

Discover the **Tibetan Highlands of Sichuan!**

July 8-21, 2016

***A Backroads Journey to Fascinating
Cultures & Spectacular Landscapes!***



Dear Travelers:

The Tibetan Highlands in Sichuan are a remote corner of China, with a network of backroads that impart a constant sense of discovery. Rivers, plunging toward Sichuan, have created a labyrinth of gorges and snow-clad peaks with stunning landscapes, diverse alpine habitats, and superb opportunities for cultural insight.

This summer we will travel overland from the metropolis of Chengdu, cultural center of Sichuan, through giant panda country to the river gorge and plateau landscapes in Western Sichuan (eastern Tibet). Our journey will culminate in Yading National Park and the sacred peaks of Konkaling.

We will spend an introductory day in Chengdu, a city renowned for its tea houses, temple gardens, and literary traditions. Then our journey begins with a drive to Ya'an and the Bifengxia Panda Sanctuary. The riverside towns along our route, Ya'an and Baoxing, formed through centuries of trade and acted as gateways where Sichuan Chinese and Tibetans could learn each others' contrasting ways.

Nearby Fengtongzhai Panda Reserve is part of a UNESCO World Heritage Site for Giant Panda Conservation, and it was in this area that the French Catholic priest Père David obtained four panda skins. In the late 19th century, he first described this enigmatic species to the West.

Above Baoxing, we begin to encounter the distinctive architecture and religious iconography of Tibet,

placing us at the edge of a cultural region that extends across 1,500 miles of high plateau to Ladakh, India. People in this part of eastern Tibet belong to groups like the Qiang and the Jiarong, and are culturally distinct from other Tibetans.

Farmers by tradition, the Jiarong have long interacted with lowlanders of the Sichuan Basin, bartering bricks of tea carried by pony along ancient trading routes through the mountains. Over the years, they have built many great stone watchtowers whose purpose even today remains uncertain.

Leaving the gorge country behind, we will see a shift to the lifestyles of the Tibetan Plateau: less farming, more livestock, and summers spent in portable black felt tents with yaks and goats close at hand. Horses (and increasingly motorbikes) are an important means of transport.

Buddhist symbols dominate the landscape in a very literal sense. Hill slopes are decorated with esoteric arrays of prayer flags and colorful banners. The same message is carved repeatedly, hypnotically, into riverside boulders.

Around the towns of Bamei and Tagong, long-haired Khampa men ride horseback in their traditional robes, adorned with coral and turquoise, images of their favorite lama worn discretely. Gold-roofed monasteries align with sacred, snow-clad peaks. After a night in the plateau town of Litang, a cultural hub of eastern Tibet, we will traverse



cloud-cloaked in summer. Whether or not we are so fortunate as to glimpse the high peaks, we will certainly find the region remarkable, with distinctively textured rocks and rich alpine vegetation. Here are some of the highest forests in the world, with dense stands of larch and spruce growing at elevations over 14,000 ft. The Chonggu monastery near the entrance to the valley is especially important for Tibetan pilgrims who come here to walk around the peaks.

Day 13/14 Daocheng to Chengdu & home

We will drive to Daocheng for a flight to Chengdu. Enjoy the Sichuan opera this evening and a festive farewell! On Day 14 take flights to Beijing and the USA.



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RESERVATIONS #1429

Yes! I/we want to join the **Tibetan Highlands of Sichuan Expedition, July 8-21, 2016**, offered by **New England Wild Flower Society**. Please reserve ___ space(s). As a deposit, I/we enclose a check for \$_____ (\$500 per person) payable to Betchart Expeditions Inc. Trust Account.

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_____ Age _____

Address _____

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Phone: Home (_____) _____

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Accommodations Preference:

___ Twin ___ Single Twin Share: ___ with a friend or

___ Nonsmoker ___ Smoker ___ assign a roommate

Signature _____ Date _____

Signature _____ Date _____

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