



PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF CHINA

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China is vast, physically and culturally. The landscapes we are familiar with: the deep, sweeping desert stretching from Siberia; the snaking Yangtze, unravelling its brown torrent of life from Tibet to Shanghai; flat green expanses of farmland punctuated by thrusting limestone karst pinnacles. Much has been written about the physical beauty of the Chinese landscape and her iconic sites: the Great Wall, Forbidden Temple and the Terracotta Warriors. Little, however, is mentioned of her people and the ethnic diversity of the population as you travel to different corners of her map.

China's immense population contains pockets of minority groups with very distinct cultures. Of China's 1.3 billion people, 92% of are of Han origin. 56 minority groups make up the remaining 8% and display a kaleidoscope of cultural diversity, with each ethnic group having a unique set of traditions, dress, architecture, even language and facial features. The pockets of land along China's southwest border, the often-rugged landscape of the Tibetan plateau, and the spectacular expanse of land on the frontiers of Central Asia and Mongolia are the best places for glimpses into these fascinating cultures.



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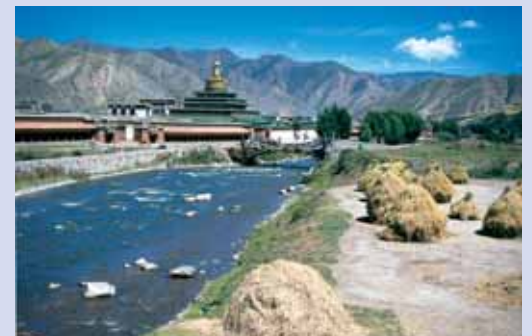
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Visits to the areas mentioned can readily be incorporated into tours of China for the first time visitor or for those returning to explore further. A 16-night tailor-made tour of Southwest China, for example, would cost from £2,095 per person based on two people travelling. For further details please call our China Specialists, Paul, Steve, Huw and David on 01869 276 217.



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Concentrated in the ancient lake-side town of Dali, the Bai people have a history of over 3,000 years, reflected in the fine architecture of local temples and pagodas. Be sure to visit one of the bustling, colourful markets as the locals haggle for their tomatoes, have their teeth pulled, or trade their goats. If that doesn't tempt you then try the UNESCO town of Lijiang, in the shadow of Jade Dragon Snow Mountain, or the picturesque villages by remote Lake Lugu. This region is steeped in the matriarchal traditions of the Naxi and Mosu people, where the women wear the pants and maintain their hold over men with flexible arrangements for love affairs. Many sights may be familiar as it was featured in the documentary 'Beyond the Clouds' and was recently visited by Michael Palin on his 'Himalaya' trip.



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The route north from Lijiang to Zhongdian is an arduous yet rewarding journey of zigzags and switchbacks - one side of the car with views of bottomless gorges, the other of craggy peaks. The changing landscape and the rising altitude remind you that, though still within China, you are now ascending onto the Tibetan plateau. As if mirroring this thought you soon notice that the temples have been replaced with monasteries, and that people are now swathed in Buddhist cloth. The Tibetan people are perhaps the most instantly recognisable of China's ethnic minorities, with their colourful prayer-flags blowing Buddhist wishes into the Himalayas, their flowing chubas (cloak) and serene demeanour. Many thriving Tibetan communities exist in this spectacular strip of high steppe stretching north from western Yunnan to Sichuan and Gansu provinces. The towns of Zhongdian, Deqin and Xiahe are three of our favourites.



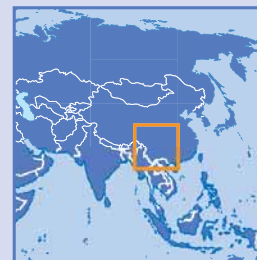
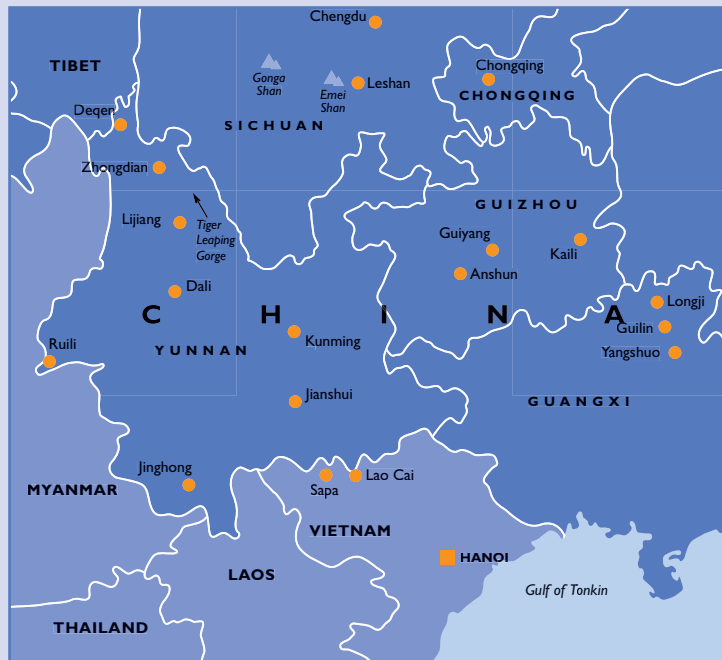
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Guangxi and Guizhou are two of the most scenically and ethnically diverse provinces in China, full of postcard moments and colourful highlights. The scenery is the stuff of glossy tourist brochures - shimmering rivers uncoiling between jagged limestone pinnacles; undulating bamboo forests lathered in green; rice terraces placed with geometrical precision – but it is the people that make this region truly fascinating. Despite their geographical proximity, the cultures of the Miao and Dong people are quite distinct. The Dong are famed for their community spirit, their hospitality and their architecture, whilst the Miao, who are ethnically linked to the Hmong of Laos and Vietnam, have a reputation for their extravagant jewellery, and personal accumulation.

If you are fortunate enough to visit this area of China, be sure to take in the communal drum towers and wind and rain bridges in Dong villages



- 1 Naxi women, Lijiang
- 2 Local Bai market, Dali
- 3 Yao girls at Longji
- 4 Labuleng Tibetan Monastery, Xiahe
- 5 Wind and Rain Bridge, Chengyang

such as Chengyang and Zhaoxing (traditionally constructed without nails from the timber of at least 300 fir trees) and be present during festival time in the remote villages surrounding Kaili to witness Miao girls adorned in huge horned, silver headdresses and silver crowns resplendent with delicate silver birds, flowers and coins.

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