

Lhasa ལ་ས ལྷ་ས 拉萨



Lhasa, the remote abode of the Dalai Lamas, object of devout pilgrimage and heart and soul of Tibet, is still a city of wonders, despite the large-scale encroachments of modern Chinese influence. Your first hint that Lhasa is close is the Potala, a vast white-and-ochre fortress soaring over one of the world's highest cities. It's a sight that has heralded the marvels of the Holy City to travellers for close to four centuries and it still raises goose bumps.

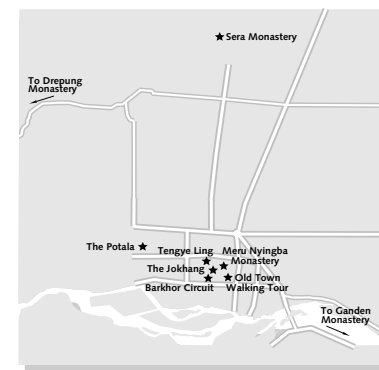
While the Potala dominates the skyline, the Jokhang, some 2km to the east, is the real spiritual heart of the city. An otherworldly mix of flickering butter lamps, wafting incense and prostrating pilgrims, the Jokhang is the most sacred and alive of Tibet's temples. It is here and the encircling Barkhor pilgrim circuit that most visitors first fall in love with Tibet.

The old Tibetan quarter makes up a small area of Lhasa these days. The modern city is a Chinese boom town, where a new train line has fuelled massive growth in tourism, alongside new hotels, shops and supermarkets. The face of Lhasa is changing daily, with buildings rising and falling like the Shanghai stock market.

For all its modernisation Lhasa remains a fantastic cultural hybrid, its streets bustling with a diverse mix of people. As the gateway to the 'real' Tibet, out in the countryside, Lhasa deserves at least a week to see all the sights, soak up the backstreets and organise the adventures that beckon at the city limits.

HIGHLIGHTS

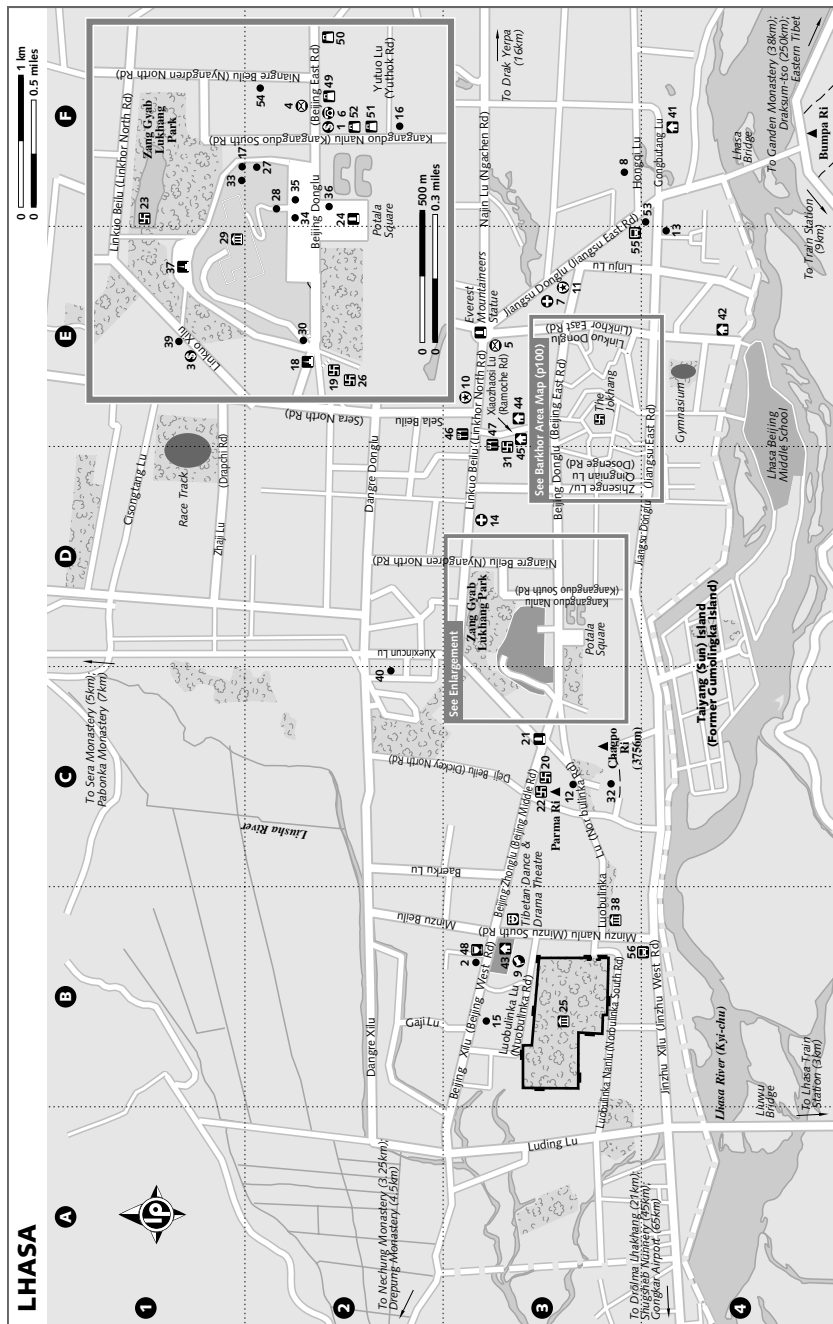
- Follow monks, mendicants and fellow pilgrims around the **Barkhor** (p102), Lhasa's fascinating medieval pilgrim circuit
- Join the shuffling lines of awed pilgrims around the glowing shrines of the **Jokhang** (p103), Tibet's holiest temple
- Go down into the bowels of the **Potala** (p108), the impressive but spiritless citadel of the Dalai Lamas, from the fifth to the 14th
- Take in a prayer meeting or some monk-debating at **Sera** (p133) and **Drepung** (p129), two of the largest and most intact of Tibet's great monasteries
- Catch the pilgrim bus for a day out to **Ganden Monastery** (p137) and test your sin on its fascinating kora (pilgrim path)
- Explore the traditional whitewashed architecture, teashops and craft workshops of Lhasa's backstreets on our **Old Town Walking Tour** (p117)
- Track down one of Lhasa's off-the-beaten-track temples, such as the **Meru Nyingba Monastery** (p103) or **Tengye Ling** (p114)



■ TELEPHONE CODE: 0891

■ POPULATION: 400,000

■ ELEVATION: 3595M



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市人民医院.....7 E3	Ramoche Temple 小昭寺.....31 D3	Shöl Opera Troupe 雪巴拉姆...(see 42)
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HISTORY

Lhasa rose to prominence as an important administrative centre in the 7th century AD, when Songtsen Gampo (c 618–49), a local ruler in the Yarlung Valley, continued the task initiated by his father of unifying Tibet. Songtsen Gampo moved his capital to Lhasa and built a palace on the site now occupied by the Potala. At this time the temples of Ramoche and the Jokhang were established to house Buddha images brought to Tibet as the dowries of Songtsen Gampo's Chinese and Nepali wives.

With the break-up of the Yarlung empire 250 years later, Buddhism enjoyed a gradual resurgence at monastic centres outside Lhasa and the centre of power shifted to Sakya, Nedong (Ü) and then Shigatse (Tsang). No longer the capital, Lhasa now languished in the backwaters of Tibetan history until the fifth Dalai Lama (1617–82) defeated the Shigatse kings with Mongol support.

The fifth Dalai Lama moved his capital to Lhasa. He built his palace, the Potala, on the site of the ruins of Songtsen Gampo's 7th-century palace. Lhasa has remained Tibet's capital since 1642, and most of the city's his-

torical sights date from this second stage of the city's development.

Modern Lhasa in many ways provides the visitor with both the best and the worst of contemporary Tibet. Photographs of the city taken before October 1950 reveal a small town nestled at the foot of the Potala and linked by an avenue to another cluster of residences in the area of the Jokhang. The population of the city before the Chinese takeover is thought to have been between 20,000 and 30,000. Today the city has a population of around 500,000, and Chinese residents easily outnumber Tibetans, perhaps 2:1.

Shöl, the village at the foot of the Potala, has all but disappeared, and the old West Gate, through which most people entered the Holy City, was torn down during the Cultural Revolution to be replaced by a smaller, modern version in 1995. The area in front of the Potala has been made into a Tiananmen-style public square, complete with a 35m-tall monument to the 'liberation' of Tibet (under constant guard to prevent vandalism). What used to be the Tibetan picnic spot of Gumolingka Island is now a Chinese-style shopping and karaoke complex.

The Tibetan quarter is now an isolated enclave in the eastern end of town, comprising only around 4% of the total area of contemporary Lhasa. Even these lingering enclaves of tradition are under threat despite official protection. Lhasa has probably changed more in the last 20 years than in the thousand years before.

ORIENTATION

Lhasa is a surprisingly sprawling city and it now takes at least 20 minutes to drive through the western suburbs. The city divides clearly into a western (Chinese) section and an eastern (Tibetan) section, with the Potala Palace marking no-man's-land in the middle. The Tibetan eastern end of town is easily the most interesting place to be based and has all the budget and midrange accommodation popular with independent travellers.

The principal thoroughfare is the east–west Beijing Zhonglu (Dekyi Nub Lam), which becomes Beijing Donglu (Dekyi Shar Lam) in the east of town.

The Jokhang and Barkhor Square are between Beijing Donglu and Jiangsu Lu (Chingdröl Shar Lam) and are connected to these two main roads by the Tibetan quarter, a web of winding alleyways lined with the whitewashed façades of traditional Tibetan

homes. This Tibetan area is not particularly extensive. Rather than worry about orientation it is more fun to simply slip away from the Barkhor circuit at some point and aimlessly wander the alleys. You won't stay lost for long.

Maps

The *Lhasa Tour Map* is a relatively useful 2006 English-language map of the city, available at the Xinhua bookshops (below), branches of China Post and the gift shops of most hotels. Other maps of Lhasa are available outside Tibet (p321).

INFORMATION

Useful information is scarce in Lhasa. The information boards at the Banak Shol, Snowlands and Kirey hotels (p120) can be useful if you're looking for trekking partners, a ride in a Land Cruiser, or even a second-hand Lonely Planet guidebook, though these days most of the notices are in Chinese.

Bookshops

The Nam-tso Restaurant (p123) at the Banak Shol hotel and the Summit Café (p125) both have some English-language books for exchange/rent and hotel gift shops stock a few glossy coffee-table souvenir books.

Xinhua Bookstore Yutuo Lu (Map p96); Beijing Xilu (Map p96) The most central branch, located about 10 minutes' walk west of Barkhor Square, has some maps, postcards and photo books. A new larger store is being built on Beijing Xilu.

Internet Access

The most popular internet cafés are those at the Snowlands, Kirey and Yak hotels (see Sleeping, p119), where you can surf the internet (Y5) and burn CDs (Y15 to 20), from 9am to midnight. If you have a laptop, the Summit Café (see p125) offers free wi-fi.

The following local places are cheaper, smokier and noisier:

Red Forest Net Café (Map p100; Beijing Donglu; per hr Y3; ☎ 24hr) Opposite the Banak Shol hotel.

Yuzhou Wangba (Map p96; 3rd fl, Xinhua Bookstore, Yutuo Lu; per hr Y3; ☎ 24hr)

Laundry

The Banak Shol and Kirey hotels offer a free laundry service to guests, but don't get the clothes all that clean. Most others will do laundry for a modest fee.

DANGERS & ANNOYANCES

If you fly straight into Lhasa, remember to take things easy for your first day or two: it's not uncommon to feel breathless, suffer from headaches and sleep poorly because of the altitude. Don't attempt the steps up to the Potala for the first few days, drink lots of fluids and read p351 for details on acute mountain sickness (AMS).

On a more mundane note, take care when re-opening things such as tubes of sunscreen after a flight in to Lhasa or even jars of Coffee-mate from a local shop, as the change in pressure can cause messy explosions of volcanic proportions.

Medical Services

Several hotels and pharmacies around town sell Tibetan herbal medicine recommended by locals for easing symptoms of altitude sickness. The most common medicine is known as *solomano* in Tibetan and *hongjingtian* (红景天) in Chinese, though locals also recommend *gaoyuanning* (高原宁) and *gaoyuankang* (高原康). A box of vials will cost you Y20 to 35; take three vials a day.

Military Hospital (Xizang Junqu Zongjiyuan; 西藏军区总医院; Map p129; ☎ 628 0557; Niangre Beilu) Travellers who have received medical attention

confirm that this place is the best option (if you have an option).

Money

Bank of China branch (Zhongguo Yinhang; Map p100; Beijing Donglu; ☎ 9am–5pm Mon–Fri, 10.30am–3.30pm Sat & Sun) The most conveniently located bank changes cash and travellers cheques without fuss. It can't give a cash advance on a credit card but the ATMs normally work. It's between the Banak Shol and Kirey hotels.

Bank of China branch (Zhongguo Yinhang; Map p96; Beijing Xilu; ☎ 9am–5pm Mon–Fri, 10.30am–3.30pm Sat & Sun) Opposite the Lhasa Hotel.

Bank of China main office (Zhongguo Yinhang; Map p96; Linkuo Xilu; ☎ 9am–6.30pm Mon–Fri, 10am–4pm Sat & Sun) West of the Potala. This is the place for credit-card advances; there's a 3% commission and the maximum withdrawal is Y2000 per transaction. This is also the place to arrange a bank transfer (p322). There are ATMs inside and outside the building (the latter open 24 hours). Take a number as you walk in the door and expect to wait for ages.

Post

China Post main office (Zhongguo Zheng; Map p96; ☎ 624 1404; Beijing Donglu; ☎ 9am–8pm Mon–Sat, 9.30am–6.30pm Sun) The counter in the far left corner sells stamps and packaging for parcels. Leave parcels unsealed until you get to the post office as the staff will want to check the contents for customs clearance. Express Mail Service (EMS) is here. Postcards are sold in the shop to the east.

STREET NAMES

In this edition we use Chinese street names, as that is what most locals (including many Tibetans) and almost all taxi drivers use. The traditional Tibetan names are included in brackets.

- Beijing Donglu (Dekyi Shar Lam)
- Beijing Zhonglu (Dekyi Nub Lam)
- Deji Lu (Dickey Lam)
- Jiangsu Lu (Chingdröl Shar Lam)
- Linkuo Lu (Linkhor Lam)
- Minzu Lu (Mirig Lam)
- Niangre Lu (Nyangdren Lam)
- Qingnian Lu (Dosenge Lam)
- Xiaozhaosi Lu (Ramoche Lam)
- Yutuo Lu (Yuthok Lam)
- Zangyiyuan Lu (Mentsikhang Lam)

LHASA'S PILGRIM CIRCUITS

For Tibetan pilgrims, who approach the Holy City with priorities somewhat different from those of the average Western visitor, the principal points of orientation are Lhasa's three koras (pilgrimage circuits): the Nangkhör, Barkhor and Lingkhör. For the visitor, all the koras are well worth following, especially during festivals, such as Saga Dawa (p319), when the distinction between tourist and pilgrim can become very fine. Remember always to proceed clockwise.

- Nangkhör – This kora encircles the inner precincts of the Jokhang.
- Barkhor – This traces the outskirts of the Jokhang in a circuit (p102) of approximately 800m. It is the most famous of Lhasa's pilgrimage circuits and probably the best introduction to the old town for newcomers.
- Lingkhör – This devotional route traditionally encompassed the entirety of the old city. Nowadays the Lingkhör includes a great deal of scenery that is of a decidedly secular and modern nature but it is still used by pilgrims. You can join the 8km-long circuit anywhere, but the most interesting section is covered in our Lingkhör Walking Tour (p118).
- Potala Kora (Tsekhor) – Another popular kora encircles the holy Potala, passing by an almost continuous circuit of prayer wheels, chörtens (stupas), rock paintings and the Lukhang Temple (p113).
- Other koras – There are excellent koras at Drepung (p132), Ganden (p139) and Sera (p135) Monasteries.

DHL (Zhongwaiyuan Dunhao; Map p96; ☎ 635 6995; www.cn.dhl.com; Room 4, 2nd fl, Back Block, Norpel Ling Hotel/Baofa Jiudian, 6 Hongqi Lu) Free pick-up and delivery service.

Public Security Bureau (PSB)

Lhasa City PSB (Lasa Shi Gong'anju; Map p96; ☎ 624 8154; 17 Linkuo Beilu; ☎ 9am-12.30pm & 3.30-6pm Mon-Fri) Visa extensions of up to a week are given, but only a day or two before your visa expires.

Tibet PSB (Gong'anting; Map p96; ☎ 631 1442; cnr Beijing Donglu & Jiangsu Donglu; ☎ 9am-12.30pm & 3.30-6pm Mon-Fri) Travel permits are issued at this office but only to organised tour groups.

Telephone

The cheapest way to make an international call is through the various **private telephone booths** (☎ 8.30am-11pm), often advertised as 'Telecom Supermarkets'. Useful examples are in front of the Kirey Hotel or east of the Kyichu Hotel. Rates are Y2.4 per minute to the US, Y3.6 to Europe and Australia, or Y4.8 to other countries.

China Unicom (Zhongguo Liantong; Map p96; Beijing Donglu; ☎ 9am-6.30pm) Across from China Post, offers similarly cheap rates.

Travel Agencies

Most independent travellers in Tibet arrange their travel with one of several Foreign Independent Traveller (FIT) offices run by the Tibet Tourism Bureau (TTB). Despite being the same company, these offices operate independently and will quote you different rates.

FIT Banak Shol hotel (Map p100; ☎ 655 9938, 655 1841; fax 634 4397; fit0891@hotmail.com; 8 Beijing Donglu) Contact Xiaojin. Good prices, reliable and fairly transparent.

FIT Snowlands Hotel (Map p100; ☎ 634 9239; lhakpa88@yahoo.com; www.tibetfit.com; 2nd fl, Snowlands Hotel, 4 Zangyiyuan Lu) The main FIT office; contact Lhakpa or Samdup. Also goes under the name Tibet Changtang Yak Adventure, with an office next door.

Shigatse CITS (Map p100; ☎ 691 2080; Zangyiyuan Lu) Connected with FIT Banak Shol.

There are plenty of other travel agencies, though most cater to Chinese tourists who don't require travel permits (see p323). They are perhaps best used only for trips around Lhasa.

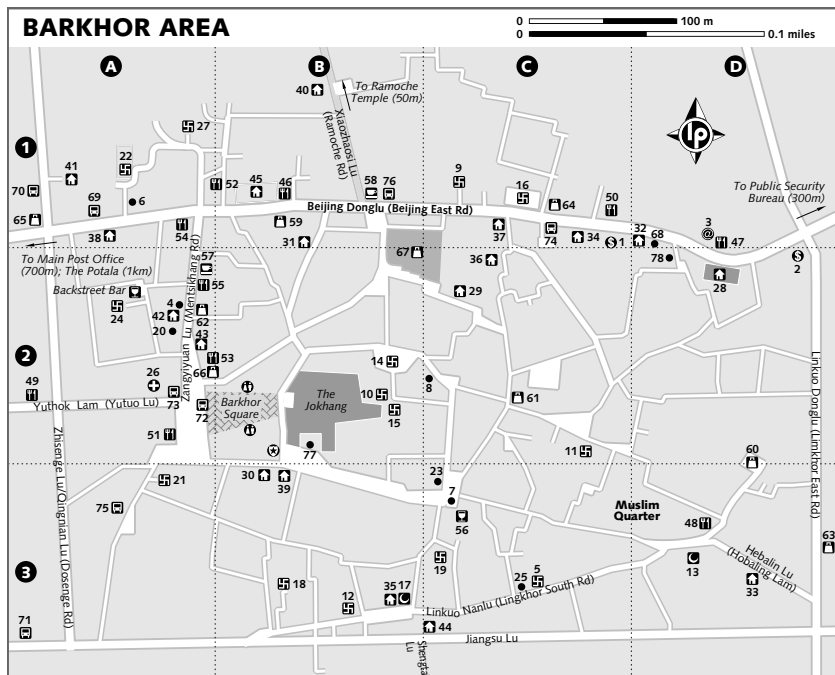
SIGHTS

The Barkhor བར་ཁོར་ 八廓

The first stop for most newcomers to Lhasa is the Jokhang in the heart of the Tibetan old town. But before you even venture into the Jokhang it's worth taking a stroll around the **Barkhor** (Map p100), Lhasa's most interesting kora (pilgrimage circuit), a quadrangle of streets that surrounds the Jokhang and some of the old buildings adjoining it. It is an area unrivalled in Tibet for its fascinating combination of sacred significance and push-and-shove market

economics. This is both the spiritual heart of the Holy City and the main commercial district for Tibetans.

The Barkhor is the one part of Lhasa that has most resisted the inroads of the modern world. Pilgrims from Kham, Amdo and further afield step blithely around a prostrating monk and stop briefly to finger a jewel-encrusted dagger at a street stall; monks sit cross-legged on the paving stones before their alms bowls muttering mantras. It's a place you'll want to come back to time after time.



INFORMATION

- Bank of China 中国银行 1 C1
- Bank of Construction ATM 中国建设银行 2 D2
- Family & Independent Traveller Office (FIT) 散客旅游管理接待中心 (see 28)
- Family & Independent Traveller Office (FIT) 高原散客旅游管理接待中心 ... (see 43)
- Red Forest Net Café 红树林网城 3 D1
- Shigatse CITS 4 A2
- Telecom Booths 电话超市 (see 37)

SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

- Ani Sangkhung Nunnery 5 C3
- Blind Massage Centre 6 A1
- Darchen Pole 7 C3
- Gedun Cheophel Artists' Guild 8 C2
- Gongkar Chöde Chapel (see 10)
- Gyüme (Lower Tantric College) 9 C1
- Jampa Lhakhang 10 B2
- Karmashar Temple 11 C2
- Lho Rigsum Lhakhang 12 B3
- Main City Mosque 拉萨清真寺 13 D3
- Mandala Museum (see 30)
- Mani Lhakhang 14 B2
- Meru Nyingba Monastery 15 B2
- Meru Sarpa Monastery 16 C1
- Mosque 清真寺 17 B3
- On the Tourist's Way 西藏日喀则中国国际旅行社 ... (see 33)
- Pode Kangtsang 18 B3
- Rabtse Temple 19 C3
- Raft Tibet (Tibet Wind Horse Adventure) 龙达国际旅行社 20 A2
- Rigsum Lhakhang 21 A3
- Shide Tratsang 22 A1
- Shrine 23 C3
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- Thaizand Bicycle Tours 泰山单车 (see 37)
- Thangka Workshop 25 C3
- Tibet Chamdo International Travel 西藏昌都国际旅行社 (see 39)
- Tibetan Traditional Hospital (Mentsikhang) 藏医院 26 A2
- Tsome Ling 27 A1

SLEEPING

- Banak Shol 八郎学旅馆 28 D2
- Barkhor Namchen House 八角龙乾家庭旅馆 29 C2
- Barkhor Norzeng Hotel 八角街诺增宾馆 30 B3
- Dhood Gu Hotel 敦固宾馆 31 B1
- Dongcuo International Youth Hostel 东措国际青年旅馆 32 D1
- Flora Hotel 哈达花神旅馆 33 D3
- Gang Gyan Hotel 刚坚拉萨饭店 34 C1
- Gorkha Hotel 郭尔喀饭店 35 B3
- House of Shambhala 香巴拉宫 36 C2
- Kirey Hotel 吉日旅馆 37 C1
- Kyichu Hotel 吉曲饭店 38 A1
- Mandala Hotel 满斋酒店 39 B3
- Oh Dan Guest House 欧丹宾馆 40 B1
- Phuntsok Khasang International Youth Hostel 平措康桑青年旅舍 41 A1
- Shangbala Hotel 香巴拉酒店 42 A2
- Snowlands Hotel 雪域宾馆 43 A2
- Xiongbala Hotel 雄巴拉大酒店 44 C3
- Yak Hotel 亚克宾馆 45 B1

EATING

- Dunya Restaurant 肥姐便餐 46 B1
- Feijie Restaurant 肥姐便餐 47 D1
- Islam Restaurant 伊斯兰饭庄 48 D3
- Kagui Nongmo Sakhang 白日自助餐 49 A2
- Lanqing Qingzhen Fanguan 兰青清真饭馆 50 C1
- Mandala Restaurant (see 39)
- Nam-tso Restaurant 纳木措餐馆 (see 28)
- New Mandala Restaurant 新满斋餐厅 51 A2
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- Snowland Restaurant 雪域餐厅 53 A2
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- Dunya (see 46)
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- Summit Café 顶峰咖啡店 (see 42)
- Teahouse 57 A2
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- Turquoise Dragon Teahouse 58 B1

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- Shangrila Restaurant (see 37)

SHOPPING

- Dorje Antique Shop 59 B1
- Drophenling 卓番林 60 D2
- Ezhi Exquisite Thangka Shop 61 C2
- Kyichu Art Gallery (see 38)
- Mani Thangka Arts 嘛呢唐卡艺术 62 A2
- Norling Supermarket 诺林超市 63 D3
- Outlook Outdoor Equipment 64 C1
- Sifang Supermarket 四方超市 65 A1
- Snow Leopard Carpet Industries 雪豹毯业有限公司 66 A2
- Tromsikhang Market 冲赛康市场 67 B2

TRANSPORT

- Bodi Chongshang Bike Hire 博迪车行 68 D1
- Bus 301 & 302 to Lhasa Hotel & Drepung Monastery 69 A1
- Bus 503 to Sera Monastery 70 A1
- Bus 89 to Train Station 71 A3
- Buses to Ganden Monastery, Drak Yerpa & Samey 72 A2
- Buses to Tsurphu Monastery, Dranang, Tsetang & Shugsheh Nunnery 73 A2
- Government Bus to Shigatse 74 C1
- Lugu Bus Stand 75 A3
- Minibuses to Shigatse & Nagchu 76 B1
- Ticket Office for Bus to Ganden Monastery 77 B2
- Yueye Bike Rental 越野自行车出租 78 D2

LHASA

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BARKHOR SQUARE

For your first visit to the Barkhor, enter from Barkhor Square (八角广场; Bajiao Guangchang), a large plaza that was cleared in 1985. The square has become a focus for political protest and has been the scene of pitched battles between Chinese and Tibetans on several occasions, most noticeably in 1998 when several Tibetans were killed and a Dutch tourist was shot in the shoulder. Look for the video cameras recording everything from the rooftops above the square. The recent addition of several tacky fast-food joints at the west end of the square is a shame. At least the Chinese resisted the temptation to plunk a Mao statue in the middle of it all.

Close to the entrance to the Jokhang a constant stream of Tibetans follows the Barkhor circumambulation route in a clockwise direction. Look for the two pot-bellied, stone *sangkang* (incense burners) in front of the Jokhang. There are four altogether, marking the four extremities of the Barkhor circuit; the other two are at the rear of the Jokhang. Behind the first two *sangkang* are two joined enclosures. The northern **stele** is inscribed with the terms of the Sino-Tibetan treaty of 822. The inscription guarantees mutual respect of the borders of the two nations – an irony seemingly lost on the Chinese authorities. The southern one harbours the stump of an ancient willow tree, known as the hair

of the Jowo, allegedly planted by Songtsen Gampo's Chinese wife, Princess Wencheng (Wencheng Konjo), and a stele erected in 1793 commemorating smallpox victims.

For your first few visits to the Barkhor circuit, it's best to let yourself be dragged along by the tide of pilgrims, but there are also several small, fascinating temples to pop into en route.

BARKHOR CIRCUIT

As you follow the flow of pilgrims past sellers of religious photos, felt cowboy hats and electric blenders (for yak-butter tea!), you'll soon see a small building on the right, set off from the main path. This is the **Mani Lhakhang**, a small chapel that houses a huge prayer wheel set almost continuously in motion. To the right of the building is the grandiose entrance of the former city jail and dungeons, known as the Nangtse Shar.

If you head south from here, after about 10m you will see the entrance to the **Jampa Lhakhang** (also Jamkhang or Water Blessing Temple) on the right. The ground floor of this small temple has a two-storey statue of Miwang Jampa, the Future Buddha, flanked by rows of various protector gods and the meditation cave of the chapel's founder. Pilgrims ascend to the upper floor to be blessed with a sprinkling of holy water and the touch of a holy *dorje* (thunderbolt).

VISITING MONASTERIES & TEMPLES

Most monasteries and temples extend a warm welcome to foreign guests and in remote areas will often offer a place to stay for the night. Please maintain this good faith by observing the following courtesies:

- Always circumambulate Buddhist monasteries and other religious objects clockwise, thus keeping shrines and chörtens (stupas) to your right.
- Don't take prayer flags or mani (prayer) stones.
- Refrain from taking photos during a prayer meeting. At other times always ask permission to take photos, especially when using a flash. The larger monasteries charge photography fees, though some monks will allow you to take a quick picture for free. If they won't, there's no point getting angry; you don't know what pressures they may be under.
- Don't wear shorts or short skirts in a monastery.
- Take your hat off when you go into a chapel (though there's generally no need to remove your shoes).
- Don't smoke in a monastery.
- Be aware that women are generally not allowed in protector chapels (*gönkhang*); always ask before entering.

Continue down the alley following the prayer wheels, then pass through a doorway into the old **Meru Nyingba Monastery**. This small but active monastery is a real delight and is invariably crowded with Tibetans thumbing prayer beads or lazily swinging prayer wheels and chanting under their breath. The chapel itself is administered by Nechung Monastery, which accounts for the images of the Nechung oracle inside. The building, like the adjoining Jokhang, dates back to the 7th century, though most of what you see today is recently constructed.

On the west side of the courtyard up some narrow stairs is the small Sakyapa-school **Gongkar Chöde** chapel. Below is the **Jambhala Lhakhang**, with a central image of Marmedze (Dipamkara), the Past Buddha, and a small inner kora path. From here you can return north or head east to join up with the Barkhor circuit.

On the northeast corner of the Barkhor is the **Gedun Choephel Artists' Guild** (☎ 632 3825; ☎ 10am-7pm), an exhibition hall for a dozen modern Tibetan artists. It's a rare opportunity to view Tibetan modern art free from religious convention (and there are good views from the roof!).

The eastern side of the circuit has more shops and even a couple of small department stores that specialise in turquoise. In the southeast corner is a wall shrine and a *darchen* (prayer pole), which mark the spot where Tsongkhapa planted his walking stick in 1409. The empty southern square of the Jokhang used to host annual teachings by the Dalai Lama during the Mönlam festival. The circuit finally swings north by a PSB station back to Barkhor Square.

The Jokhang ཇོམ་མངའ་གཅིད་ལྷ་ཁང་ 大昭寺

The **Jokhang** (Dazhao Si; Map p100; admission Y70; ☎ inner chapels 8am-12.30pm, sometimes 5.30-8pm, Mon-Sat), also known in Tibetan as the Tsuglhakhang, is the most revered religious structure in Tibet. Thick with the smell of yak butter, echoing with the murmur of mantras and bustling with awed pilgrims, the Jokhang is an unrivalled Tibetan experience. Don't miss it.

The chapels can be very busy, with long lines of pilgrims, so try to view the most popular ones just after the temple opens or just before it closes around noon. The complex is open in the afternoon but many chapels are closed then. Once you've left the complex you

can't re-enter without buying another ticket. Photos are not allowed inside the chapels.

HISTORY

Estimated dates for the Jokhang's founding range from 639 to 647 AD. Construction was initiated by King Songtsen Gampo to house an image of Mikyöba (Akshobhya) brought to Tibet as part of the dowry of his Nepali wife Princess Bhrikuti. The Ramoche Temple was constructed at the same time to house another Buddha image, Jowo Sakyamuni (Sakya Thukpa), brought to Tibet by his Chinese wife Princess Wencheng. It is thought that after the death of Songtsen Gampo, Jowo Sakyamuni was moved from Ramoche for its protection and hidden in the Jokhang by Princess Wencheng. The image has remained in the Jokhang ever since (Jokhang, or Jowokhang, means 'chapel of the Jowo'), and it is the most revered Buddha image in all of Tibet.

Over the centuries, the Jokhang has undergone many renovations, but the basic layout is ancient and differs from that of many other Tibetan religious structures. One crucial difference is the building's east-west orientation, said to face towards Nepal to honour Princess Bhrikuti. A few interior carved pillars and entrance arches remain from the original 7th-century work of Newari artisans brought from the Kathmandu Valley in Nepal to work on the construction.

In the early days of the Cultural Revolution, much of the interior of the Jokhang was desecrated by Red Guards and it is claimed that a section was utilised as a pigsty. Since 1980 the Jokhang has been restored, and without the aid of an expert eye, you will see few signs of the misfortunes that have befallen the temple in recent years.

GROUND FLOOR

In front of the entrance to the Jokhang is a forecourt that is perpetually crowded with pilgrims polishing the flagstones with their prostrations. Several monuments stand in front of the Jokhang (opposite).

Just inside the entrance to the Jokhang are statues of the **Four Guardian Kings** (Chökyong), two on either side. Beyond this is the **main assembly hall** or *dukhang*, a paved courtyard that is open to the elements. During festivals the hall is often the focus of ceremonies. The throne on the left wall was formerly used by the Dalai Lamas. You'll see a line of pilgrims

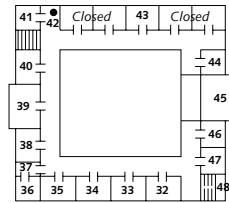
THE JOKHANG

Approximate Scale 0  50 m

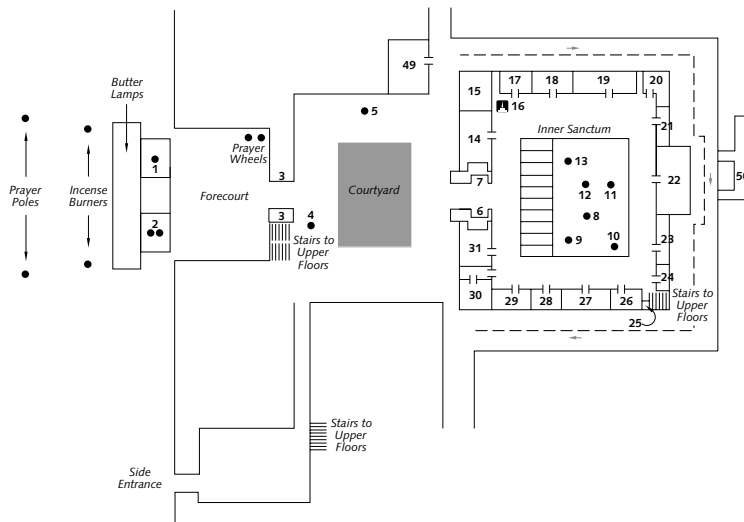
- | | | |
|--|--|--|
| 1 Sino-Tibetan Treaty Stele | 17 Chapel of the Eight Medicine Buddhas | FIRST FLOOR |
| 2 Smallpox Stele and Ancient Willow Tree | 18 Chapel of Chenresig (Avalokiteshvara) | 32 Chapel of Lhobdak Namka Gyaltzen |
| GROUND FLOOR | 19 Chapel of Jampa | 33 Chapel of Sakyamuni |
| 3 Guardian Kings | 20 Chapel of Tsongkhapa | 34 Chapel of Eight Medicine Buddhas |
| 4 Ticket Office | 21 Chapel of the Buddha of Infinite Light | 35 Chapel of Sakyamuni |
| 5 Throne of the Dalai Lamas | 22 Chapel of Jowo Sakyamuni | 36 Chapel of Five Protectors |
| 6 Naga Chapel | 23 Chapel of Jampa | 37 Anteroom |
| 7 Nojin Chapel | 24 Chapel of Chenresig (Riding a Lion) | 38 Chapel of the Three Kings |
| 8 Jampa Statue | 25 Guru Rinpoche Shrine and Rock Painting | 39 Chapel of Songtsen Gampo |
| 9 Jampa Statue | 26 Chapel of Tsepame | 40 Chapel of Chenresig |
| 10 Jampa Statue | 27 Chapel of Jampa | 41 Chapel of Sakyamuni |
| 11 Guru Rinpoche Statue | 28 Chapel of the Hidden Jowo | 42 Prayer Wheel |
| 12 Chenresig Statue | 29 Chapel of the Seven Buddhas | 43 Chapel of Guru Rinpoche & Sakyamuni |
| 13 Guru Rinpoche Statue | 30 Chapel of the Nine Buddhas of Longevity (Tsepame) | 44 Chapel of Songtsen Gampo |
| 14 Chapel of Tsongkhapa & His Disciples | 31 Chapel of the Kings | 45 Zhelre Lakhang (Inaccessible) |
| 15 Chapel of the Buddha of Infinite Light (Opagme) | | 46 Chapel of Guru Rinpoche |
| 16 Chörten | | 47 Chapel of Samvara |
| | | 48 Palden Lhamo Statues |
| | | OTHER CHAPELS |
| | | 49 Drölma Chapel |
| | | 50 Guru Rinpoche Chapel |



--- Nangkhör



FIRST FLOOR



filing past the main Jokhang entrance as they walk the pilgrim circuit around the temple.

The inner prayer hall of the Jokhang houses the most important images and chapels. Most prominent are six larger-than-life statues that dominate the central prayer hall. In the foreground and to the left is a 6m statue of Guru Rinpoche. The statue opposite it, to the right, is of Jampa (Maitreya), the Future Buddha. At the centre of the hall, between and to the rear of these two statues, is a thousand-armed Chenresig (Avalokiteshvara). At the far right are two more Jampa statues, one behind the other, and to the far rear, behind Chenresig and facing the main Jowo statue, is another statue of Guru Rinpoche, encased in a cabinet.

Encircling this enclosed area of statues is a collection of chapels. Tibetan pilgrims circle the central area of statuary in a clockwise direction, visiting the chapels en route. There are generally long queues for the holiest chapels, particularly the Chapel of Jowo Sakyamuni. Pilgrims rub the doorways and chain-mail curtains, touch their heads to re-

vered statues, throw seeds as offerings and pour molten yak butter into the heat of a thousand prayer lamps. The hushed atmosphere of respect is broken only by groups of Chinese tourists chattering into their mobile phones.

The chapels, following a clockwise route, are as follows. The numbers marked here refer to those marked on the Jokhang map.

Chapel of Tsongkhapa & His Disciples (14)

Tsongkhapa was the founder of the Gelugpa order, and you can see him seated centre, flanked by his eight disciples.

Chapel of the Buddha of Infinite Light (15)

This chapel is usually closed. Just outside is the large Tagba chörten (stupa).

Chapel of the Eight Medicine Buddhas (17)

The eight medicine buddhas are recent and not of special interest.

DEMONESS-SUBDUING TEMPLES

Buddhism's interaction with the pre-existing Bön – a shamanistic folk religion of spirits, ghosts and demons – combined with the wild and inhospitable nature of the Tibetan terrain has led to many metaphoric fables about Buddhism's taming of Tibet. The story of the early introduction of Buddhism to Tibet is attended by the story of a vast, supine demoness whose body straddled all of the high plateau.

It was Princess Wencheng, the Chinese wife of King Songtsen Gampo, who divined the presence of this demoness. Through Chinese geomantic calculations she established that the heart of the demoness lay beneath a lake in the centre of Lhasa, while her torso and limbs lay far away in the outer dominions of the high plateau. As in all such fables, the demoness can be seen as a symbol, of both the physical hardships of Tibet and the existing Bön clergy's hostility towards Buddhism; both had to be tamed before Buddhism could take root there. It was decided that the demoness would have to be pinned down.

The first task was to drain the lake in Lhasa of its water (read life-blood of the demoness) and build a central temple that would replace the heart of the demoness with a Buddhist heart. The temple built there was the Jokhang. A stake through the heart was not enough to put a demoness of this size out of action, however, and a series of lesser temples, in three concentric rings, were conceived to pin the extremities of the demoness.

There were four temples in each of these rings. The first are known as the *runo* temples and form a protective circle around Lhasa, pinning down the demoness' hips and shoulders. Two of these are Trandruk Monastery in the Yarlung Valley (p175) and Katsel Monastery (p161) on the way to Drigung. The second group, known as the *tandrul* temples, pin the knees and elbows of the demoness. Buchu Monastery (p250) near Bayi in eastern Tibet is one of these. And the final group, known as *yandrul* temples, pin the hands and feet. These last temples are found as far away as Bhutan (Paro and Bumthang) and Sichuan, though the location of two of them is unknown. You can see a representative image of the demoness and the temples that pin her down in the Tibet Museum (p116).

Chapel of Chenresig (18)

This chapel contains the Jokhang's most important image after the Jowo Sakyamuni. Legend has it that the statue of Chenresig here sprang spontaneously into being and combines aspects of King Songtsen Gampo, his wives and two wrathful protective deities. The doors of the chapel are among the few remnants still visible of the Jokhang's 7th-century origins and were fashioned by Nepali artisans.

Chapel of Jampa (19)

In this chapel are statues of Jampa as well as four smaller bodhisattvas: Jampelyang (Manjushri), Chenresig (to the left), Chana Dorje (Vajrapani) and Dröлма (Tara). Öpagme (Amitabha) and Tsongkhapa are also present here, as are two chörtens, one of which holds the remains of the original sculptor.

Chapel of Tsongkhapa (20)

This chapel's image of Tsongkhapa, founder of the Gelugpa order, was commissioned by the subject himself and is said to be a precise resemblance. It is the central image on top of the steps.

Chapel of the Buddha of Infinite Light (21)

This is the second of the chapels consecrated to Öpagme (Amitabha), the Buddha of Infinite Light. The outer entrance, with its wonderful carved doors, is protected by two fierce deities, red Tamdrin (Hayagriva; right) and blue Chana Dorje (Vajrapani; left). There are also statues of the eight bodhisattvas. Pilgrims generally pray here for the elimination of impediments to viewing the most sacred image of the Jokhang, that of Jowo Sakyamuni, which awaits in the next chapel.

Outside the chapel are statues of King Songtsen Gampo with his two queens and also Guru Rinpoche (with a big nose).

Chapel of Jowo Sakyamuni (22)

The most important shrine in Tibet, this chapel houses the image of Sakyamuni Buddha at the age of 12 years, brought to Tibet by Princess Wencheng. You enter via an anteroom containing the Four Guardian Kings, smiling on the left and frowning to the right. Inside are statues of the protectors Miyowa (Achala) and Chana Dorje (Vajrapani, blue). Several large bells hang from the anteroom's Newari-style

THE SACRED GOAT

It is said that Princess Wencheng chose the site of the Jokhang, and that just to be difficult she chose Lake Wothing. The lake had to be filled in, but it is said that a well in the precincts of the Jokhang still draws its waters from those of the old lake. Over the years, many legends have emerged around the task of filling in Lake Wothing. The most prominent of these is the story of how the lake was filled by a sacred goat (the Tibetan word for goat, *ra*, is etymologically connected with the original name for Lhasa – Rasa). Look for a small image of the goat peering out from the Chapel of Jampa (27) on the south wall of the Jokhang's ground-floor inner sanctum.

roof. The carved doorway has been rubbed smooth by generations of pilgrims.

The 1.5m statue of Sakyamuni is embedded with precious stones, covered in silks and jewellery, and surrounded by silver pillars with dragon motifs. The silver canopy above was financed by a Mongolian khan. Pilgrims touch their forehead to the statue's left leg before being tapped on the back by a monk 'bouncer' when it's time to move on.

To the rear of Sakyamuni are statues of the seventh and 13th Dalai Lamas (with a moustache), Tsongkhapa and 12 standing bodhisattvas. Look for the 7th-century pillars on the way out.

Chapel of Jampa (23)

The Jampa (Maitreya, or Future Buddha) enshrined here is a replica of a statue that came to Tibet as a part of the dowry of Princess Bhrikuti, King Songtsen Gampo's Nepali wife. Around the statue are eight images of Dröлма, a goddess seen as an embodiment of the enlightened mind of Buddha-hood and who protects against the eight fears – hence the eight statues. There are some fine doorcarvings here.

Chapel of Chenresig Riding a Lion (24)

The statue of Chenresig on the back of a *sengye* (snow lion) is first on the left (it's not the largest of the icons within). The other eight statues of the chapel are all aspects of Chenresig.

Some pilgrims exit this chapel and then follow a flight of stairs up to the next floor, while others complete the circuit on the

ground floor. If you're chapelled out (you've seen the important ones already), continue on upstairs, but look out first for a small hole in the wall on the left as you exit the chapel, against which pilgrims place their ear to hear the beating wings of a mythical bird that lives under the Jokhang.

Guru Rinpoche Shrine (25)

Two statues of Guru Rinpoche and one of King Trisong Detsen are next to the stairs. Beside the shrine is a rock painting of the medicine buddha protected by a glass plate.

Chapel of Tsepame (26)

Inside are nine statues of Tsepame (Amitayus), the red Buddha of Longevity, in *ya-byum* (sexual and spiritual union) pose.

Chapel of Jampa (27)

This, another Jampa chapel, holds the Jampa statue that was traditionally borne around the Barkhor on the 25th day of the first lunar month for the Mönlam festival. Jampa's yearly excursion was designed to hasten the arrival of the Future Buddha. Jampelyang and Chenresig flank the Buddha.

The chapel is also named the 'Chapel of the Sacred Goat', after the rough 'self-arisen' (ie not man-made) image of the goat lurking in the first corner, beside the first protector deity (see the boxed text, opposite).

Chapel of the Hidden Jowo (28)

This is the chapel where Princess Wencheng is said to have hidden Jowo Sakyamuni for safekeeping after the death of her husband. You can see the cavity on the eastern wall, currently blocked by a bag of tsampa (roasted-barley flour). Inside is a statue of Öpagme (Amitabha) and the eight medicine buddhas with characteristic blue hair.

Other Chapels

From here there are several chapels of limited interest to non-Tibetologists. The **Chapel of the Seven Buddhas (29)** is followed by the **Chapel of the Nine Buddhas of Longevity (30)**, whose deities hold vases of immortality. The last of the ground-floor chapels is the **Chapel of the Kings (31)**, with some original statues of Tibet's earliest kings. The central figure is Songtsen Gampo, flanked by images of King Trisong Detsen (left) and King Ralpachen (right). Pilgrims touch their head to the central pillar.

On the wall outside the chapel is a fine mural depicting the original construction of the Jokhang and the Potala, alongside performances of Tibetan opera, yak dances, wrestling, weightlifting and horse-racing.

FIRST FLOOR

At this point you should return clockwise to the rear of the ground floor (if you did not do so earlier) and climb the stairs to the upper floor of the Jokhang. The upper floor of the Jokhang's inner sanctum is also ringed with chapels, though some of them are closed.

As you begin the circuit, you will pass by several newly restored rooms that feature **Sakyamuni (33, 35)** accompanied by his two main disciples, and one featuring the **eight medicine buddhas (34)**. The **Chapel of Lhodrak Namka Gyaltzen (32)** near the southeast corner features Pabonka Rinpoche, Sakyamuni, Tsongkhapa and Atisha (Jowo-je). The chapel in the southwest corner is the **Chapel of Five Protectors (36)** and has some fearsome statues of Tamdrin (Hayagriva), Palden Lhamo (Shri Devi) and other protector deities, attended by Tantric drumming in the anteroom. Next is the **Chapel of the Three Kings (38)**, dedicated to Songtsen Gampo, Trisong Detsen and Ralpachen. Also featured in the room are Songtsen Gampo's two wives, various ministers, and such symbols of royalty as the elephant and horse in the left corner.

Also worth a look is the **Chapel of Songtsen Gampo (39)**, the principal Songtsen Gampo chapel in the Jokhang. It is positioned in the centre of the west wall (directly above the entry to the ground-floor inner sanctum). The bejewelled king, with a tiny buddha protruding from his turban, is accompanied by his two consorts, his Nepali wife to the left and his Chinese wife to the right. His silver-embossed animal-headed *chang* (barley beer) container is placed opposite him behind a grill.

Most of the other rooms are hidden behind grills, the main exception being the meditation cell of **Chapel of Songtsen Gampo (44)** near the floor's northeastern corner, which has an incredible carved doorway smeared with decades' worth of yak butter. Murals to the right of the doorway depict the Jokhang. As you walk back to the stairs look at the unusual row of carved beams that look like half-lion, half-monkey creatures.

Back by the stairs, notice the round doorframes of the **Chapel of Guru Rinpoche (46)** and the

Chapel of Samvara (47), showing Samvara with consort, which date back to the 7th century.

Before you leave the 1st floor by the stairs in the southeast corner, ascend half a floor up to two statues of the protectress **Palden Lhamo (48)**, one wrathful, the other benign. There's also a photo of the Nechung oracle here. You can sometimes gain access to a Tantric chapel up on the 2nd floor.

OTHER CHAPELS

After you've explored the interior of the Jokhang, it's definitely worth spending some time on the **roof**, with its stunning views and small teahouse. The orange building on the north side holds the private quarters of the Dalai Lama. The outer halls and the roof are effectively open daily from sunrise to sundown.

It's worth finishing off a visit with a walk around the **Nangkhor** pilgrim path, which encircles the Jokhang's inner sanctum. If you're not utterly exhausted you could have a brief look at the **Drölma Chapel (49)**, featuring Drölma flanked by her green and white manifestations and others of her 21 manifestations. Pilgrims sometimes pop into the **Guru Rinpoche Chapel (50)**, a series of three interconnected shrines stuffed with images of Guru Rinpoche, at the back of the kora.

The Potala བོད་ལྷ་ས་ བྱུང་ལྷ་ས་

Lhasa's cardinal landmark, the **Potala** (Budala Gong; Map p96; admission Y100; ☎ 9.30am-3pm before 1 May, 9am-3.30pm after 1 May, interior chapels close 4.30pm) is one of the great wonders of world architecture. As has been the case with centuries of pilgrims before you, the first sight of the fortress-like structure will be a magical moment that you will remember for a long time. It's hard to peel your eyes away from the place.

The Potala is a structure of massive proportions, an awe-inspiring place to visit, but still many visitors come away slightly disappointed. Unlike the Jokhang, which hums with vibrant activity, the Potala lies dormant like a huge museum, and the lifelessness of the highly symbolic building constantly reminds visitors that the Dalai Lama has been forced to take his government into exile. It's a modern irony that the Potala now hums with large numbers of chattering Chinese tourists staring with wonder at the building the generation before them tried in vain to destroy.

HISTORY

Marpo Ri, the 130m-high 'Red Hill', which commands a view of all Lhasa, was the site of King Songtsen Gampo's palace during the mid-7th century, long before the construction of the present-day Potala. There is little to indicate what this palace looked like, but it is clear that royal precedent was a major factor in the fifth Dalai Lama's choice of this site when he decided to move the seat of his Gelugpa government here from Drepung Monastery.

Work began first on the White Palace, or Karpo Potrang, in 1645. The nine-storey structure was completed three years later, and in 1649 the fifth Dalai Lama moved from Drepung Monastery to his new residence. However, the circumstances surrounding the construction of the larger Red Palace, or Marpo Potrang, are subject to some dispute. It is agreed that the fifth Dalai Lama died in 1682 and that his death was concealed until the completion of the Red Palace 12 years later. In some accounts, the work was initiated by the regent who governed Tibet from 1679 to 1703 and foundations were laid in 1690 (after the fifth Dalai Lama's death). In other accounts, the Red Palace was conceived by the fifth Dalai Lama as a funerary chörten and work was well under way at the time of his death. In any event, the death of the fifth Dalai Lama was not announced until he was put to rest in the newly completed Red Palace.

There is also some scholarly debate concerning the Potala's name. The most probable explanation is that it derives from the Tibetan name for Chenresig's 'pure land', or paradise, also known as Potala. Given that Songtsen Gampo and the Dalai Lamas are believed to be reincarnations of Chenresig, this connection is compelling.

Since its construction, the Potala has been the home of each of the successive Dalai Lamas, although since construction of the Norbulingka summer palace in the late 18th century, it has served as a winter residence only. It was also the seat of the Tibetan government, and with chapels, schools, jails and even tombs for the Dalai Lamas, it was virtually a self-contained world.

The Potala was shelled briefly during the 1959 popular uprising against the Chinese but the damage was not extensive. The Potala was spared again during the Cultural Revolution, reportedly at the insistence of Zhou Enlai, the Chinese premier, who is said to have de-

ployed his own troops to protect it. The Potala was reopened to the public in 1980 and final touches to the US\$4 million renovations were completed in 1995.

ENTRY PROCEDURES

A quota system is now in place to cope with the huge numbers of domestic tourists trying to visit the Potala during the summer months. From mid-April to November you need to go to an office at the southwestern gate by noon the day before your intended visit. Present your passport and get a reservation slip detailing a time for your visit the next day. One person can get slips for four people, so earn some good karma and take your friends' passports. After 2300 slips have been allotted (only 700 of which go to independent tourists) you'll be turned away, so start queuing early in peak seasons. There is talk of introducing an online booking system, which would make things a lot easier. It is expected that the entry fee will soon hit a cool Y300. During the winter months (December to mid-April) you can just buy a ticket on the spot.

The next day head to the main southern entrance and then proceed through the rebuilt village of Shöl up into the palace. Halfway up is the ticket office. From the roof you wind down into the labyrinthine bowels of the Potala, before exiting at the rear of the palace and descending to either the Lukhang or the western entrance. Much of your visit will be in one huge shuffling queue.

Photography of the interior of the Potala is forbidden and all rooms are wired with motion sensors and video cameras.

SHÖL

Nestled at the southern foot of Marpo Ri, the former village of Shöl (which means 'at the base of') was once Lhasa's red-light district, as well as the location of a prison, a printing press and some ancillary government buildings. Some of these buildings have been rebuilt, including an inn supposedly favoured by the sixth Dalai Lama and the residence of the monk police chief. Expect some kind of admission fee before long. There are plans for an exhibition hall, perhaps to include the famous three-dimensional mandala made of over 200,000 pearls that was formerly displayed inside the Potala.

Entry to the Potala is up two steep access ramps that will soon leave you wheezing in the

oxygen-depleted air. The stairs lead past the ticket office to the large **Deyang Shar**, the external courtyard of the White Palace. At the top of the triple stairs leading up to the White Palace look out for the golden handprints of the fifth Dalai Lama on the wall to the left, and murals to the north depicting Songtsen Gampo's original Potala and the construction of the Jokhang.

ROOF OF THE WHITE PALACE

As you arrive on the roof, head right for the private quarters of the 13th and 14th Dalai Lamas. The first room you come to is the **throne room** (Simchung Nyiwoi Shar), where the Dalai Lamas would receive official guests. The large picture on the left of the throne is of the 13th Dalai Lama; the matching photo of the present Dalai Lama has been removed. There are some fine murals here, including a depiction of Bodhgaya (where the Buddha achieved enlightenment) and the mythical paradise of Shambhala (by the entry).

The trail continues clockwise into the **reception hall** (Dhaklen Paldseg), with a fine collection of bronze statues and fine hidden views from the balcony. Next comes the **meditation room**, which still displays the ritual implements of the present Dalai Lama on a small table to the side of the room. Protector gods here include Nagpo Chenpo (Mahakala), the Nechung oracle and Palden Lhamo. The final room, the **bedroom of the Dalai Lama** (Chimey Namgyal), has some personal effects of the Dalai Lama on show, such as his bedside clock. The mural above the bed is of Tsongkhapa, the founder of the Gelugpa order of which the Dalai Lama is the head. The locked door leads into the Dalai Lama's private bathroom.

RED PALACE Third Floor

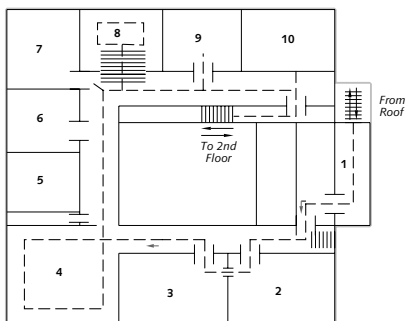
The first room in the main palace building is the **Chapel of Jampa** (Jamkhang), which contains an exquisite image of Jampa commissioned by the eighth Dalai Lama; it stands opposite the Dalai Lama's throne. To the right of the throne is a wooden Kalachakra mandala. The walls are stacked with the collected works of the fifth Dalai Lama. The chapel was unfortunately damaged in a fire in 1984 (caused by an electrical fault) and many valuable thangkas (religious paintings) were lost.

The **Chapel of Three-Dimensional Mandalas** (Loilang Khang) houses spectacular jewel-encrusted mandalas of the three principal

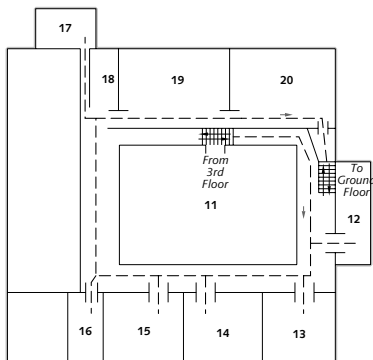
RED PALACE OF THE POTALA

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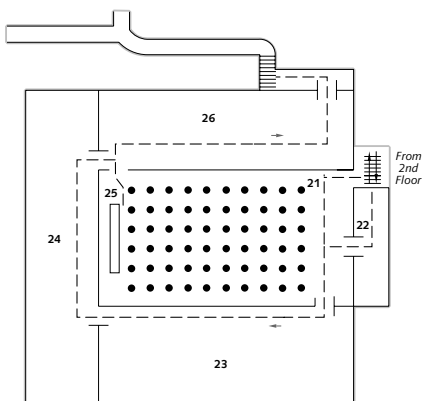
THIRD FLOOR



SECOND FLOOR



GROUND FLOOR



THIRD FLOOR

- 1 Chapel of Jampa (Jamkhang)
- 2 Chapel of the Three-Dimensional Mandalas (Loilang Khang)
- 3 Chapel of the Victory over the Three Worlds (Sasum Namgyal)
- 4 Chapel of Immortal Happiness (Chimey Dedan Kyil)
- 5 Tomb of the 13th Dalai Lama
- 6 Lhama Lhakhang
- 7 Tomb of the 7th Dalai Lama (Serdung Tashi Obar Khang)
- 8 Chapel of Arya Lokeshvara (Pakpa Lhakhang)
- 9 Tomb of the 8th Dalai Lama
- 10 Tomb of the 9th Dalai Lama

SECOND FLOOR

- 11 Rest Area
- 12 Chapel of Kalachakra (Dukhor Lhakhang)
- 13 Chapel of Sakyamuni (Thuburang Lhakhang)
- 14 Chapel of the Nine Buddhas of Longevity (Tsephak Lhakhang)
- 15 Treasures of the Potala Exhibition
- 16 Chapel of Sakyamuni (Zegya Lhakhang)
- 17 King Songsten Gampo's Meditation Chamber (Chogyal Drupuk)

- 18 Lima Lhakhang
- 19 Lima Lhakhang
- 20 Lima Lhakhang

GROUND FLOOR

- 21 Assembly Hall
- 22 Chapel of Lamrim
- 23 Rigsum Lhakhang
- 24 Chapel of the Dalai Lamas' Tombs (Serdung Zamling Gyenjkhang)
- 25 Throne
- 26 Chapel of the Holy Born (Trungrab Lhakhang)

--- Suggested Route

Tantric deities of the Gelugpa order (Chana Dorje, Demchok and Yamantaka). Unfortunately you can no longer walk around to see the fine blackened murals near the throne of the seventh Dalai Lama.

The **Chapel of the Victory over the Three Worlds** (Sasum Namgyal) houses a library and displays examples of Manchu texts. The main statue is a golden thousand-armed Chenresig, while the main thangka is of the Manchu Chinese emperor Qianlong dressed in monk's robes, with accompanying inscriptions in four languages.

Next, the **Chapel of Immortal Happiness** (Chimey Dedan Kyil) was once the residence of the sixth Dalai Lama, whose throne remains; it is now dedicated to Tsepame, the Buddha of Longevity, who sits by the window. Next to him in the corner is the Dzogchen deity Ekajati (Tsechigma), with an ostrich-feather hat and a single fang.

From here a locked corridor leads off the main circuit to a gallery that overlooks the **tomb of the 13th Dalai Lama**. You could at one time look down on the chörten from above and then descend to look at it at ground level, but the room has been closed for years.

Also in the northwest corner is the **Lhama Lhakhang** and the golden **tomb of the Seventh Dalai Lama** (Serdung Tashi Obar Khang), constructed in 1757 and encased in half a tonne of gold. To the right stands a statue of the seventh Dalai Lama, Kalsang Gyatso.

In the northwest corner, steps lead up into the small but important **Chapel of Arya Lokeshvara** (Pakpa Lhakhang). Allegedly this is one of the few corners of the Potala that dates from the time of Songtsen Gampo's 7th-century palace. It is the most sacred of the Potala's chapels, and the image of Arya Lokeshvara inside is the most revered image housed in the Potala. The statue is accompanied on the left by the seventh Dalai Lama and Tsongkhapa, and on the right by the fifth, eighth and ninth Dalai Lamas and the protector Chana Dorje (Vajrapani). Relics include stone footprints of Guru Rinpoche and Tsongkhapa.

The last two rooms on this floor are the jewel-encrusted **tombs of the Eighth and Ninth Dalai Lama**, the former over 9m tall.

Second Floor

If you're exhausted already (not even half-way!), you can rest your legs at a reception area/teahouse in the middle of the floor.

The first of the chapels you come to on the 2nd floor is the **Chapel of Kalachakra** (Dukhor Lhakhang). It is noted for its stunning three-dimensional mandala, which is over 6m in diameter and finely detailed with over 170 statues. A statue of the Tantric deity Dukhor (Kalachakra) stands in the far right corner, though access to the room is limited.

The **Chapel of Sakyamuni** (Thuburang Lhakhang) houses a library, the throne of the seventh Dalai Lama and some fine examples of calligraphy.

In the **Chapel of the Nine Buddhas of Longevity** (Tsepak Lhakhang), look for the murals by the left window – the left side depicts Tangtong Gyelpo (see p30) and his celebrated bridge (now destroyed) over the Yarlung Tsangpo near Chushul. The images of coracle rafts halfway up the wall add an intimate touch. There are also nine statues of Tsepame here.

Passing the **Chapel of Sakyamuni** (Zegya Lhakhang), continue to the northwestern corner where you'll find a small corridor that leads to **King Songtsen Gampo's meditation chamber** (Chogyal Drupuk), which, along with the Chapel of Arya Lokeshvara on the 3rd floor, is one of the oldest rooms in the Potala. The most important statue is of Songtsen Gampo himself, to the left of the pillar. To his left is his minister Tonmi Sambhota (said to have invented the Tibetan script) and to the right are his Chinese and Nepali wives. The king's Tibetan wife (the only one to bear a son) is in a cabinet by the door. The fifth Dalai Lama lurks behind (and also on) the central pillar. Queues for this chapel can be long.

The last three rooms are all linked and are chock-a-block full of 3000 pieces of Chinese statuary, many donated by a Khampa businessman in 1995.

First Floor

This floor has been closed to visitors for years and is unlikely to reopen soon.

Ground Floor

As you round the steps, enter the beautiful **assembly hall**, which is the largest hall in the Potala and is its physical centre. Note the fine carved pillar heads. The large throne that dominates one end of the hall was the throne of the sixth Dalai Lama. Four important chapels frame the hall.

The first chapel on this floor is the **Chapel of Lamrim**. *Lamrim* means literally 'the graduated

path', and refers to the graduated stages that mark the path to enlightenment. The central figure in the chapel is Tsongkhapa, the founder of the Gelugpa order, with whom *lamrim* texts are usually associated. Outside the chapel a fine mural depicts the Forbidden City, commemorating the fifth Dalai Lama's visit to the court of Emperor Shunzhi in Beijing.

The next chapel, the long **Rigsun Lhakhang**, is dedicated to eight Indian teachers who brought various Tantric practices and rituals to Tibet. The central figure is a silver statue of Guru Rinpoche (one of the eight), who is flanked by his consorts Mandarava and Yeshe Tsogyel (with a turquoise headdress), as well as statues of the eight teachers on his left and a further eight statues of him in different manifestations on the right. As you exit the chapel, take an up-close look at the fine wall murals.

In the west wing of the assembly hall is one of the highlights of the Potala, the awe-inspiring **Chapel of the Dalai Lamas' Tombs** (Serdung Zamling Gyenjkhang). The hall is dominated by the huge 12.6m-high chörten of the great fifth Dalai Lama, gilded with some 3700kg of gold. Flanking it are two smaller chörten containing the 10th (right) and 12th (left) Dalai Lamas, who both died as children. Richly embossed, the chörten represent the concentrated wealth of an entire nation. One of the precious stones is a pearl said to have been discovered in an elephant's brains and thus, in a wonderful piece of understatement, 'considered a rarity'. Eight other chörten represent the eight major events in the life of the Buddha.

The last chapel is the **Chapel of the Holy Born** (Trungrab Lhakhang). Firstly, in the corner, is the statue and chörten of the 11th Dalai Lama, who died at the age of 17. There are also statues of the eight medicine buddhas, a central Sakyamuni and fifth Dalai Lama, and then Chenresig, Songtsen Gampo and the first four Dalai Lamas.

Around the Potala

A morning visit to the Potala can easily be combined with a circuit of the Potala kora and an afternoon excursion to some of the temples nearby. One of the best ways to visit the following sights is on our Lingkhör Walking Tour – see p118.

POTALA KORA

The pilgrim path that encircles the foot of the Potala makes for a nice walk before or after

a visit to the main event. Recent renovations by the city authorities have largely secularised the walk, doing away with many of the stalls frequented by pilgrims, but there are still plenty of people here, especially in the mornings. From the western chörten (formerly the western gate to the city), follow the prayer wheels to the northwest corner, marked by three large chörten.

The northeast corner is home to several rock paintings and a delightful prayer hall occupied by nuns. Just past here, spin the large prayer wheel of the Phurba Chok Hermitage Mani Lhakhang and then swing past the Chinese-style square, where pilgrims often prostrate in front of the Potala. Look out for the three 18th-century *doring* (stele); the two to the north side of the road commemorate victories over the Central Asian Dzungars (left) and Nepali Gorkhas (right). The single southern obelisk is said to have been erected by King Trisong Detsen in the eighth century.

DRUBTHUB NUNNERY & PALHA LU-PUK

Southwest of the Potala an unmarked road leads around the eastern side of Chagpo Ri, the hill that faces Marpo Ri, site of the Potala. Take this road past stone carvers and rock paintings to **Drubthub Nunnery** (Map p96). The nunnery is dedicated to Tangtong Gyelpo, the 15th-century bridge-maker, medic and inventor of Tibetan opera, who established the original nunnery on the top of Chagpo Ri. Gyelpo's white-haired statue graces the nunnery's main hall.

After the nunnery, head next door to the **Palha Lu-puk** (Map p96; admission Y20; ☎ 8am-8pm), where stairs lead up to an atmospheric cave temple said to have been the 7th-century meditative retreat of King Songtsen Gampo.

The main attraction of the cave is its relief rock carvings, some of which are over a thousand years old, making them the oldest religious images in Lhasa. Altogether there are over 70 carvings of bodhisattvas in the cave and on the cave's central column; the oldest are generally the ones lowest on the cave walls. Songtsen Gampo is depicted on the west side.

The yellow building above the Palha Lu-puk is a chapel that gives access to the less interesting meditation cave (*drubpuk*) of King Songtsen Gampo's Chinese wife, Princess Wencheng.

LUKHANG

The **Lukhang** (Map p96; admission Y10; ☎ 9am-5pm) is a little-visited temple on a small island in a lake, behind the Potala. The lake is in the recently remodelled and very pleasant **Zang Gyab Lukhang Park** (Map p96).

The lake was created during the construction of the Potala. Earth used for mortar was excavated from here, leaving a depression that was later filled with water. *Lu* (also known as *naga*) are subterranean dragon-like spirits that were thought to inhabit the area, and the Lukhang, or Chapel of the Dragon King, was built by the sixth Dalai Lama to appease them (and also to use as a retreat). You can see Luyi Gyalpo, the *naga* king, at the rear of the ground floor of the Lukhang. He is riding an elephant, and protective snakes rise from behind his head. The *naga* spirits were finally interred in the nearby Palha Lu-puk (opposite).

The Lukhang is celebrated for its 2nd- and 3rd-floor murals, which date from the 18th century. Bring a torch (flashlight). The 2nd-floor murals tell a story made famous by a Tibetan opera, while the murals on the 3rd floor depict different themes on each of the walls – Indian yogis demonstrating yogic positions (west), 84 *mahisaddhas* or masters of Buddhism (east), and the life cycle as perceived by Tibetan Buddhists (north), with the gods of Bardo, the Tibetan underworld, occupying its centre. Look for the wonderful attention to detail, down to the hairy legs of the sadhus and the patterns on the clothes.

The 3rd floor also contains a statue of an 11-headed Chenresig and a meditation room used by the Dalai Lamas. To reach the 3rd floor, walk clockwise around the outside of the building and enter from the back via a flight of stairs. Finish off a visit with a kora of the island.

For a detailed commentary on the murals check out Ian Baker and Thomas Laird's coffee-table book *The Dalai Lama's Secret Temple: Tantric Wall Paintings from Tibet*.

PARMA RI

Several hundred metres west of Chagpo Ri, **Parma Ri** (Map p96) is a much smaller hill with a couple of interesting sights. At the foot of the hill, close to Beijing Zhonglu, is one of Lhasa's four former royal temples, **Kunde Ling** (Map p96; admission Y10; ☎ 9am-7pm). The *ling* (royal) temples were appointed by the fifth Dalai Lama, and it was from one of them that regents of

Tibet were generally appointed. There are only a couple of restored chapels open, but it's a friendly place and worth a visit. Look for the upstairs mural of the original Kunde Ling, 80% of which has been destroyed.

On the north side of Parma Ri is the **Gesar Ling** (Map p96; admission Y5; ☎ 9.30am-7pm), a Chinese construction that dates back to 1793 and was recently renovated. It is the only Chinese-style temple in Lhasa. The main yellow-walled temple has a statue of the mythical Tibetan warrior Gesar (associated with Guandi, the Chinese God of War) along with Guru Rinpoche on the left and Ekajati, the Dzogchen deity, on the right. A separate yellow chapel has a statue of an orange Jampelyang with Sakyamuni, Chana Dorje (Vajrapani) and Chenresig.

Ramoche Temple ར་མོ་ཆེ་ སྐྱེ་མཚན་ལྷ་ཁྱེད་

The **Ramoche** (Xiaozhaosi; Map p96; admission Y20; ☎ 8am-4.30pm) is the sister temple to the Jokhang, constructed around the same time but in Chinese style. It was built to house the Jowo Sakyamuni image that is now in the Jokhang. The principal image in Ramoche is Mikyöba (Akshobhya), brought to Tibet in the 7th century as part of the dowry of King Songtsen Gampo's Nepali wife, Princess Bhrikuti. The image represents Sakyamuni at the age of eight years. By the mid-15th century the temple had become Lhasa's Upper Tantric College. It is said to have been badly damaged by Red Guards during the Cultural Revolution, but the complex has since been restored with Swiss assistance.

As you enter the temple, past pilgrims doing full-body prostrations and the first of two inner koras, you'll see a **protector chapel** to the left, featuring masks and puppets on the ancient pillars and an image of Dorje Yudroma covered in beads on a horse. The main chapel is full of fierce protector deities in *yabyum* pose, as befitting a Tantric temple.

The fabulously ornate Mikyöba (Akshobhya) image can be seen in the inner **Tsangkhang**, protected by the four guardian kings and a curtain of chain mail, which pilgrims rub for good luck.

As you exit the Ramoche, look for a doorway just to the right by a collection of yak-butter and incense stalls, leading to a delightful chapel, the **Tsepak Lhakhang**. The central image is Tsepame, the buddha associated with longevity, flanked by Jampa and Sakyamuni. There are smaller statues of Dorje Chang

(Vajradhara) and Marmedze (Dipamkara), and a protector chapel next door. This hidden corner is very popular with pilgrims.

Another highlight is the pedestrian-only **Ramoche Lam** (aka Xiaozhaosi Lu), probably the most interesting street in Lhasa, jam-packed with teahouses, restaurants and stalls selling everything from saddles, cloaks and Tibetan tents to handmade potato chips and Tibetan scriptures. It's well worth a stroll.

Gyüme ལྷུང་ལེང་གྲུ་ཚོང་།

The **Gyüme** (Map p100; 15 Beijing Donglu), or Lower Tantric College, is across from the Kirey Hotel. It is easy to miss this working temple; look for an imposing entrance set back from the road. It's a surprisingly impressive place and little visited by foreigners.

Gyüme was founded in the mid-15th century as one of Tibet's foremost Tantric training colleges. In Lhasa, its importance was second only to the monasteries of Sera and Drepung. More than 500 monks were once in residence, and students of the college underwent a physically and intellectually gruelling course of study. The college was thoroughly desecrated during the Cultural Revolution, but a growing number of monks are now in residence.

The main *dukhang* (assembly hall) has statues of Tsongkhapa, the 13th Dalai Lama and Sakyamuni. Look for the monks' alms bowls encased in crafted leather, hanging from the pillars. Behind are huge statues of Tsongkhapa and his two main disciples, and next door is a fearsome statue of Dorje Jigje (Yamantaka). The 2nd- and 3rd-floor chapels are sometimes open.

Other Temples

Down the alleys off Beijing Donglu are three obscure temples, which can be visited if you've seen everything else.

Tsome Ling (Map p100) is the most interesting of the three. One of the four *ling* (royal) temples of Lhasa (along with Kunde Ling and Tengye Ling), this small site consists of two temples. To the east of the residential courtyard is the Karpo Potrang (White Palace), built in 1777, and to the west is the Marpo Potrang (Red Palace), built at the beginning of the 19th century. Both buildings have fine murals and are well frequented by pilgrims. Of equal interest is the small embroidery and Tibetan mattress workshop on site.

The obscure and rarely visited **Tengye Ling** (Map p100) chapel is a Nyingmapa-sect temple dedicated to the red-faced deity Tseumar, as well as Pehar (a protector linked to Samye) and Tamdrin (Hayagriva). The crates of *baijiu* (rice wine) stacked in the corner are there to refill the cup in Tseumar's hand; the chapel smells like a distillery. Look for the wonderful old photo of the Dalai Lama's pet elephant, stabled in the Lukhang behind the Potala. The chapel is hidden in the backstreets west of the Snowlands Hotel and is hard to find; enter through the gateway marked by juniper and *baijiu*-sellers, just south of the Backstreet Bar.

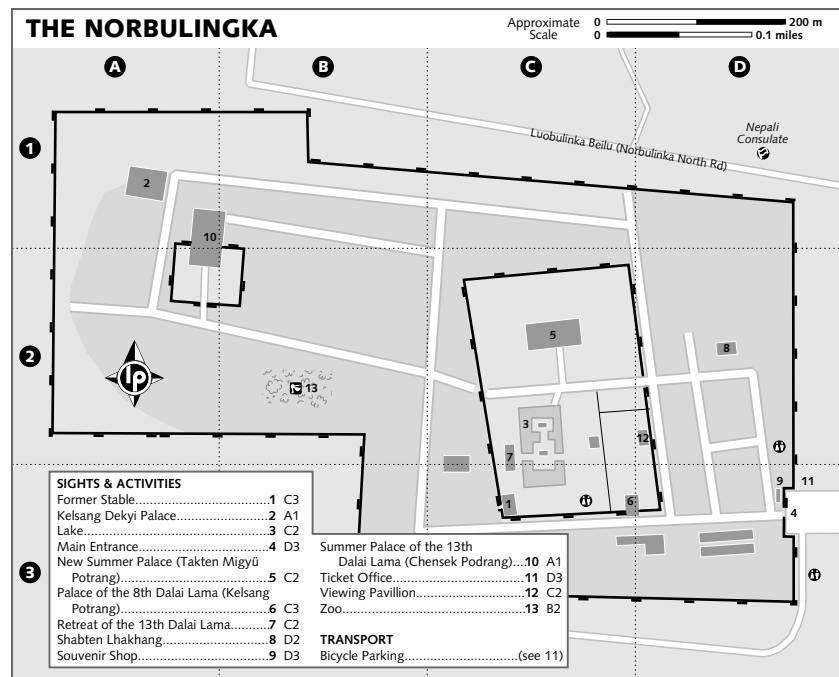
The badly ruined temple of **Shide Tratsang** (Map p100) is connected to Reting Monastery and was once one of the six principal temples encircling the Jokhang. It's in a housing courtyard, down a back alley near Tashi I restaurant, and remains a rare example of what Lhasa looked like before the renovation teams moved in.

The **Rigsum Lhakhang** (Map p100) is a small chapel hidden in a housing courtyard southwest of Barkhor Square. It's dedicated to the Rigsum Gonpo trinity of Jampelyang, Chenresig and Chana Dorje (Vajrapani). Look for the line of prayer wheels disappearing down the alley.

Die-hards can track down the hard-to-find **Pode Kangtsang** (Map p100), in the south of the old town, with its old upper-floor murals and large thangkhas. It's accessed from the south.

The Norbulingka རྫོང་བུ་གླིང་ཀར་ འུ་བུ་ལྷོ་ཀར་། The **Norbulingka** (Luobulinka; Map p96; Minzu Lu; admission ¥60, Tibetans ¥3; ☎ 9am–6.30pm), the summer palace of the Dalai Lamas, is about 10 minutes' walk south of the Lhasa Hotel in the western part of town. It ranks well behind the other points of interest in and around Lhasa. The gardens are poorly tended and the palaces themselves are something of an anticlimax, since most rooms are closed to the public. Avoid the thoroughly depressing **zoo** (admission ¥10).

This said, the Norbulingka is worth a visit if you don't mind the high entry fee, and the park is a great place to be during festival times and public holidays. In the seventh lunar month of every year, the Norbulingka is crowded with picnickers for the Shötun festival, when traditional Tibetan opera performances are held.



HISTORY

The seventh Dalai Lama founded the first summer palace in the Norbulingka (whose name literally means 'jewel park') in 1755. Rather than use the palace simply as a retreat, he decided to use the wooded environs as a summer base from which to administer the country, a practice that was repeated by each of the succeeding Dalai Lamas. The grand procession of the Dalai Lama's entourage relocating from the Potala to the Norbulingka became one of the highlights of the Lhasa year.

The eighth Dalai Lama (1758–1804) initiated more work on the Norbulingka, expanding the gardens and digging the lake, which can be found south of the New Summer Palace. The 13th Dalai Lama (1876–1933) was responsible for the three palaces in the northwest corner of the park, and the 14th (present) Dalai Lama built the New Summer Palace in 1956.

In 1959, the 14th Dalai Lama made his escape from the Norbulingka disguised as a Tibetan soldier (see p40). Unfortunately, all the palaces of the Norbulingka were damaged

by Chinese artillery fire in the popular uprising that followed the Dalai Lama's flight. At the time, the compound was surrounded by some 30,000 Tibetans determined to defend the life of their spiritual leader. Repairs have been undertaken but have failed to restore the palaces to their full former glory.

PALACE OF THE EIGHTH DALAI LAMA

This palace (also known as Kelsang Potrang) is the first you come to. It was used as a summer palace by the eighth Dalai Lama and by every succeeding Dalai Lama up to the 13th. Only the main audience hall is open; it features 65 hanging thangkhas and some lovely painted furniture.

NEW SUMMER PALACE

The New Summer Palace (Takten Migyü Potrang) in the centre of the park was built by the present (14th) Dalai Lama between 1954 and 1956 and is the most interesting of the Norbulingka palaces. You can only enter the walled complex from its east side.

The first of the rooms is the **Dalai Lama's audience chamber**. Note the wall murals, which

depict the history of Tibet in 301 scenes that flow in rows from left to right. As you stand with your back to the window, the murals start on the left wall with Sakyamuni and show the mythical beginnings of the Tibetan people (from the union of a bodhisattva and a monkey in the Sheldrak Cave). The wall in front of you depicts the building of the circular monastery of Samye, as well as Ganden, Drepung and other monasteries to the right. The right wall depicts the construction of the Potala and Norbulingka.

Next come the **Dalai Lama's private quarters**, which consist of a meditation chamber and a bedroom. The rooms have been maintained almost exactly as the Dalai Lama left them, and apart from the usual Buddhist images they contain the occasional surprise (a Soviet radio, among other things).

The **assembly hall**, where the Dalai Lama would address heads of state, is home to a gold throne backed by wonderful cartoon-style murals of the Dalai Lama's court (left, at the back). Look out for British representative Hugh Richardson in a trilby hat, and several Mongolian ambassadors. The right wall depicts the Dalai Lamas. The first five lack the Wheel of Law, symbolising their lack of governmental authority. Last are the meeting rooms of the Dalai Lama's mother.

South of the New Summer Palace is the artificial lake commissioned by the eighth Dalai Lama. The only pavilion open here at the time of research was the personal **retreat of the 13th Dalai Lama** in the southwestern corner, featuring a library, a thousand-armed Chenresig statue, and a stuffed tiger in the corner! The seats overlooking the duck pond are a fine spot for a picnic.

THE BUMPA RI TREK

The demanding but excellent five-hour return trek up imposing Bumpa Ri, the holy peak to the southeast of Lhasa, is worth attempting if you're fit and acclimatised. It's straight up and then straight down, but offers unparalleled views over the Holy City, either from the top or just part of the way.

From the Eastern Bus Station it's a 10-minute walk south over the Lhasa Bridge to the base of the hill, where a path ascends to a chörten and incense-burning site. From here faint trails head straight up the hillside to the third small ridge, where a faint trail branches to the right. In general, aim for the pylon, to meet up with the main trail. After an hour you reach a ridge with views of the summit spires ahead. It's another hour's climb from here to the summit, following the trail to the right of the spires, over a spur and then up a gully to the two main summits, festooned in prayer flags. From the top it's a two-hour descent back down the way you came.

SUMMER PALACE OF THE 13TH DALAI LAMA

The summer palace of the 13th Dalai Lama (Chensek Potrang) is in the western section of the Norbulingka, northwest of the awful zoo.

The ground-floor assembly hall holds the throne and photo of the 13th Dalai Lama and is stuffed full of various buggies, palanquins and bicycles. The fine murals depicting the life of Sakyamuni are hard to see without a torch.

Nearby, the smaller **Kelsang Dekyi Palace** was also built by the 13th Dalai Lama but is closed.

Tibet Museum འབྲེགས་སྡོད་ཁང་ 西藏博物馆

This grand-looking new **museum** (Xizang Bowuguan; Map p96; Minzu Nanlu; ☎ 681 2210; adult/student Y30/5; 🕒 9am-6.30pm May-Oct, 10.30am-5pm Nov-Apr), in the west of town just opposite the Norbulingka, isn't too bad as long as you can filter out the blatant propaganda. The adult ticket includes a useful audio tour (student ticketholders pay an extra Y10 for this), but the commentary suffers from terrible Americanised pronunciation (Da-lai La-maaarr!).

The halls start logically with prehistory, which highlights the Neolithic sites around Chamdo and rock paintings at Rutok and Nam-tso. The 'Tibet is Inalienable in History' hall is full of boring seals and misleading Chinese political spin, but it's worth seeking out the Guge kingdom shields and the 18th-century gold urn and ivory slips that were used by the Chinese to recognise their version of the Panchen Lama (see p196). The more interesting third hall covers Tibetan script

(with some fine 8th-century birch-paper scriptures), opera masks, musical instruments, divination guides, medical thangkas and statuary. The next hall concentrates on thangkas. The final hall has a good display of folk handicrafts, ranging from coracle boats to nomad tents, with some fine traditional Tibetan locks and leather bags used for carrying salt or tsampa.

The top floor has an inappropriate collection of Chinese jade and a hall of stuffed Tibetan wildlife, with a collection of python and leopard skins that were confiscated from local poachers. There are toilets and an overpriced shop. Photos are not allowed but everyone takes them anyway.

ACTIVITIES

Braille Without Borders Blind Massage Centre (Map p100; ☎ 632 0870; 4th fl, Room 59, Beijing Donglu; 🕒 9am-9pm) This worthy enterprise, set up by the Braille Without Borders organisation (p327), offers hour-long traditional massages (Y80) by blind therapists. The centre is in a courtyard, down an alley across from the Tashi I Restaurant. Call in advance. Ask at the Kyichu Hotel if you can't find it.

Thaizand Bicycle Tours (Map p100; ☎ 691 0898; thaizand@hotmail.com; Kirey Hotel, 105 Beijing Donglu) This small operation operates good bicycle tours ranging from day trips around Lhasa to fully supported overland rides to Kathmandu.

Tibet Wind Horse Adventure (Map p96; ☎ 136-3890 0332; www.windhorsetibet.com; Zangjiyuan Lu) Offers full-service rafting trips between June and October, either a half-day on the Tolung-chu (Y600), one/two days on the Drigung-chu (Y760/1520) or an ambitious five-day trip on the Reting Tsangpo. It also offers day trips on horseback in the Drigung and Tolung Valley regions (Y760). Trips are managed by Aussie adventurer Chris Jones. Pop into the Raft Tibet office (Map p100) near the Snowlands Hotel between June and September for details. See also p284.

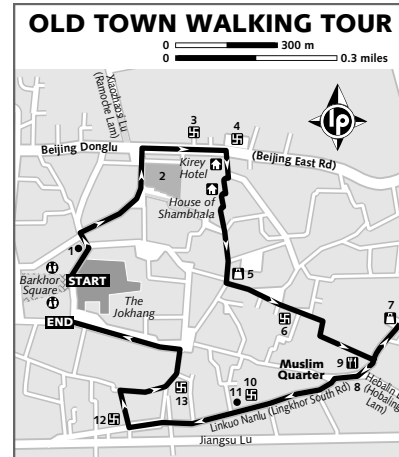
WALKING TOURS Old Town Walking Tour

The fragile Tibetan **old town** shelters the soul of Lhasa, far from Chinese influence. This walk takes in craft workshops, backstreet chapels and pilgrim paths, passing en route some of Lhasa's last remaining traditional architecture.

At the first turn of the **Barkhor circuit** (1; p102) take a left and then quick right, past

WALK FACTS

Start Barkhor Square
Finish Barkhor Square
Distance 3km
Duration Two to three hours



strips of dried yak meat and yellow bags of yak butter to the bustling **Tromsikhang Market** (2). After a quick look around the modern market (the original Tibetan-style building was demolished in 1997), head north to the main road, Beijing Donglu, and then right to visit the **Gyüme Lower Tantric College** (3; p114).

About 50m further down the road, opposite the Kirey Hotel, are the deceptively long white walls of the small but active **Meru Sarpa Monastery** (4; admission free). The building in the middle of the central housing compound houses a traditional wood-block printing press. In the northwest corner is an atmospheric chapel with a statue of thousand-armed Chenresig.

Take the alley down the east side of the Kirey Hotel into the old town and follow the winding branch to the right, past the yellow walls of the House of Shambhala (p123), which has a nice rooftop restaurant. As you continue south you'll pass Tibetan craftspeople making statues, cabinets, masks and Tibetan banners. At the junction there's the **Eizhi Exquisite Thangka Shop** (5) to the left; you want to take a left here but first look down the alleyway to

the right to see the brassware shop, a Tibetan tailor and a noodle-making workshop.

As you head southeast past a small market, curve right to the quiet but interesting **Karmashar Temple (6)**, once the home of the Karmashar, Lhasa's main oracle. Look for the Karmashar statue in the far right corner of the back chapel, decorated with bangles, beads and hair clips, and for the spooky faded icon painted on a pigskin bag in the main hall, pacified with offerings of tsampa and barley beer. There are also some nice original murals on the upper walls. Enter from the south side.

Continue east to a T-junction past outdoor pool tables and blaring video teahouses. At the T-junction take a left to visit the stylish **Dropening crafts centre (7)**; p125), where you can watch local craftsmen from the **Ancient Art Restoration Centre** (☎ 9am-1pm & 2-6pm) across the courtyard, as they grind up mineral paints for thangka-painting and hammer away at metal sculptures.

After loading up with souvenirs, head south towards the **Muslim quarter (8)**, the focus of Lhasa's 2000-strong Muslim population. During Friday lunchtime weekly prayers the quarter is full of men with wispy beards and skullcaps (non-Muslims are denied entry to the mosque itself). Many women here wear black-velvet headscarfs, characteristic of the Linxia region of China's Gansu province. Try a bowl of Muslim noodles at the **Islam Restaurant (9)**; p124) if you're feeling peckish.

As you face the mosque, turn right and head southwest past Muslim tea stalls and butcher shops, along part of the Lingkhör pilgrim circuit to the yellow walls of the **Ani Sangkhung Nunnery (10)**; 29 Linkuo Nanlu; admission ¥30; ☎ 8am-5pm).

This small, friendly and active nunnery is the only one within the precincts of the old Tibetan quarter. The site of the nunnery probably dates back to the 7th century, but it housed a monastery until at least the 15th century. The principal image, upstairs on the 2nd floor, is a thousand-armed Chenresig. A small alley to the side of the main chapel leads down to the former meditation chamber of Songtsen Gampo, the 7th-century king of Tibet. The busy nuns run a great teahouse in the courtyard. Just next to the entrance is an excellent and very friendly **thangka workshop (11)**.

Continue past a second mosque to the **Lho Rigsum Lhakhang (12)**, one of four chapels

surrounding the Jokhang at cardinal points. The lovely chapel, almost completely ignored by tourists, has a central statue of Tsepame (Amitayus) flanked by the four main bodhisattvas and its own inner kora. The site is looked after by monks from Ganden Monastery.

Take a right here headed north and then a right, then a left. At the junction you can see the **Rabtsé Temple (13)**, affiliated to Sera Monastery.

The alley north takes you to the southeast corner of the Barkhor circuit, where you can continue clockwise to Barkhor Square.

Lingkhör Walking Tour

This walk follows the most interesting section of the city's main pilgrimage circuit, the Lingkhör (see p99). It's best walked in the morning, when you'll be joined by hundreds of Tibetan pilgrims.

The hardest part of this walk is finding the starting point. Take a taxi to Ladefense Restaurant (拉芳舍; Lafang She) or the next-door Xuefeng Binguan hotel (雪峰宾馆) on Jiangsu Lu, opposite the bridge to Sun Island, and look for a scruffy looking alleyway head-

ing north. The alleyway is next to a petrol station and marked by an **incense burner (1)**.

After a couple of hundred metres the alleyway hits the base of **Chagpo Ri (2)**; 3746m), the Iron Mountain, and continues west past a motley collection of rock paintings, shrines, stone mantras, carved yak skulls, *tsa-tsa* (clay icons) and even flower pots, discarded for good luck. A forest of prayer flags marks a crest in the path and you descend to a collection of **stone carvers (3)**, who tap away in front of sheets of slate. Detour to the right to walk clockwise around a large **chörten (4)**, built entirely of the carvers' mani stones.

Just west of here, at the southwest end of the hill, is a lovely collection of painted **rock carvings (5)**; admission ¥10) centred around a huge image of Tsepame. Altogether there are over 5000 carvings on Chagpo Ri, a tradition that started back in the 7th century and continued for the next thousand years. Pilgrims perform full body prostrations in front of the images, besides several rooms full of glowing butter lamps.

From here head west to Deji Lu (Dickey Lam in Tibetan) and head north through modern Lhasa. Just before you hit Beijing Zhonglu (the second crossroads) follow the alleyway to the right to visit the friendly **Kunde Ling (6)**; p113). Back at the intersection with Beijing Zhonglu, pilgrims rub their backs, shoulders and hips against a series of polished **holy stones (7)**, in hopes of their healing properties. A couple of minutes' walk east along Beijing Zhonglu is the Chinese-style **Gesar Ling (8)**; p113), which is also worth a quick visit.

Continue east to the **Golden Yaks statue (9)**, erected for the 40th anniversary of the 'liberation' of Tibet, and pass the Tibet TV station before reaching the former western **city gate (10)**; Daggo Kani), at the corner of the Potala Palace. Black-and-white photos displayed in the Brahmaputra Grand Hotel (p122) show British Army troops entering the city through the original gate during the invasion of 1903-04.

Climb up to the **viewpoint (11)** just above the white chörten for one of Lhasa's classic photo opportunities. The hilltop behind you was once the site of Lhasa's principal Tibetan medical college, known as the Mentsikhang. Founded in 1413, the college was destroyed in the 1959 popular uprising. An army post means you can no longer climb to the mountain-top for the fine views.

From here, head down the nearby alley, past the Drubthub Nunnery, to visit **Palha Lu-puk (12)**; p112), the site of Lhasa's earliest religious icons.

Either end the walk here with a well-deserved cup of sweet tea in the hot and humid **cave teahouse (13)** just east of the city gate or, if you have the energy, finish with a quick circuit of the Potala kora (see p112), stopping in at the fabulous murals of the **Lukhang (14)**; p113) en route.

FESTIVALS & EVENTS

If at all possible, try to time your visit to Lhasa with one of the city's main festivals (p318). The **New Year** and **Saga Dawa** festivals in particular see thousands of pilgrims flood into town, and the city's pilgrim circuits take on a colourful, party atmosphere.

The Saga Dawa festival sees huge numbers of pilgrims making circuits around Lhasa late into the night. The entire 2km length of Deji Lu overflows with thousands of beggars, as rich Tibetans hand out alms from gigantic wads of one-mao notes.

A couple of months later, during the **Chökor Düchen** festival, Lhasa residents trek up to the summit of Gambo Ütse Ri, the high peak behind Drepung Monastery. In olden days even the Dalai Lama would ascend the peak, riding atop a white yak.

SLEEPING

The Tibetan-style accommodation around the old town is easily the most interesting place in which to be based. Several new midrange and upmarket options here means there's now something for everyone. Apart from the hotels listed here there are dozens of shiny, characterless Chinese-style hotels scattered around town. You might find yourself in one of these if you arrive on a tour or book a hotel online.

Prices given here (and throughout this book) apply to the high season from May to early October (see p314). If things are quiet (and certainly from mid-October to April), expect a discount of 25% to 50% on the room rates listed here.

Several new hostels, popular with the ever-increasing number of Chinese backpackers, are giving the long-established Tibetan places a run for their money. Note that most of the budget places don't accept reservations. You may have to hunt around for a room in the

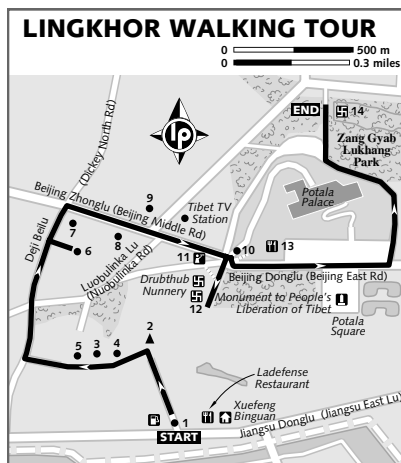
WALK FACTS

Start Jiangsu Lu (Chingdröl Shar Lam)

Finish Potala Palace

Distance 3-4km

Duration Two to three hours



peak months of July and August and during Chinese holidays.

Budget

Apart from the places mentioned below, there is an increasing number of small and simple family-run guesthouses hidden in the backstreets of the Tibetan quarter, mostly frequented by Chinese backpackers. See also the Yak Hotel (opposite) for cheap dorm beds.

Dongcuo International Youth Hostel (Dongcuo Guojijing Lüguan; Map p100; ☎ 627 3388; www.yhalasa.com; 10 Beijing Donglu; dm Y15-20, s/d/tr/q without bathroom Y80/90/105/120, s/d/t with bathroom Y100/140/180; 📍) This Chinese-run hostel attracts both foreign backpackers and Chinese adventurers and has a quite different feel from the Tibetan-run places. Rooms are smallish but well maintained, with wooden floors and crisp white sheets, though a few don't have any exterior windows. The bunk-bed style dorms vary in size – the best deal is a bed in a triple for Y35. Hot water is available from 8pm to 7am in the rooms with bathrooms, or 24 hours in the common showers.

Banak Shol (Balangxue Lüguan; Map p100; ☎ 632 3829; 8 Beijing Donglu; dm/s/d Y20/30/60, d with bathroom Y100-160) Once the place to stay back in the early days of independent travel, the Banak Shol is looking pretty tired these days. It's still got several things going for it, including the good Nam-tso Restaurant (p123), reliable luggage storage and pleasant wooden verandas, but the staff seem jaded, the walls of the cheaper rooms are paperthin, and most rooms look onto either the noisy main road or a courtyard that seems perpetually full of reversing Land Cruisers. The doubles with a hot-water bathroom are among the cheapest such rooms in Lhasa, but they aren't terribly well maintained. Other plus points include an efficient branch of FIT and free laundry (though the staff won't touch your crusty socks after a week's trekking!). The majority of the guests these days are Chinese backpackers. The hotel doesn't accept reservations.

Snowlands Hotel (雪域宾馆 Xueyu Binguan; Map p100; ☎ 632 3687; fax 632 7145; 4 Zangyiyuan Lu; dm/d/tr Y25/60-80/105, d/deluxe d with bathroom Y250/350; 📍) Snowlands is another of Lhasa's old-timers. It was a favourite with backpackers and carpet-traders back in the 1980s, but the mood has changed a bit since then. Despite the almost perfect location beside Barkhor Square, Snowlands is quieter than both the Yak and the

Banak Shol, largely because the standards are lower. The cheaper rooms suffer from paper-thin walls, the shower block is hit-and-miss and there's a frustrating lack of washbasins. Quiet but dark doubles with bathroom are discounted to Y100 in the low season and come with a heater. The deluxe rooms offer new beds and Tibetan décor. Laundry costs Y2 per piece.

Kirey Hotel (Jiri Lüguan; Map p100; ☎ 632 3462; 105 Beijing Donglu; dm/d/t Y25/60/90, d with bathroom Y80-100; 📍) The third of Lhasa's old-timers, Kirey deserves more custom than it gets. It is friendly and clean, and has reliable hot water (9am to 9pm) in the shower block around the back. The Tashi II restaurant is on the premises and there's lots of balcony sitting space and a good internet café. Laundry service is free – put your washing in the bags provided and hand it in to reception before 9am. The main grumbles we have are the scarcity of sinks and the crummy shared toilets. The dim doubles with private bathroom at the back of the courtyard aren't really up to much either, though the upstairs rooms are better. The Y60 doubles offer perhaps the best value.

Barkhor Namchen House (Bakuo Longqian Jiating Lüguan; Map p100; ☎ 656 3009; info@shangrilatours.com; dm Y25, s Y60-70, d Y70; 📍) This promising new Tibetan-style guesthouse is a better budget choice. The old-town location just off the Barkhor is near perfect, the staff are friendly, and the common bathrooms and hot showers are superclean. The lounge area catches the winter sun and offers internet access, or head to the good rooftop restaurant for fine views. Some rooms have limited natural light; the upper-floor rooms are brighter. All rooms share the bathroom block.

Phuntsok Khasang International Youth Hostel (平措康桑青年旅舍; Pingcuo Kangsang Qingnian Lüshe; Map p100; ☎ 691 5222; www.tibetinn.cn; 48 Qingnian Lu; dm Y30-60, s/d/tr Y180/210/240) Lhasa's second Chinese-run youth hostel feels a bit too much like *Cell Block H* for us, with graffiti-tied hallways and rooms set around an echoey courtyard. Useful perks include free breakfast, sitting areas, a laundry service and baggage storage. Prices swing wildly with the season, tripling from May to August, but are decent value in the low season (high-season rates are listed here). All of the 70 rooms, even dorms, have their own bathrooms and there are some Japanese-style rooms.

Barkhor Norzeng Hotel (Bajiaojie Nuoseng Binguan; Map p100; ☎ 633 5199; fax 691 6038; dm Y30-50, d/tr Y150/220) The top floor of the Namsel Department Store is not where you'd expect to find this decent modern option. The interior views of the department store aren't quite what you came to Lhasa for, but the spacious rooms are comfortable and bathrooms are clean. The five-bed room with bathroom is a bargain at Y50 per bed. The cheapest rooftop rooms look like they'd be hot in summer, but are cheap at Y30 per bed and you can use the hot shower in another room for Y5. The hotel is accessed down an alley beside the department store. The rooftop Tibetan restaurant has awesome views over the Jokhang without another tourist in sight.

Flora Hotel (Hadahuashen Lüguan; Map p100; ☎ 632 4491; www.florahotel.piczo.com; Hebalin Lu; dm Y35, s/d/tr with bathroom Y150/200) The Flora is a well-run and reliable hotel in the interesting Muslim quarter (it's run by a Nepali Muslim). Nice touches include a minibar at local-shop prices, a stock of foreign magazines and a laundry service. The decent but slightly cramped four-bed dorms out the back (with attached toilet and shared hot shower) offer a quiet alternative to the backpacker hotels of Lhasa. There's also a good but rather glum Nepali restaurant here. Prices generally include breakfast. Credit cards and bookings are accepted.

Oh Dan Guest House Annex (Oudan Lüguan; Map p96; ☎ 633 8104; 38 Xiaozhaosi Lu; s/d/tr without bathroom Y40/60/90) Ah, this new place could be so good. The Tibetan-style courtyard architecture lends a cosy vibe, the three-bed rooms are spacious, and the clean common hot showers come with heat lamps. Unfortunately the Tibetan-style mattresses were infested with bedbugs during our last visit, the lights were dim and it can be noisy. These may just be teething troubles (it opened at the time of writing) so give it a chance, but check the mattresses first.

Pilgrimages Inn (Miaojixiang Lüguan; Map p96; ☎ 634 1999; www.mjxiang.com; 15 Xiaozhaosi Lu; s/d/tr Y60/80/110, d with bathroom Y220) Like so many of Lhasa guesthouses, this Taiwanese-run place is built around an echoey internal courtyard, which makes it noisy. The sterile red carpets and white walls scream out for some homey touches but the rooms are clean, comfortable and good value, with a clean shared Western-style bathroom. The rooms with bathroom have better quality beds and some even have views of the nearby Ramoche Temple.

Mandala Hotel (Manzhai Jiudian; Map p100; ☎ 633 8940; fax 632 4787; 31 South Barkhor; s/d/tr with bathroom Y168/268/368) If you're more interested in what's going on outside your window than inside the room, then try the Mandala, with its superb location just off the Barkhor. The rooms are certainly nothing special, with tired carpets and dim lighting, but the views of the Barkhor circuit (from rooms 305 to 311 and 205 to 211) are priceless. If you do get a bum room just head to the Nepali-style rooftop restaurant to savour the Jokhang views over a cup of masala tea. The Mandala is one of the few budget places to accept reservations.

Midrange

See also the Banak Shol and Snowlands hotels in the Budget listings (opposite) for good-value midrange rooms.

Yak Hotel (Yake Binguan; Map p100; ☎ 632 3496; 100 Beijing Donglu; dm Y30, d without bathroom Y200, d with bathroom Y450-550; 📍 📍) The wildly popular and well-run Yak has gone seriously upscale in recent years, though the popular (but cramped) dorm rooms are still hanging on, just. For a double with bathroom choose between the colourful Tibetan-style décor of the back block or the larger but noisier deluxe rooms overlooking the main street. Useful perks include good internet access, an open-air rooftop Nepali restaurant and bicycle hire (Y30 per day). Rooms are often occupied by tour groups, so book ahead.

Gorkha Hotel (Guo'erka Fandian; Map p100; ☎ 627 2222; tibetgorkha71@hotmail.com; 45 Linkuo Nanlu; dm Y80, tr without bathroom Y240, r Y388, ste Y867-889; 📍) This atmospheric Nepali-Tibetan venture is a nice blend of cultures, from the Tibetan-style entry murals and traditional architecture to the photographs of Nepali royalty and fine Nepali-style restaurant on the roof. The back block housed the Nepali consulate in the 1950s. The rooms are set around a pleasant courtyard but are dark and some are better than others, so take a look at a few. All in all, it's a good choice. The hotel is in the south of the old town, near several lovely old temples. A small chapel on the roof is dedicated to the deity Ekajati.

Oh Dan Guest House (Oudan Binguan; Map p100; ☎ 634 4999; ohdan_guesthouse@yahoo.com; 15 Xiaozhaosi Lu; d with/without bathroom Y368/258, discounts of 30-60%; 📍 📍) One of several hotels owned by the Oh Dan group, this is a good lower midrange Tibetan-run choice with an interesting location on

the pedestrian street leading to the Ramoche Temple (taxi can't go up this street during the day). The rooms are spacious and clean, though only the top-floor rooms get much natural light. The English-speaking staff are helpful; for Y20 they'll even teach you how to make *momos* (dumplings)! The cosy restaurant is a nice refuge and serves good breakfasts (try the breakfast burrito) and Nepali dishes.

our pick **Kyichu Hotel** (Jiqu Fandian; Map p100; ☎ 633 1541; www.kyichuhotel.com; 149 Beijing Donglu; s/d/tr Y380/480/560, ste Y680; 🏠 🚿) The two-star Kyichu is a friendly and well-run choice that's very popular with repeat travellers to Tibet. The 52 rooms are simple but pleasant, with Tibetan carpets and private bathrooms, but the real selling points are the location and excellent service. There's also a good restaurant, a small library of books and, that rarest of Lhasa commodities – a lovely garden retreat (with wi-fi). Ask for a garden-view room at the back, as these are the quietest. A 20% winter discount is given from November to April. Reservations are essential in summer. Credit cards are accepted.

Dhood Gu Hotel (Dungu Biquan; Map p100; ☎ 632 2555; www.dhoodguhotel.com; near the Tromsikhang market; s/d/tr Y420/520/640, Potala-view d Y600, ste Y940; 🏠) If you're looking for a dash of style, this comfortable Nepali-run three-star place is another good choice, with ornate Tibetan-style décor, a decent restaurant (Y40 buffet) and a superb location in the old town. Breakfast is included and rooms come with modern bathrooms, though the singles are cramped and some rooms lack views. The rooftop bar has fine Potala views. Credit cards are accepted.

Xiongbala Hotel (Xiongbala Dajjudian; Map p100; ☎ 633 8888; xingbl@public.lsx.zn.cn; 28 Jiangsu Lu; s/d Y468/518, discounts of 20%; 🏠 🚿) This is a relatively new and well-run three-star Chinese hotel with a good location on the southern edge of the old town. Facilities include a coffee bar, sauna, business centre and several restaurants. West-facing rooms offer views of the Potala from the 5th floor.

Himalaya Hotel (Ximalaya Fandian; Map p96; ☎ 632 1111; fax 623 2675; 6 Linkuo Donglu; s/d Y536/728, deluxe r Y827, discounts of up to 40%) The overhauled rooms in this modern Chinese hotel make this a decent choice, particularly when discounted to Y400. Heat lamps in the bathrooms and photos of Tibet on the walls add a vague sense of style, though the single rooms are small.

Most rooms have oxygen machines. The location isn't very convenient. Credit cards are accepted.

Shangbala Hotel (Xiangbala Jiudian; Map p100; ☎ 632 3888; www.tibetshangbala.com; 1 Danjuelin Lu; s/d Y580/680, discounts of up to 40%) Not to be confused with the Xiongbala Hotel, this modern block-house is totally out of place in its Tibetan surroundings, but it's popular with groups who want to be close to the Barkhor. Rooms are bland but reassuring, with clean bathrooms and good views from the 4th floor. You can't beat the location, just off Zangyiyuan Lu.

Loads of new hotels are being built around town. The new three-star block of the **Gang Gyan Hotel** (Gangjian Lasa Fandian; Map p100; 83 Beijing Donglu) is bound to be popular when it opens in 2008.

A new 16-room Tibetan-style hotel is being built next to Dropenling (see p125) and should be well done. Standard rooms, suites and rooms without bathroom are planned.

Top End

Brahmaputra Grand Hotel (Yaluzangbu Dajjudian; (Map p96; ☎ 630 9999; www.tibethotel.cn; Section B, Yangcheng Plaza, Gongbutang Lu; s/d Y980/1800; 🏠 🚿) The brain-child of China's Hongyan supermarket baron, Tibet's first five-star hotel occupies a space somewhere between hotel and ethnographic museum. The excellent lighting accentuates hundred of exhibits, from antique opera masks to armour, to create a mood that is at once grand and intimate, and that's just the corridors! You could easily spend an hour wandering the exhibits, even if you're not staying here. The rooms are comfortable and well designed but less remarkable than the public areas; ask for an upper-floor room with a view over the city. The cheapest singles are worth avoiding.

Lhasa Hotel (Lasa Fandian; Map p96; ☎ 683 2221; www.lhasahotel.com.cn; 1 Minzu Nanlu; standard/deluxe d Y1051/1368, Tibetan-style d Y1602, Tibetan ste Y2410; 🏠 🚿 🚿) In 1997 Holiday Inn pulled out of Tibet under increasing pressure from pro-Tibetan groups, and handed this hotel back to the government, who presumably didn't spend a lot of time agonising over its new name. Standards have certainly slid since then and only tour groups and the relatively clueless stay here these days. There is still a selection of restaurants, a clinic with both Western and Tibetan doctors, satellite TV and a dirty pool (summer only), but the putting-green

carpets don't exactly scream cool and the staff appear to be a little glum. Still, it's a city landmark. Credit cards are accepted.

House of Shambhala (Map p100; ☎ 632 6533; www.houseofshambhala.com; 7 Jiri Erxiang; d incl breakfast US\$60-90) Hidden in the old town in a historic Tibetan building, the Shambhala is Tibet's first real boutique hotel. The 10 rooms, decorated in wood and stone with antique Tibetan furniture, are perfect for those who prefer atmosphere over modern amenities. You'll have to fend off a lot of New Age nonsense, especially at the small spa. As with much of the hotel, the witty restaurant menu serves up its fare with a generous slice of bullshit** – try the 'Guru Rinpoche chicken tikka' or the 'Heinrich Harrer schnitzel!' The fabulous rooftop terrace is a great place to relax over a 'flaming dakini' (lassi yoghurt, Cointreau and rum set ablaze; Y88). Just don't take it as seriously as the owners seem to.

Several top-end hotels are planned in Lhasa over the coming years. The St Regis and Banyan hotels are due to open in 2010, with perhaps the Best Western and Crowne Plaza to follow.

EATING

The best places for breakfast are probably the Dunya and Nam-tso restaurants. All the eateries listed serve lunch and dinner, but you will struggle to find a meal after about 9.30pm.

Most individual travellers eat in the Tibetan quarter around the Barkhor Square area and there are plenty of great restaurants to try.

WESTERN

our pick **Tashi I** (Map p100; cnr Zangyiyuan Lu & Beijing Donglu; mains Y10-25; ☎ 8am-10pm) We've been coming to this Lhasa institution for over 20 years now and, despite increased competition, it's still a favourite. The service is friendly, the prices are cheap and everything on the revitalised menu is decent. Special praise is reserved for the *bobis* (chapati-like unleavened bread), which come with seasoned cream cheese and fried vegetables or meat. Tashi's cheesecakes (Y6) have been eclipsed by other restaurants' desserts in recent years but they are still a treat. Menu in English.

Tashi II (Map p100; ☎ 632 3462; Beijing Donglu; mains Y10-25) Located in the Kirey Hotel, Tashi II offers the same menu as Tashi I but is quieter and has a spruced-up interior. Menu in English.

Dunya Restaurant (Map p100; ☎ 633 3374; www.dunyarestaurant.com; 100 Beijing Donglu; dishes Y18-40) With sophisticated décor, excellent and wide-ranging food (from yak enchiladas to Indonesian noodles), this cosy foreign-run place feels like a 'real' restaurant. It's pricier than most other places in town but the food is authentic, from the oregano-flavoured pizza crust to the Italian imported pasta. The homemade sandwiches and soups are good for lunch, and this is one place where you can tuck into a salad without worrying about getting sick. Menu in English.

our pick **Nam-tso Restaurant** (Map p100; Banak Shol hotel; mains Y20, set breakfast Y20-25) This old-timer is still one of the top hotel-restaurants. Prices are a little higher than at the Tashi restaurants, but dishes stretch to vegetarian lasagne, burritos and yak burgers, and the sunny roof seating is one of the few places in town to sit outdoors. The chicken sizzler (Y25) is the classic Lhasa meal. The restaurant's breakfasts (muesli brought in from Kathmandu, among other things) have also achieved a devoted following. Menu in English.

Snowland Restaurant (Xueyu Canting; Map p100; ☎ 632 0821; Zangyiyuan Lu; dishes Y25-35) Attached to the Snowlands Hotel, this is a more upmarket and very popular place that serves a mix of excellent Continental and Nepali food in very civilised surroundings. The Indian dishes are particularly good, especially the small but tasty chicken tikka masala (Y20). The cakes are easily the best in town. Menu in English.

TIBETAN, CHINESE & MUSLIM

Kagui Nongmo Sakhang (Map p100; ☎ 632 7902; Yutuo Lu; mains Y6-20) This traditional Tibetan-style restaurant is a great place to take a Tibetan friend and try out local dishes without feeling overwhelmed (there's a picture menu for easy ordering). It has a good range of Tibetan and Chinese dishes, from curried potatoes to sweet-and-sour ribs, and the friendly Tibetan staff are very helpful.

Langqing Qingzhen Fanguan (Map p100; Beijing Donglu; dishes Y6-45) There are several Muslim restaurants in the old town but this one is unique in having cosy Tibetan-style seating in the side room. The Xinjiang specialty *xiaopanji* (小盘鸡; Y25) – chicken in a sauce with potatoes and carrots on a bed of noodles – is bony but very tasty. The photo menu on the wall is a help, though the images bear only a passing resemblance to the real thing.

For lunch try one of the noodle dishes, such as *chaomianpian* (fried noodle squares) or *ganbanmian* (a kind of stir-fried spaghetti bolognese) – see p77 for details.

Pentoc Tibetan Restaurant (Map p100; dishes Y7-12) For something more authentically Tibetan, charming English-speaking Pentoc runs this local teahouse restaurant after working in Tashi I for many years. The menu includes breakfast (eggs, Tibetan bread, pancake, curd) and it's a good place to try homemade Tibetan standards, such as *momos*, *thugpa* (noodles), *shemdre* (rice, potato and yak meat), plus butter tea and *chang* (barley beer). It's 20m down an alleyway off Beijing Donglu, on the left. Menu in English.

Feijie Restaurant (Map p100; Beijing Donglu; dishes Y7-20) Across from the Banak Shol hotel, this simple Sichuanese restaurant offers good, cheap Chinese dishes and is one of the few to have an English menu.

Norzing Selchung Tashi Yamphel Restaurant (Map p96; Xiaozhaosi Lu; dishes Y10-25) Superconvenient if you're visiting the next-door Ramoch Temple, this pleasant upstairs Tibetan restaurant offers great views over the street below from the low Tibetan-style tables. Try the set meal of *shemdre* (rice, potato and yak meat) for Y10 or choose something more adventurous from the photo menu, such as the tiger-skin chillies.

Islam Restaurant (Yisilan Fanzhuang; Map p100; ☎ 633 9258; noodles Y6-10, meat dishes Y15-35) For the most authentic Muslim food head to the Muslim district and particularly the Islam Restaurant. Invest in a cup of Muslim tea (*babao wanzi*; Y3) and a bowl of Xinjiang noodles (Y10) and watch the chefs at work in the open kitchen – but note that the English menu is more expensive than the Chinese.

Holy Land Vegetarian Restaurant (Shendi Su Canting; Map p96; ☎ 636 3851; 10 Linkuo Beilu; dishes Y10-25) Vegetarians don't need to worry about the 'soy fish' or 'soy chicken feet', this is 100% vegetarian food, dressed up to resemble meat dishes. The wooden tables and Buddhist images on the wall give the place a simple Zen-like atmosphere. The English and picture menus help things along.

NEPALI

With the arrival of half-a-dozen Nepali restaurants, Lhasa now rivals Kathmandu in its range of foreign foods (though prices are a bit higher). All offer a mix of Indian, pseudo-Chinese and

Western dishes for about Y25, with Indian veggie dishes cheaper at Y10 to 12. If you're hankering for enchiladas, chocolate pudding, peach lassis and other Nepali backpacker favourites, make a beeline for these places.

New Mandala Restaurant (Map p100; ☎ 634 2235; west of Barkhor Sq; dishes Y15-25) This Nepali-run restaurant is definitely a winner for its fine views over the Barkhor, either from the 2nd floor or the sunny rooftop. The inside features some lovely and ornate Tibetan murals. It also sells packaged Nepali foods such as muesli and soup mixes. The owner runs the Tashi restaurants in Shigatse and Tsetang. Menu in English.

Mandala Restaurant (Map p100; ☎ 632 9645; Mandala Hotel, 31 South Barkhor; dishes Y15-30) Perfect for a post-kora meal, this cosy place on the Barkhor circuit offers a wide range of dishes from Indian curries to pizza, plus a few special-occasion Tibetan dishes and decent breakfasts. The Indian dishes can be a bit bland, so ask for the 'real' spices if that's how you like it. In summer grab a seat on the rooftop for awesome views of the Jokhang. Menu in English.

Tengyelink Café (Map p100; ☎ 632 3866; Zangyiyuan Lu; dishes Y25) This warm and cosy restaurant is popular with both foreigners and Tibetans, so get here early for a good table. The Chinese and Western dishes are joined by a good range of Tibetan, Thai and even Korean options. Service is good and it's a well-run place. The cakes are discounted after 9pm. Menu in English.

DRINKING Bars

There's not a great deal in the way of entertainment options in Lhasa. In the evening most travellers head to one of the restaurants in the Tibetan quarter and then retire to the roof of the Yak or Banak Shol hotels (see Sleeping, p119) for a cold Lhasa Beer.

Makye Amye (Map p100; ☎ 632 8608; Barkhor; drinks Y8-23, mains Y20-38) The past is tastier than the present at this watering hole overlooking the Barkhor. If the stories are to be believed, this was once a drinking haunt of the licentious sixth Dalai Lama, who met the famed Tibetan beauty Makye Amye here and composed a famous poem about her. Tour groups and Chinese tourists are drawn to the views of the Barkhor from the window tables and fine rooftop terrace, but the food is just so-so.

Dunya (Map p100; 100 Beijing Donglu; beer Y12) The upstairs bar at this popular restaurant (see

p123) is a favourite of both local expats and tour groups. Friday's happy hour means a Y2 discount between 7pm and 9.30pm.

Music Kitchen (Yinyue Chufang; Map p96; ☎ 681 2980; 77 Beijing Xilu; beer Y12-15) Part of a string of bars and restaurants across from the Lhasa Hotel, this Tibetan-owned place was one of the city's first and still boasts some of the best music in town, with live bands at the weekend, a full dinner menu, and just the right aroma of late-night booze and depravity.

Teahouses & Cafés

Summit Café (Dingfeng Meiyishu Kafedidan; Map p100; ☎ 691 3884; www.thetibetsummitcafe.com; 1 Danjielin Lu; coffee Y15-25; ☎ 7.30am-10pm; ☑) With authentic espresso coffee and smoothies, sofas that you could lose yourself in, free wi-fi and melt-in-your-mouth desserts, this American-style coffeehouse is caffeine nirvana for Starbucks-addicts and latte lovers. It's in the courtyard of the Shangbala Hotel, off Zangyiyuan Lu.

There are several Tibetan teahouses around town where you can grab a cheap cup of *cha ngamo* (sweet tea). Most of them are grungy Tibetan-only places, blasted by high-decibel kung fu videos, but there are a few exceptions. **Turquoise Dragon Teahouse** (Map p100; nr Beijing Donglu & Xiaozhaosi Lu) is a Tibetan-style place with a fine balcony overlooking Beijing Donglu. The bustling local **teahouse** (Map p100; Zangyiyuan Lu) underneath the Tashi Takgay Hotel is very central and full of colour, though the **Ani Sangkhung Nunnery teahouse** (Map p100; 29 Linkuo Nanlu) is probably the nicest for a quiet cup of tea.

ENTERTAINMENT

Unfortunately there is little in the way of cultural entertainment in Lhasa. Restaurants like the Shangrila in the courtyard of the Kirey Hotel have free song-and-dance performances for diners (buffet Y50). For authentic performances of Tibetan opera and dancing you'll probably have to wait for one of Lhasa's festivals (p318).

Shöl Opera Troupe (Map p96; ☎ 632 1111; 6 Linkuo Donglu) Performs a selection of Tibetan operas nightly at 7.30pm at the Himalaya Hotel. Tickets for the 90-minute show cost Y100, and there's a small museum on site.

For something a bit earthier there are several Tibetan *nangma* dance halls around town, which offer a mildly nationalistic mix of disco, traditional Tibetan line dancing, lots of beer

and a bit of Chinese karaoke thrown in for good measure. Locations change regularly, so ask a Tibetan friend for the best places.

SHOPPING

You can get most things in Lhasa these days, though items such as medical supplies, books, water-purifying tablets and deodorant are still not easy to find.

Lhasa Department Store (Lasa Baihuo Dalou; Map p96; nr Kangangduo Nanlu & Yutuo Lu) A good one-stop shop for most supplies, especially clothes, though it's a little pricier than elsewhere.

Photography

It is still a good idea to bring your own film supplies, but these days most flavours of memory card, camera batteries and print film are relatively easy to find in Lhasa (although bring your own slide film). A profusion of **photographic shops** (Map p96; Kangangduo Lu) to the east of the Potala Square offer digital prints from around Y1 per print.

Souvenirs

The Barkhor circuit (p102) is lined with stalls selling everything a visiting Tibetan or tourist might possibly need. Expect to be asked an outrageous initial price and then settle down for some serious and persistent haggling. Popular purchases include prayer wheels, rings, daggers, prayer scarves and prayer flags, all of which are fairly portable. Most of the stuff on offer is actually made in Nepal and sold by Chinese or Hui Muslim traders. Items of Tibetan clothing, such as *chubas* (long-sleeved sheepskin cloaks), Tibetan dresses, cowboy hats, Chinese silk jackets, Tibetan brocade and fur hats, are good buys.

The majority of shops in the Barkhor sell jewellery, most of it turquoise and coral and almost all of it fake (p325).

There are a couple of *thangka* workshops (Map p100) just south of the Barkhor circuit and several others in the surrounding backstreets.

Dropenling (Map p100; ☎ 636 0558; www.tibetcraft.com; 11 Chaktsalgang Lam; ☎ 10am-8pm) Run by the Tibetan Artisans Initiative, this nonprofit enterprise aims to bolster traditional Tibetan handicrafts in the face of rising Chinese and Nepali imports. Products are of high quality and employ traditional techniques (natural dyes, wool not acrylic cloth etc) updated with contemporary designs. Prices are fixed, with

proceeds going back to artisans in the form of wages and social funds. Artefacts for sale include woolly carpets from the Wangden region of southern Tsang, UNDP-supported weavings and silverware, Tibetan aprons, leather appliqué bags, table runners and horse blankets. Credit cards are accepted (with a 4.2% fee), as are US dollars, and it can arrange international shipping. See also p117.

Snow Leopard Carpet Industries (Map p100; ☎ 632 1481; snowleopardcarpet@yahoo.com; 2 Zangyiyuan Lu) Next to the Snowland Restaurant, this place sells a collection of high-quality carpets and can arrange delivery abroad.

Mani Thangka Arts (Map p100; ☎ 657 7307; Zangyiyuan Lu) Opposite the Shangbala Hotel, Mani Thangka Arts features thangkas made with mineral paints by local artist Phurbu Tsering. Most of the other thangka shops are owned by Chinese traders who sell Nepali imports.

For higher-quality items at higher prices, try shops like the **Dorje Antique Shop** (Map p100; Beijing Donglu), opposite the Yak Hotel, and the **Kyichu Art Gallery** (Map p100; 149 Beijing Donglu) in the Kyichu Hotel.

There are several Tibetan dress shops on Beijing Donglu where you can get a formal Tibetan dress made or buy off the rack. One good place is opposite the Kyichu Hotel.

Supermarkets

Lhasa's glittering new supermarkets now offer a staggering range of imported goods, from frozen squid to ripe pineapples, alongside a bewildering array of dried yak meat. **Baiyi Supermarket** (Baiyi Chaoshi; Map p96; Beijing Donglu; ☎ 10am-9pm), next to Lhasa Department Store, boasts Lhasa's best range of foodstuffs, though the nearby **Hongyan Supermarket** (Map p96; Beijing Donglu; ☎ 9am-10.30pm) and **Sifang Supermarket** (Map p100; Beijing Donglu; ☎ 9am-10pm), the latter closest to the old town, are also good.

Tromsikhang Market (Map p100) This bazaar-style area in the old town has the widest selection of dried fruits and nuts and is the place to buy such Tibetan specialties as tsampa and yak butter.

The old town has a couple of Tibetan-run Nepali supermarkets selling everything from imported muesli and chocolate spread to Indian spices and peanut butter, though at prices higher than in Nepal.

Norling Supermarket (Nuolin Chaoshi; Map p100; 20 Linkuo Donglu) Located near the Muslim quarter, this has one of the widest selections.

Cheese-heads desperate for a lactose fix can try the Dunya (p123) and Nam-tso (p123) restaurants for locally made yak cheese by the pound.

Travel & Trekking Equipment

To find basic items, such as thermoses and water canisters, the best places are the lanes that run from the Tromsikhang Market down to the Barkhor circuit. Cheap pots and pans (ideal for instant noodles) are available at the stalls on the east side of the Potala, north of the Airway Hotel. For hard-to-find items such as, sunscreen and deodorant, dig around in the Nepali-stocked shops dotted around the Barkhor circuit.

Outlook Outdoor Equipment (Map p100; ☎/fax 633 8890; 11 Beijing Donglu; ☎ 9.30am-9pm) This fine trekking shop across from the Kirey Hotel has Western-quality sleeping bags, Gore-Tex jackets and tents, plus hard-to-find imported knick-knacks like altimeters, trekking socks and Primus cook sets. Gear is also available for rent (Y10 for a stove, Y25 for a tent).

There are now dozens of other trekking shops on Beijing Donglu and Zangyiyuan Lu, though most offer low-quality Nepali- or Chinese-made knock-offs.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

While there are a number of ways to get to Lhasa, the most popular routes are by air from Chengdu (in Sichuan), by train from Xining, and overland or by air from Kathmandu. For details of getting *into* Tibet, see p333.

Air

Flying *out* of Lhasa is considerably easier and cheaper than flying in. No permits are necessary – just turn up to the **Civil Aviation Authority of China office** (CAAC; Zhongguo Minhang; Map p96; ☎ 683 3446; 1 Niangre Lu; ☎ 9.30am-8pm) and buy a ticket. In August and around national holidays (p318), you'd be wise to book your ticket at least a week in advance.

To book a ticket you need to complete a form, get a reservation and then pay the cashier (cash only). You can buy onward tickets from Chengdu here, but not at discounted prices.

Bus & Minibus

TO/FROM CHINA

The arrival of the train has pushed the sleeper buses into irrelevancy. There are still daily

sleeper services to Golmud (Y150 to 200, 20 hours), Xining (Y340, 2½ days) and even Chengdu (Y500, three days and four nights, via Golmud) but these must surely be an endangered species.

TO/FROM NEPAL

With the twice-weekly Lhasa–Kathmandu bus off limits to foreigners (see p335), you're left with hiring a Land Cruiser or looking out for the occasional advertisements posted around the Tibetan quarter for seats in non-stop minibuses or Land Cruisers to Zhangmu. Seats cost around Y350 to 450 for the overnight trip.

AROUND TIBET

Buses to popular pilgrim destinations leave early in the morning from the west side of Barkhor Square. Buses leave around 6.30am and 7.30am for Ganden Monastery (Y20 return, 1½ hours), 7am for Tsurphu Monastery (Y25 return, 2½ hours), 7.30am for Drak Yerpa (Y20 return), and 7.30am for Tsetang (Shannan; Y30) and Dranang (Y25). For Samye one direct bus runs via the bridge east of Tsetang (Y40, 3½ hours, 6am), while a second runs to the ferry only (Y25, 7.30am); see p172. For the direct bus buy your ticket the day before from the tin shack just north of the square on Zangyiyuan Lu. Buses depart when full, so expect lots of hanging around.

At the time of research the main **Western Bus Station** (Xijiao Keyunzhan; Map p96) wasn't selling bus tickets to foreigners. In case this changes there are services to Shigatse (Y50 to 60, 3½ hours, every 30 minutes), Tsetang (Y30 to 40, every 30 minutes), Nagchu (Y53, six hours, hourly) and Chamdo (nonsleeper Y280, three days). You might have more luck getting on one of the private minibuses or cars that wait to the side of the buses. A seat in a car costs about double the bus fare.

Your best bet to Shigatse are the private buses that leave from between the Yak and Kirey hotels on Beijing Donglu between 8am and 9am. Some are reluctant to take foreigners but most are more than happy to take your money. Private buses also depart from here around 7.30am for Nagchu (Naqu; Y53) and Damxung (Dangxiong; Y44).

A government bus to Shigatse (Y55) waits east of the Kirey Hotel to pick up passengers at around 8.30am, though staff are reluctant to sell foreigners a ticket. For Gyantse you'll

probably have to take a bus to Shigatse and change there.

The **Eastern Bus Station** (Dongjiao Keyunzhan; Map p96) has frequent minibuses to Lhundrub (Linzhou; Y15) and Medro Gongkar (Mozhu Gongka; Y15), from outside the main station. Inside there are daily buses to Drigung Til (Y30, 7am) and Reting Monastery (Y40, 8am), among others. The frequent buses to Bayi (Y80 to Y100) are normally off limits to foreigners.

Lhasa's chaotic **Lugu Bus Stand** (Map p100) is southwest of the Barkhor Square and has several departures daily to Chushul, Yangpachen and Nyemo, but timings are awkward and information hard to find.

Lhasa's **Northern Bus Station** (Beijiao Qiche Keyunzhan; Map p129) has sleeper buses to Ali in western Tibet, operated by Tibetan Antelope Travel and Transportation Co (see p226). Officials wouldn't sell tickets to foreigners at the time of research but in case things change buses run every other day at around 5pm and take around 60 hours nonstop. Berths cost Y651, Y701 or Y751, depending on the location in the bus (the cheaper berths are at the back). Buses also run from this station to Zhangmu, Yadong, Markham, Zhongdian and Shigatse, but foreigners can't take them.

Rental Vehicles

Rental vehicles have emerged as the most popular way to get away from Lhasa in recent years, even though you can still travel along many of the main routes by public transport.

At the time of research, all Land Cruiser trips were supposed to be organised through the government-owned FIT (p100), though for trips around the Lhasa region (which require no permits) there is nothing to stop you negotiating with a private driver or other travel agency.

The popular seven-day trip to the Nepali border via Yamdrok-tso, Gyantse, Shigatse, Sakya and Everest Base Camp (see p20) costs between Y5500 and Y6500. The price includes permits and a guide but not entry fees nor the Y405 vehicle fee to enter the Qomolangma Nature Preserve. A return six-day trip to Everest Base Camp costs around Y5000.

If you are heading to the Yarlung Valley, a three- or four-day trip to Samye, Mindrolling Monastery, Tsetang and back again costs Y2500 to Y2800 (including a guide and

permits), or add on Gyantse and Shigatse for a total of Y4000.

For the rates of other popular Land Cruiser trips, see p163 and p152. For general advice on vehicle rental see p343.

Train

After years of waiting, it's now possible to do the hitherto impossible; take a train up onto the Tibetan plateau all the way to Lhasa. There are daily trains to/from Beijing, Xining/Lanzhou and Chengdu/Chongqing, and services either daily or every other day to Xi'an, Shanghai and Guangzhou. See p339 for fares and other details. All trains from Lhasa depart in the morning and all trains to Lhasa arrive in the evening. The train station is 4km southwest of town. A service to Shigatse is due to begin in 2009.

You can buy train tickets up to 10 days in advance at the Lhasa **train station ticket office** (☎ 7am-10pm) or the more centrally located **city ticket office** (Map p96; Luobulinka Lu; ☎ 8am-6pm) next to the TTB office.

To get from the train station into town take bus 89 (see right) to the centre or take bus 91 over the Lhasa Bridge to the terminus near the Eastern Bus Station and then hop on bus 97 to Beijing Donglu. To get to the station catch bus 89 just south of the Barkhor on Jiangsu Lu or take bus 91/97 in the opposite direction. Buses run every 20 minutes from 6.30am to 10.30pm. A taxi costs around Y30.

GETTING AROUND

For those travellers based in the Tibetan quarter of Lhasa, most of the major inner-Lhasa sights are within fairly easy walking distance. For sights such as the Norbulingka over in the west of town, it's better to take a taxi or rent a bicycle.

To/From Gongkar Airport

Recently renovated Gongkar airport is 65km from Lhasa, via the US\$78 million tunnel and bridge that opened in 2005.

Airport buses (☎ 682 6282) leave seven times a day (Y25, 1¼ hours) between 7.30am and 1pm from beside the CAAC building. From the airport, buses wait for flights outside the terminal building. Buy tickets on the bus.

A taxi to the airport costs around Y150.

Bicycle

Bicycles are a great way to get around Lhasa once you have acclimatised to the altitude.

Thaizand Bicycle Tours (Map p100; ☎ 691 0898; thaizand@hotmail.com; Kirey Hotel, 105 Beijing Donglu) rents quality mountain bikes for Y60 per day, with a helmet and pads.

Yueye Bike Rental (Map p100; Beijing Donglu; ☎ 8am-9pm) down the alley beside the Banak Shol hotel rents decent Giant-brand mountain bikes for Y30 per day. The nearby **Bodi Chehang Bike Hire** (Map p100; Beijing Donglu; ☎ 9.30am-9.30pm) also rents bikes for Y20 per day. Other rental places on Zangyiyuan Lu charge around Y30 per day. The Yak Hotel (p121) is another possibility.

Bicycle theft is a problem in Lhasa, so be sure to park your bike in designated areas (Y1). A lock and chain is a good idea.

Minibus & City Buses

Buses (Y1) and private minibuses (Y2) are frequent on Beijing Donglu, and if you need to get up to the area around the Lhasa Hotel or the bus station this is the cheapest way to do it.

Useful bus routes:

Bus 89 From the train station to the Eastern Bus Station, via the Western Bus Station, TTB office, Potala Palace, Lhasa Department Store and Jiangsu Lu

Bus 106 From Beijing Donglu to the Potala, TTB office and Norbulinka

Bus 109 From Beijing Donglu to the Western Bus Station, via the CAAC office, Linkuo Xilu, Bank of China, Beijing Zhonglu and Norbulinka; returning to Beijing Donglu via Luobulinka Lu

Minibus 205 From Beijing Donglu to the Eastern Bus Station

Minibus 301 From the Eastern Bus Station to Beijing Donglu, CAAC, Zang Gyab Lukhang Park, Bank of China, Lhasa Hotel and the turn-off to Drepung Monastery

Pedicab

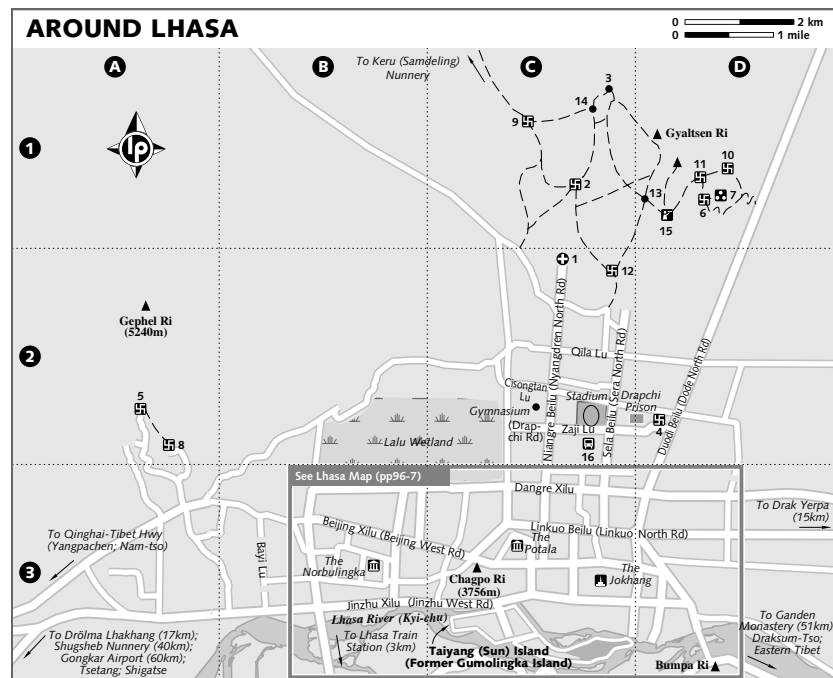
There is no shortage of pedicabs plying the streets of Lhasa, but they require endless haggling and are only really useful for short trips (around Y5). At least most are Tibetan owned. *Always* fix the price before getting in.

Taxi

Taxis charge a standard fare of Y10 to anywhere within the city.

AROUND LHASA

Within easy cycling distance of central Lhasa are the impressive Gelugpa monasteries of Sera and Drepung. Both are must-sees, even if you have only a brief stay in Lhasa.



See the Ü map (p145) for the location of Drak Yerpa, Drölmä Lhakhang and Shugsheb Nunery.

DREPUNG MONASTERY འཇམ་མཉམས་པོ་ལོ་ཤར་གྱི་ལྷོ་ཁྱེད་ལྷོ་ཁྱེད་

About 8km west of central Lhasa, **Drepung** (Zhebang Si; admission Y50, ☎ 8.30am-6.30pm) was once one of the world's largest monasteries. The word Drepung literally translates as 'rice heap', a reference to the huge numbers of white monastic buildings that once piled up on the hillside. It suffered through the ages with assaults by the kings of Tsang and the Mongols, but was left relatively unscathed during the Cultural Revolution and there is still much of interest intact. Rebuilding and resettlement continue at a pace unmatched elsewhere in Tibet and the site once again resembles a small village, with around 600 monks resident.

The best way to visit the chapels is to follow the pilgrims or, failing that, the yellow signs. Interior photography costs Y10 to 20 per chapel. A restaurant near the bus stop serves reviving tea by the glass, as well as bowls of *shemdre*

INFORMATION

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SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

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Keutsang Ritro 6 D1
Keutsang Ruins 7 D1
Nechung Monastery 8 A2
Pabonka Monastery 9 C1
Phurbu Chok Monastery 10 D1
Rakdrak Hermitage 11 D1
Sera Monastery 12 C2
Sera Utse 13 D1
Tashi Chöling Hermitage 14 C1
Viewpoint 15 D1

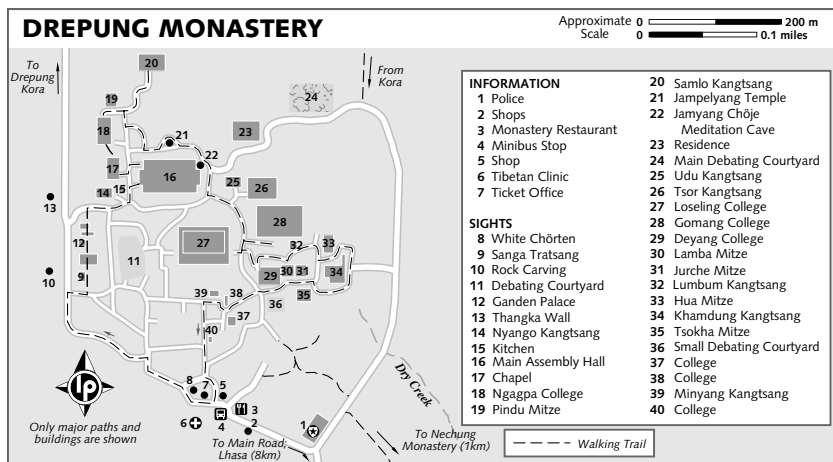
TRANSPORT

Northern Bus Station 北郊客运站 16 C2

(rice, potato and yak meat; Y6) and *momos*. The upstairs seating is very pleasant.

History

Drepung was founded in 1416 by a charismatic monk and disciple of Tsongkhapa called Jamyang Chöje. Within just a year of



completion the monastery had attracted a population of some 2000 monks.

In 1530 the second Dalai Lama established the Ganden Palace, the palace that was home to the Dalai Lamas until the fifth built the Potala. It was from here that the early Dalai Lamas exercised their political as well as religious control over central Tibet, and the second, third and fourth Dalai Lamas are all entombed here.

Ganden Palace

From the car park, follow the kora clockwise around the outside of the monastery until you reach the steps up to the Ganden Palace.

The first hall on the left is the **Sanga Tratsang**, a recently renovated chapel housing statues of the protectors Namse (Vairocana), Nagpo Chenpo (Mahakala), Dorje Jigje (Yamantaka), Chögyel (Dharmaraja), Palden Lhamo (Shri Devi; on a horse) and the Nechung oracle, all arranged around a central statue of the fifth Dalai Lama.

Head up across the main courtyard, where performances of *cham* (a ritual dance) are still performed during the Shötun festival. The upper floor of the main building has three chapels that make up the apartments of the early Dalai Lamas. The second of the three chapels, to the right, has wonderfully detailed **murals** and the throne of the fifth Dalai Lama, next to a thousand-armed statue of Chenresig. The third is a simple living room.

From here descend and cross over to a final chapel whose entrance is defaced by a partially removed Cultural Revolution-era painting of

Chairman Mao, complete with political slogans. Signs lead past a refreshment stand and a corner shrine to Drölma to the exit to the north.

Main Assembly Hall

The main assembly hall, or *tsogchen*, is the principal structure in the Drepung complex. The hall is reached through an entrance on the west side, just past a **kitchen**, whose medieval-looking giant cauldrons and ladles look like a set from the film *The Name of the Rose*.

The huge interior is very atmospheric, draped with thangkas and supported by over 180 columns, some of which are adorned with ancient armour.

The back-room chapel features the protector deities Chana Dorje (Vajrapani, blue) and Tamdrin (Hayagriva, red), and contains statues of Sakyamuni with his two disciples, the Buddhas of the Three Ages, and nine chörtén above. The walls and pillars are lined with statues of the eight bodhisattvas. To the front centre there is also a youthful-looking statue of Lamdrin Rinpoche (a former abbot of Drepung recognisable by his black-rimmed glasses); next to it is his chörtén. To the east is Tsongkhapa, the founder of the Gelugpa sect.

Sculptures of interest in the main hall include a two-storey Jampelyang (Manjushri), accompanied by the 13th Dalai Lama; Sakyamuni; Tsongkhapa; Jamyang Chöje, Drepung's founder, in a cabinet to the right; and to the right Sakyamuni, flanked by five of the Dalai Lamas. At either end of the altar is a group of eight *arhats* (literally 'worthy ones').

Back by the main entrance, steps lead up to the 1st and 2nd floors. At the top of the stairs is the **Hall of the Kings of Tibet**, featuring the fifth Dalai Lama, and then a chapel containing the head of a two-storey **Jampa** statue. Pilgrims prostrate themselves here and drink from a sacred conch shell.

Continue moving clockwise through the **Sakyamuni Chapel**, stuffed with chörtén, and then descend to the **Miwang Lhakhang**. This chapel contains the assembly hall's most revered image, a massive **statue of Jampa**, the Future Buddha, at the age of 12. The statue rises through three floors of the building from a ground-floor chapel that is usually closed, and is flanked by Tsongkhapa to the left and Jamyang Chöje to the right. The chörtén behind contain the remains of the second Dalai Lama and Jamyang Chöje. At the front right are statues of seven of the Dalai Lamas.

To the right of the Sakyamuni Chapel is a **Drölma chapel**. Drölma is a protective deity, and in this case the three Drölma images in the chapel (to the immediate right) are responsible for protecting Drepung's drinking water, wealth and authority respectively. There are also some fine examples of Tibetan Kangyur **scriptures** here. The central statue is a form of

Sakyamuni, whose amulet contains one of Tsongkhapa's teeth.

Exit the building from the western side of the 2nd floor.

Ngagpa College

Ngagpa is one of Drepung's four colleges, and was devoted to Tantric study. The chapel is dedicated to Dorje Jigje (Yamantaka), a Tantric meditational deity who serves as an opponent to the forces of impermanence. The cartoon-style Dorje Jigje image is said to have been fashioned by Tsongkhapa himself. Working clockwise, other statues include Palden Lhamo (first clockwise), Nagpo Chenpo (third), Drölma (fourth), Tsongkhapa (fifth), the fifth Dalai Lama (seventh), the Nechung oracle and, by the door, Dorje Drakden (p132). Look for Chögyel to the right, his hand thrusting out of the glass cabinet.

To get a feel for what Drepung was like before the renovation teams arrived, detour briefly up to the **Samlo Kangtsang**, unrestored and surrounded by melancholic ruins.

As you follow the pilgrim path (clockwise) around the back of the assembly hall you will pass the small **Jampelyang Temple**, where pilgrims pour yak butter on the wall and then

MONASTERIES IN TIBET

The great Gelugpa monasteries of Drepung, Sera and Ganden, collectively known as the *densa chenmo sum*, once operated like self-contained worlds. Drepung alone, the largest of these monasteries, was home to around 10,000 monks at the time of the Chinese takeover in 1951. Like the other major Gelugpa institutions, Drepung operated less as a single unit than as an assembly of colleges, each with its own interests, resources and administration.

The colleges, known as *dratsang*, were (and still are) in turn made up of residences, or *kangtsang*. A monk joining a monastic college was assigned to a *kangtsang* according to the region in which he was born. For example, it is thought that 60% of monks at Drepung's Loseling College were from Kham, while Gomang college was dominated by monks from Amdo and Mongolia. This gave the monastic colleges a distinctive regional flavour and meant that loyalties were generally grounded much deeper in the colleges than in the monastery itself.

At the head of a college was the abbot or *khenpo*, a position that was filled by contenders who had completed the highest degrees of monastic studies. The successful applicant was chosen by the Dalai Lama. Beneath the abbot was a group of religious leaders who supervised prayer meetings and festivals, and a group of economic managers who controlled the various *kangtsang* estates and funds. There was also a squad of huge monks known as *dob-dobs*, who were in charge of discipline and administering punishments.

In the case of the larger colleges, estates and funds were often extensive. Loseling College had over 180 estates and 20,000 serfs who worked the land and paid taxes to the monastery. Monasteries were involved in many forms of trade. For the most part, these holdings were not used to support monks – who were often forced to do private business to sustain themselves – but to maintain an endless cycle of prayer meetings and festivals that were deemed necessary for the spiritual good of the nation.

peer in to see a holy rock painting and get hit on the back with a holy iron rod. Just a little further, tucked in on the right, is the tiny **meditation cave** of Jamyang Chöje, with some fine rock paintings.

Losing College

Losing is the largest of Drepung's colleges, and studies here were devoted to logic. The **main hall** houses a throne used by the Dalai Lamas, an extensive library, and a long altar decorated with statues of the fifth, seventh and eighth Dalai Lamas, Tsongkhapa and former Drepung abbots. The chörten of Losing's first abbot is covered with offerings. There are three chapels to the rear of the hall. The one to the left houses 16 *arhats*, which pilgrims walk under in a circuit. The central chapel has a large image of Jampa and interesting photos and a self-arisen image of the Nechung oracle; the chapel to the right has a small but beautiful statue of Sakyamuni.

On the 2nd floor you'll come to a small chapel full of angry deities and then you pass under the body of a stuffed goat draped with one-mao notes before entering the spooky *gönkhang* (protector chapel). There are more protective deities here, including Nagpo Chenpo, Dorje Drakden and Dorje Lekpa.

If you have time, pop into the small debating courtyard west of Losing College. Monks sometimes do their music practise in the garden here, blowing huge horns and crashing cymbals.

Gomang College

Gomang is the second largest of Drepung's colleges and follows the same layout as Losing. The **main hall** has a whole row of images, including Jampa, Tsepame and the seventh Dalai Lama. Again, there are three chapels to the rear: the one to the left houses three deities of longevity, but more important is the **central chapel**, chock-a-block with images. As at Losing, there is a single protector chapel on the upper floor. Women are not allowed into this chapel.

Deyang College & Other Colleges

The smallest of Drepung's colleges, this one can safely be missed if you've had enough. The principal image in the main hall is Jampa, flanked by Jampelyang, Drölma, the fifth Dalai Lama and others.

East of here is a cluster of friendly colleges that the tour groups never reach, includ-

ing the Lamba Mitze, Lumbum Kangtsang, **Jurche Mitze**, once home to students from Inner Mongolia, and then round to the **Khamdung Kangtsang**, the upstairs of which is defaced with faded Mao slogans and images. More buildings sport English signs saying that visitors are welcome.

If you're here in the afternoon, save some time to watch the monk-debating (lots of handslapping and gesticulation) between 2.30pm and 4.30pm in the main **debating courtyard** at the northeast corner of the monastery (photos Y15).

Drepung Kora

This lovely kora climbs up to around 3900m and probably should not be attempted until you've had four or five days to acclimatise in Lhasa. The walk takes about an hour at a leisurely pace (it is possible to do it more quickly at hiking speed). Look for the path that continues uphill from the turn-off to the Ganden Palace. The path passes several rock paintings, climbs up past a high wall used to hang a giant thangka during the Shötun festival (p319), peaks at a valley of prayer flags, and then descends to the east via an encased Drölma statue and several more rock carvings. There are excellent views along the way.

Getting There & Away

The easy way to get out to Drepung is by minibus 301, 302 and 303, which run from Beijing Donglu to the foot of the Drepung hill. From here a coach runs up to the monastery (Y1). Direct minibuses (Y3) run early in the morning from in front of Barkhor Square.

A taxi from the Barkhor is Y20 to Y30.

NECHUNG MONASTERY གནས་ཆུང་གླུ་ཚོང་ 乃琼寺

Only 10 minutes' walk downhill from Drepung Monastery, **Nechung** (Naiqiong Si; admission sometimes Y25; ☎ 9am-4pm) is worth a visit for its historical role as the seat of the Tibetan State Oracle until 1959. The oracle was the medium of Dorje Drakden, an aspect of Peihar, the Gelugpa protector of the Buddhist state, and the Dalai Lamas would make no important decision without first consulting him. The oracle was not infallible, however; in 1904 the oracle resigned in disgrace after failing to predict the invasion of the British under Younghusband. In 1959 the State Oracle fled to India with the Dalai Lama.

THE NECHUNG ORACLE

Every New Year in Lhasa until 1959, the Dalai Lama consulted the Nechung oracle on important matters of state. In preparation for the ordeal, the oracle strapped on eye-shaped bracelets and an elaborate headdress of feathers, so heavy that it had to be lifted onto his head by two men.

The oracle would then whip himself into a trance in an attempt to dislodge the spirit from his body. Eyewitness accounts describe how his eyeballs swelled and rolled up into his sockets, and how his mouth opened wide, his tongue curling upward as his face reddened. As he began to discern the future in a steel mirror, the oracle would answer questions in an anguished, tortured, hissing voice, and the answers would be interpreted and written on a small blackboard. After the trance the oracle would faint from the ordeal and have to be carried away.

Nechung is an eerie place associated with possession, exorcism and other pre-Buddhist rites. The blood-red **doors** at the entrance are painted with flayed human skins and scenes of torture line the top of the outer courtyard. Tantric drumming booms from the depths of the building like a demonic heartbeat. For images of Dorje Drakden, the protective spirit manifested in the State Oracle, see the back-room chapel to the left of the main hall. The statue on the left shows Dorje Drakden in his wrathful aspect, so terrible that his face must be covered; the version on the right has him in a slightly more conciliatory frame of mind. The sacred tree in between the two is the home of Peihar.

The far right chapel has an amazing **spirit trap** and an image of the Dzogchen deity Ekajati, recognisable by her single fang. On the 1st floor is an audience chamber, whose throne was used by the Dalai Lamas when they consulted with the State Oracle. The 2nd floor features a huge new statue of a wrathful Guru Rinpoche. There are some fine murals in the exterior courtyard.

Nechung is easily reached on foot after visiting Drepung, en route to the main road. A path leads past stonemasons to the monastery.

SERA MONASTERY སེ་ར་དཀོན་ཆུང་ 色拉寺

Sera Monastery (Sela Si; admission Y55; ☎ 9am-5pm), approximately 5km north of central Lhasa, was one of Lhasa's two great Gelugpa monasteries, second only to Drepung. Its once-huge monastic population of around 5000 monks has now been reduced to several hundred and building repairs are still continuing. Nevertheless the monastery is worth a visit, particularly in the morning when the monastery is at its most active, but also between 3pm and 5pm

(not Sundays), when debating is usually held in the monastery's debating courtyard. Chapels start to close at 3pm, so it makes sense to see the monastery chapels before heading to the debating.

Interior photography costs Y15 to Y30 per chapel; video fees are an outrageous Y850. Near the monastery entrance there is a simple but pleasant restaurant-teahouse.

History

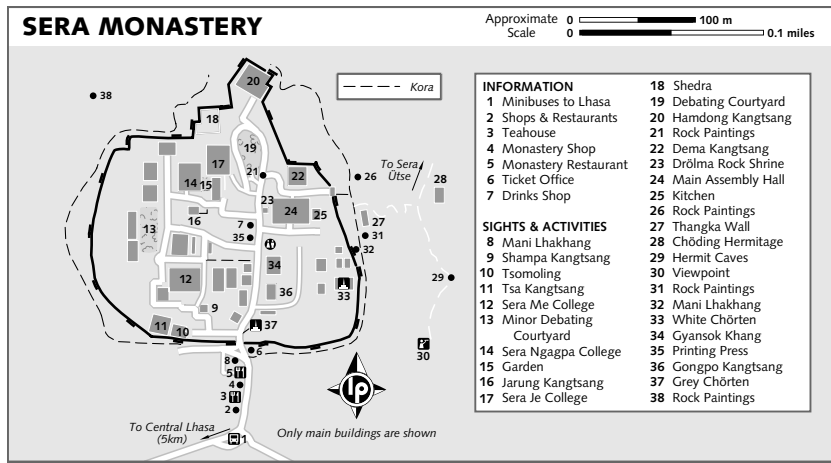
Sera was founded in 1419 by Sakya Yeshe, a disciple of Tsongkhapa also known by the honorific title Jamchen Chöje. In its heyday, Sera hosted five colleges of instruction, but at the time of the Chinese invasion in 1959 there were just three: Sera Me specialised in the fundamental precepts of Buddhism; Sera Je in the instruction of itinerant monks from outside central Tibet; and Sera Ngagpa in Tantric studies.

Sera survived the ravages of the Cultural Revolution with light damage, although many of the lesser colleges were destroyed.

Sera Me College

Follow the pilgrims clockwise, past the Shampa Kangtsang and Tsa Kangtsang residential halls and several minor buildings, to the Sera Me College. This college dates back to the original founding of the monastery.

The central image of the impressive **main hall** is a copper Sakyamuni, flanked by Jampa (left) and Jampelyang. To the rear of the hall are four chapels. To the left is a dark chapel dedicated to the dharma protector of the east, Ta-og (in an ornate brass case and wearing a hat), alongside Dorje Jigje. Don't miss the **masks**, iron thunderbolts and antique bows hanging from the ceiling. Women cannot enter this chapel. To the left of the entrance is a three-dimensional wooden mandala.



Continue to the central chapel, which contains statues of the Past, Present and Future Buddhas, as well as 16 *arhats* depicted in their mountain grottos.

The next chapel is home to Miwang Jowo, a central Sakyamuni statue that dates from the 15th century and is the most sacred of the college's statues. At the back are Tsepame and eight bodhisattvas. The entrance to the chapel is guarded by the protectors Tamdrin (Haya-griva; red) and Miyowa (Achala; blue). The last chapel is dedicated to Tsongkhapa and there are also images of several Dalai Lamas, as well as of Sakya Yeshe, Sera's founder and first abbot.

There are two chapels on the upper floor. The first, after you mount the stairs, is dedicated to Sakyamuni, depicted in an unusual standing form. The second is a Drölma chapel with 1000 statues of this protective deity. The third has 1000 statues of Chenresig, as well as a huge brass pot in the corner.

Sera Ngagpa College

A Tantric college, Ngagpa is also the oldest structure at Sera. The **main hall** is dominated by a statue of Sakya Yeshe (wearing a black hat), behind the throne, surrounded by other famous Sera lamas. There are three chapels to the rear of the hall, the first featuring Jampa and thousand-armed Chenresig, the second with 16 *arhats* and a large Sakyamuni statue, and the third with a statue of the protective deity Dorje Jigje, as well as Namtöse (Vaishravana), the guardian of the north, to the right,

who rides a snow lion and holds a mongoose that vomits jewels. There are also a couple of the eight upstairs featuring Tsepame and the right medicine buddhas (Menlha).

After exiting, most pilgrims pay a visit to the **Jarung Kangtsang** residential college.

Sera Je College

This is the largest of Sera's colleges, generally accessed from the side. It has a breathtaking **main hall**, hung with thangkas and lit by shafts of light from high windows. Several chörtens hold the remains of Sera's most famous lamas.

To the left of the hall is a passage leading, via a chapel dedicated to the Past, Present and Future Buddhas, to the most sacred of Sera Monastery's chapels, the **Chapel of Tamdrin**. Tamdrin (Hayagriva) is a wrathful meditational deity whose name means 'horse headed'. He is the chief protective deity of Sera, and there is often a long line of shuffling pilgrims waiting to touch their forehead to his feet in respect. The ornate brass shrine recalls the temples of the Kathmandu Valley. Take a look at the weapons, hats and masks hanging from the ceiling. There is a second chapel for him on the upper floor, but there he is in another aspect with nine heads.

The first chapel to the rear of the hall is devoted to a lovely statue of Sakyamuni, seated below a fine canopy and ceiling mandala. Pilgrims climb steps to the right to touch his left leg. The next two chapels are dedicated to Tsongkhapa, with Sakyamuni and Öpagme

(Amitabha); and to Jampelyang, flanked by Jampa and another Jampelyang. From here head to the upstairs chapels.

To the northeast of Sera Je is Sera's **debating courtyard**. There is usually debating practise here in the afternoons from around 3pm to 5pm, which provides a welcome relief from peering at Buddhist iconography. You will hear it (with much clapping of hands to emphasise points) as you approach Sera Je. Foreign photographers circle the site like vultures at a sky burial.

Hamdong Kangtsang

Hamdong served as a residence for monks studying at Sera Je College. The back left chapel contains a bearded image of a Sera lama who died in 1962; in a case to the right is an image of Drölma, who is said to protect Sera's water supply. Look for three **photos of Ekai Kawaguchi**, the Japanese monk who studied here in disguise (p17) in 1901.

As you walk downhill, note the wonderful **rock paintings** depicting Jampelyang, Chenresig, Chana Dorje (Vajrapani) and Green Tara.

Main Assembly Hall (Tsoqchen)

The main assembly hall is the largest of Sera's buildings and dates back to 1710. The central hall is particularly impressive and is noted for its wall-length thangkas and two-storey statue of Jampa. He is surrounded by other figures, including Dalai Lamas on the right, while to the left is the large throne of the 13th Dalai Lama. Behind the throne is a figure of Sakyamuni accompanied by the 13th Dalai Lama and Sakya Yeshe, the founder of Sera.

Of the three chapels to the rear of the hall, the central is the most important, with its 6m-high Jampa statue. The statue rises up to the upper floor, where it can also be viewed from a central chapel. Also on the upper floor (to the far left of the central chapel) is a highly revered statue of a thousand-armed Chenresig. Pilgrims put their forehead to a pole that connects them directly and literally to the heart of compassion. The pilgrim path enters the building from the back so this may be the first chapel you come across, before descending to the prayer hall.

Printing Press

Before leaving the monastery it's worth having a look at the printing blocks in this new hall. Photos are Y5. Prints made on site are for sale. A small building to the side holds a sand mandala.

Sera Kora

The Sera kora takes less than an hour and is well worth the time. It starts outside the entrance and heads west, following an arc around the monastery walls. On the eastern descent, look out for several brightly coloured **rock paintings**. The largest ones on the eastern side of the monastery are of Dorje Jigje, Tsongkhapa and others. Next to the rock paintings is a support wall used to hang a giant thangka during festivals.

A path leads up the side steps of this wall to the **Chöding hermitage**. The hermitage was a retreat of Tsongkhapa, and predates Sera. There is not a great deal to see, but it is a short walk and the views from the hermitage are worthwhile. A path continues south around the hillside past a holy spring to a point that has fine views of Sera and Lhasa beyond.

Getting There & Away

Sera is only a half-hour bicycle ride from the Barkhor area of Lhasa. Leave your bicycle next to the monastery restaurant.

Alternatively, head down to the intersection of Beijing Donglu and Zhisenge/Qingnian Lu and catch minibus 503 (Y2, every 10 minutes) from just north of the intersection. Minibuses 501 and 502 also run to Sera.

PABONKA MONASTERY བཟོང་ཁ་དོན་ལྷོ་མ་གྲོང་ཁའུ་གྲོང་ཁའུ་

Pabonka Monastery (admission free; ☞ dawn-dusk) is one of the most ancient Buddhist sites in the Lhasa region. It is infrequently visited, but is only a one-hour walk (or short taxi ride) from the Sera Monastery turn-off and is worth the effort.

Built on a flat-topped granite boulder, Pabonka may even predate the Jokhang and Ramoche. It was built in the 7th century by King Songtsen Gampo. The Tibetan king Trisong Detsen, Guru Rinpoche and Tibet's first seven monks all meditated here at various times, and it was also here that the monk Thonmi Sambhota reputedly invented the Tibetan alphabet. It was destroyed in 841 by the anti-Buddhist King Langdharma and rebuilt in the 11th century. The fifth Dalai Lama added an extra floor to the two-storey building. It suffered damage in the Cultural Revolution and has undergone repairs in recent years.

The first building you come across is the **Rigsum Gonpo Temple**, jam-packed with shrines,

DIY: TREKKING THE DODE VALLEY

From Sera Monastery you can make a great half-day trek up to the Sera Ütse retreat above the monastery and then around the ridge to the little-visited retreats of the Dode Valley. You shouldn't attempt the trek until you are well acclimatised to the altitude.

From Sera the steep relentless climb up to the yellow-walled **Sera Ütse** retreat takes at least an hour (look up and see how far it is before you set off). Take the path towards the Chöding hermitage (see p135) and branch off to the left before you get there, climbing the ridge via a switchback path until you reach the yellow building perched high above the valley. Sera Ütse was a retreat used by Tsongkhapa (his *drubpuk*, or meditation cave, can be visited) and is currently home to two monks. You can also reach the retreat directly from Pabonka's Tashi Chöling hermitage (opposite).

From the Ütse continue east along a level trail for 10 minutes to a superb **viewpoint**, probably Lhasa's most scenic picnic spot. From here the main trail continues east down into the Dode Valley, though it's possible for fit climbers to detour straight up the hillside to the summit, a knob of rock covered in prayer flags.

The main trail descends past a balancing rock to the small **Rakadrak** retreat, where you can visit three simple caves associated with Tsongkhapa. Five minutes' walk below Rakadrak is the larger **Keutsang Ritro**, a retreat complex home to 23 monks. The original hermitage lies in ruins in an incredible location on the side of the sheer cliff-face to the east. A painting inside the main chapel (to the right) depicts the original. As you leave the complex a path to the left leads to the dramatic ruins but the trail is dangerous and ends in a sheer drop. The far section of the ruins can only be reached from the other side of the cliff.

From the Keutshang Ritro follow the dirt road downhill and after 10 minutes branch left for the short uphill hike to the **Phurbu Chok Monastery** and its hilltop Rigsum Gonpo Lhakhang (an hour detour in total from the road). You can spot two nunneries from here; Negodong to the east and Mechungri to the southeast. Back at the junction, descend to the main road to flag down bus 601, which terminates at Linkuo Beilu, just north of the Ramoche Temple.

On the ride back it's worth getting off at Zaji (Drapchi) Lu to visit **Drapchi Monastery**, an active and unusual monastery that is located near Lhasa's most notorious political prison. Huge amounts of rice wine and *chang* (barley beer) are offered continuously to the local protectress Drapchi Lhamo and the site has an almost animist feel to it.

whose most famous relic is the blue and gold carved mantra '*om mani padme hum*' (hail to the jewel in the lotus) that faces the entrance on the far side of the hall. The central shrine contains a 1300-year-old 'self-arising' (not man-made) carving depicting Chenresig, Jampeyang and Chana Dorje (Vajrapani) – the Rigsum Gonpo trinity after which the chapel is named. The stone carvings were buried during the Cultural Revolution and only dug up in 1985.

Continue uphill, turn left at the row of chörtens, and continue clockwise around the Pabonka rock (said to represent a female tortoise) to the **Palden Lhamo Cave** on the west side, where King Songtsen Gampo once meditated. Images inside are of Songtsen Gampo (with a turban), his two wives, Guru Rinpoche, Trisong Detsen (to the side) and a rock carving of the protectress Palden Lhamo.

Pabonka Potrang sits atop the ancient rock. There is nothing to see on the ground floor,

but the upper floor has an intimate assembly hall with a picture of the current Pabonka Lama and a 'self-arising' Chenresig statue hidden behind a pillar to the right. The inner protector chapel holds an ancient conch shell (*dungkhar*) wrapped in a *kathak* (prayer scarf) and in a glass case. The four-pillared Kashima Lhakhang next door is lined with various lamas, three kings and their wives. The cosy rooftop quarters of the Dalai Lama have a statue of the meditational deity Demchok (Chakrasamvara) and offer fine views.

Further above the Pabonka Potrang are the remains of 108 chörtens and the yellow **Jasa Potrang**, or temple of Princess Wencheng (the Chinese wife of King Songtsen Gampo). The two ground-floor rooms are dedicated to five manifestations of Tsongkhapa and the medicine buddhas, and an upper-floor chapel has a small statue of Wencheng herself in the far right, near an image of Thonmi Sam-

bhota (who reputedly invented the Tibetan alphabet here). Songsten Gampo's Nepali wife Bhrikuti is also present, as are images on the other side of the room of Green and White Drölma, of whom the two wives are thought to be emanations.

Walks Around the Monastery

A few intrepid (and fit) travellers use Pabonka as a base for walks further afield. The half-day kora around Pabonka, Tashi Chöling hermitage and Chupsang Nunnery makes a nice addition to a visit to Sera Monastery. Midday can be hot here, so bring enough water.

For those who aren't so fit, an easier 20-minute walk from Pabonka leads up to **Tashi Chöling hermitage**. There's not a lot left to see at the hermitage, but it offers good views. Pilgrims drink holy spring water from the upper chapel before making a kora of the hermitage. To get here from the back of the Pabonka kora, follow the path diagonally up the hillside, following the electricity poles.

From Tashi Chöling, the trail drops into a ravine and follows this down for 30 minutes to **Chupsang Nunnery**. There are some 80 nuns resident at Chupsang and it's a very friendly place. It's about 40 minutes' walk from the nunnery to the main road into Lhasa.

An alternative route from Tashi Chöling is to hike for 40 minutes northeast up the ravine to the cliffside hermitage of **Dadren Ritro**. You can see the hermitage from the trail. From here, trekkers can follow trails across the ridge for an hour or two to Sera Monastery or Sera Ütse (see the boxed text, opposite).

Keru (or Samdeling) Nunnery is a tough four-hour trek from Tashi Chöling or Pabonka (allow around two hours for the descent). This is a serious day trek and should not be attempted until you are well adjusted to the altitude. The faint trail heads northwest from Tashi Chöling and follows a steep ridge. The nunnery, home to more than 80 nuns, is at an altitude of over 4200m.

Getting There & Away

To get to Pabonka, take minibus 502 or 503 to the Sera Monastery turn-off on Nangre Beilu. Rather than take the turn right to Sera, look for a left turn a little up the road before the military hospital. After five minutes take a right at the canal; after 15 minutes take the branch to the left and you'll see Pabonka ahead to the left, perched on its granite boul-

der. The 'monastery' to the right is actually Chupsang Nunnery.

GANDEN MONASTERY དགའ་ལྷན་གྱི་གཤེན་འཇགས་གྲྀ་ཁྱིམ་

Ganden (Gandan Si; adult/student Y45/35; ☎️ dawn-dusk), just 50km northeast of Lhasa, was the first Gelugpa monastery and has been the main seat of this major Buddhist order ever since. If you only have time for one monastery excursion outside Lhasa, Ganden would probably be the best choice. With its stupendous views of the surrounding Kyi-chu Valley and fascinating kora, Ganden is an experience unlike the other major Gelugpa monasteries in the Lhasa area.

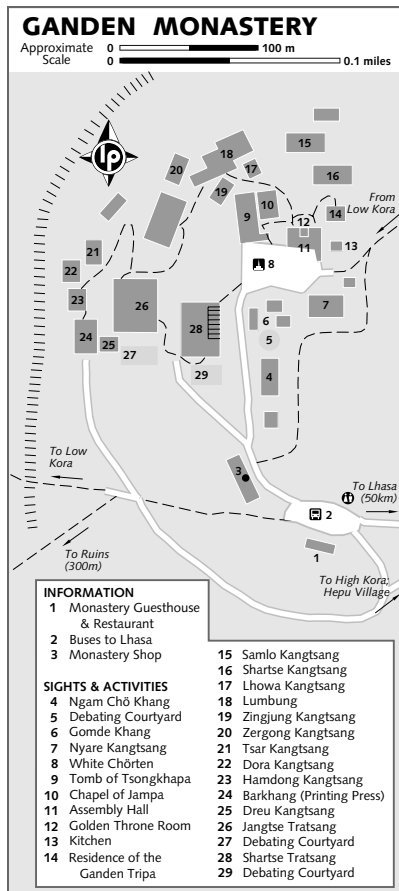
The monastery was founded in 1409 by Tsongkhapa, the revered reformer of the Gelugpa order, after the first Mönlam festival was performed here. Images of Tsongkhapa flanked by his first two disciples, Kedrub Je and Gyatsab Je, are found throughout the monastery. When Tsongkhapa died in 1411, the abbotship of the monastery passed to these disciples. The post came to be known as the Ganden Tripa and was earned through scholarly merit, not reincarnation. It is the Ganden Tripa, not, as one might expect, the Dalai Lama, who is the head of the Gelugpa order.

Ganden means 'joyous' in Tibetan and is the name of the Western Paradise (also known as Tushita) that is home to Jampa, the Future Buddha. There is a certain irony in this because, of all the great monasteries of Tibet, Ganden suffered most at the hands of the Red Guards, possibly because of its political influence.

Today it is the scene of extensive rebuilding, but this does not disguise the ruin that surrounds the new structures. In 1959 there were 2000 monks at Ganden; today there are just a couple of hundred. The destruction was caused by artillery fire and bombing in 1959 and 1966. New chapels and residences are being opened all the time, so even pilgrims are sometimes unsure in which order to visit the chapels.

Ganden was temporarily closed to tourists in 1996 after violent demonstrations against the government's banning of Dalai Lama photos. There were further scuffles in 2006 when monks smashed a statue of the controversial deity Dorje Shugden (see p139).

Interior photography fees are Y20 per chapel; video fees are an amazing Y1500. For



details of the trek from Ganden to Samye, see p288.

Ngam Chö Khang

The first chapel you reach from the parking area is Ngam Chö Khang. It is built on the site of Tsongkhapa's original assembly hall (*dukhang*), and has a small shrine with images of Tsongkhapa. On the left is a protector chapel (*gönkhang*), that houses four protective deities. The largest image is of Dorje Jigje.

Debating Courtyard

Southeast of the Gomde Khang residence is the debating courtyard. You should be able to hear the clapping of hands as you pass if there is a debate in progress.

Tomb of Tsongkhapa

The red fortress-like structure of Tsongkhapa's mausoleum, also known as the Serkhang, is probably the most impressive of the reconstructed buildings at Ganden. It's above the prominent white chörten.

The main entrance leads to a new prayer hall with a small sand mandala and an inner Sakyamuni chapel. The protector chapel to the right is the domain of the protective deity Chögyel (to the far right). Women are not allowed into this chapel.

Exit this building, turn to the left and take the stairs leading to the upper floors. The holiest shrine here is the Yangpachen Khang (or Serkhang) chapel, which houses Tsongkhapa's funeral chörten. The chapel is named after the stone in the back left, covered in offerings of yak butter, which is said to have flown from India. Both the original tomb and the preserved body of Tsongkhapa inside it were destroyed by Red Guards. The new silver-and-gold chörten was built to house salvaged fragments of Tsongkhapa's skull. The images seated in front of the chörten are of Tsongkhapa flanked by his two principal disciples. The room also holds several holy relics attributed to Tsongkhapa. Pilgrims line up to buy votive inscriptions written in gold ink by the monks. Protective amulets and incense are sold outside the chapel and one-mao notes are stuffed in the grill outside as offerings.

You can climb up to the roof for good views.

Chapel of Jampa

This small chapel (Jampa Lhakhang), just across from the exit of the Tomb of Tsongkhapa, holds two large images of the Future Buddha, plus the eight bodhisattvas.

Assembly Hall

The recently renovated assembly hall has statues of the 16 *arhats* and two huge statues of Tsongkhapa. Stairs lead up to the inner sanctum, the **Golden Throne Room (Ser Trikhang)**, which houses the throne of Tsongkhapa, where pilgrims get thumped on the head with the yellow hats of Tsongkhapa and the Dalai Lama.

There are two entrances on the north side of the building. The west one gives access to a 2nd-floor view of the Tsongkhapa statue, and the east one (sometimes closed) houses a library (Tengyur Lhakhang).

Residence of the Ganden Tripa

To the east of the Golden Throne Room and slightly uphill, this residence (also known as Zimchung Tridok Khang) contains the living quarters and throne of the Ganden Tripa. Other rooms include a protector chapel, with statues of Demchok, Gonpo Gur (Mahakala) and Nangjoma (Vajrayogini); a Tsongkhapa chapel; and a room with the living quarters of the Dalai Lama (note the photo of the 13th Dalai Lama). To the right is the 'Nirvana Room', which has a large shrine to Kurt Cobain (only kidding, it's Tsongkhapa again, who is said to have died in this room). The upper-floor library has a round platform used for creating sand mandalas.

Other Buildings

From here, the pilgrim trail winds through various renovated *kangtsangs* (residences), which offer some good opportunities to meet the local monks away from the tourist trail.

Lumbung Kangtsang is also known as the Amdo Kangtsang. Tsongkhapa himself was from Amdo (modern-day Qinghai), and many monks came from the province to study here.

The other main buildings are the **Jangtse Tratsang**, an active college with an impressive main prayer hall, and the **Shartse Tratsang**, both large, recently reconstructed colleges. In the morning (between 7.30am and 11am) and early afternoon (1.30pm to 3pm) listen out for debating in the enclosed courtyard south of the Shartse Tratsang.

Below the main assembly hall, the innocuous-looking **Nyare Kangtsang** houses a controversial statue of the deity Dorje Shugden. Worship of the deity has been outlawed by the Dalai Lama and in 2006 monks stormed the building and smashed the statue, leading to the arrest of two monks. The statue was replaced in 2007 with the support of a Chinese government more than happy to fan the flames of a sectarian split between local monks and the Dalai Lama. The standoff remains tense and the chapel is under the guard of a bored-looking PSB officer. The statue is in the third chapel, in the far right corner, with a red face and third eye, wearing a bronze hat and riding a snow lion.

Ganden Kora

The Ganden kora is a simply stunning walk and should not be missed. There are superb

views over the braided Kyi-chu Valley along the way and there are usually large numbers of pilgrims and monks offering prayers, rubbing holy rocks and prostrating themselves along the path.

There are actually two parts to the walk: the high kora and the low kora. The high kora climbs Angkor Ri south of Ganden and then drops down the ridge to join up with the lower kora.

To walk the **high kora**, follow the path southeast of the car park, away from the monastery. After a while the track splits – the left path leads to Hepu village on the Ganden–Samye trek; the right path zigzags up the ridge to a collection of prayer flags. Try to follow other pilgrims up. It's a tough 40-minute climb to the top of the ridge, so don't try this one unless you're well acclimatised. Here, at two peaks, pilgrims burn juniper incense and give offerings of tsampa before heading west down the ridge in the direction of the monastery, stopping at several other shrines en route.

The **low kora** is an easier walk of around 45 minutes. From the car park the trail heads west up and then around the back of the ridge behind the monastery. The trail winds past several isolated shrines and rocks that are rubbed for their healing properties or squeezed through as a karmic test. At one point, pilgrims all peer at a rock through a clenched fist in order to see visions.

A **sky-burial site** is reached shortly before the high point of the trail. Some pilgrims undertake a ritual simulated death and rebirth at this point, rolling around on the ground.

Towards the end of the kora, on the eastern side of the ridge, is **Tsongkhapa's hermitage**, a small building with relief images of Atisha, Sakyamuni, Tsepame and Palden Lhamo. These images are believed to have the power of speech. Above the hermitage is a coloured rock painting that is reached by a narrow, precipitous path. From the hermitage, the kora drops down to rejoin the monastery.

Sleeping & Eating

The simple **Monastery Guesthouse** (dm Y15-40) is used mostly by trekkers headed to Samye. Better quality rooms have recently been built above the well-stocked monastery shop just down from the car park. The **monastery restaurant** has low-grade *thugpa* (Tibetan noodles; Y3) and some fried dishes.

Getting There & Away

Ganden (Y20 return, 1¼ hours) is one of the few sights in Ü that is connected to Lhasa by public transport. At least one bus leaves from in front of the Barkhor Square some time between 6am and 7am (a second bus often leaves between 7am and 7.30am), returning between 12.30pm and 1.30pm. A new paved road switchbacks the steep final 9km to the monastery, making the last few kilometres of the cycling trip here a lot less painful.

On the way back to Lhasa, the pilgrim bus normally stops at Sanga Monastery, set at the foot of the ruined Dagtse Dzong (or Dechen Dzong; *dzong* means 'fort').

A Land Cruiser for a day trip to Ganden costs around Y400; a taxi will be cheaper. Guides and permits are not required.

DRAK YERPA གྲམ་ཡེར་པ་ ཡེ་པ་གྲམ་པ་

For those with an interest in Tibetan Buddhism, **Drak Yerpa hermitage** (Yeba Si; admission sometimes Y20), about 16km northeast of Lhasa, is one of the holiest cave retreats in Ü. Among the many ascetics who have sojourned here are Guru Rinpoche and Atisha (Jowo-je), the Bengali Buddhist who spent 12 years proselytising in Tibet. King Songtsen Gampo also meditated in a cave, after his Tibetan wife established the first of Yerpa's chapels. The peaceful site offers lovely views and is a great day trip from Lhasa.

At one time the hill at the base of the cave-dotted cliffs was home to Yerpa Drubde Monastery, the summer residence of Lhasa's Gyutö College at the Ramoche Temple. The monastery was destroyed in 1959.

Monks have begun to return to Yerpa but numbers are strictly controlled by the government, which tore down several 'unauthorised' chapels as recently as 1998.

The Caves

As you ascend from the parking lot, take the left branch of the stairway to visit the caves in clockwise fashion. The first caves are the **Rigsun Gampo Cave** and the **Tendrel Drubpuk**, the cave where Atisha (portrayed in a red hat) meditated. At one nearby cave pilgrims squeeze through a hole in the rock wall; at another they take a sip of holy water.

The yellow **Jamkhang** has a two-storey statue of Jampa flanked by Chana Dorje (Vajrapani) to the left and Namse (Vairocana) and Tamdrin (Hayagriva) to the right. Other statues are of Atisha (Jowo-je) flanked by the fifth

Dalai Lama and Tsongkhapa. The upper cave is the **Drubthub-puk**, recognisable by its black yak-hair curtain. Continuing east along the ridge a detour leads up to a chörten that offers fine views of the valley.

The next chapel surrounds the **Lhalung-puk**, the cave where the monk Lhalung Pelde meditated after assassinating the anti-Buddhist king Langdharma in 842.

The largest chapel is the **Dawa-puk** (Moon Cave), where Guru Rinpoche (which is the main statue) is said to have spent seven years meditating. Look for the painting of Ekajati (Tsechigma) in the left corner of the anteroom and the stone footprints of Guru Rinpoche and Lhalung in the inner room, to the right.

Heading west, climb to the **Chögyal-puk**, the Cave of Songtsen Gampo. The interior chapel has a central thousand-armed Chenresig (Avalokiteshvara) statue known as Chaktong Chentong. Pilgrims circle the central rock pillar continually. A small cave and statue of Songtsen Gampo are in the right-hand corner.

Below the main caves and to the east is the **Neten Lhakhang**, where the practice of worshipping the 16 *arhats* was first introduced. Below here is where Atisha is said to have taught. Further east is the holy mountain of Yerpa Lhari, topped by prayer flags and encircled by a kora.

There are several caves and retreats higher up the cliff-face and some fine hiking possibilities in the hills if you have time. With a sleeping bag and some food it's generally possible to spend the night in one of the chapels (normally the Dawa-puk).

Getting There & Away

A daily pilgrim bus leaves from the Barkhor Square at around 7.30am for the caves (Y20 return), returning around 1pm. Bus drivers often call the site 'Drayab'. The newly paved road crosses the low 3980m Ngachen-la before turning into the side valley at Yerpa village and passing two ruined *dzongs* (forts) and a large disused dam en route to the caves. The bus does a final circuit of a large ruined chörten before screeching to a halt in a great cloud of dust.

DRÖLMA LHAKHANG འཇོལ་མ་ལྷ་ཁང་

This small but significant **monastery** (Zhuomalakang; admission free; ☞ dawn-dusk) is full of ancient relics and hidden treasures. It's only

30 minutes by bus southwest of Lhasa and is worth a stop for those interested in Tibetan Buddhism.

As you take the Lhasa–Tsetang road out of Lhasa, you'll pass a blue **rock carving** of Sakyamuni Buddha at the base of a cliff about 11km southwest of town (it's easily missed coming from the south). Nyetang village and the monastery are about 6km further on.

Drölma Lhakhang is associated with the Bengali scholar Atisha (982–1054). Atisha came to Tibet at the age of 53 at the invitation of the king of the Guge kingdom in western Tibet and his teachings were instrumental in the so-called second diffusion of Buddhism in the 11th century. Drölma Lhakhang was established at this time by one of Atisha's foremost disciples, Drömtonpa, who also founded the Kadampa order, to which the monastery belongs. Atisha died at Netang aged 72.

The monastery was spared desecration by the Red Guards during the Cultural Revolution after a direct request from Bangladesh (which now encompasses Atisha's homeland). Apparently, Chinese premier Zhou Enlai intervened on its behalf.

The first chapel to the left is a *gönkhang* (protector chapel), decorated with severed stags' heads. As you enter and exit the main monastery building look for the two ancient guardian deities, which may even date back to the 11th-century founding of the monastery.

From the entry, pass into the first chapel, the **Namgyel Lhakhang**, which contains a number of chörtens. The black-metal Kadampa-style chörten to the right reputedly holds the staff of Atisha and the skull of Naropa, Atisha's teacher. Statuary includes Atisha and the eight medicine buddhas.

The eponymous middle **Drölma Lhakhang** houses a number of relics associated with Atisha. The statues at the top include an 11th-century statue of Sakyamuni and statues of the 13th Dalai Lama (left), Green Tara, and Serlingpa (right), another teacher of Atisha. A 13th-century statue of Chenresig was allegedly stolen from here recently by art thieves. The lower central statue behind the grill is an image of Jampa that was reputedly saved from Mongol destruction when it shouted 'Ouch!'. There are also 21 statues of Drölma, after whom the monastery and the chapel are named.

The final **Tsepame Lhakhang** has original statues of Tsepame, cast with the ashes of Atisha, flanked by Marmedze (Dipamkara), the Past

Buddha, Jampa (the Future Buddha) and the eight bodhisattvas. The small central statue of Atisha in a glass case is backed by his original clay throne. As you leave the chapel, look out for two sunken white chörtens, which hold Atisha's robes.

Upstairs is the throne room of the Dalai Lama, as well as a living room in the far left featuring a fine tree-of-life thangka depicting the Gelugpa lineages. To the right is a library.

Really keen *gompa* stompers can plod out a further hour west from Drölma Lhakhang to **Ratö Monastery**. This Gelugpa institution is renowned for its fine wall murals. It is reached via a track that heads west from the main road, south of Drölma Lhakhang.

Getting There & Away

Any bus heading to/from destinations south of Lhasa (eg to Shigatse, Samye Monastery, Tsetang) will take you past the entrance to Drölma Lhakhang. Alternatively, visit on the way back from Shigatse or the Yarlung Valley, since you can get back to Lhasa by flagging down anything that comes by.

SHUGSHEB NUNNERY གུ་ག་གཞིབ་མ་ནི་དཀོན་མཆོག་གི་སྐུ་ལྷ་ཁང་

Trekkers and anyone who likes to get off the beaten track will love this excursion to Tibet's largest nunnery, set in a large natural bowl about 65km south of Lhasa and home to over 280 nuns. The region is a favourite of bird-watchers.

From the end of the motorable road it's a steep 45-minute hike up to the village-like **nunnery** (Xiongse Nig Si; no admission fee). The central hall contains a three-dimensional mandala of Drölma and statues of Guru Rinpoche, Dorje Semba (Vajrasattva), White Tara and several old lamas. Both Nyingma and Dzogchen schools are represented here. Stairs to the right lead upstairs to a chapel with a statue of Machik Labdronma (holding a double drum), the famous 11th-century adept who opened up the valley. There is also a black-and-white photo of one of her reincarnations.

You can hike up the hill, following the electric poles, for 45 minutes to the **Gangri Tokar shrine** (Drubkhang), where Longchenpa, an important 14th-century Dzogchen lama, once meditated. The chapel has a cave shrine and a sacred tree stump in front of a rock image of the Dzogchen deity Rahulla.

From here fit and acclimatised hikers can climb for a couple of hours up past meditation caves (marked by prayer flags) to the ridgeline behind. The views of the Kyi-chu Valley are fantastic from here and if the weather is clear you'll get views of snowcapped 7191m Nojin Kangtsang and other Himalayan peaks to the south. From the ridgeline you can continue northwest across a boulder field for 15 minutes to a small hill (5160m) topped by a chörten that offers epic views northwards as far as Lhasa. Alternatively you could continue east along the ridge to summit the bowl's main peak.

It's possible to stay the night at the nunnery **guesthouse** (dm Y10-20). The small teahouse below the main complex offers simple meals.

Getting There & Away

A nunnery bus (Y15) leaves at 7am from Lhasa's Barkhor Square on Monday, Wednesday and Saturday, returning to Lhasa around 5pm. At the time of research it crossed the Kyi-chu just before the tunnel to Gongkar airport, since the more direct bridge, 10km south of Drölma Lhakhang, was closed to traffic.

The bus passes the picturesque cliffside Samanga Monastery en route to the nunnery and stops briefly at the small Öshang Lhakhang on the way back, though this may change when the more direct bridge is repaired. On the way back to Lhasa the nunnery bus pauses at the Drölma Lhakhang (p140) for a quick tour of the chapels, before terminating in Lhasa at the Palha Lu-puk (p112).