

Songtsam Yunnan Circuit “Journey to Mt. Kawagebo” 5N/6D



“In Tibetan culture legend has it that in another time and space there is a kingdom called Shambala. It is a quiet and peaceful kingdom because everybody there knows the source of happiness.”

Mr Pema Dorjee
Founder & Chairman of Songtsam

The Three Parallel Rivers area of Yunnan encompasses a majestic land hemmed in by the mighty Yangtze, the free-flowing Mekong, and the wild Salween. Many of the twenty-five different ethnic minorities currently living in Yunnan can be found in this area, which features snow-capped peaks more than 6,000m high, glaciated gorges, and terraced rice fields. The peaceful people that inhabit the region have not only preserved this area for generations, but have also nurtured this “Shangri-La”.

Songtsam have built a series of hotels and lodges in five carefully selected locales, which enable guests to experience the different cultures and landscapes inherent in these regions. By combining stays at the different Songtsam properties our circuit tour takes you into the heart of the Three Parallel Rivers area and lets you explore this magical land.

Trip Highlights

This trip is for adventurous travelers looking for an experience that offers physical and cultural activities, wildlife discovery, and untouched off the beaten path regional exploration. From the stunning views of the highest snow peak in Yunnan to the lush and floral Mekong valley, this trip takes you through the heart of the Three Parallel Rivers area and reveals its living heritage.

Explore Untamed and Wild Terrain at Meili Snow Mountain

Every year Tibetans and travellers from all over the world make their journey to worship Kawagebo, the highest peak of the Meili snow mountain range. Our tranquil lodge is located away from main tourist area and we know the most beautiful and untamed paths around Meili. Our guided hikes take you off the beaten track allowing you to connect with nature whilst at the same time offering a private experience of this spiritual land with no crowds.



Understand the Rich Culture Through Experiential Activities

Our Songtsam circuit offers breathtaking landscapes and wonderfully diverse cultures. All activities are designed so that guests can experience true authentic living heritage, which includes:

- Important Tibetan Monastery visits such as Dongzhulin Monastery in Benzilan.
- Local Tibetan family visit to learn how to print traditional Tibetan prayer flags.
- Following in the footsteps of plant hunters to the alpine pasture and discover the local way of life.



Enjoy the Great Geographic Diversity and Wonderful World of Wildlife

Due to the quick and varied changes in altitude, one can move from cold snowy mountains to warm flower-filled valleys within a couple of hours, experiencing four seasons within one day. Great biodiversity is the highlight of this route, which includes:

- Discovering hundreds of different kinds of rhododendrons (usually blossoming from late April to mid-May in Shangri-La, and late May in Meili).
- Revealing the home place of numerous flowers you find around the world.
- Wild mushrooms growing in the woods (usually from July to September) whilst hiking mountains and village paths.



Go Off the Beaten Path in Comfort

Throughout the journey guests will be staying in Tibetan style boutique hotels and lodges. All Songtsam properties feature an exquisite level of amenities, handpicked antique furniture and art collections, and a level of service that one wouldn't expect for such remote places.

Songtsam Lodge Benzilan (1,900m)

Nestled in an intimate green valley by the Yangtze River, Songtsam Benzilan features spacious guest rooms, all decorated in a modern Sino-Tibetan style. The lodge is surrounded by authentic white-walled Tibetan homes and has views of a small prayer house that rests atop a hill. From the lodge, it is an easy walk to the nearby hills and traditional Tibetan villages, where temples are decorated with beautiful murals.



Songtsam Lodge Shangri-La (3,300m)

Songtsam's first lodge opened its doors in 2001 and underwent a renovation in 2019. Tucked away from the hustle and bustle of downtown Shangri-La the lodge is located in Kna Village, only a 2-minute walk to the Songzanlin Monastery. The lodge is a beautiful four-storey stone building housed in a traditional Tibetan dwelling within a self-sufficient farming village, where founder Pema Dorjee spent his childhood. Rooms excel in creating a true feeling of home, all of which are decorated in a Tibetan style and balanced with modern comforts.



Songtsam Linka Shangri-La (3,300m)

Hidden in the city's peaceful and green valleys between Tibetan villages and Himalayan barley fields, our hotel is located a short distance away from the Songzanlin Monastery. Tibetan-style rooms, dining facilities, spa, and other modern amenities are housed in lovingly hand-built stone structures spread over 21 acres of hillside surrounded by snow-capped mountains.



Songtsam Lodge Meili (3,600m)

Built in an unspoilt village away from any tourists and overlooking the majestic Meili mountain range. Rooms are furnished with large comfortable beds, sofas, and timber flooring, providing a warm atmosphere that combines rustic charm with modern comforts. Most of the rooms come with a cosy fireplace and a stunning view of Meili Snow Mountain.



Trip Schedule

Program starts and ends in Shangri-La. All information in this itinerary is accurate to the best of our knowledge but please note that changes to our trips can and do occur.

Day	Overnight Location	Activities
Day 1	Songtsam Lodge Shangri-La (3,300m) Deluxe Room D	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Pick up from Diqing Shangri-La Airport. - Check into Songtsam Lodge Shangri-La. - Welcome dinner at the lodge.
Day 2	Songtsam Lodge Benzilan (1,900m) Deluxe Room B, L, D	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - After breakfast, visit the visit the Songzanlin Monastery, the largest Tibetan Buddhist monastery in Yunnan province and sometimes referred to as the “Little Potala Palace”. Located just a few-minutes walk from the lodge, it is also the most important monastery in southwest China. - Have lunch at the hotel. - In the afternoon, depart for Benailan. - Arrive at Benzilan, explore the surrounding area and take a walk to the nearby white stupa for an elevated view of the village. - Have dinner at the lodge.
Day 3	Songtsam Lodge Meili (3,600m) Deluxe Room B, L, D	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - After breakfast, hike into Niding Forest, which is a beautiful primeval forest filled with towering Yunnan and Huashan pine trees and an abundance of peonies, azaleas and irises. The hike starts in the small tranquil village of Niding and takes a circular route mainly downhill with low difficulty. - Have outdoor picnic in the forest. - In the afternoon, depart to Meili, visit the Dongzhulin Monastery on the way. - Arrive at Meili and check into Songtsam Lodge Meili. - Dinner at the lodge.
Day 4	Songtsam Lodge Meili (3,600m) Deluxe Room B, L, D	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Experience the golden sunrise over Mt. Kawagebo. - After breakfast, take a leisurely walk along the road around the Feilaisi viewing platform, which faces Meili Snow Mountain. - Return to the lodge and have lunch. - Explore the surrounding village, visit a local family to learn how to print Tibetan prayer flags. - Dinner at the lodge.

Day 5	Songtsam Linka Shangri-La (3,300m) Deluxe Room B, L, D	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Experience the golden sunrise over Mt. Kawagebo. - After breakfast, depart for Shangri-La stopping off at the Moon Bay of Jinsha River. - Have lunch at the local restaurant, enjoy the Nixi chicken hotpot for lunch. - Visit the Napa Lake, which is both an ideal field for herdsmen and a paradise for many species of birds. - Arrive at Shangri-La and check in to Songtsam Linka Shangri-La. - Have farewell dinner at the Tibetan restaurant at the hotel.
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Day 6	Departure B	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - After breakfast, transfer to Diqing Shangri-La Airport.

Trip Costs

Price unit: USD xxxxx per person

Date	Low Season	Shoulder Season	Peak Season	Holidays
Private Tour (Minimum 2 PAX)	2899	3169	3389	3569
Single Room Supplemen t	589	68	849	999

***Low season:** 19 Feb - 31 Mar, 1 Nov - 30 Nov, 2024

Shoulder season: 3 Jan - 5 Feb, 1 Apr - 26 Apr, 6 May - 30 Jun, 24 Aug - 27 Sep, 8 Oct - 31 Oct, 1 Dec - 22 Dec, 2024

Peak season: 1 Jan - 2 Jan, 1 Jul - 23 Aug, 2024, 23 Dec - 31 Dec, 2024

Holidays: 6 Feb - 18 Feb, 27 Apr - 5 May, 28 Sep - 7 Oct,

2024 Land Costs INCLUDE:

- All land transfers on best-in-class local transportation indicated in the itinerary.
- All admission fees and activities indicated in the itinerary.
- All accommodation based on double occupancy.
- All meals starting from dinner on the first day to breakfast on the last day.
- Standard drinking water and snacks throughout the trip.
- Complimentary minibar in guest rooms.
- Service of English speaking local guides.

Land Costs DOES NOT INCLUDE:

- Medical, travel insurance or evacuation insurance plans.
- Personal telecommunication.
- Domestic or international airfare to and from Shangri-La.
- Excursions and activities not included in itinerary.

Trip Expectations

Trip difficulty: This journey is considered moderate when touring and moderate when hiking. Our itinerary includes full days of activities, which start early in the morning and end in the evening. Each person can respond to a change in altitude differently. In the event of altitude sickness, we would move to a lower altitude. After plenty of rest, symptoms usually subside. For more information, please consult your doctor.

Road conditions and transportation: Depending on the size of the group, we travel in well maintained SUVs or vans. Experienced Songtsam drivers drive all vehicles. Some sections of the road follow winding mountain paths and are bumpy especially when some parts are under construction. We will make stops at beautiful villages and scenic spots on the way and will prepare water and snacks for the road trips.

Weather: During this trip you will experience diverse temperatures. The temperature can change from 20 degrees centigrade to 5 degrees centigrade within one day. Wearing layers of clothes is advisable to allow for changes in temperature.

Meals: During your journey you will get to try Tibetan cuisine, which includes a good amount of barley flour-based items such as dumplings and noodles, as well as red meat such as yak and mutton. At Benzilan, Meili, and Shangri-La lodges we provide set menus, which combine Tibetan and Chinese cuisine.

Emergency evacuation and procedures: We suggest all travellers purchase an International SOS (an AEA company) Service Plan, which provides emergency evacuation to the nearest medical facility of international standards.

Trip escorts: Our well-trained local guides are specialists on Tibet and the local region and will travel with you throughout the trip. All originating from different villages and areas, all Songtsam guides have stories to share about their hometowns, which provides deeper travel experiences for all guests to understand the local culture and geography.

The Songtsam Story



Some memories never fade. It seems like only yesterday that Songtsam founder and Chairman Mr Pema Dorjee was on his way back to Shangri-La with ambitious plans to shoot a documentary of his childhood home. While it had been many years since he had last set foot in his native land, fond memories came pouring back. He remembered the excitement of climbing local mountains as a young boy, the intimate solitude of his town's temples, and the people who helped define him as a person.

Finally, he was home. The rush of emotions made him wonder: How could he give back? What more could he do? Soon it all became clear. He thought about the region's rich culture and how he could create a way for travellers to come and experience a new way of life. A place that was more than the usual hotel and gift shops, a place where guests could immerse themselves in living history. So Pema turned his family's small guesthouse into the first Songtsam lodge.

Inspired by the rich Tibetan culture, he worked with local artisans and members of the community to help produce and run Songtsam Lodge Shangri-La. Eleven properties and eighteen years later, Pema's vision continues to grow, and so does the Songtsam experience.

About the Area



The great China tectonic plate runs into the Tibetan Plateau in northern Yunnan, forging high mountain ranges with soaring snow-packed peaks. Three major rivers, the Yangtze (Jinshajiang), Mekong (Lancangjiang) and Salween (Nujiang) run through deep gorges with wild, untamed scenery. This charming destination is diverse in nature and culture due to its unique geography, indeed, one can experience all four seasons in just one day. Due to the vast range in altitude, travellers can quickly move from cold snowy mountains to warm flower-filled valleys.

Northwest Yunnan is the richest area in China in terms of biodiversity, boasting unique flora and fauna, and is possibly the most biologically diverse temperate region on earth. This is the original location of the world's gardens: in spring and summer, the surrounding hills are blanketed with rhododendrons and camellias. The Victorians collected and brought these to the Western world. The temperate forests and lowlands contain over 3,000 species of orchids and more than 200 of the world's 400 species of rhododendron. In summer time, strikingly blue irises are in blossom along the mountain paths.



Bird watching and cycling bring travellers in close proximity to all kinds of migrant birds at their winter heaven around Napa Lake, including the black-

necked crane – the holy bird for Tibetans. High in the forests between the Mekong and Yangtze River lives the rare Yunnan Black snub-nosed monkey (*Rhinopithecus biteti*), one of the world's most endangered primates - fewer than 2,000 are now found in the wild. These monkeys live at the highest altitude (3,000-4,500m) of any animal primate.



Historically, people were separated by the soaring mountains and deep gorges in this area, facilitating the development of the most distinctive ethnic cultures. Kham Tibetans in Diqing are characterized by their big white wooden houses and colourful customs, which differ from Tibetans in other areas of Tibet. In this area along the Lancang River, although the shining golden roofs of Tibetan Buddhist monasteries sparkle in the light, Tibetans here follow Catholic teachings and practice their ceremonies at small Catholic churches surrounded by vineyards. Travelling from the highlands to the banks of the rivers, styles of housing and costume change. The Lisu people, another ethnic group, dwell close to the water in the mountain valleys.



The Tea Horse Road, an ancient trade route linking tea-producing areas with Tibet, connects the mountains and deep gorges as well as different ethnic groups. For hundreds of years, horse caravans travelled along this route carrying tea to Tibet and India, and bringing other commodities back home. This route has formed a corridor rich in culture, as different groups interact with each other in their daily lives. Today, one can travel around this area journeying along different parts of this ancient trail.

