment and a willingness to spend an unheated night at 4,980 m.

Averages for the southern Tibetan plateau. The March row is administrative rather than meteorological: the region shuts to foreign visitors for the month.

Guides and porters

Your guide and driver

A licensed Tibetan guide accompanies you for the whole time you are in the region, with a driver who knows the road. The guide is a legal requirement: independent travel by foreign passport holders is not permitted anywhere in Tibet, so you cannot go off on your own, even for an afternoon. Our guides are Tibetan rather than Han Chinese, which makes a difference to what you learn in the monasteries.

What a guide can discuss

Please be aware of this before you ask. Your guide is licensed by a government body and can lose that licence, so there are subjects on which they will change the topic. This is not evasiveness or lack of knowledge; their job and family are at stake. Your guide can tell you a great deal about the iconography, history, monasteries and pilgrims. Please do not press them on contemporary politics, especially near a checkpoint, as this puts them at risk.

The vehicle

A Land Cruiser for a party of four to eight, or a minibus for larger groups, carrying your luggage, bottled water and oxygen. You spend six of the twelve days in it, for five to eight hours each day. This is a road trip across a plateau, and the drive is a large part of the experience.

Tipping

Tipping is not traditional in Tibet but is now expected from tour groups. Allow about $120 to $180 per traveller for the guide and driver together, handed over on the last evening in Lhasa.

Responsible travel

Photography

Inside most monastery halls, photography is either forbidden or charged for, sometimes at CNY 100 per chapel, and the money goes to the monastery. Please ask, and respect the answer. The following rules are strict: do not photograph military installations, checkpoints, border posts or police, do not photograph monks without asking, and do not photograph anyone who is prostrating.

Sky burials

You may be offered the chance to see a sky burial. Please do not go. It is a funeral, families are present, and in several parts of Tibet spectators are now prohibited by law. An operator that arranges this is acting disrespectfully and, increasingly, illegally.

Supporting local communities

Less of your money stays local than on our Nepal treks. The permits and reserve fees go to Chinese government bodies. The hotels, vehicles and guiding are largely Tibetan-run. Monastery entry fees, which on this itinerary come to well over a hundred dollars per person, go directly to the monasteries and are the most useful money you will spend here.

Protecting the Rongbuk valley

The road to the north side has made Everest accessible to anyone with a Land Cruiser, and the valley shows the effects. Rubbish, vehicle emissions and the number of visitors are an ongoing problem, and the Chinese authorities have responded by limiting access and running the eco-buses. We carry our waste out to Shigatse and use the buses, and we ask you not to leave prayer flags or anything else at the viewpoint.

Booking and payment

Booking before the permit application

This is the reverse of most travel. The Tibet Travel Permit is issued against a confirmed, paid itinerary that names your hotels and guide, so you commit to the trip before you know whether the permit will be approved. This is why our Tibet deposits require a longer lead time than any of our other trips.

Documents we need and when

We need clear colour scans of your passport photo page at least six weeks before departure, with your occupation on the form. Journalists, photographers, diplomats and anyone with 'government' in their job title are routinely refused. If you tell us your occupation accurately and early, we can usually find a way to proceed. An inaccurate answer discovered at the border cannot be resolved.

Group visa requirements

The Kathmandu group visa is issued to a party on one visa, and current practice requires at least five travellers. A couple can join one of our departures. A private Tibet trip from Kathmandu for two people is not possible, and we will tell you so rather than take a deposit.

Refund if the permit is refused

Refusals happen occasionally, with no reason given and no appeal. If this happens, we refund the Tibet portion in full. This is the one part of a Tibet booking where we carry the risk rather than you, and we recommend asking any operator that does not offer this why they do not.

Optional extras

Namtso lake
from $340, +2 days
A sacred lake at 4,718 m north of Lhasa, reached over the Largen La at 5,190 m, and the most photographed place in Tibet after the Potala. The extension takes two days, and the night at the lake is cold.

Two extra nights in Lhasa
$310, +2 days
Time to visit Ganden monastery, see the Norbulingka in full, and spend longer in the Barkhor rather than only walking its circuit. Lhasa benefits from a slower pace more than the rest of this itinerary.

Fly in as well as out
saves 2 days, costs $260, -2 days
For travellers who are short of time. It removes the graded overland approach, which is the most important feature of this itinerary, so we generally advise against it.

Everest Base Camp trek, Nepal side
from $1,867, +16 days
See Everest from both sides in one trip. Travellers who have done both say the two sides feel very different.

The Friendship Highway to Kathmandu
no change, same length
Drive out via Kerung instead of flying, reversing the itinerary. You spend two more days on the road and save the cost of the flight, but you miss the view from the aircraft.

Single room where available
$290
For the hotel nights in Kathmandu, Kerung, Tingri, Shigatse, Gyantse and Lhasa. At Rongbuk all rooms are shared, and a single room is not possible.

Frequently asked questions

Answers to the 22 questions travellers ask us most often. If your question is not here, contact us and we will answer it.

How does this compare with trekking to Everest Base Camp in Nepal?
They are very different trips. In Nepal you fly to Lukla and walk for ten days to reach the moraine at 5,364 m below the icefall, where the summit is not visible. Here you drive up the Rongbuk valley to 5,200 m, and Everest

stands at the head of the valley with a clear view of its three and a half vertical kilometres. The Nepal trek is the better journey; the Tibet route has the better view of the mountain.

Can you drive to Everest Base Camp?

You can drive to within a few kilometres of it. This is the only base camp on the mountain that a vehicle can reach. Private vehicles stop at Rongbuk monastery, and a short eco-bus ride takes you to the viewpoint. There is about an hour of walking in total on the whole trip.

Will I stand at Everest Base Camp?

You stand at the tourist viewpoint at around 5,200 m, where the road and the eco-bus end. The climbers' base camp is a little further up and is closed to visitors during the climbing season. From the viewpoint you see the north face of Everest in its best-known view.

Can I visit both the Tibet and Nepal sides of Everest?

Yes. Travellers who have done both say the two sides feel very different. The usual plan is this trip followed by the Nepal trek, or the reverse, in about a month. We arrange this combination regularly.

How demanding is the altitude if there is little walking?

The altitude is the most important thing to understand about this trip. In four days you go from 1,400 m to sleeping at 4,980 m at Rongbuk, crossing a 5,236 m pass, without walking any of the ascent. That is higher than any overnight stop on the Everest Base Camp trek except Gorak Shep, and you reach it on day four rather than day ten. Mild altitude sickness at Tingri and Rongbuk is common.

What happens if I feel unwell before Rongbuk?

We cancel the Rongbuk night rather than take you through it. This is our own protocol, not an industry standard. You visit the Everest viewpoint as a day trip from Tingri and return to 4,300 m to sleep, or continue to Shigatse. You see the same mountain from the same place.

Is there oxygen?

Yes. Bottled oxygen is carried in the vehicle for the whole plateau section, particularly for the Rongbuk night. It gives time to descend; it does not treat altitude sickness.

What happens in an emergency?

You descend by road, which is the main advantage this trip has over a trek. There is no helicopter rescue for tourists in Tibet. The nearest adequate hospital is at Shigatse, seven to eight hours from Rongbuk, and Kathmandu is a day and a half away. Insurance covering evacuation and repatriation is a condition of booking.

What do I need to enter Tibet?

You need a China group visa issued in Kathmandu, which is different from a normal Chinese visa, and the Tibet Travel Permit, which we apply for against a paid itinerary. No other documents are needed on this route. The Alien's Travel Permit was dropped for the Shigatse prefecture, which covers Everest, in June 2025, although some operators still list it.

Should I get a Chinese visa before I travel?

No, please do not apply for one. The Kathmandu group visa cancels any Chinese visa already in your passport, so a visa obtained at home is wasted money and can cause complications at the border.

How far in advance do I need to book?

At least two months, and three months is advisable. The Tibet Travel Permit takes fifteen to twenty working days and the group visa a further five, and both are applied for only against a paid booking. This lead time is set by the government office, and we cannot shorten it.

Can two people travel on their own?

Not on our departures. The Kathmandu group visa is issued to a party, and current practice requires at least five names on one visa. Two people can join a scheduled departure. This is the limit of what we can arrange from Kathmandu.

Can the permit be refused?

Occasionally, with no reason given and no appeal. If this happens, we refund the Tibet portion in full. Occupation is the usual cause: journalists, photographers, diplomats and anyone with 'government' in their job title are routinely declined. Please tell us your occupation accurately when you enquire, and we can usually find a way to proceed.

Why is nothing scheduled in March?

Tibet routinely closes to foreign visitors for the whole of March and sometimes into April, around the anniversary of the 1959 uprising. The closure is announced with a few days' notice or none. None of our trips start in March, and we advise caution with any operator that runs departures that month.

How much of this is spent in a vehicle?

Six of the twelve days, for five to eight hours each. This is what crossing the plateau involves, and you should be aware of it before booking. The drive is spectacular, crossing two 5,000 m passes and passing Yamdrok Tso, but it is still six long days in a vehicle.

What is Rongbuk like?

Rongbuk is the highest monastery in the world, at 4,980 m, and the guesthouse beside it is basic, shared and unheated. It is cold, and you are unlikely to sleep well, but it is the most memorable night of the trip. Bring your own sleeping bag to use on top of the quilts.

Will the internet work?

The connection will work, but most of the services you use will not, because the usual Western services are blocked in China. Install a VPN on every device before you leave Nepal, as you cannot download one once you have crossed the border.

Can I take photographs in the monasteries?

Outside, you can take photographs freely. Inside the halls, photography is often forbidden and sometimes charged, occasionally at CNY 100 per chapel, and that money goes to the monastery. Please ask each time. Never photograph checkpoints, military installations or police, and never photograph someone who is prostrating.

Can I ask my guide about politics?

Your guide can tell you a great deal about history, iconography, monasteries and pilgrims. Please do not press them on contemporary politics, particularly near a checkpoint, as this puts their licence and their family at risk. If you ask, your guide will change the subject.

When is the best time to go?

April and October give the clearest views of Everest from the north, and September is our preferred month for the whole route. May is excellent but busy, as the climbing season below Rongbuk is under way. July and August are warm, and the mountain is often in cloud.

Why does this trip cost more per day than your other trips?

A party of four needs the same Land Cruiser, the same driver and the same licensed guide for nine days as a party of twelve, and these make up close to half the price. The cost also covers five permits, a one-way international flight, monastery fees of well over a hundred dollars per person, and hotels rather than teahouses. Very little of the price is margin.

Is the overland route reliable?

It is mostly reliable, but not entirely. The Kerung road is prone to landslides on the Nepali side between June and September, and the crossing has closed at short notice for administrative reasons more than once. If it closes, we fly the group into Lhasa and run the itinerary in reverse. This works, but it is harder on your body.

Photos, videos and reviews of this trip: earthbound.rajansimkhada.com/everest-base-camp-tibet-tour