

2015 China Tour: 13th-25th of October

THE MERIDIAN SOCIETY

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The Tea Horse Road

Introduction

This historical tour retraces the steps of the legendary "Tea Horse Trail" (*Chama Gudao* 茶马道) taken by the Caravans of Yunnan province since the *Tang* Dynasty.

The route earned its name from the common trade of Tibetan ponies for Chinese tea. These ponies were instrumental for the war against the nomads to the North of China. It is speculated that through this network tea was originally introduced to the rest of Asia and eventually, the world.



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✚ Kunming (昆明)

Kunming city is a must-see for any Chinese enthusiast. The capital is famous for its weather; nicknamed the "City of Eternal Spring" the capital is usually awash in flowers and lush greenery.



✚ Dali (大理)

The city of *Dali* has a rich history going back hundreds of years. The old city used to be the capital of both the kingdoms of *Nanzhao* and *Dali*, and later played a central role in the Panthay Rebellion.

Nowadays, the old city and new city are kept separate, so the picturesque old city has managed to conserve peace and quiet in the rush of modern life.

✚ Wei Shan (巍山)

The old town of *Weishan* has over 600 years of history and had once been the capital of the *Nanzhao* Kingdom.

Today, you can still see the original city tower, and gridded layout of the streets.



✚ Shaxi (沙溪)



Shaxi was a very important stop for anyone travelling the Tea Horse Road.

Both the tea and the salt were highly sought after, and today the village square and nearby houses are still in their original form.

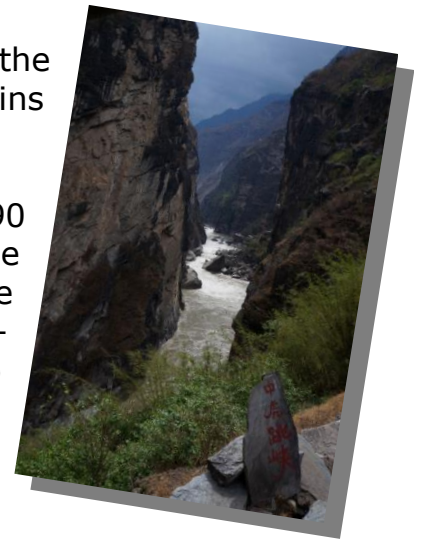
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✚ Tiger Leaping Gorge (*Hutiao Xia* 虎跳峡)

The Tiger Leaping Gorge is the narrowest part of the *Jinsha* River where the steep walls of the mountains on the two sides have created an impressive view.

Containing a maximum depth of approximately 3790 metres from river to mountain peak, it is one of the deepest and most spectacular river canyons in the world. The whole gorge features a variety of micro-ecosystems and waterfalls, and visitors are sure to experience a unique spot of natural beauty.



✚ Shangri-La (*Xianggelila* 香格里拉) - formerly *Zhong dian*

Named after the James Hilton novel *Lost Horizon*, Shangri-La is the largest Tibetan town in *Yunnan* province. The town is surrounded by beautiful snow mountains, rich pasture lands and barley fields.



✚ *Lijiang* (丽江)

Lijiang was central to the production of silk and embroidery throughout history; the women of *Lijiang* are renowned for their skilled hand-made embroidery.

In ancient times *Lijiang* was the largest market in *Yunnan*, and caravans would converge to buy and sell goods, as well as take a rest and stock up on supplies before they continue on this perilous journey. It is possible to still meet old caravan leaders in this area!



Photographs 2 and 11 are courtesy of Michael Freeman – copyright. His book '*Tea Horse Road*' co-authored with Selena Ahmed is published by River Books 2011. Copies can be obtained at Arthur Probsthain Bookshop.

Tour Overview



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The tour will commence in *Kunming*, the capital of *Yunnan*. For the first day we'll spend time relaxing and exploring one of the most leisurely cities in China. The following day we will depart *Kunming* by flight to *Jinghong*, the capital city of *Xishuangbanna* prefecture, home to many different minority groups. Firstly, a trip to the *Nannuo* Mountain, where we will visit different villages where tea is produced and sample different teas. Afterwards, we will head onwards to *Menghai*, and visit family tea processing workshops.

On the third day we will visit *Xidang*, a small village with a cheerful market. After the market we will head to *Jinghong* to visit the Tropical Botanical Garden. The following day we will travel to the old town of *Yiwu*, to visit the old trading houses and learn about the significance of *Yiwu* during the period of the Tea Horse Trail. Afterwards, we will travel back to *Jinghong* for dinner and relaxation.

The fifth day starts with a flight to *Dali*, where we will explore the old city with the chance to rent bikes or to take the cable car up *Cang* Mountain. The whole of the next day will be spent exploring *Weishan*. The following day will be a trip to two villages, *Zhouceng* and *Xizhou*, both ancient and steeped in local traditions. Afterwards we will transfer to *Shaxi*, and spend time exploring the city. The next morning we will have the choice of either visiting and spending a leisurely morning at the old town of *Shaxi* or discovering the Buddhist Grottoes of the *Shibao* Mountain. Following lunch we will travel to the Tiger Leaping Gorge.

The morning of the ninth day we will have the option of a robust hike down to the river. After exploring the gorge we will travel to *Shangri-la*, the Tibetan hub of *Yunnan*. It is from here that the road became even more dangerous and almost impassable for the tea horse caravans as they entered into the territory of Tibet. Time here will be spent visiting the *Pudacuo* National Park and a *Lama* Monastery. The morning of the eleventh day will find us exploring the small town of *Benzilan*, a traditional Tibetan town with lively markets. That evening we will travel on to *Lijiang*. The penultimate day will be spent visiting *Shuhe*, *Baisha* and *Dayan* in *Lijiang*. We will have a farewell dinner before taking an overnight train back to *Kunming*.

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PRICES

Meridian and SACU members: £1520.00 per person (including all "tour inclusions" in a shared twin bedroom).

Non-members: £1580.00 per person (including all "tour inclusions" in a shared twin bedroom).

Single room supplement: £235.

Deposit: £300



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Deposit Deadline Date: 15/05/2015

Full Payment Deadline Date: 15/08/2015

Details

The price includes accommodation, meals, all travel, the services of a tour leader and a local guide.

It does not include entry fees, personal expenses, drinks during the meals other than tea/coffee, expenses related to activities not mentioned on the programme, international flights, visa fees, accident/health insurance or gratuities.

We have not included airfares or other travel costs to and from Kunming where this tour starts and ends to enable travellers to travel independently either before or after the tour, if they so wish. For a small administration fee we can organise domestic flights and extra nights in Kunming. Details will be available when you book the tour.

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Detailed Itinerary

Days and Location	Details	Overnight Stay	Included Services
Day 1 <i>Kunming</i>	Group assembles at <i>Kunming</i> Hotel to start tour. There will be time for you to explore <i>Kunming</i> on your own. Despite modern development it is still a very laid-back town.	<i>Kunming</i> Four Season Flowers Hotel 3*	Coach transfer; Local English speaking guide; Hotel accommodation; Dinner.
Day 2 <i>Kunming</i> - <i>Jinghong</i> - <i>Nannuo</i> Mountain - <i>Menghai</i>	Depart <i>Kunming</i> by morning flight to <i>Jinghong</i> . From the airport, you will be transferred directly to <i>Nannuo</i> Mountain, one of the famous tea mountains where the <i>Aini</i> people grow and produce the <i>Pu'er</i> tea. Here, we'll visit a couple of different villages where tea is produced, and sample the tea that is grown on the hills of <i>Nannuo</i> at the home of the local people. Then we will transfer to <i>Menghai</i> and visit one or two family tea processing workshops.	<i>Menghai</i> Hotel 4*	Coach transfer; Local English speaking guide; Hotel accommodation; Breakfast; Lunch; Dinner.
Day 3 <i>Menghai</i> - <i>Xiding</i> - <i>Jinghong</i>	Morning transfer to <i>Xiding</i> ; there is a colourful weekly market in this tiny village where villagers from near and far come to gather to buy and sell their goods. You will be able to encounter people of different ethnic groups and after the market we'll continue onto <i>Jinghong</i> to visit the Tropical Botanical Gardens.	<i>Jinghong</i> Hotel 3*	Local English speaking guide; Hotel accommodation; Breakfast; Lunch; Dinner.
Day 4 <i>Jinghong</i> - <i>Yiwu</i> - <i>Jinghong</i>	We will go to the old town of <i>Yiwu</i> , and visit the old tea trading houses, learning about the significance of <i>Yiwu</i> during the tea house period. For the evening we will return to <i>Jinghong</i> for dinner and free time afterwards to wander around the city.	<i>Jinghong</i> Hotel 3*	Coach transfer; Local English speaking guide; Hotel accommodation; Breakfast; Lunch; Dinner.

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Day 5 <i>Jinhong</i> - <i>Dali</i>	<p>Morning flight from <i>Jinhong</i> to <i>Dali</i>. Then, coach transfer to the hotel to check in and visit the old town city gates and city walls.</p> <p>During the evening there will be free time in <i>Dali</i>, with the options of renting bikes or taking the cable car up to the peak of the <i>Cang</i> Mountain.</p>	<i>Dali</i> Fairyland hotel	<p>Flight from <i>Jinhong</i> to <i>Dali</i>; Coach transfer; Local English speaking guide; hotel accommodation; Breakfast; Lunch; Dinner.</p>
Day 6 <i>Dali</i> - <i>Weishan</i> - <i>Dali</i>	<p>After breakfast we will transfer to the ancient city of <i>Weishan</i>. Near <i>Weishan</i> are <i>Hui</i> communities who played an important role during the tea horse trade. Then we will visit the former home of a <i>Hui</i> caravan leader.</p> <p>During the late afternoon we will return to <i>Dali</i>, and have a free evening.</p>	<i>Dali</i> Fairyland hotel	<p>Coach transfer; Local English speaking guide; Hotel accommodation; Breakfast; Lunch; Dinner.</p>
Day 7 <i>Dali</i> - <i>Shaxi</i>	<p>Transfer to <i>Shaxi</i> after breakfast, stopping at both <i>Zhoucheng</i> and <i>Xizhou</i>, two ancient villages not far from <i>Dali</i> which still preserve much of the local traditions. <i>Zhoucheng</i> is famous for its tie-dye, and <i>Xizhou</i> was the hub for the biggest trading families.</p> <p>In the afternoon we will travel to <i>Shaxi</i>, another important stop on the tea horse trail.</p>	<i>Shaxi</i> Boutique Guesthouse	<p>Coach transfer; Local English speaking guide; Hotel accommodation; Breakfast; Lunch; Dinner.</p>
Day 8 <i>Shaxi</i> -Tiger Leaping Gorge (middle)	<p>In the morning we will have two options of either spending a leisurely morning in the old town of <i>Shaxi</i>, or exploring the Buddhist Grottoes of the <i>Shibao</i> Mountain.</p> <p>After lunch, we will travel to the Tiger Leaping Gorge.</p>	Tina's Guesthouse	<p>Coach transfer; Local English speaking guide; Hotel accommodation; Breakfast; Lunch; Dinner.</p>

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Day 9 Tiger Leaping Gorge (Middle) -Shangri-la	In the morning those who are adventurous are free to take a hike down to the river. Afterwards, we will travel to <i>Shangri-la</i> .	SGL <i>Tianfu</i> Hotel 3*	Coach transfer; Local English speaking guide; Hotel accommodation; Breakfast; Lunch; Dinner.
Day 10 -Shangri-la	<i>Shangri-la</i> is the largest Tibetan town in <i>Yunnan</i> province. First, we will visit the <i>Pudacuo</i> National Park, and in the late afternoon the charming little <i>Lama</i> Monastery called the <i>Dabao Si</i> . Afterwards, free time in <i>Shangri-la</i> .	SGL <i>Tianfu</i> Hotel 3*	Coach transfer; Local English speaking guide; Hotel accommodation; Breakfast; Lunch; Dinner.
Day 11 <i>Shangri-la</i> -Lijiang	After breakfast we will drive to the small town of <i>Benzilan</i> . This town has a strong Tibetan character, and has plenty of lively markets and handicraft workshops that produce local wares. We will return to <i>Shangri-la</i> for lunch then go on to <i>Lijiang</i> .	<i>Shuhe</i> SYTT Guesthouse 3*	Coach transfer; Local English speaking guide; Hotel accommodation; Breakfast; Lunch; Dinner.
Day 12 <i>Lijiang</i> -Kunming	Firstly we will visit the three old towns of <i>Shuhe</i> , <i>Baisha</i> and <i>Dayan</i> , all located in <i>Lijiang</i> . <i>Shuhe</i> houses a museum dedicated to the history of the Tea Horse road era. We will also be visiting the old home of a former caravan leader. <i>Baisha</i> was the old administrative center, and <i>Dayan</i> was the largest market in NW <i>Yunnan</i> . Enjoy free time in either <i>Shuhe</i> or <i>Dayan</i> . After a group farewell dinner, The group will depart by train for <i>Kunming</i> around 8pm.		Coach transfer; Local English speaking guide; Train tickets (soft sleeper); Breakfast; Lunch; Dinner.
Day 13 <i>Kunming</i>	Arrive into <i>Kunming</i> , transfer to the airport for breakfast and flight. Trip ends.		Train station to airport transfer.

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If you are interested in joining this tour please complete the booking form and send it with your deposit by 15th of May 2015. Should we not reach the required group size and have to cancel we will refund your deposit in full. We will let you know as soon as possible after the 15th of May whether or not the tour will go ahead.

