

HIMALAYAN EXPRESS, 21 DAYS

This document was designed to be read in conjunction with our other pre-departure information provided after you have made a booking with Wendy Wu Tours. It aims to provide a straightforward description of the physical activities involved in sightseeing or travelling during the tour. All passengers should read this dossier to confirm their ability to complete the tour. This is not your **Final Itinerary** and therefore does not mention all the sites visited.

Tour grade – Active paced tour

This is defined in our brochure as the following: “Refers to programmes where personal involvement is necessary, which can travel to remote areas and that may contain areas of high altitude, between 3,000 and 5,200m. These tours may involve some hiking. Accommodation on these tours may be in simple hostels or camps in remote areas. These programmes also require a good level of fitness.”

The Himalayan Express travels by the Qinghai-Tibet Railway - the highest in the world- from Tibet and the Qinghai Plateau to Beijing; the capital and one of the most developed cities within China. Some parts of this itinerary include areas that are remote and developing. It is essential that all passengers recognise the demands and difficulties of factors such as basic facilities, travelling at altitude and cultural differences. The rewards of seeing and experiencing these lands is immeasurable and can only be enhanced by an adventurous spirit.

Participants need to have a good level of fitness and be able to walk over uneven surfaces without assistance. Sightseeing may involve walking and/or travelling over rough roads for extended periods. Our local guides always endeavour to provide the highest level of service and assistance, but they cannot be expected to cater for passengers who are unfit to complete the itinerary.

The more difficult aspects of this itinerary involve areas of high altitude and very long driving distances. Please refer to Your Travel Guide's TRAVEL HEALTH section for further information. The ITINERARY section below also has estimates of driving times and distances, as well as the altitude reached each day you are in Tibet.

Group size

In most cases, the group size will operate with a minimum of 10 passengers.

China Tipping

As with most countries, tipping is a way of life in China. For our passengers' convenience we ask for a compulsory amount to be paid at the beginning of our group tours to cover tipping for guides, drivers, restaurant staff etc. Approximate tipping amounts can be found in our brochure and/or website. Exact tipping amounts will be stated in your final documentation, approximately 3 weeks before departure.

Itinerary changes

1. Order of events and sightseeing may vary according to local conditions.
2. The Hall of Supreme Harmony within the Forbidden City complex in Beijing has recently undergone comprehensive restoration work.
3. If time permits during your Beijing touring you will be taken through the Beijing Olympic precinct to view and photograph such sites as the Beijing Olympic Stadium (the Bird's Nest) and the Aquatic Centre (water cube). This would normally occur on the day you visit the Great Wall.
4. In late 2006, the Tibetan Govt imposed a new system of allocating entrance tickets to the Potala Palace. To limit the number of tourists inside at any one time, tickets must be bought in advance and are valid for a set time of day. Our local office will buy the tickets for our passengers, so you do not have to queue for them. Please note that this may affect the order of the rest of your sightseeing in Lhasa too.
5. In 2006, the Tibet-Qinghai Railway officially opened and began operation, from newly constructed

stations and railways in Tibet, over the Himalaya, Tangula and Kunlun mountain ranges and connecting with existing railways from the central Qinghai Province. The itinerary which appears in our 2009/10 brochure travels by air from Chengdu to Lhasa and then by train from Lhasa to Beijing. We have chosen this routing in order to ensure we can confirm our passengers' tickets for the new railway section, and because we have had so much interest from passengers.

6. The railway section between Xining and Xian is in high demand and can be difficult to confirm for groups numbering more than 15 people. This means that the itinerary for Days 12 and 13 is *very* subject to change. If overnight soft sleeper tickets are unavailable, you will be able to take an earlier train and travel during the day (soft seat class). This train would arrive in Xian shortly before midnight, allowing you to check in at the hotel overnight and rest the next morning.

Altitude

This tour includes areas of high altitude from 3,650m in Lhasa to over 5,000m during the Qinghai-Tibetan Railway journey. We will spend a period of 10 days above 3,000m from Day 3 to 12.

Please refer to Your Travel Guide's TRAVEL HEALTH section for further information. If you have an existing respiratory, vascular or coronary condition, we recommend checking with your Doctor before undertaking this itinerary.

Roads

Roads in this region have generally been improved over recent years, but road or weather conditions may still lengthen driving times. Road construction work in China usually

encompasses a large section of road - not a couple of kilometres as you would be used to. For this reason, the timings listed in the section below are approximations only.

Rail Journeys

This trip involves 3 overnight train journeys. Please refer to Your Travel Guide's TRANSPORT section for details.

It is important to understand that the train carriages used are not luxurious, but simply the best available in China - similar to the standard of the First Class (soft sleeper, 4 berth per compartment) carriages that we travel in for our other tours in China. Please refer to Your Travel Guide for more details. For the new section, between Xining and Lhasa, the carriages have one important difference: oxygen outlets above each sleeping berth and in the dining car for passengers to use if they need.

Meals

In the other areas of China; more often visited by western tourists, the hotels serve some western dishes for breakfast. In this region there will be some hotels which serve few if any western dishes for breakfast. Chinese and Tibetan breakfast dishes include cold vegetable/ pickle dishes, bean curd noodles, soups, *congee* (a rice porridge), steamed buns with pork or sweet red bean and green tea. You may also be served fruit, a fried egg, or toast - although the bread tends to be very sweet and unlike the bread we have in Australia. Black tea and coffee are not always served, but can usually be requested. Fresh milk is not generally available. Also, some restaurants don't serve alcohol and it is inappropriate to bring your own.

Sichuan cuisine (or Szechwan as it is still known in the West) is distinguished by its use of ginger, chilli and the "Sichuan peppercorn" called *bagara*. Each meal will usually have some mild dishes for those who don't enjoy eating hot or spicy food, but please bear in mind that the majority of local specialty dishes will be hot. If your group finds there are not any mild dishes served, please inform your National Escort/Local Guide so that they may resolve the problem for the next meal.

Please note that long driving distances or road conditions may delay/alter your mealtime.

Your Suggested Packing List lists some snacks that you may like to bring with you from Australia. There are also some small supermarkets in Chengdu where you can buy similar items (except UHT or powdered milk, which is best bought in Australia).

Within monasteries

The interior of all Tibetan monasteries is quite dark and usually lit by yak butter candles. Please remember to walk slowly and carefully, let your eyes adjust to the darkness and watch your step. Always walk in a clockwise direction along pilgrim circuits, around shrines, alters, temples and prayer wheels. If you are unsure of suitable and respectful behaviour within such places, please ask your local guide's advice.

Different names of towns

Many places in China have several different names, including some of those which we have used in our brochure, maps and itineraries. You may find it confusing when researching your tour but please remember the fact that there are so many languages and cultures in this region. For example, one town may have five different names used in the Chinese (Mandarin), Tibetan, Indian and Kham languages. The Tibetan name is frequently spelt phonetically when used by English speakers, so 'x' becomes 'sh'. The result could be six different names for one place.

Here is a list of some places along the Himalayan Express route and their alternatives:

Shigatse / Xigaze

Tashilhunpo / Zhanshilunbu Si

Gyantse / Jyantse

Pelkor Monastery / Palkhor Chode

Tibet / Xizang

Mekong River / Lancang Jiang / Dza Chu

Yangtze River / Jinsha Jiang

Salween River / Nu Jiang

Brahmaputra River / Yarlung Tsampo Fort / Dzong

Monastery / Gompa

Shrine / Chorten / Stupa

NB: Times and distances listed in this section are approximations only.

Day 1: Australia/Chengdu

You will be met at Chengdu airport in the arrivals hall by your Local Guide and/or National Escort from Wendy Wu Tours. Together with all other group members who may be arriving at a similar time, you will transfer (1hr drive) to your hotel. Either tonight or tomorrow morning, a tour introduction will be held in the hotel. There will not be food or drinks served at this meeting; it is simply an opportunity for your group to meet and learn more about travelling in China. There will not be sightseeing today.

Day 2: Chengdu

The Panda Reserve is located only 10km from the city centre. It is not guaranteed that you will be able to see the feeding of the younger pandas, as this only happens at the very start and end of each day. Sightseeing here involves at least 1½ hrs on foot. Easy sightseeing in afternoon.

Day 3: Chengdu/Lhasa

Lhasa altitude 3,650m

Transfer (30mins drive) to the airport for your morning flight to Lhasa (flight duration 2hrs). Drive 2 hrs (95km) north to the city of Lhasa and check in at hotel. The remainder of the day is at leisure to allow for acclimatisation to the higher altitude; you are advised to rest and drink lots of fluids.

Days 4, 5 & 6: Lhasa

Over the next 3 days you will be able to explore some of the most sacred places and sites in Tibet, amongst the procession of pilgrims and bustle of the capital city. Sightseeing at *all* of the monasteries and palaces involves climbing steps and walking over uneven surfaces in dim light.

Day 7: Lhasa/Gyantse

Maximum altitude today 5,050m

Gyantse altitude 4,000m

The road is closed between here and Lhasa, so you will need to drive via Shigatse and then drive along the Northern Friendship Highway to Gyantse. Total driving today via Shigatse is 7hrs/260km. In the afternoon visit the Pelkor Monastery and the Gyantse Kumbum. Sightseeing here involves the coach driving you

half way up the hill to parking lot then you must climb stairs (15 mins).

Day 8: Gyantse/Shigatse

Maximum altitude today 4,300m

Shigatse altitude 3,900m

From Gyantse, drive through the Nyang-Chu Valley to Shigatse. Explore the Tashilhunpo Monastery, a significant and active place of study as well as the seat of the Panchen Lamas. It is a very large complex so you will be able to spend significant here. Check in at hotel. Shigatse is a major town which has been developed by the Central Government to become the second largest city in Tibet. However, it still retains an interesting local market and one of the largest functioning monasteries in Tibet. Total driving is approx 2 hrs/90km.

Day 9: Shigatse/Lhasa via Yandrok Lake

Maximum altitude today 5,050m

Drive approx 220km along the Northern Friendship Highway, then turn south along Kyichu River, cross the Yarlung Tsangpo and ascend the Karo La Pass @ 5050m. From here you can see spectacular views of the Yamdrok Tso Lake and Nojin-Kangtsang Glacier. Enjoy a simple picnic lunch prepared by the hotel this morning, or at a local restaurant. This afternoon, continue driving north to Lhasa and check in at hotel. Total driving today via Yamdrok Lake is 7 hours/370km.

Day 10: Lhasa/Xining

Maximum altitude on railway 5072m

This morning, transfer ½ hr to the train station for your overnight train to Xining. This journey usually takes 25 hrs (approx 1,900 km). During the day you will ascend to the highest point at the Tanggula Pass @5,072m but spend most of the journey at 4,000m.

Day 11: Xining

Xining altitude 2,300m

[NB: Check out time in China is midday so you may not be able to check in to your room until then.]

You will arrive this morning at Xining, capital of Qinghai Province, and transfer (½ hr drive) to the hotel, check in and have breakfast. Leisurely visit to local ethnic village.

Day 12: Xining/Xian

This morning drive 1 hr (26km) to visit the Ta'er Temple. Sightseeing here

involves 2hrs on foot and the pilgrim circuit (*kora*) involves walking over uneven ground and climbing some slopes. Please note that you will start and finish in the same spot, so this can be done at your own pace. This evening, transfer back to the train station for your overnight train to Xian. This journey usually takes 10 hrs (over 890km).

Day 13: Xian

You will arrive at Xian station late in the morning and transfer to your hotel, where you can leave your luggage and freshen up. Sightseeing at the Little Wild Goose Pagoda involves at least 1 hr on foot.

[NB: Check out time in China is midday so your group's rooms are unlikely to be available. This morning you will commence sightseeing and return to hotel later to check in to your rooms.]

Day 14: Xian

The Museum of the Terracotta Warriors is located more than 1 hr drive outside of Xian. From the bus park to the Museum entrance is a 15 minute walk, usually without any shade. There are electric carts offered by private vendors, which can be organised at your own cost. There is no electric cart available for the return from Museum exit to Bus Park. Within the Museum area the warriors can be seen in 3 different "pits", which are active archaeological digs. The site is large and, towards the summer months, can be hot outside. Sightseeing here involves 2½ hrs on foot. To visit the City Walls this afternoon you will need to walk up the stairs onto the wall, then the Local Guide will give you time to explore at your own pace. There are options here to hire a bicycle or an electric cart to drive along the length of the walls. These are offered by private vendors and can be organised at your own cost.

Day 15: Xian/Beijing

Morning at leisure before checking out before midday. Sightseeing at the Shaanxi Museum, and Muslim Quarter involves 2hrs on foot. Take care of your valuables while in the Muslim Quarter's alley market stalls. Transfer to Xian Station in the early evening. This journey usually takes 12 hrs (over 1,200 km).

Day 16: Beijing

You will arrive at Beijing West Train Station and transfer to your hotel, where you can have breakfast and freshen up. Afterwards drive 1 ½ hrs to the Summer Palace in the north of the city. The palace is set over an extensive park and man-made lake complex and there is 2 to 3 hours walking involved at this site.

[NB: Check out time in China is midday so your group's rooms are unlikely to be available. This morning you will commence sightseeing and return to hotel later to check in.]

Day 17: Beijing

Sightseeing in central Beijing involves 3 to 4 hrs on foot during the morning to see Tiananmen Square and the Forbidden City. Visiting Mao's Mausoleum is subject to the length of the queue, as so many domestic tourists visit every day. In the afternoon visit the Temple of Heaven in central Beijing - at least 2 hours sightseeing on foot here.

Day 18: Beijing

We have an early rise this morning to drive 1 ½ hrs (50 km) northwest of the city to the Juyongguan Pass section of the Great Wall. The aim of this is to avoid the crowds of tourists who will arrive later in the morning, and the heat of the day. Visiting the Wall involves walking a steep path of 200m from the bus to the first section. After your group has been given an introduction to the Great Wall's unique history you will have free time to explore the rest at your own pace.

Day 19: Depart Beijing

Any time before your flight is at leisure. You will be transferred from the hotel to the airport, according to the departure time of your international flight.

Day 20: Australia

Arrive home.

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