

Tsang གཅེང་



With most of its major sights relatively close to Lhasa, and on or near the paved Friendship Hwy, the traditional province of Tsang draws the crowds. This is no reason to avoid it. After all, this is the region that has Everest, the highest mountain in the world, the Gyantse Kumbum, Tibet's most stunning architectural wonder, and many of the country's most important monasteries. The latter include the fortress-like Sakya Monastery, seat of the first Tibetan government with a lama ruler, and Tashilhunpo, seat and burial site of the Panchen Lamas.

Getting off the tourist path is relatively easy, though if you're travelling by Land Cruiser tour you should arrange this from the start. Phuntsoling and Shalu monasteries are two very worthwhile diversions. Both are intensely atmospheric, highly photogenic and have important places in Tibetan history.

Tsang doesn't hurt for outstanding scenery, either. There's Everest, of course, but also the turquoise waters of Yamdrok-tso, the snaking valleys of the Yarlung Tsangpo, wide meadows dotted with whitewashed villages, and stunning views from passes that get up to 5100m. The adventurous take this all in slowly by cycling down the Friendship Hwy, or trekking: Everest Base Camp to Tingri (p299) is the most popular trekking route in Tsang, though there are others.

After Shegar and the turn-off for Mt Everest, the attractions dry up. Though most travellers are headed for Kathmandu, a round trip from Lhasa should allow you to see more in a short time. How short? A week is bare minimum, while three weeks gives time for day hikes out to little-visited monasteries, one longer trek and (well-deserving) repeat visits to the larger monastic compounds.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Marvel at the turquoise waters of **Yamdrok-tso** (opposite), one of Tibet's most sacred lakes
- Worship before a 26m gold Buddha at **Tashilhunpo Monastery** (p191), a walled complex the size of a village
- Climb the dazzling **Gyantse Kumbum** (p187), a monumental chörten with mural-filled chapels
- Absorb the holy atmosphere inside ancient **Sakya Monastery** (p201)
- Get off the beaten track at photogenic **Phuntsoling Monastery** (p200), set at the base of a monstrous sand dune
- Sleep in nomad tents and gaze upon the north face of **Mt Everest** (p209)



History

Tsang lies to the west of Ü and has shared political dominance and cultural influence over the Tibetan plateau with its neighbour. With the decline of the Lhasa kings in the 10th century, the epicentre of Tibetan power moved to Sakya, under Mongol patronage from the mid-13th to the mid-14th centuries.

After the fall of the Sakya government, the power shifted back to Ü and then again back to Tsang. But, until the rise of the Gelugpa order and the Dalai Lamas in the 17th century, neither Tsang nor Ü effectively governed all of central Tibet, and the two provinces were rivals for power. Some commentators see the rivalry between the Panchen Lama and Dalai Lama as a latter-day extension of this provincial wrestling for political dominance.

Permits

Most of Tsang's sights involve detours from the Friendship Hwy and you need permits to visit these areas. At the time of writing the only way to get permits was by travelling with an organised Land Cruiser tour. Check the situation before you leave as many expect a relaxation of the rules after the 2008 Olympics.

Getting Around

The main road through Tsang, the Friendship Hwy, is paved all the way to Tingri. The dirt road from Tingri to Nyalam is in good

shape, but after Nyalam it's a mess to the Nepali border. The southern route via Yamdrok-tso was being upgraded at the time of writing and should be paved all the way from Chushul to Shigatse by the end of 2007. Land Cruiser trips (the usual way to travel through the region) take this more scenic route, but there is less public transport here for the independent traveller.

Public transport runs along the Northern Friendship Hwy as far as Shegar. By 2009 the Qinghai-Tibet train could be open from Lhasa to Shigatse.

Note that at the time of writing, foreigners were not permitted to take any form of public transport from Lhasa's main bus station. This may change, so we have included information where it exists.

The entries in this chapter follow a south-westerly route through Tsang from Lhasa to the border with Nepal, taking in the main attractions of the area on the way.

YAMDROK-TSO ཡམ་འཛོལ་གསལ་མཚོ་ 羊卓雍措 elev 4441m

Dazzling Yamdrok-tso (Yang Zhuoyong Cuo) is normally first seen from the summit of the Kamba-la (4700m). The lake lies several hundred metres below the road, and in clear weather is a fabulous shade of deep turquoise. Far in the distance is the huge massif of Mt Nojin Kangtsang (7191m).

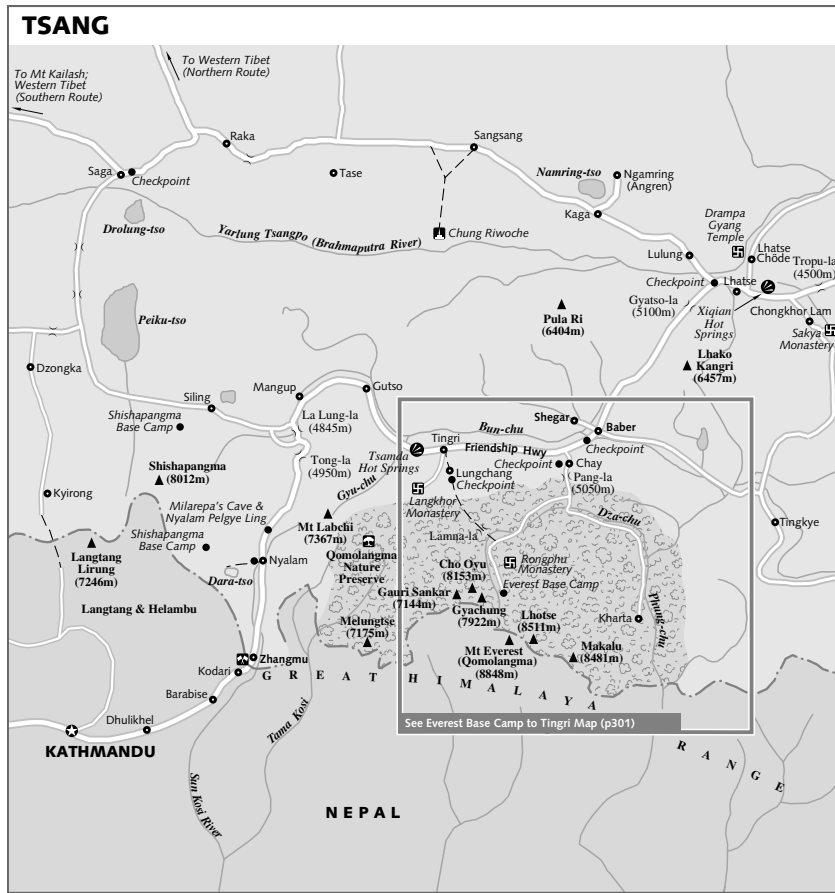
DOWN THE DRAIN

Yamdrok-tso is one of Tibet's holiest lakes and an important centre for pilgrimage. It's also, incongruously, the site of Tibet's largest hydroelectric plant.

Yamdrok-tso has an unusual location, locked 4441m above sea level in a high bowl above the Yarlung Tsangpo (Brahmaputra River). In the mid-1980s the Chinese leadership sanctioned a plan to build a 6km tunnel below the surface of the lake that would send the waters dropping some 846m. The hydroelectric project, capable of generating 90 megawatts of power, would be a gift to the Tibetan people, according to then premier Li Peng.

But the gift was not greeted with the enthusiasm that may have been expected. Not only was it a painful affront to Tibetan religious sensibilities but, as many complained bitterly, the energy produced would mostly be directed to military bases and Chinese communities around Lhasa. Work was temporarily halted after opposition by the Panchen Lama, but with the lama's death in 1989 the project was back on track. By 1997 the turbines had started to produce electricity for the Lhasa region. You can see the pumps from the Lhasa-Shigatse road, 15km southwest of Chushul.

A decade later, the plant is still generating controversy with every watt of power. Much of the ongoing concern is over the environment. Yamdrok-tso is a dead lake with no outlet and no perennial source of water. While it is unlikely the Chinese will allow Yamdrok-tso to completely drain, diverting river water (as has been promised, though never done) to replenish what is lost would change the consistency of the lake's waters. Like the vast herds of gazelle in Ngari, the famed turquoise-blue waters of Yamdrok-tso, and the ecosystem it now supports, may one day be things of the past.



Yamdrok-tso is shaped like a coiling scorpion. It doubles back on itself on the western side, effectively creating a large island within its reaches. For Tibetans, it is one of the four holy lakes (the others are Lhamo La-tso, Nam-tso and Manasarovar) and home to wrathful deities. Devout Tibetan pilgrims circumambulate the lake in around seven days.

Most Western travellers are content with a glimpse of the lake from the Kamba-la and views from the town of Nangartse, where you can stay the night.

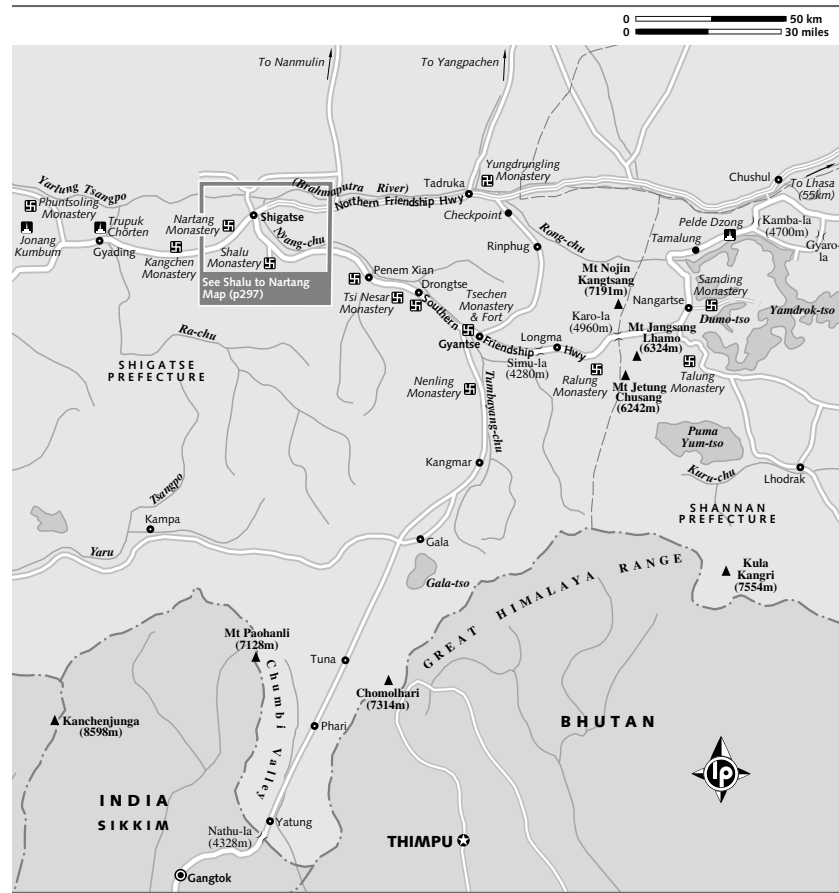
Permits

At the time of writing you could only travel as far as the Kamba-la due to road construction (access via Gyantse was also restricted), but

the new road was expected to be open by the time you read this. Permits are currently required. If you travel with a Land Cruiser tour staff will arrange the permits for you.

Nangartse ལྷ་དཀར་ཚེ
☎ 0893 / elev 4400m

Nangartse is the largest town on the lakeside and a popular stop for the night. It's not a particularly attractive place but there is a small monastery in the south of town, an old Tibetan quarter and a small dzong (fort) to the north (famed as the birthplace of the mother of the fifth Dalai Lama). There are also opportunities for walks, such as to Samding Monastery. You can't actually walk to the lakeshore as you will soon find yourself up to



your knees in bog, but the views are still good and bird-watchers in particular will have a field day during the summer months.

There are a number of cheap guesthouses and restaurants in town as this is a popular stopping point for Land Cruiser tours. All are within 200m of each other on the main road.

Samding Monastery བསམ་ལྗེ་དང་འགྲོ་པ་

On the shores of Yamdrok-tso, about 10km east of Nangartse, Samding is situated on a ridge that separates the northern arm of the lake from Dumo-tso (a smaller lake between the northern and southern arms of Yamdrok-tso). It provides excellent views of the Dumo plain and the mountains to the south. You

can walk here from Nangartse in about two hours.

Samding is noted for the unusual fact that it is traditionally headed by a female incarnate lama named Dorje Phagmo (Diamond Sow). When the Mongolian armies invaded Samding in 1716, Dorje Phagmo changed her nuns into pigs to help them escape. Her current incarnation works for the government in Lhasa.

It's possible to visit the main dukhang (assembly hall), to the right of the courtyard, which is dominated by a statue of Sakyamuni (Sakya Thukpa). There's also a footprint of the ninth Dorje Phagmo here, plus an eerie protector chapel and several chapels upstairs. There are 31 monks in residence.

Getting There & Away

When the road reopens, many people travelling in rented vehicles will once again include Yamdrok-tso in their trip to the Nepali border. But it will also be possible to rent a vehicle for a four-day loop from Lhasa visiting the lake, Gyantse and Shigatse. Semiregular bus service should also resume between Lhasa's main bus station and Nangartse. The distance between the two locations is around 140km.

Note there is no public transport from Nangartse to Gyantse, 100km to the southwest.

Leaving Yamdrok-tso is as spectacular as arriving, since you have to cross the 4960m Karo-la, with its awesome roadside views of the Nojin-Kangtsang Glacier. It was here that Younghusband's British troops clashed with Tibetan forces en route to Lhasa (p186).

RALUNG MONASTERY རལུང་དགོན་པ་

elev 4350m

If you have your own transport and you want to get off the beaten track, make a 5km detour south to Ralung Monastery from the road between Nangartse and Gyantse. Ralung was founded in 1180 and gets its name from the monastery's 'self-arising' image of a *ra* (goat).

The original *tsuglhakhang* (great temple) stands in ruins, as does a chörten (stupa) visible from the roof. As you wander around, look for images of the founder, Tsanpa Gyare, and the Drukpa Rinpoche (the monastery belongs to the Drukpa Kagyud school), who resides in India.

When the road between Gyantse and Ralung is completed, irregular bus service should resume. Previously, buses ran every four days between Gyantse and Ralung village.

GYANTSE རྒྱལ་ཁྲེ་ རྟམ་རྩེ་

☎ 0892 / pop 15,000 / elev 3980m

One of the more pleasant towns around Tibet, Gyantse (Jiangzi), located in the Nyang-chu Valley, is famed for the Gyantse Kumbum, the largest chörten in Tibet. The white chörten, a magnificent tiered structure, contains a seemingly endless series of mural-filled chapels and offers outstanding views from its upper levels.

Most people rush through Gyantse, stopping only to see the *kumbum* (100,000 Buddha images), but the Gyantse Dzong, which dominates the town's skyline, should not be missed, especially if you are feeling a little Buddha-burnout from endless monastery vis-

its. For those with more time, there are some pleasant day trips that involve hikes to little-visited monasteries in the vicinity. And no matter what your schedule is, try to find a little time to wander the back streets of town: the mix of pilgrims, children, pop music, cows, motorcycles and mud is as true a picture of contemporary Tibetan life as you'll find.

If you happen to be in Tibet in early June, note that Gyantse has a horse-racing and archery festival during this time, though the date could change again (see p319).

History

Between the 14th and 15th centuries, Gyantse emerged as the centre of a fiefdom, with powerful connections to the Sakyapa order. By 1440 Gyantse's most impressive architectural achievements – the *kumbum* and the *dzong* – had been completed. The Pelkor Chöde Monastery also dates from this period.

Gyantse's historical importance declined from the end of the 15th century, although the town continued to be a major centre for the trade of wood and wool between India and Tibet. Gyantse carpets were considered the finest in Tibet. The town's position at the crossroads of trade routes leading south to Bhutan, west to Shigatse and northeast to Lhasa turned Gyantse into the third-largest town in Tibet by the time of the Chinese takeover, but it's since been eclipsed by Chamdo, Bayi, Ali and Tsetang. In 1904 it became the site of a major battle during Younghusband's advance on Lhasa.

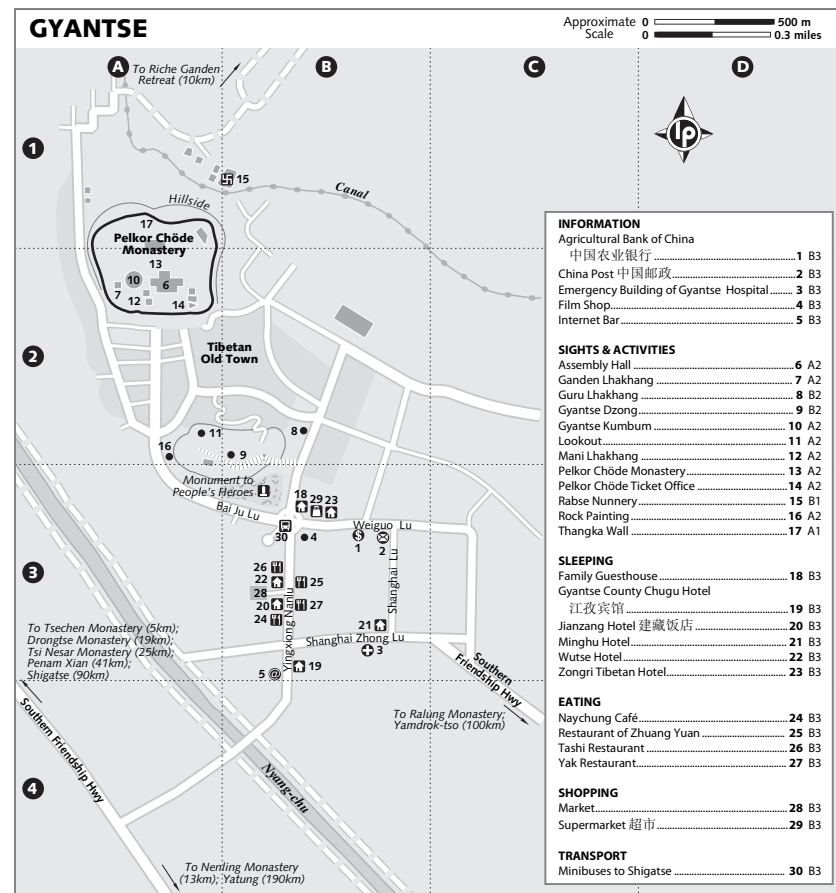
Orientation

Gyantse 'downtown' is small, consisting of a few wide streets. Yingxiong Nanlu (Hero South Rd) is 'main street' and has a decent selection of shops, restaurants and hotels.

To the north and west is the old Tibetan part of town, concentrated around the main road leading to Pelkor Chöde Monastery past the *dzong*, which looms over the town on a high ridge. To the south and east is an incipient Chinese quarter with government buildings and more shops, restaurants and a couple of hotels.

Information

There's an **internet bar** (wangba; Yingxiong Nanlu; per hr ¥8) in the south of town with decent connection speeds. For cash withdrawals the **Agricultural Bank of China** (Weigu Lu) has an



ATM that accepts foreign cards on the Plus, Visa or MasterCard network. There are private telecom booths around town for cheap phone calls.

Sights

PELKOR CHÖDE MONASTERY

དཔལ་ལོངས་མཚོ་དྲེན་དགོན་

The sprawling compound in the far north of town houses **Pelkor Chöde Monastery** (Pelkor Chötöngön; ☎ 817 2680; admission ¥40; ☹ 9am-6pm, some chapels closed 1-3pm) and the monumental Gyantse Kumbum, a chörten filled with fine paintings and statues. Both are deservedly top of the list on most travellers' must-sees.

Founded in 1418, the red-walled Pelkor Chöde was once a compound of 15 monas-

tries that brought together three different orders of Tibetan Buddhism – a rare instance of multidominational tolerance. Nine of the monasteries were Gelugpa, three were Sakyapa and three belonged to the obscure Büton suborder whose head monastery was Shalu (p199) near Shigatse.

A climb up the nearby Gyantse Dzong will give you a clear birds-eye view of the original extent of the monastery and a sense of what a bustling place it must have been. Today, however, much of the courtyard, enclosed by high walls that cling to the hills backing onto the monastery, is bare and many buildings are empty. But the monastery has not yet become a mere museum. There's a small but visible population of monks and a steady

BAYONETS TO GYANTSE

The early-20th-century British invasion of Tibet, also known as the Younghusband expedition, began, as wars sometimes do, with unreliable intelligence. Newspapers were spreading the claim that Russia had designs on Tibet, and many were lapping it up. The British Raj feared losing a buffer state and so sent Major Francis Younghusband, an army officer with rich experience of Central Asia, on a diplomatic mission to Tibet. After six months of waiting, no Chinese or Tibetans had showed up for the meetings. A stronger message had to be sent. Younghusband was instructed to advance on Lhasa with 3000 troops (plus 7000 servants and 4000 yaks) to force a treaty on the recalcitrant Tibetans.

Despite previous brushes with British firepower, the Tibetans seem to have had little idea what they were up against. About halfway between Yatung and Gyantse, a small Tibetan army bearing a motley assortment of arms confronted a British force carrying light artillery, Maxim machine guns and modern rifles. The Tibetans' trump card was a charm marked with the seal of the Dalai Lama, which they were told would protect them from British bullets. It didn't. Firing began after a false alarm and the British slaughtered 700 Tibetans in four minutes.

The British buried the Tibetan dead (the Tibetans dug them up at night and carried them off for sky burial) and set up a field hospital, dumbfounding the wounded Tibetans, who could not understand why the British would try to kill them one day and save them the next. The British then continued their advance to Gyantse, but found the town's defensive fort (the Gyantse Dzong) deserted. Curiously, rather than occupy the *dzong*, the British camped on the outskirts of Gyantse and waited for officials from Lhasa to arrive. While they waited, Younghusband sped off up to the Karo-la with a small contingent of troops to take on 3000 Tibetans who had dug themselves in at over 5000m. The result was the highest land-based battle in British military history and a fine example of frozen stiff upper lip.

After nearly two months of waiting for Lhasa officials, the British troops received orders to retake the Gyantse Dzong (it had been reoccupied by Tibetans) and march on Lhasa. Artillery fire breached the walls of the fort, and when one of the shells destroyed the Tibetan gunpowder supply the Tibetans were reduced to throwing rocks at their attackers. The *dzong* fell in one day, with four British casualties and over 300 Tibetan dead.

With the fort under their command, the British now controlled the road to Lhasa. Younghusband led 2000 troops to the capital with few incidents. In fact, the greatest challenge he faced was getting all the troops across the Yarlung Tsangpo (Brahmaputra River): it took five days of continual ferrying.

Once in Lhasa Younghusband tried to ascertain where the bloody hell the Dalai Lama was (he had fled to Mongolia). After a month, Younghusband managed to get the Tibetan regent to sign an agreement allowing British trade missions at Gyantse and Gartok (near Mt Kailash). (Ironically, the troops discovered that British goods were already trickling into the bazaars – one British soldier wrote that he found a sausage machine made in Birmingham and two bottles of Bulldog stout in the Barkhor.) But the treaty and others that followed in 1906 were largely meaningless as Tibet simply had to no capacity to fulfil them.

As for Younghusband himself, the most significant event of the campaign was yet to come. On the evening before his departure, as he looked out over Lhasa, he felt a great wave of emotion, insight and spiritual peace. Younghusband had always been a religious man, but this moment changed him forever. 'That single hour on leaving Lhasa was worth all the rest of a lifetime,' he later quipped.

For more information on this chapter in Tibet's history, try Charles Allen's book *Duel in the Snows: The True Story of the Younghusband Mission to Lhasa*.

stream of prostrating, praying, donation-offering pilgrims doing the rounds almost any time of the day.

The **assembly hall** is straight ahead as you walk into the compound, and most people begin their explorations here. The entrance is

decorated with statues of the Four Guardian Kings, instead of the usual paintings, and a large Wheel of Life mural. Just by the entrance on the left is a particularly spooky protector chapel, with murals depicting sky burial in fairly graphic details. Look for the huge *tor-*

mas (sculptures made out of tsampa) in a case outside the entrance.

The hall is quite dark inside and if you want a good look at the various murals and thangkas, it is a good idea to bring a torch. The main chapel is located to the rear. There is an inner route around the chapel, which is lined with fine murals. The central image is of Sakyamuni, who is flanked by the Past and Future Buddhas.

To the left of the main chapel is the **Dorjeling Lhakhang**, with a four-headed Nampa Namse (Vairocana) and the other four Dhyani (or Wisdom) Buddhas.

Moving to the upper floor, the first chapel to the left is noted for a three-dimensional mandala, wall paintings of the Indian-looking *mahasiddhas* (highly accomplished Tantric practitioners) and lacquered images of key figures in the Sakyapa lineage. Each of the 84 *mahasiddhas* is unique and shown contorted in a yogic posture. Unfortunately, the room is seldom opened. Other chapels, which are open in the mornings, are dedicated to Jampa (Maitreya), Tsongkhapa and the 16 *arhats* (literally 'worthy ones'). Some chapels have fairly kitschy modern displays. Photos cost Y10 per chapel.

A new and easily overlooked **Ganden Lhakhang** chapel to the left of the *kumbum* is worth a quick peek for the largest Tsongkhapa statue in Tibet.

GYANTSE KUMBUM ལྷོ་རྒྱ་འབྲུག་

Commissioned by a Gyantse prince in 1427, the **Gyantse Kumbum** (Gyen Kumbum; admission included with entry to Pelkor Chöde) is the town's foremost attraction. The 35m-high chörten, with its white layers trimmed with decorative stripes and its crown-like golden dome, is awe-inspiring. But the inside is no less impressive, and in what seems an endless series of tiny chapels you'll find painting after exquisite painting (*kumbum* means '100,000 images').

The Gyantse Kumbum has been described as the most important of its kind in Tibet. There are only two contemporaries, ruined and remote, in the Buddhist world: Jonang Kumbum (p200), 60km northeast of Lhatse, and the even more remote Chung Riwoche in the west of Tsang. However, it is commonly held that neither could ever compare with the style and grandeur of the Gyantse Kumbum.

You can enter the *kumbum* and follow a clockwise route that leads murmuring pil-

grims up through the six floors, taking in the dozens of rather tiny chapels that recede into the walls along the way. Much of the statuary in the chapels was damaged during the Cultural Revolution but the murals have weathered well. They date back to the 14th century, and if they were not created by Newari (Nepali) artisans then they were obviously influenced by Newari forms. Experts also see evidence of Chinese influence and, in the fusion of these Newari and Chinese forms with Tibetan sensibilities, the emergence of a syncretic but distinctly Tibetan style of painting.

Whatever the case, there are an awful lot of murals to see and it is difficult not to hurry through floors. You really won't be missing out if you stop and linger in just a few of the chapels to have a close look at the wall frescoes. In fact, you will probably enjoy the experience more and gain a greater appreciation for Tibetan art if you examine some of the wall figures in detail.

Depending on the position of the sun, certain chapels are sometimes illuminated with a warm, soft light that allows flashless photographs. There is a photography charge of Y10 for interior shots.

First Floor

This floor has four main chapels, two storeys high, and oriented according to the cardinal points. The four chapels are dedicated to: Sakyamuni (along with two disciples, medicine buddhas and Guru Rinpoche) in the south; Sukhavati, the 'pure land of the west' and home of red Öpagme (Amitabha) in the west; Marmedze (Dipamkara, the Past Buddha) in the north; and Tushita, another 'pure land' and home of Jampa (Maitreya), in the east. In between are some excellent murals depicting minor Tantric and protector deities. Statues of the Four Guardian Kings in the east mark the way to the upper floors.

Second Floor

The first four chapels in clockwise order from the stairs are dedicated to Jampelyang (known in Sanskrit as Manjushri), Chenresig (Avalokiteshvara), Tsepame (Amitayus) and Drölma (Tara). Most of the other chapels are devoted to wrathful protector deities, including Drölkar (White Tara; 12th chapel from the stairs), Chana Dorje (Vajrapani; 14th chapel) and Mikyöba (Akshobhya; 15th

chapel), a blue buddha who holds a *dorje* (thunderbolt).

Third Floor

This floor is also dominated by a series of two-storey chapels at the cardinal points portraying the four Dhyani Buddhas: red Öpagme (Amitabha) in the south; yellow Rinchen Jungne (Ratnasambhava) in the west; green Donyo Drupa (Amoghasiddhi) in the north; and blue Mikyöba (Akshobhya) in the east. There are several other chapels devoted to the fifth Dhyani Buddha, white Namse (Vairocana). Again, most of the other chapels are filled with wrathful deities.

Fourth Floor

The 11 chapels on this floor are dedicated to teachers, interpreters and translators of obscure orders of Tibetan Buddhism. Exceptions are the Three Kings of Tibet on the north side (eighth chapel clockwise from the steps) and Guru Rinpoche (10th chapel).

Upper Floors

The 5th floor, which is also known as the Bumpa, has four chapels and gives access to the roof of the *kumbum*. Hidden steps behind a statue on the western side lead up to the 6th floor and take you onto the veranda at the level of the eyes painted on the wall. There is also a series of murals painted around a central cube, but most people are taken in by the outstanding views, especially looking south over the old town where, in the background, the white-walled Gyantse Dzong is perched atop a colossal outcrop.

The top floor of the *kumbum* portrays a Tantric manifestation of Sakyamuni, but you will likely find the way up locked.

GYANTSE DZONG

Like most Tibetan towns, Gyantse radiates old-world charm when its whitewashed buildings are viewed from on high. So the stiff 20-minute climb to the top of the **Gyantse Dzong** (☎ 817 2116; admission Y40) is worth the effort for the great lookouts. In addition to Gyantse, clear views are afforded of the entire fertile Nyang-chu Valley and down into the compound of the Pelkor Chöde Monastery.

Many of the 14th-century fort's buildings and rooms are open for exploration, and a few have interesting murals and friezes, though most are bare. There's a kitschy attempt to

re-create the old **tax office** behind the ticket booth, and a little further on to the left you'll find a dungeon, chapel and torture room with dioramas that leave nothing to the imagination. Bring a torch to explore the spooky lower chambers beneath the chapel.

Entry to the *dzong* is via a gate, just north of the main roundabout. Land Cruisers can drive up about halfway to the top.

OTHER SIGHTS

Hidden behind the hill that runs between the monastery and the *dzong* is **Rabse Nunnery**, a delightful place decorated with prayer flags, chörtens and *mani lhakhangs*. The 'correct' way to visit is along the clockwise pilgrim trail that goes around the back of the Pelkor Chöde Monastery. To start, follow the road up beside the monastery and then swing right onto the dirt kora path. Bring a compass as the way back takes you through a maze of streets in the old town (but what views of the fort in the distance!). Bring water and lunch, too, as once you get out to this splendid open area you're going to want to continue to Riche Garden Retreat (p190). A round trip from central Gyantse to Rabse and back takes about two hours.

Sleeping

All the following have English signage at the front.

BUDGET

our pick Jianzang Hotel (Jianzang Fandian; ☎ 817 3720; Yingxiong Nanlu; tr per bed with/without bathroom Y50/40, d Y180-200, discounts of 20%) The Jianzang once again gets our vote as the best place in town. Rooms are clean, spacious and good value. Some rooms have squat toilets; others are Western-style and there are shared hot showers for the cheaper rooms. The best rooms, with wood floors and little touches of Tibetan décor, are in the new block overlooking the main road (it's quiet at night).

Wutse Hotel (Wuzi Fandian; ☎ 817 2909; fax 817 2880; Yingxiong Nanlu; dm Y50, s/d/tr with bathroom Y280/200/288, discounts of 30%) A popular place set around a courtyard. The quads are old but serviceable and there are reasonably clean toilets and showers. The private rooms have wood floors, 24-hour hot water and cosy beds with white cotton quilts.

Family Guesthouse (Jiangzi Liangshiju Zhaodaisuo; ☎ 817 4666; Weiguolu; s/d/tr per bed Y60/40/25) The carpets are old and stained but otherwise the

rooms and shared bathrooms (no showers) are clean and fine for a night's stay. The guesthouse is on the corner of Yingxiong Nanlu and Weiguolu, on the 2nd floor. The owner (who also owns the next door Zongri Tibetan Hotel) speaks some English.

MIDRANGE

Gyantse County Chugu Hotel (Jiangzi Chugu Binguan; ☎ 817 3165; Yingxiong Nanlu; s & d Y150) The newest courtyard hotel in Gyantse, with 24-hour hot water, wood-floor rooms and friendly staff.

Zongri Tibetan Hotel (Jiangzi Zongshan Fandian; ☎ 817 5555; ngawangrangchuan_n@hotmail.com; 1 Weiguolu; d incl breakfast Y320, discounts of 30-50%) With 24-hour hot water, clean Western-style rooms and usual discounted rates of Y140 to Y160 a room, this is a solid-value midrange option. A top-floor restaurant (dishes Y10 to Y30) offers almost 360 degree views of Gyantse. Step outside onto the rooftop (access via the back of the restaurant) for the perfect shot of the Gyantse Dzong.

Minghu Hotel (Minghu Fandian; ☎ 817 2468; 1 Shanghai Lu; d/tr Y369/380, discounts of 20-30%) A clean and quiet two-star Chinese-style hotel with comfy beds and 24-hour hot water. Most travellers probably won't find the jump in quality over cheaper courtyard places so great to justify the extra expense, however.

Eating

For a small town, Gyantse has a good range of decent restaurants. Most will cook at any time.

Naychung Café (☎ 892 2223; Yingxiong Nanlu; mains Y10-30; ☺ breakfast, lunch & dinner) Newly opened at the time of writing, the Naychung serves the usual traveller-friendly Nepalese, Tibetan, Chinese and Western fare. The food is a little better than average and the friendly, competent staff and the bistro atmosphere make this a good choice for a relaxing meal at the beginning or end of the day. Menu in English.

Yak Restaurant (☎ 817 4971; Yingxiong Nanlu; mains Y15-30; ☺ breakfast, lunch & dinner) The Yak offers backpacker treats like French toast (Y12), pizza, yak burgers, sizzlers (dishes served on a hot, sizzling plate) and Western breakfasts. Menu in English.

Tashi Restaurant (☎ 817 2793; Yingxiong Nanlu; mains Y15-40) The Nepalese curries and the Tibetan dishes are not as good as you get in Lhasa but are tasty enough when you're this far from home. Menu in English.

Restaurant of Zhuang Yuan (☎ 139-8059 6328; Yingxiong Nanlu; dishes Y15-50) The owners of the Zhuang Yuan know how to promote themselves, and you'd likely find yourself stepping in for a look even without our recommendation. The Chinese dishes are tasty and while the prices are not cheap, portions are large, although single travellers will spend much more here than elsewhere for a complete meal. Menu in English.

SELF-CATERING

Yingxiong Nanlu is filled with small shops selling drinks, fresh fruit and basic snack foods. There are a couple of **supermarkets** (on Weiguolu & Yingxiong Nanlu), and a **market** (Yingxiong Nanlu) directly opposite the Restaurant of Zhuang Yuan selling veggies and meat, including roasted chicken (great to take for lunch on a long hike).

Getting There & Away

Minibuses to Gyantse depart from in front of Shigatse's main bus station between 10am and 8pm (Y20, 1½ hours). Alternatively you can get a seat in a taxi for around Y25 (one hour).

Minibuses from Gyantse back to Shigatse leave from the main intersection in Gyantse. Gyantse is 90km from Shigatse.

Getting Around

All of Gyantse's sights can be reached comfortably on foot, but there are rickshaws and even taxis if you need them. Negotiate all prices before you head out.

AROUND GYANTSE

There are several excellent adventurous half-day trips to sights around Gyantse that could warrant an extra day or two in town.

Tsechen Monastery & Fort མཚོ་ཚེན་དགོན་པ་

The traditional village of Tsechen is located about 5km northwest of Gyantse and is a nice half-day trip from town. There is a small monastery above the village, but the main reason to hike out here is to climb the ruined fortress, wander along the defensive walls and enjoy great views of the (often flooded) river valley below. It's a good idea to bring a picnic.

The fortress is believed to have been built as early as the 14th century and was used by the British during their 1904 invasion, although

it was already partly ruined by then. Hike up to the right side of the fortress and then cross over to the highest ramparts on the left. Across the highway and behind a hill are more monastic ruins.

To get to Tsechen you can either walk, hitch (see p344) or take a taxi along the Southern Friendship Hwy toward Shigatse. The village is just past the turn-off south to Yatung. On the way back it's possible to cut through fields to the river and follow the dirt roads back to the Gyantse bridge. You might get a lift back on a tractor for a couple of yuan; otherwise it's an hour-long walk.

Riche Ganden Retreat རི་ཆེ་དགའ་ལྷན་

Hidden in a fold of a valley north of town, this ruined and little-visited monastery is a fine 10km (two-hour) hike from Gyantse. The last section is the only steep part, as you drop into a ravine and then climb from a ruined manor house and herders' camp. Watch out for the dogs here.

There are ruins all around the site, including what was once the main Drölma Lhakhang; compare it with the black-and-white photos taken of the monastery before it was destroyed. Today there are eight Gelugpa monks here. The central Tsongkhapa statue has a glass plate in his chest, which holds an older image of Tsongkhapa.

To get to Riche walk up the road beside the Pelkor Chöde Monastery and turn right onto the dirt track (a kora route) heading towards the Rabse Nunnery. Shortly you'll see a misspelled sign for Riche Ganden directing you north. The way is obvious and clear across an open valley.

Other Monasteries

If you have your own transport, there are several minor monasteries you can visit on the road connecting Gyantse and Shigatse.

Places to explore include **Drongtse Monastery** and chörten, 19km from Gyantse, **Tsi Nesar Monastery**, 25km from Gyantse, a **monastery** at the county capital Penam Xian, 41km from Gyantse, and another **monastery** 62km from Gyantse, 8km before the turn-off to Shalu Monastery.

YUNGDRUNGLING MONASTERY

གཡུང་དྭང་ལྷན་

Just visible across the river from the road between Lhasa and Shigatse is the Bönpo

Yungdrungling Monastery. It was once the second most influential Bön (p70) monastic institution in Tibet and home to 700 monks. The number is now limited to 35 by the Chinese government and consists largely of different factions of Bönpos from the Aba region of northern Sichuan.

To many, Yungdrungling looks much like a Buddhist monastery, but note the swastikas swirling anticlockwise and the reluctance of your guide and driver to enter the grounds (many Tibetan Buddhists have an aversion to Bön). The monks welcome visitors and one or two can even speak English. If someone is around who has a key, you can visit the large *dukhang*, with its impressive thrones of the monastery's two resident lamas. There are 1300 small iron statues of Shiromo (the equivalent of Sakyamuni) along the walls – look for the deity's characteristic swastika mace. You may also be able to visit a couple of chapels behind the main hall, including the Namgya Lhakhang. Just remember to make the rounds in an anticlockwise direction.

The monastery is 170km west of Lhasa on the north bank of the Yarlung Tsangpo (Brahmaputra River), just east of where the Nangung-chu meets it. Cross the bridge and follow the road 2km north along the Nangung-chu to a footbridge. From here it's about 1.5km up to the monastery (take the path diagonally up the hillside after crossing the stream). If the water level of the Nangung-chu is not too high, you can also take the dirt road 100m to the right after crossing the Yarlung Tsangpo.

SHIGATSE གཞི་ཀའི་ ཇི་ཤེ་རྗེ་

☎ 0892 / pop 80,000 / elev 3840m

About 250km southwest of Lhasa, or 90km northwest of Gyantse, lies Shigatse (Rikaze), Tibet's second-largest town and the traditional capital of Tsang province. Shigatse is a sprawling place, with dusty, uneven streets humming with traffic (even the pedestrian-only lane). As you drive in across the plains, the site of the Potala-lookalike Shigatse Dzong, high on a hilltop overlooking the town, will probably fire up your imagination, but the fort is empty and most of what you see dates from a 2007 reconstruction. It is the Tashilhunpo Monastery, to the west of town, that is the real draw. Since the Mongol sponsorship of the Gelugpa order, Shigatse has been the seat of the Panchen

Lama, and this seat was traditionally based in the monastery.

The town, formerly known as Samdruptse, has long been an important trading and administrative centre. The Tsang kings exercised their power from the *dzong* and the fort later became the residence of the governor of Tsang. The modern city is divided into a tiny old Tibetan town huddled at the foot of the fort, and a rapidly expanding modern Chinese town that has all the charm of, well, every other expanding modern Chinese town.

During the second week of the fifth lunar month (around June/July), Tashilhunpo Monastery becomes the scene of a three-day festival and a huge thangka is unveiled (p319).

Information

INTERNET ACCESS

Internet bars (网吧, wangba) go in and out of business quickly in Shigatse.

China Telecom Internet Bar (Shandong Lu; per hr ¥4; ☎ 24hr) Has been around for a while and, though it's somewhat dark and smoky inside, the connection speeds are decent.

Tien Le Internet Bar (Shandong Lu; per hr ¥5 ☎ 24hr) Has good connection speeds and window seats for those who need a little fresh air.

MONEY

Bank of China (Zhongguo Yinhang; Shanghai Zhonglu; ☎ 9am-6.30pm Mon-Fri in summer, 9.30am-6pm in winter, 10am-5pm Sat & Sun) Next door to the Shigatse Hotel across the intersection, changes travellers cheques and cash and gives credit-card advances. There's a 24-hour ATM outside.

PERMITS

At the time of writing, the **Public Service Bureau** (PSB, Gong'anju; Qingdao Xilu) was not issuing permits for individual travel. Check with other travellers and on Lonely Planet's Thorn Tree forum for the latest information.

POST

China Post (Zhongguo Youzheng; cnr Shandong Lu & Zhufeng Lu) It's possible to send international letters and postcards from here, but not international parcels.

TELEPHONE

The cheapest places to make calls are the many private telecom booths around town. **China Telecom** (Zhongguo Dianxin; Zhufeng Lu; ☎ 9am-6.30pm Mon-Fri, 9.30am-6.30pm Sat & Sun) You can send faxes and make international phone calls here, around the corner from the post office.

TRAVEL AGENCIES

FIT (☎ 883 8068, 899 0505; Zhufeng Lu) Branch office of the Lhasa government agency, situated next to the carpet factory. At the time of writing FIT could not arrange any travel for foreigners (due to restrictions on permits), except direct trips to the Tibet-Nepal border.

Sights

TASHILHUNPO MONASTERY

བཀྲ་ཤིས་ལྷན་དགོན་ 扎什伦布寺

One of the few monasteries in Tibet that weathered the stormy seas of the Cultural Revolution, **Tashilhunpo** (Tashi Lhüngön; Zhashilunbu Si; ☎ 882 2114; Qingdao Xilu; admission ¥55; ☎ 9am-7pm in summer, 10am-noon & 3-6pm in winter) remains relatively unscathed. It is a real pleasure to explore the busy cobbled lanes twisting around the aged buildings. Covering 70,000 sq metres, the monastery is essentially a walled town in its own right.

From the entrance to the monastery, visitors get a grand view. Above the white monastic quarters is a crowd of ochre buildings topped with gold – the tombs of the past Panchen Lamas. To the right, and higher still, is the **great white wall** that is hung with massive, colourful thangkas during festivals. Circumnavigating the compound is a one-hour kora that takes you into the hills behind the monastery.

As you explore the various buildings, you'll see a lot of photos of the ninth, 10th and 11th Panchen Lamas. The ninth is recognisable by his little moustache. The 11th is the disputed Chinese-sponsored lama, a young boy.

History

The monastery is one of the six great Gelugpa institutions, along with Drepung, Sera and Ganden in Lhasa, and Kumbum (Ta'er Si) and Labrang in Amdo (modern Gansu and Qinghai provinces). It was founded in 1447 by a disciple of Tsongkhapa, Genden Drup. Genden Drup was retroactively named the first Dalai Lama and he is enshrined within Tashilhunpo. Despite its association with the first Dalai Lama, Tashilhunpo was initially isolated from mainstream Gelugpa affairs, which were centred in the Lhasa region.

The monastery's standing rocketed, however, when the fifth Dalai Lama declared his teacher – then the abbot of Tashilhunpo – to be a manifestation of Öpagme (Amitabha). Thus Tashilhunpo became the seat of an important



lineage: the Panchen ('great scholar') Lamas (see p196). Unfortunately, with the establishment of this lineage of spiritual and temporal leaders – second only to the Dalai Lamas themselves – rivalry was introduced to the Gelugpa order.

The monastery has a very high profile as the largest functioning monastic institution in Tibet. The monks here can be somewhat cool and there is conjecture that many of the English-speaking monks are in cahoots with the Chinese authorities.

Information

Morning is the best time to visit as more of the chapels are open. After 11am most tour-

ists start to head out for lunch leaving many buildings practically empty.

Severe restrictions are in place on photography inside the monastic buildings. The going cost for a photograph varies, but be prepared for a pricey Y75 fee per chapel, and as high as Y150 in the assembly hall. Video camera fees are an absurd Y1000 to Y1500 in some chapels.

The monastery lends itself to wandering but, with rooms on rooms, tombs beside tombs, winding staircases, ladders and secret passages, after a while you probably won't know where you are, even with our map. At these moments you can always wait for a tour group to come in and eavesdrop on the guide to help orientate yourself again.

INFORMATION		Mosque.....14 B2		Songtsen Tibetan Restaurant.....26 B2	
Bank of China 中国银行.....1 C4	China Post 中国邮政.....2 C3	China Telecom Internet Bar 中国电信网吧.....3 C3	China Telecom 中国电信.....4 C3	FTT.....5 B3	Hospital 医院.....6 B3
PSB 公安局.....7 B2	Tibet-Shigatse Regional People's Hospital.....8 C2	Ticket Booth.....9 A3	Tien Le Internet Bar.....10 C2	SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES	Chörten.....11 A3
Festival Thangka Wall.....12 A2	Mani Lhakhang.....13 C1	Shigatse Dzong.....15 B1	SLEEPING	Gang Gyan Shigatse Orchard Hotel 日喀则刚坚宾馆.....16 B3	Post Hotel.....17 C4
Qomolongma Friendship Hotel.....18 A4	Samdrupstse Hotel.....19 C2	Shambhala Hotel 西藏刚坚日喀则香巴拉宾馆.....20 C2	Shigatse Hotel 西藏日喀则饭店.....21 C4	Tenzin Hotel.....22 C1	SHOPPING
Department Store.....29 C2	Photo Shop.....30 B3	Photography Shops.....31 C2	Sifang Supermarket.....32 C3	Tibet Gang Gyen Carpet Factory.....33 B3	Tibetan Market.....34 B1
Toread Outdoor.....35 C2	TRANSPORT	Main Bus Station.....36 C3	Minibuses & Taxis to Lhasa.....37 C2		
Fruit & Vegetable Market.....23 C2	Gongkar Tibetan Restaurant.....24 C2	Kailash Traditional Restaurant.....25 B3			

Chapel of Jampa (Jamkhang Chenmo)

Walk through the monastery and bear left for the first and probably most impressive of Tashilhunpo's sights: the Chapel of Jampa. An entire building houses the world's largest gilded statue, a 26m figure of Jampa (Maitreya), the Future Buddha. The statue was made in 1914 under the auspices of the ninth Panchen Lama and took some 900 artisans and labourers four years to complete.

The impressive, finely crafted and serene-looking statue looms high over the viewer. Each of Jampa's fingers is more than 1m long, and in excess of 300kg of gold went into his coating, much of which is also studded with precious stones. On the walls surrounding the image there are a thousand more gold paintings of Jampa set against a red background.

Victory Chapel (Namgyel Lhakhang)

This chapel is a centre for philosophy and houses a large statue of Tsongkhapa flanked by Jampa and Jampelyang (Manjushri). If it's not open, try to convince one of the monks to let you in.

Tomb of the 10th Panchen Lama (Sisum Namgyel)

This dazzling gold-plated funeral chörten holds the remains of the 10th Panchen Lama, who died in 1989. His image is displayed in front of the tomb. The ceiling of the chapel is painted with a Kalachakra (Dukhor in Tibetan) mandala and the walls are painted with gold buddhas.

Tomb of the Fourth Panchen Lama (Kundun Lhakhang)

The 11m silver-and-gold funerary chörten of the fourth Panchen Lama (1570–1662) was

the only tomb chörten to escape destruction during the Cultural Revolution.

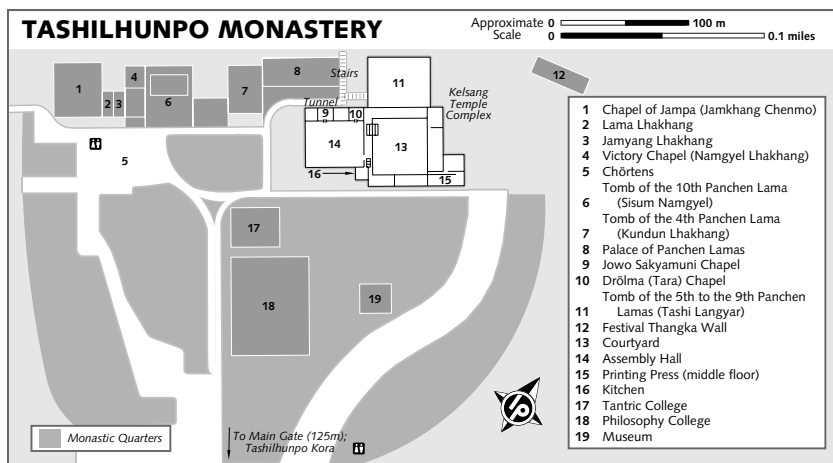
From here you pass through a dark walkway that leads out to the Kelsang Temple complex.

Kelsang Temple

The centrepiece of this remarkable collection of buildings is a large courtyard, which is the focus of festival and monastic activities. This is a fascinating place to sit and watch the pilgrims and monks go about their business. Monks congregate here before their lunchtime service in the main assembly hall. A huge prayer pole rears up from the centre of the flagged courtyard and the surrounding walls are painted with buddhas. There are splendid photo opportunities here.

The assembly hall is one of the oldest buildings in Tashilhunpo, dating from the 15th-century founding of the monastery. The massive throne that dominates the centre of the hall is the throne of the Panchen Lamas. The hall is a dark, moody place, with rows of mounted cushions for monks, and long thangka, depicting the various incarnations of the Panchen Lama, suspended from the ceiling. The central inner chapel holds a wonderful statue of Sakyamuni, while the chapel to the right holds several images of Drölma (Tara).

You can also visit the huge new Tomb of the Fifth to the Ninth Panchen Lamas (Tashi Langyar), built by the 10th Panchen Lama to replace tombs destroyed in the Cultural Revolution. The central statue is of the ninth Panchen Lama. The 10th Panchen Lama returned to Shigatse from Beijing to dedicate the tomb in 1989. He fulfilled his prediction that he



would die on Tibetan soil just three days after the ceremony.

There are a dozen other chapels in the complex. Follow the pilgrims on a clockwise circuit, ending up in a tangle of chapels above the assembly hall. Here in the far left (upper) corner chapel you'll find views of the two-storey Jampa statue below and, to the right, the tombs of the first and third Panchen Lamas and first Dalai Lama. Then descend to the middle floor and do another clockwise circuit taking in the interesting **printing press** and monastic **kitchen**.

Other Buildings

As you leave Tashilhunpo, it is also possible to visit the monastery's two remaining colleges. They are on the left-hand side as you walk down towards the main gate. The first is the **Tantric College** and the second is the brown **Philosophy College**. Neither is particularly interesting, but you might be lucky and find yourself in time for debating, which is held in the courtyard of the Philosophy College.

Tashilhunpo Kora

The kora around Tashilhunpo takes just an hour to walk and provides a chance to mingle with pilgrims, turn a few hundred prayer wheels, donate cash to beggars (the other pilgrims will insist you do so) and take some great photos of the monastery from above. About the only negative is that the route is garbage ridden in many spots.

From the main gate, follow the monastery walls in a clockwise direction and look

out for an alley on the right. The alley curves around the western wall and climbs into the hills above the monastery where streams of prayers flags spread over the dry slopes like giant colourful spider limbs. The views of the compound below are wonderful from here. In about 20 minutes you pass the 13-storey white tower used to hang a giant thangka at festival time. The path then splits in two: down the hill to complete the circuit of the monastery, and along a ridge to the Shigatse Dzong, a walk of around 20 minutes. There is a small flat rock outcrop at this point for relaxing on and taking in the views.

SHIGATSE DZONG བཞི་ཀུ་ཚེ་རྫོང་།

Once the residence of the kings of Tsang and later the governor of Tsang, very little remained of the *dzong* after it was destroyed in the popular uprising of 1959. Construction on a new building began several years ago and Shigatse is now once again graced with an impressive hilltop fort that bears a close resemblance to the Potala, albeit on a smaller scale.

The *dzong* was empty and closed at the time of writing and there was no word on when it would open.

SUMMER PALACE OF THE PANCHEN LAMAS བདེ་ཚེན་སྐལ་བཟང་ལོ་བློ་

德庆格桑颇彰
Though it ranks far below Tashilhunpo, if you have extra time in Shigatse, pay a visit to this walled **palace complex** (admission ¥15; ☎ 9.30am-12pm

& 4-6pm) on the south end of town. Recent efforts at rehabilitating the straggle gardens are taking fruit, as is the restoration or reworking of wall murals. While the new paintings cannot compare to the masterly works of the past, they are still quite lovely and, covering every surface of the rooms as they do with vibrant colours and fantastic images, form a rather awesome whole.

The palace was built in 1844 by the seventh Panchen Lama, Tenpei Nyima. At the time of writing you could walk around the gardens and enter the palace itself. Only the first hall and the staircase seemed open to visitors but you could still enter many rooms and watch the artists at work. If the entire building is open when you arrive, look for the 10th Panchen Lama's **sitting rooms** on the 1st floor and his **audience chamber** on the 2nd floor.

The palace is about 1km south of Tashilhunpo. Follow the road to the end and turn right into the gated compound.

Sleeping

Shigatse has a good range of decent hotels, most with flush toilets and 24-hour hot water. All the following have English signage out the front.

BUDGET

Tenzin Hotel (Tianxin Luguang; ☎ 882 2018; fax 883 1565; 8 Bangjiakonglu; q per bed ¥40, d/tr without bathroom ¥180/120, standard/deluxe d with bathroom ¥280/320, discounts of 20-30%) Popular with both backpackers and Land Cruiser groups, though a little noisy for our tastes, especially on the lower floors. The shared bathrooms are excellent and have 24-hour hot water. The restaurant has a good range of Indian, Western and Nepalese dishes (¥15 to ¥35).

Shambhala Hotel (Xiangbala Fandian; ☎ 882 7668; fax 883 3681; Qingdao Lu; s without bathroom ¥60, d/tr with bathroom per bed ¥60/40) With its clean rooms, 24-hour hot water and courteous staff, this is one of the best budget choices in town. Showers are available for ¥5 for rooms without bathrooms. The facilities are clean, though the ancient metal showerheads will probably remind you of M*A*S*H.

Qomolongma Friendship Hotel (Zhufeng Youyi Binguang; ☎ 882 1929; fax 882 2984; Puzhang Lu; d ¥100) Cheap doubles run by apathetic staff who seem eager to return to the front desk to watch TV. It's fine if you are on a budget but really need your own bathroom.

Samdrupste Hotel (Sangzhuzhi Fandian; ☎ 882 2280; 2 Qundao Lu; d/tr without bathroom ¥180/150, d with bathroom ¥280, discounts of 30%) This bright, quiet, modern hotel features courteous staff and rooms with wood floors and decent cotton bedding. The cheaper doubles and triples can sometimes be paid per bed.

MIDRANGE & TOP END

Gang Gyan Shigatse Orchard Hotel (Rikezi Gangjian Binguang; ☎ 882 0777; fax 883 0171; 77 Zhufeng Lu; d/tr without bathroom ¥168/188, s/d with bathroom ¥288/388, discounts of 30%; ☎) Right next to the carpet factory is this well-managed hotel offering large Western-style rooms with comfortable beds and furnishings. The shared bathrooms are clean but the showers' water supply is iffy; rooms with private bathrooms have a good supply of water. Breakfast is included, but best of all is the location of the hotel, less than 100m from the entrance of the Tashilhunpo Monastery.

Post Hotel (Youzheng Binguang; ☎ 882 2938; 12 Shanghai Zhonglu; tw ¥260, discounts of 30%) All rooms are twins in this modern, well-managed place across from the Shigatse Hotel. You wouldn't expect it looking at the glossy surfaced lobby, but a few rooms are a bit tattered, so check carefully before you pay.

Shigatse Hotel (Rikaze Fandian; ☎ 882 2525; fax 882 1900; 12 Shanghai Zhonglu; s/d/tr ¥560/560/660, discounts of 20%) Recently remodelled and sporting a very fancy looking Tibetan-style lobby and atrium, the Shigatse is often booked solid by affluent tour groups. Rooms are furnished Tibetan- and Western-style, and there's in-house dry cleaning and laundry, and a games room.

Eating

Shigatse is swarming with good restaurants generally open for lunch and dinner.

our pick Gongkar Tibetan Restaurant (☎ 882 1139; Xueqing Lu; dishes ¥10-20) Hang out with the people and enjoy good food. In addition to the standard *momos* (dumplings) and noodle dishes, you'll find easy-to-resist dishes such as yak-tongue soup. Menu in English.

Zhengxin Restaurant (Xueqing Lu; dishes ¥10-20; ☎) breakfast, lunch & dinner) On a street with a few other Chinese restaurants, the Zhengxin stands out mostly for its English menu and friendly owners. The food is tasty enough but not outstanding. Menu in English.

Kailash Traditional Restaurant (☎ 899 5923; Zhufeng Lu; dishes ¥10-30; ☎) breakfast, lunch & dinner) At

THE PANCHEN LAMAS

As the second-highest ranking lamas in the land, the Panchen Lamas' authority often rivalled that of the Dalai Lamas. So great is their prestige, in fact, that the Panchen Lamas assist in the process of choosing new Dalai Lamas (and vice versa). And as with the latter, the Panchen lineage results from the rebirth of previous lamas, which in the 20th century has led to a long series of unfortunate events.

The ninth Panchen Lama (1883–1937) spent his last days in the clutches of a Chinese nationalist warlord after attempting to use the Chinese as leverage in gaining greater influence in Tibet. His reincarnated self never knew anything but Chinese interference and control.

After the ninth's death, the usual search went on for his replacement. In 1951, the Chinese forced Tibetan delegates in Beijing to endorse their choice. (They even claimed that in 1949, the 11-year-old future Panchen Lama had written to Mao Zedong asking him to 'liberate' Tibet.) Though little more than a tool of Beijing when he arrived at Tashilhunpo Monastery in 1951, by 1965 the Panchen Lama had become a 'big rock on the road to socialism'. By the year of his death, 1989, he had become a hero to his people. What happened?

It seems that the Panchen Lama had a change of heart about his Chinese benefactors after the 1959 Lhasa uprising. In September 1961, the Panchen Lama presented Mao with a 70,000-character catalogue of the atrocities committed against Tibet, and a plea for increased freedoms. The answer was a demand that he denounce the Dalai Lama as a reactionary and take the latter's place as spiritual head of Tibet. Not only did the Panchen Lama refuse but, in 1964, with tens of thousands of Tibetans gathered in Lhasa for the Mönlam festival, he said to the crowds that he believed Tibet would one day regain its independence and the Dalai Lama would return as its leader.

It must have come as quite a shock to the Chinese to see their protégé turn on them. They responded in time-honoured fashion by throwing the Panchen Lama into jail, where he remained for 14 years, suffering abuse and torture. His crimes, according to the Chinese authorities, included participating in orgies, 'criticising China' and raising a private insurrectionary army. A 'smash the Panchen reactionary clique' campaign was mounted, and those close to the Panchen Lama were subject to 'struggle sessions' and in some cases were imprisoned.

After emerging from prison in early 1978, the Panchen Lama rarely spoke in outright defiance of the Chinese authorities, but continued to use what influence he had to press for the

preservation of Tibetan cultural traditions. (He argued, for example, against the building of a hydroelectric power plant at Yamdrok-tso, one of Tibet's most sacred lakes.) It is believed that shortly before his death he again fell out with the Chinese, arguing at a high-level meeting in Beijing that the Chinese occupation had brought nothing but misery and hardship to his people. Accordingly, many Tibetans believe that he died not of a heart attack, as was reported, but by poisoning. However, others maintain that, exhausted and perhaps despairing, the Panchen Lama came home in 1989 to die – as he always said he would – on Tibetan soil.

Of course, the story doesn't end here. In May 1995 the Dalai Lama identified Gedhun Choekyi Nyima, a six-year-old boy from Amdo, as the latest reincarnation of the Panchen Lama. Within a month the boy had been forcibly relocated to a government compound in Beijing, causing him to be dubbed the 'world's youngest political prisoner', and an irate Chinese government had ordered the senior lamas of Tashilhunpo to come up with a second, Chinese-approved choice. Chadrel Rinpoche, the abbot who led the search that identified Gedhun, was later imprisoned for six years for 'splitting the country' and 'colluding with separatist forces abroad' (ie consulting the Dalai Lama), and Tashilhunpo was closed to tourists for a few months.

Tashilhunpo's lamas eventually settled on Gyancaïn Norbu, the son of Communist Party members, who was formally approved in a carefully orchestrated ceremony.

Beijing's interest is not only in controlling the education of Tibet's number-two spiritual leader, but also influencing the boy who could later be influential in identifying the reincarnation of the Dalai Lama. Meanwhile, Dalai Lama-appointed Panchen Lama, now 18, remains under house arrest at an undisclosed location in China.

There are a number of groups campaigning to free the Panchen Lama. Check out the websites of the **Tashilhunpo Monastery in exile** (www.tashilhunpo.org), which offers a reward for information on the whereabouts of the boy, the **Australia Tibet Council** (www.atc.org.au) and the **Canada Tibet Committee** (www.tibet.ca).

The Search for the Panchen Lama by Isabel Hilton is a look at the political intricacies of Tibet, with an emphasis on the controversial Panchen Lama and China's abduction of his current reincarnation.

the end of Zhufeng Lu next to the park is this new travellers' hang-out with cosy Tibetan-style seating and decent Nepalese curries, Western breakfasts and sandwiches. Menu in English.

Tashi Restaurant (☎ 883 5969; Buxing Jie; dishes ¥10-30; ☺ breakfast, lunch & dinner) Another popular travellers' hang-out with a wide range of comfort foods. This Nepali-run restaurant has everything from yoghurt muesli to pizza and Nepali curries. Staff sometimes give you the impression they've been doing this kind of work for a few too many years. Menu in English.

Songtsen Tibetan Restaurant (☎ 883 2469; Buxing Jie; dishes ¥20-35; ☺ breakfast, lunch & dinner) A similar but brighter, friendlier Tibetan-style place on the pedestrian-only street. Sit by the window and people watch as you dine on Indian, Nepalese, Tibetan or Western fare, or just enjoy a hearty Western breakfast at the start of the day. Menu in English.

SELF-CATERING

Shigatse has a number of shops selling drinks and snacks along Zhufeng Lu and Shandong Lu. There's a traditional market behind the defunct department store selling fruit, vegetables, meats and breads.

Jin Long Supermarket, on the ground floor of the defunct department store, has a small selection of goods. **Sifang Supermarket** (cnr Zhufeng Lu) has a wider selection.

Shopping

The **market** (Bangjiakonglu) in front of the Tenzin Hotel is a good place to pick up souvenirs, such as prayer wheels, rosaries and thangkas. There are also dozens of souvenir and craft shops along the pedestrian-only street. Bargain hard.

Tibet Gang Gyan Carpet Factory (☎ 882 2733; 9 Zhufeng Lu; ☺ 9am-1pm & 3-7pm) Beside the Gang Gyan Hotel, 100m down a dirt track (follow the enormous signs), this French joint venture exports 100% Tibetan wool

carpets to the USA and Europe. It's fun to visit just to look around as women work on the carpets, singing as they weave, dye, trim and spin; you are free to take photographs. Expect to pay a few hundred US\$, plus shipping, for a carpet measuring 185cm by 90cm. Note that almost half the profits go to Tashilhunpo Monastery.

Toread Outdoor Sports (☎ 882 3195; Shanghai Zhonglu) If you are headed off on a trek but totally unprepared, you can pick up basic equipment such as tents, stoves and jackets here.

There are a couple of photo shops next to each other across from Monastery Square and also on Qingdao Lu where you can burn CDs.

Getting There & Away

Minibuses to Lhasa (¥50) leave from a stand on Qingdao Lu on the eastern side of Shigatse. You can also catch the similar public bus service, which runs from the main bus station.

Foreigners will be able to buy bus tickets to Lhasa on the minibuses, but not tickets on buses to Lhasa from the main bus station.

Going between Lhasa and Shigatse, taxis do the trip for ¥50 to ¥70 per person (four hours) and wait for fares near the spot where the minibuses depart.

At the main bus station there are daily morning minibuses to Sakya (¥40, four hours) and Lhatse (¥40, five hours).

Minibuses to Gyantse (¥20, 1½ hours) run when full from outside the main bus station from morning till late evening. Taxis run when full for ¥25 per seat.

There are daily (sometimes twice daily) buses running to Saga (¥150, 16 hours), and two or three buses daily to Shegar (¥75, seven hours).

Getting Around

Shigatse is not that large and can be comfortably explored on foot. For trips out to the

KILOMETRE MARKERS ALONG THE FRIENDSHIP HIGHWAY

The following towns, geographical features and points of interest along with their appropriate kilometre markers (signifying distance from Shanghai) may be of help to travellers, hitchhikers and mountain bikers.

Lhasa to Shigatse

Marker	Feature
4646	Lhasa's eastern crossroads to Golmud or Shigatse
4656	Blue Buddha rock painting
4661	sign to Nyetang Tashigang Monastery
4662/3	Netang village and Drölma Lhakhang
4673	bridge (closed at time of writing) on left to Shugsheb Nunnery
4683	new bridge and tunnel to Gongkar airport
4695-7	Chushul (Tibetan 'End of River')
4703	bridge over the Yarlung Tsangpo to Nangartse and Tsetang; shops and restaurants
4712	hydroelectric project on the far side of the river; the structure shaped like a golf ball atop the hill is a radar and meteorological centre
4717/8	ruined fortress on left and village
4724	village, ruined <i>dzong</i> and monastery
4732	valley begins to narrow into rocky gorge
4757	road to Nyemo to north; restaurants; bridge
4768	suspension footbridge to left
4779	bridge over to south side of river
4800	checkpoint; turn-off to Rinbu (Rembu); old road to Shigatse; shops
4820	Traduka; bridge to Yungdrungling Monastery and Yangpachen; restaurants
4835	Drakchik Ferry
4840	Huda village
4869	Ansa Monastery on hillside to south
4875	bridge north to Nanmulin (potato-growing region)
4900-5	Shigatse

Shigatse to Tingri

Marker	Feature
4900-5	Shigatse
4913	turn-off to Ngor Monastery
4917	Nartang Monastery
4928	Gyeli village
4932/3	very gentle mountain pass of Tra-la (3970m)
4936	Kangchen Monastery to right
4956/7	interesting ruined Trupuk Chörtén 1km to the north
4960/1	Gyading; ruined fort; restaurants and shops
4972	Dilong village
4977/8	turn-off to Phuntsoling Monastery
4994	Daoban
5000	marker showing 5000km from Shanghai; small monastery and ruined <i>dzong</i>

Shigatse Hotel or bank, you might want to use a pedicab (Y5). A ride anywhere in town in one of the many taxis will cost Y10.

AROUND SHIGATSE

There are many sights around Shigatse, but few are visited by Western travellers. En route to Lhatse stop at **Nartang Monastery**, a 12th-century

Kadampa monastery famed for wood-block printing the Nartang canon in the 18th century, and **Kangchen Monastery**. Both are signposted in English just off the Friendship Hwy. There's a trek from Shalu to Nartang (p296). It is possible to visit Gyantse as a day trip from Shigatse. It's a very pleasant ride through a lightly wooded valley dotted with small villages.

5009	village and start of climb to pass
5014	Tropu-la (Tsuola; 4500m)
5028	Sakya bridge; turn-off to Sakya; rebuilt hilltop monastery
5036	ruined <i>dzong</i>
5041	village and turn-off to Xiqian Hot Springs
5052	Lhatse
5058	checkpoint and turn-off to western Tibet
5063	start of climb to pass, with a height gain of around 1000m
5083	Gyatso-la (5100m)
5114	views of Everest and the Himalaya
5121	hermitage across river
5124	bridge; to nunnery and fortress
5128/29	Qiabu village, fort and caves
5133	Baber (Baipa) and turn-off to Shegar
5139	Shegar checkpoint
5145	turn-off to Everest Base Camp
5155	ruined <i>dzong</i> to left
5162	village
5170	village
5193-4	Tingri

Tingri to Nyalam

Marker	Feature
5193-4	Tingri
5199	paved road ends
5206	turn-off for Tsamda Hot Springs
5216	two small Tibetan guesthouses in village
5221-9	various ruins by side of road
5232-3	Gutso village; guesthouse and restaurant
5237	village on west side of the river
5254	village and small guesthouse and restaurant
5258	ruins by road
5263	start climb to La Lung-la
5265	turn-off to Saga and Mt Kailash via Peiku-tso
5276	La Lung-la (4845m)
5282	bridge, road workers' hostel
5289	Tong-la (Yarle Shung; 4950m) and view of Cho Oyu and Mt Everest
5292	short cut down the hillside, used by Land Cruiser drivers
5303	roadworkers' hostel and village
5311	village, with ruins behind
5334	Gangka village and track to Milarepa's Cave
5345	Nyalam
5376	approximate checkpoint
5378	Zhangmu
5386	Nepali border

Shalu Monastery ལཱུ་དགོན་པ་ 夏鲁寺

It's a treat for the traveller when a sight is both a pleasure to explore and of great importance in local history and culture. Such is the **Shalu Monastery** (Xialu Si; admission Y40), which dates back to the 11th century. The monastery rose to prominence in the 14th century when its abbot, Büton Rinchen Drup, emerged as the

foremost interpreter and compiler of Sanskrit Buddhist texts of the day. (A suborder, the Büton, formed around him.) It also became a centre for training in skills such as trance walking and *thumo* (generating internal heat to survive in cold weather), feats made famous by the flying monks of Alexandra David-Neel's book *Magic and Mystery in Tibet*.

In the abstract, the design of the monastery represents the paradise of Chenresig (Avalokiteshvara), a haven from all worldly suffering. In the concrete, Shalu is the only monastery in Tibet that combines Tibetan and Chinese styles in its design. Much of the original structure was destroyed by an earthquake in the 14th century and, as this was a time of Mongol patronage (see p203), many Han artisans were employed in the reconstruction. The green-tiled Chinese style, clearly visible as you approach, is one of the monastery's most easily recognisable features.

What remained of the original 11th century Tibetan-style monastery was largely destroyed in the Cultural Revolution, but the Chinese-influenced inner Serkhang has survived reasonably well. If you enjoy looking at murals, Shalu has some fine ones from the 14th century that fuse Chinese, Mongol and Newari styles. The best murals line the walls of a corridor that rings the central assembly hall; bring a powerful torch (flashlight) to really appreciate these.

The inner Serkhang contains a **kanjyur lhakhang** (scripture chapel), with lovely 14th-century mandala murals. The west chapel has a black stone statue of Chenresig Kasrapani, the monastery's holiest relic. The northern chapel has more fine murals, including one in the left corner depicting the monastery's founder. There are a couple of upper chapels, including the Mudu Lhakhang, which holds the **funeral chörten** of Büton.

From Shalu you can make the trek to Nartang (p296) or take an hour's walk up to **Ri-puk Hermitage**, a former meditation centre built around a spring. There are pleasant views of the Shalu Valley from here.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Shalu Monastery is just a few kilometres off the Shigatse–Gyantse road and a side-trip here should not add to the cost of a Land Cruiser trip. If taking a Gyantse-bound minibus from Shigatse, get off at kilometre marker 19 or 21 and take a dirt road heading south. Both approaches will lead you to Shalu village in an hour. As you walk through the small village look for the monastery (its green-tiled roof is a dead giveaway) on the right down an alley.

There are a number of shops outside Shalu Monastery gates selling soft drinks, water and noodles.

PHUNTSOLING MONASTERY & JONANG KUMBUM

If you're travelling down the paved Friendship Hwy and want to get a taste of what off-the-beaten track looks like, consider a few hours' diversion to **Phuntsoling Monastery** (admission ¥30). Not only is the drive here along the winding Yarlung Tsangpo highly scenic, but so is the monastery itself, situated at the bottom of a gargantuan sand dune. A ruined red fort, seated high above the monastery on a rocky crag, just adds to the fantastic photogenic atmosphere.

Phuntsoling Monastery was once the central monastery of the Jonangpa. This Kagyu sect is especially known for the examination of the nature of emptiness undertaken at the monastery by its greatest scholar, Dolpopa Sherab Gyaltzen (1292–1361). He was one of the first proponents of the hard-to-grasp notion of *shentong*. Roughly, this is based on the idea that the Buddha-mind (which transcends all forms) is not ultimately empty, even though all forms are empty illusions.

Shentong has been debated among Buddhist philosophers for seven centuries. The Gelugpa school did not share Dolpopa's view, to the point where in the 17th century the fifth Dalai Lama suppressed the Jonangpa school and forcibly converted Phuntsoling into a Gelugpa institution.

You can visit the monastery's large **assembly hall**, which is dominated by a statue of Chenresig (Avalokiteshvara). Other statues include those of the 10th Panchen Lama, Tsongkhapa and the fifth Dalai Lama. The inner sanctum of the hall contains a statue of Mikyöba (Akshobhya), while the murals on the roof tell the story of the life of Sakyamuni.

The highlight of the monastery is a walk up to the ruined **fortifications** behind the monastery, which offer stunning views of the valley. Look for the ruined *dzong* on a cliff above the Yarlung Tsangpo.

A festival is held at Phuntsoling around the middle of the fourth lunar month (or June/July) every year, and sees lamas and pilgrims from all over the county gathering in the courtyard for prayers and celebrations. Unfortunately the event is closed to foreigners and if you show up on this day, the PSB will quickly escort you off the premises.

From Phuntsoling you can head south up the valley for a two-hour walk to the ruins of the **Jonang Kumbum**. The former 20m-high

chörten was built by Dolpopa in the 14th century and was the spiritual centre of the Jonangpas. It was said to be one of the best-preserved monuments in Tibet, resembling the Gyantse Kumbum, before it was wrecked during the Cultural Revolution.

Lhatse Chöde ལྗེ་ཅུ་མཚོ་དུལྱེ་

If you continue on the road past Phuntsoling Monastery, in a couple hours you'll reach Lhatse Chöde, with its small monastery and ruined *dzong*. (You can also reach the village by going 1km east of Lhatse on the Friendship Hwy to the 5052km mark and then heading north.) To the east of the village is **Drampa Gyang Temple**, one of Songtsen Gampo's demoness-subduing temples (p105). In this case it pins the troublesome demoness' left hip.

Getting There & Away

Phuntsoling Monastery can be visited on the way from Shigatse to Lhatse. Take the dirt-road detour north of the Friendship Hwy at kilometre marker 4977/8. The monastery is 34km northwest from here (less than an hour's drive). It's a 61km journey from Phuntsoling to Lhatse but it's probably faster and more comfortable just to return to the Friendship Hwy, unless you plan to also visit Lhatse Chöde.

SAKYA སུ་ཤཱ་ལྷ་མི་

☎ 0892 / elev 4280m

A detour to visit the small town of Sakya (Sajia) is pretty much *de rigueur* for any trip down the Friendship Hwy. The town is southeast of Shigatse, about 25km off the Southern Friendship Hwy, accessed via a good dirt road through a pretty farming valley. The draw here is the **Sakya Monastery**, which, like Shalu, has great appeal to the eye (the high-walled monastery compound is dubbed the 'Great Wall of Tibet' by some) and the spirit (the dim, smoky assembly hall exudes sanctity like few others). Also like Shalu, Sakya occupies an important place in Tibetan history (see p203)

Sakya actually has two monasteries, on either side of the Trum-chu. The heavy, brooding, fortress-like monastery south of the river is the more famous and if you only have time to visit one, make it this. The hillside northern monastery, mostly reduced to picturesque ruins, is undergoing restoration work.

One characteristic feature of the Sakya region is the colouring of its buildings. Unlike the standard whitewashing that you see elsewhere in Tibet, Sakya's buildings are ash grey with white and red vertical stripes. The colouring symbolises the Rigsum Gonpo (the trinity of bodhisattvas) and stands as a mark of Sakya authority. Sakya literally means 'pale earth'.

Unfortunately, a great deal of ugly development has occurred in the southern half of Sakya in recent years, robbing the town of much of its charm. At the same time, however, a new Tibetan village (with a lovely debating hall and monks' quarters) is being constructed down by the river. Pretty much any photograph you take pointed towards the hills to the north is going to look good.

Permits

You need a travel permit from the PSB to visit Sakya, and at the time of writing there were officers inside the monastery checking to make sure you had one as soon as you paid and entered.

Sights

SAKYA MONASTERY

The immense, grey, thick-walled **southern monastery** (☎ 8242352; admission ¥45; ☎ 9am–6pm) is one of Tibet's most impressive man-made sights, and one of the largest monasteries. The monastery was established in 1268 and is designed defensively, with watchtowers on each of the corners of its high walls. Before the Cultural Revolution, Sakya Monastery had one of the largest monastic communities in Tibet. At the time of writing there was much reconstruction work underway, and many areas were closed to visitors. As usual, morning is the best time to visit as more chapels are open.

Directly ahead from the east-wall main entrance is the entry to the inner courtyard. The dusty, somewhat pedestrian looking courtyard is a bit of a disappointment after the grandeur of the outside walls, but things pick up again as you enter the main **assembly hall (Lhakhang Chenmo)**, a huge structure with walls 16m high and 3.5m thick.

At first glance the assembly hall may strike you as being like most others in Tibet: a dark interior illuminated with shafts of sunlight and the warm glow of butter lamps; an omnipresent smell of burning butter from the lamps; slick stone floors (again from the

butter); rows of red mounted cushions covered with old patterned rugs; tall columns decorated with colourful thangkas and photographs; and an array of gilded statues representing buddhas, bodhisattvas, Tibetan kings and holy men. But even weary tour groups seem to quickly recognise the age, beauty and sanctity of Sakya. Plan to spend time here just soaking up the atmosphere. You'll find few that are its equal.

A few things to look specifically for in the hall are the huge drum in the far left corner and the massive sacred pillars that hold up the ceiling. Some are made of entire tree trunks and are famous throughout Tibet. One reputedly was a gift from Kublai Khan!

The walls of the assembly hall are lined with towering **gilded buddhas**, which are unusual in that many also serve as reliquaries for former Sakya abbots. The buddha in the far left corner contains relics of Sakya Pandita; the one next to it houses those of the previous abbot of Sakya. The largest central buddha contains remains of the founder of the monastery. To the right of the central buddha are statues of Jampelyang (Manjushri), a seated Jampa

(Maitreya) and a Dorje Chang (Vajradhara) that seemed to us to radiate holiness. Sakya's famous library is accessible from this hall but hidden from sight and it is rarely opened up to tourists.

As you exit the assembly hall the chapel to the right (south) is the Purkhang Chapel. Central images are of Sakyamuni and of Jampelyang (Manjushri), while wall paintings behind depict Tsepame (Amitayus) to the left, Drölma (Tara) and white Namgyelma (Vijaya) to the far left, as well as a medicine buddha, two Sakyamunis and Jampa (Maitreya). Murals on the left wall depict Tantric deities central to the Sakya school.

To the north of the inner courtyard is a chapel containing 11 gorgeous **silver chörtens**, which are also reliquaries for former Sakya abbots. Look to the left corner for the **sand mandala** inside a dirty glass case. A sometimes-locked door leads into another chapel with additional amazing chörtens and murals. Bring a torch as the room is even dimmer than others.

There are several chapels upstairs but these may be closed for construction when you ar-

PRIESTS & PATRONS: THE REIGN OF THE SAKYAPAS

The 11th century was a dynamic period in the history of Tibetan Buddhism. Renewed contact with Indian Buddhists brought about a flowering of new orders and schools. During this time, the Kagyupa order was founded by Marpa and his disciple Milarepa, and in Sakya, the Kön family established a school that came to be called the Sakyapa. One interesting distinction between the latter school and others is that the abbotship was hereditary, restricted to the sons of the Kön family.

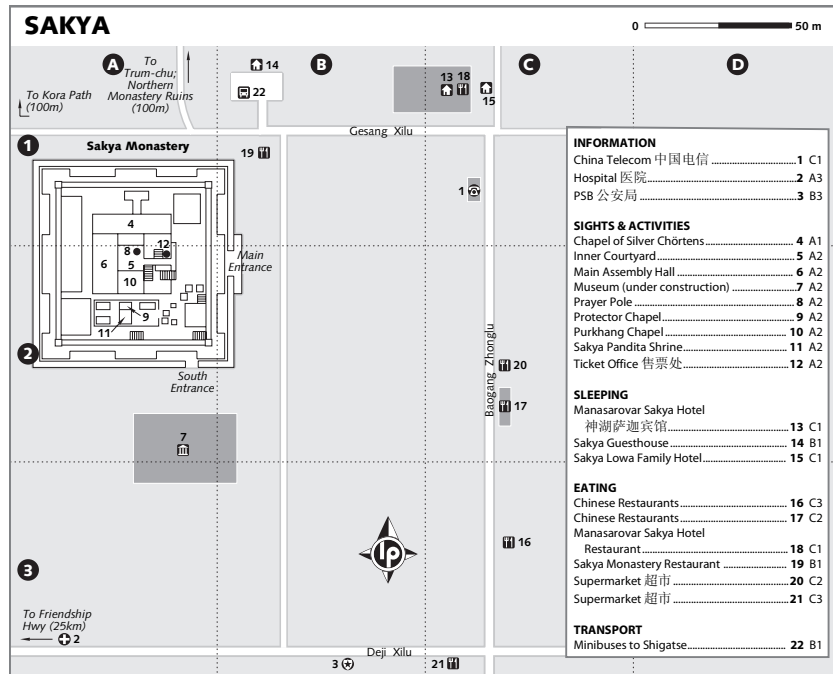
By the early 13th century, the Tsang town of Sakya had emerged as an important centre of scholastic study. The most famous local scholar was a Sakya abbot, Kunga Gyaltzen (1182-1251), who came to be known as Sakya Pandita, literally 'scholar from Sakya'.

Such was Sakya Pandita's scholastic and spiritual eminence that when the Mongols threatened to invade Tibet in the mid-13th century he represented the Tibetan people to the Mongol prince Godan (the son of Genghis Khan). Sakya Pandita made a three-year journey to Mongolia, arriving in 1247, and after meeting with Godan offered him overlordship of Tibet. Resistance was pointless, Sakya Pandita noted. The Mongols were set on conquest, and their easy victories over the Western Xia and other kingdoms left no doubt what Tibet's fate would be if it put up a fight.

After Sakya Pandita's death in 1251, one of his nephews became the abbot of Sakya and therefore (with Mongol support) the ruler of all Tibet. This was the first religious government with a lama as head of state, and set an important precedent for Tibetan government. However, the association between Tibetan lamas and Mongol masters also set a precedent of outside rule over Tibet that the Chinese have used to justify current claims over the high plateau.

As it was, Mongol overlordship and Sakya supremacy were relatively short-lived. Mongol corruption and rivalry between the Sakyapa and Kagyupa orders led to the fall of Sakya in 1354, when power fell into the hands of the Kagyupa and the seat of government moved to Nedong in Ü.

Sakya was to remain a powerful municipality, however, and, like Shigatse, enjoyed a high degree of autonomy from successive central governments. Even today, you can see homes across the plateau painted with the red, white and blue-black stripes associated with Sakya Monastery.



rive. On the right-hand side of the east-wall entrance are stairs leading up to a 2nd-floor chapel of five chörtens. Another flight of stairs in the left corner of the courtyard leads up to another couple of chapels. A long flight of stairs outside the central complex leads up to a single rooftop protector chapel.

There are a couple of chapels open outside of this central complex (but still within the compound), the most interesting of which is the very spooky **protector chapel** of the Pakspa Lhakhang. If the thick incense doesn't get you, the terrifying monsters, the huge *cham* masks and the stuffed wolves that wait in the dark recesses just may. To the left is a **shrine** dedicated to Sakya Pandita.

It may be possible to climb up onto the wall-walk of the monastery for superb views of the surrounding valley, but ask first.

NORTHERN MONASTERY RUINS

Very little is left of the original monastery complex that once sprawled across the hills north of the Trum-chu, but it is still worth climbing up through the Tibetan village and

wandering around what does remain. The northern monastery predates the southern monastery (the oldest temple situated at the northern monastery was built in 1073), and it is alleged to have contained 108 buildings, like Ganden. It may once have housed some 3000 monks who concentrated on Tantric studies.

A new Tibetan village is hastily being constructed across the river at the base of the mountains and is adding to the charm of the area. Centred in the village is a large new **debating hall** with monks' quarters. Work is in progress at the time of writing but the wood and brick structure was looking like it was going to fit into its environment very nicely.

After passing through the new village, head for the white chörtens, or the ruins even further to the left. Near the chörtens are the three main complexes that are still open: the main **Labrang Shar**, the **Namja Choede** to the left and the **Rinche Gang** nunnery to the far right. Remember to walk in a clockwise fashion as this is a kora route.

Sleeping

Accommodation is limited but you have the option of showers and a toilet if you want them. Several inexpensive family-run guesthouses were being built around the Lowa Family Hotel at the time of writing. With the exception of the Sakya Guesthouse, you'll find English signs outside all these places.

Sakya Guesthouse (☎ 824 2233; dm Y15-20) The rooms are basic but bearable if you have a sleeping bag (the guesthouse mostly serves the great unwashed masses of pilgrims), but you probably won't be able to stay here without PSB permission.

Manasarovar Sakya Hotel (Shenhu Saja Binguang; ☎ 824 2222; dm/tr Y50/380, d Y220-280, discounts of 20-30%) En suite plumbing has finally come to Sakya, for better or worse, with this large modern hotel. Rooms are carpeted (though a bit tatty in places), clean and comfortable, with hot showers, Western-style bathrooms and comfy beds. The eight-bed dorm rooms are decent enough; one even comes with en suite toilet and shower. There are superb views from the hotel's rooftop.

Sakya Lowa Family Hotel (☎ 824 2156; s/d per bed Y120/60) Recently opened, the Lowa seems to be part of a ripple (goodness knows it's not yet a wave) of better quality guesthouses hitting Tibet. Rooms are clean, fresh and furnished with decent beds, new TVs and a few with yak-dung stoves. Walls are brightly painted and accented with traditional motifs. There are no showers but you can use the courtyard's pump, which is actually a pretty fun way to wash yourself when the weather is warm.

Eating

Sakya has a number of Chinese restaurants, all set up by Sichuanese immigrants. All restaurants serve lunch and dinner, and have no fixed opening hours.

Sakya Monastery Restaurant (☎ 824 2988; dishes Y7-15) This Tibetan eating place is owned by the monastery and serves up fried rice, *thugpa* (noodles) and milk tea.

Manasarovar Sakya Hotel Restaurant (☎ 824 2222; dishes Y15-35; ☺ breakfast, lunch & dinner) For Western food, such as omelettes, burgers, sizzlers and pizza. There are also Tibetan, Nepalese and Indian dishes. Menu in English.

SELF-CATERING

For drinks and basic supplies there are several small supermarkets scattered about town.

Getting There & Away

There's one daily minibuses between Shigatse bus station and Sakya (Y40, four hours). The return bus departs from Sakya around 11.30am. Another option is to take a Lhatse-bound bus from Shigatse to the Sakya turn-off and then walk or hitch the remaining 25km. See p344 for information regarding the risks associated with hitching.

LHATSE ལཱཌེ ལྷཱེ

☎ 0892 / pop 2000 / elev 3950m

Approximately 150km southwest of Shigatse and some 30km west of the Sakya turn-off, the bleak town of Lhatse (Lazi) is best considered a pit-stop for lunch or supplies, or a venue for acclimatising or for staying overnight on the way to better destinations. Lhatse is more or less a one-street town with a small square near the town centre. The 3km-long main street runs east-west and used to be part of the Friendship Hwy, but this has now been diverted to the north. Passing Land Cruiser traffic will mostly be heading to Everest Base Camp, the Tibet-Nepal border or the turn-off for Ali in western Tibet (p224), about 6km out of town.

There's little to see in Lhatse save the small **Changmoche Monastery** at the western end of town. Nearby is the Xiqian Hot Springs, Lhatse Chöde and Drampa Gyang Temple.

Sleeping

In addition to the following (which all have English signage), at the time of writing a couple of Tibetan-style guesthouses were under construction in the eastern end of town as you first drive in from Shigatse. They may be worth a look when ready. There are also a few grubby, characterless hotels around the middle of town to consider if everything else is full. If you are coming from Lhasa or Shigatse, your stay here may be your first introduction to Tibet's infamous pit toilets.

Lhatse Tibetan Farmers Hotel (☎ 832 2333; d/tr per bed Y60/50) Located on the east side of town, this courtyard guesthouse is popular with Land Cruiser drivers and guides. It looks quaint on the outside but the rooms are pretty basic, with hard mattresses, bare furnishings and a single dim bulb. The 2nd-floor rooms are somewhat better but often booked by tour groups. The guesthouse's Tibetan-style restaurant is a very cosy place, with decent Tibetan and Western food (Y10 to Y25).

Dewang Hotel (☎ 832 2888; d/tr Y120) The rooms at this family-run courtyard are superior (they even come with TV) to the Farmers Hotel and, other than the pit toilets, even fairly fussy travellers should be OK here. The hotel is diagonal across the road from the Farmers Hotel. The sign outside reads 'Plain Sailing'.

Shanghai Hotel of Lazi (☎ 832 3678; fax 832 3786; d Y360, discounts of 30%) This is the top hotel in Lhatse and, while overpriced, is the place to stay if you need Western comforts like good bed sheets, flush toilets and showers. The hotel is obvious on the south side of the town square. There is a very large sign in English as you drive through town announcing its presence and directing you to it.

Eating

Guesthouses all have their own inexpensive Tibetan-style restaurants (with English menus) and most travellers eat at these. You can also try the many Chinese and Muslim restaurants that line the south side of the main street.

Lhatse Kitchen (☎ 832 3678; dishes Y10-35; ☺ breakfast, lunch & dinner) Just left of the Shanghai Hotel of Lazi, the Kitchen serves a range of tasty Nepali, Indian and Western dishes in an upscale Tibetan-style setting. Menu in English.

Getting There & Away

Daily morning minibuses (Y40, five hours) run between Shigatse and Lhatse. Two or three buses a day from Shigatse pass through on the way to Shegar. There's no public transport all the way out to Mt Kailash, though daily (sometimes twice-daily) buses from Shigatse pass through on the way to Saga.

AROUND LHATSE

For the small traditional village of Lhatse Chöde, just north of Lhatse, see p201.

Xiqian Hot Springs རྫོང་ལྷཱེ་ལྷཱེ་ལྷཱེ་

Tibetans come from far and wide to bathe in the healing waters of these **hot springs** (wenguan; baths per person Y60), which are said to cure a multitude of ills, especially skin irritations (so be careful who you share the pools with). The facilities have been upgraded in recent years and the odourless spring water is now piped into two large indoor pools, set under a canopy roof. It's a pleasant enough place

for a dip, especially in the cooler months or in the evenings.

The hot springs are 10km east of Lhatse. Turn north off the Friendship Hwy at the town of Xiqian (or Xiqin; kilometre marker 5041) and continue 750m north. The sign reads 'Shi Chen Hot Spring Holiday Resort', which is a bit of a stretch, though at the time of writing a new guesthouse was being built beside the pool house. It may be worth checking out as the area is much more pleasant than Lhatse (there's a large grassy park with a stream running through it adjacent to the guesthouse). It's a good idea to agree beforehand about including the springs in your itinerary if you want to visit by hired Land Cruiser.

BABER & SHEGAR རེབ་ཤར་གྲོང་ཁྱེར་

☎ 0892 / elev 4250/4150m

There's a bit of confusion about this area but Baber (also Baipa) is the name many give to the small settlement lining 1km of the Friendship Hwy at kilometre marker 5133. This is where most travellers spend the night before heading off to Everest Base Camp and also where you can buy your permit for the Qomolangma Nature Preserve, which includes Everest Base Camp, Rongphu Monastery and Cho Oyu Base Camp. The **Qomolangma Service Centre** (☎ 826 2835; ☺ 24hr) is in the Qomolangma Nature Preserve San Chen Guesthouse. To get here take the turn-off to Shegar and, after crossing the river, turn right at the first road. The hotel is plainly seen across a field.

Shegar (also known as New Tingri, but not to be confused with Tingri) is reached by turning off the Friendship Hwy at Baber and heading 7km northwest. It's worth a visit for the ruins of **Shegar Dzong** (Crystal Fort), once the capital of the Tingri region. The remains of the *dzong's* defensive walls snake incredibly over the pinnacle that looms over town. A 2km kora trail leads up from the western side of town to the top of the impossibly steep crag (think Mt Crumpit in *The Grinch Who Stole Christmas*). Along the way you can see Mt Everest in the distance. Morning light is best for taking photographs.

On the way up you'll pass the **Shegar Chöde Monastery**, a small Gelugpa institution built in 1269. A painting inside depicts the monastery at its height, when it had around 800 monks. These days only a few remain, but they are happy to have visitors sit and chat with them in the courtyard. Keep an eye out for the

'longevity sheep' (sheep that were saved from slaughter) that hang out in the courtyard.

Sleeping & Eating

Shegar has a few guesthouses, but the town is pretty grubby, with piles of rubbish everywhere and stray dogs roaming the streets. Baber is better and most groups spend the night here before heading out early the next morning to catch dawn over the Himalayas at Pang-la.

Most guesthouses and hotels in town have attached restaurants. Most of these have English menus and signs outside announcing the type of food they serve (one even has its menu scrawled on the outside wall). You can pick up water and noodles and biscuits in the shops near the Kangjong Hotel.

If the Kangjong is full, try the place signed **Tibetan Guesthouse Cheap And Best Service** (☎ 826 2880; dm per bed Y25) at the beginning of town (coming from Lhatse) on the right, or the **Chengdu Manor Hotel** (dm per bed Y30) a little further down the road and also on the right. Both places have basic rooms with shared pit toilets and simple restaurants (dishes Y10 to Y35) serving Chinese and Tibetan food.

Tibetan Tingri Snowlands Kangjong Hotel (d Y60-100) The best place in town, with basic but clean rooms set around a courtyard. There's a free shower block and fairly clean pit toilets. The cheaper doubles can be rented per bed (Y30). The more expensive doubles are a step up in comfort and quality, though they, too, have shared bathrooms (but in a separate room at the end of the hall). The hotel is in the middle of town at the crossroads to Shegar. The hotel's restaurant and sitting area has wall-to-wall comfy sofas arranged around a warm stove. Simple but good food is available (Y10 to Y15 per dish) and you can kick back with a thermos of sweet tea. It's a great place to meet other travellers.

Baber has two Western-style hotels but they are substandard.

Consider the **Qomolangma Hotel Tingri** (☎ 826 2775; fax 826 2818; d/tr Y240/468, discounts of 10%) on the other side of the river on the way to Shegar only if you have to have private bathrooms.

Getting There & Away

Baber is around 81km from Lhatse. There are two or three buses (Y75, seven hours) a day between Shegar and Shigatse with a stop in Baber. If you are hitching or cycling, you may have a hard time getting past the checkpoint

6km to the south as you will be asked to show both a passport and PSB permit.

EVEREST REGION

Everest's Tibetan name is generally rendered as Qomolangma, and some 27,000 sq km of territory around Everest's Tibetan face have been designated as the Qomolangma Nature Preserve (p85). For foreign travellers, Everest Base Camp has become one of the most popular trekking destinations in Tibet, offering the chance to gaze on the magnificent north face of the world's tallest peak, **Mt Everest** (珠穆朗玛峰, Zhumulangma Feng; 8850m). The Tibetan approach provides far better vistas than those on the Nepali side, and access is a lot easier as there is also a road all the way up.

The most satisfying way to get to Everest Base Camp is to make the popular three- or four-day trek from the Friendship Hwy at Tingri (p299). If you drive up by Land Cruiser, note that it's not possible to go all the way to Everest Base Camp anymore. All vehicles must stop at the tent camp a few kilometres past Rongphu Monastery. From here passengers must trek or take a horse and cart the last glorious 4km.

At the time of writing, the road to Everest Base Camp from Chay was closed for repairs and Land Cruiser traffic was redirected along a track near Tingri. The old route should be open by the time you read this and will sport a new paved surface, which will undoubtedly bring even more traffic to the mountain.

Permits

You need two permits to visit Everest Base Camp. The first is the usual PSB travel permit (only available if you were on a Land Cruiser tour at the time of writing). The second, a park-entry permit for Qomolangma Nature Preserve, can be bought at the Qomolangma Nature Preserve San Chen Guesthouse in Baber (p205) or in the Snow Leopard Guest House (p210) in old Tingri (if coming from Nepal). The permit costs Y400 per vehicle, plus Y180 per passenger. Make sure you are clear with your agency if this cost is included in your trip (it usually isn't).

Your passport and PSB permit will be scrutinised at the checkpoint 6km west of Shegar. The park permit is checked at the Chay checkpoint, 3km after the turn-off from the Friendship Hwy. If you are hiking or driving in from Tingri, there is a checkpoint at Lungchang.

WHAT'S IN A NAME?

In 1856, Andrew Waugh, surveyor general of India, released the most important finding of the mapping of the 'Great Arc' of mountains from the south of India to the Himalayas: Peak XV was the highest mountain in the world and would henceforth be known as 'Mount Everest', in honour of Waugh's predecessor, Sir George Everest (actually pronounced eve-rest).

Waugh's proposal met with much initial opposition, including from Everest himself who thought a local name should be used. In response Waugh claimed that there was no 'local name that we can discover'. But this was almost certainly untrue, even if Waugh himself didn't know it. Very likely there were many scholars who knew the Tibetan name for the mountain: Qomolangma, which can be interpreted as 'Goddess Mother of the Universe' or (more literally, if less poetically) 'Princess Cow'. As early as 1733, the French produced a map on which Everest is indicated as Tschoumou Lancma. In addition, on the very day Waugh's paper on Everest was presented to the Royal Geographic Society, another was read that revealed the local Nepali name to be Deodhunga.

Still, the Everest contingent gained the upper hand (even the writer of the Nepali paper wanted the great man's name used) and in 1865 the Royal Geographic Society declared 'Mt Everest' would henceforth designate the world's highest mountain. Of course, this has had little effect on what the Tibetans and Chinese call the mountain.

Dangers & Annoyances

Whatever you do, don't attempt to walk to Everest Base Camp directly after arriving in Tingri from the low altitudes of the Kathmandu Valley. The altitude gain of over 2600m leaves most people reeling from the effects of acute mountain sickness (AMS, also known as altitude sickness). Even those coming from Lhasa often have trouble.

It's also important to realise just how high and remote you are, and to carry warm clothing and some kind of rain gear no matter what time of year you visit and no matter how short your walk. Unlike on the Nepali side, there is no rescue service up here in the shadow of Everest. Get caught wearing shorts and a T-shirt when a sudden rain or snowfall hits and you could be in serious trouble.

The Chinese maintain a small military presence at Everest Base Camp to deal with any potential trouble, which include attempts to camp or trek past the base camp.

Baber to Rongphu & Tent Camp

The Everest access road begins around 6km west of the Shegar/Baber checkpoint, shortly after kilometre marker 5145. The 91km drive takes around two or three hours. The locations this drive takes you through can be seen on Map p301.

About 3km from the Friendship Hwy you get to the village of Chay, where your entry permit is checked. From Chay, it's a winding drive up to Pang-la (5050m). The views here

are stupendous on a clear day, and feature a huge sweep of the Himalaya range, including Makalu, Lhotse, Everest, Gyachung and Cho Oyu.

The road then descends past a couple of photogenic villages and ruins down into the fertile Dzaka Valley and the village of Tashi Dzom (also known as Peruche), where you can get lunch or a bed for the night at several places.

The dirt road then runs up the wide valley, passing the small villages of Lha Shing, Rephel, Pelding and Puba before reaching Pasum, which also offers accommodation. The next main village is Chödzo (more accommodation) and from here the road turns south towards Rongphu (or Rong-puk or also Rongbuk). The first views of Everest appear half an hour before you arrive at Rongphu.

Rongphu Monastery རོངཔོ་ཆེ་དགོན་པ་ elev 4900m

Though there were probably monastic settlements in the area for several hundred years previously, **Rongphu Monastery** (admission free) is the main Buddhist centre in the valley and once coordinated the activities of around a dozen smaller religious institutions, all of which are now ruined. It was established in 1902 by a Nyingmapa lama. While not of great antiquity, Rongphu can at least lay claim to being the highest monastery in Tibet and thus the world.

Renovation work has been ongoing at the monastery since 1983, and some of the interior **murals** are superb. The monastery and its large **chörten** make a great photograph with Everest thrusting its head skyward in the background.

The **Monastery Guesthouse** (dm per bed ¥40, d ¥80) offers basic quads but the doubles are a decent choice if the conditions at the tent camp bother you. There's a cosy restaurant serving up pancakes (bring your own jam or honey), egg, meat, noodle and rice dishes to order for around ¥10 each.

Across from the Monastery Guesthouse, the rooms are aging poorly at the **Government Hotel** (☎ 0892-858 4535; d per bed ¥300). Despite the

price, you won't get a private bathroom or a shower.

Tent Camp

New to the Everest scene is this group of nomad tents lining both sides of the dirt road between Rongphu and Base Camp. It's the furthest point vehicles can drive to and is a fun place to stay.

All tents charge the same per-bed fee (¥40) and all offer very simple meals and drinks. A few have beer for sale if you are in the mood to celebrate.

Be careful with your belongings as the tents are open all the time and offer no security. It's

THE ASSAULT ON EVEREST

There had been 13 attempts to climb Everest before Edmund Hillary and Sherpa Tenzing Norgay finally reached the summit as part of John Hunt's major British expedition of 1953. Some of these attempts verged on insanity.

In 1934 Edmund Wilson, an eccentric ex-British army captain, hatched a plan to fly himself from Hendon direct to the Himalaya, crash land his Gypsy Moth halfway up Everest and then climb solo to the summit, despite having no previous mountaineering experience (and marginal flying expertise). Needless to say he failed spectacularly. When his plane was impounded by the British in India he trekked to Rongphu in disguise and made a solo bid for the summit. He disappeared somewhere above Camp III, and his body and diaries were later discovered by the mountaineer Eric Shipton at 6400m. A second solo effort was later attempted by a disguised Canadian from the Tibet side. It was abandoned at 7150m.

From 1921 to 1938, all expeditions to Everest were British and were attempted from the north (Tibetan) side, along a route reconnoitred by John Noel – disguised as a Tibetan – in 1913. In all, the mountain claimed 14 lives. Perhaps the most famous early summit bid was by George Mallory and Andrew Irvine (just 22), who were last seen going strong above 7800m before clouds obscured visibility. Their deaths remained a mystery until May 1999 when an American team found Mallory's body, reigniting theories that the pair may have reached the top two decades before Norgay and Hillary. In 2005 teams were sent up to gather evidence, and the results prompted the writers at www.everestnews.com to publish an intriguing theory in support of a Mallory summit. It was Mallory, who when asked why he wanted to climb Everest famously quipped 'because it is there'.

With the conclusion of WWII and the collapse of the British Raj, the Himalayas became inaccessible. Tibet closed its doors to outsiders and, in 1951, the Chinese invasion clamped the doors shut even more tightly. In mountaineering terms, however, the Chinese takeover had the positive effect of shocking the hermit kingdom of Nepal into looking for powerful friends. The great peaks of the Himalaya suddenly became accessible from Nepal.

In 1951, Eric Shipton led a British reconnaissance expedition that explored the Nepali approaches to Everest and came to the conclusion that an assault via Nepal might indeed be met with success. Much to their dismay, the British found that the mountain was no longer theirs alone. In 1952 Nepal issued only one permit to climb Everest – to the Swiss. The Swiss, who together with the British had virtually invented mountaineering as a sport, were extremely able climbers. British climbers secretly feared that the Swiss might mount a successful ascent on their first attempt, something that eight major British expeditions had failed to achieve. As it happened, the Swiss climbed to 8595m on the southeast ridge – higher than any previous expedition – but failed to reach the summit.

The next British attempt was assigned for 1953. Preparations were particularly tense. It was generally felt that if this attempt were unsuccessful, any British hopes to be the first to reach the

best to leave everything in your Land Cruiser if possible.

This is the furthest point vehicles can drive to and is an incredibly scenic place to stay. You're hemmed in by high grey ridges to the east and west and as you look up the street, Everest's north face dominates the skyline. This is prime real estate and it's yours for a pittance.

Don't expect any privacy at the camp, though: tents sleep six people (your host and perhaps a relative or two will be sharing the space with you) in an open area around the central stove. Also, at night, when all the stoves are burning yak dung, the insides can

get very smoky. People with allergies, lung problems, or sensitive noses should consider sleeping at Rongphu. The views are just as good there.

Everest Base Camp ཇོ་མོ་གླང་མའི་གྲུ་གཤིས་ལོག་པ་ elev 5150m

Endowed with springs, Everest Base Camp was first used by the 1924 British Everest expedition. The site has a couple of permanent structures and a small army base. Clamber up the small hill festooned with prayer flags for great views of the star attraction, then have your photo taken at the base camp marker, which disappointingly

summit would be dashed. There was considerable backroom manoeuvring before the expedition set off. As a result, Eric Shipton, who had led three previous expeditions (including one in 1935), was dropped as team leader in favour of John Hunt, an army officer and keen Alpine mountaineer, though relatively unknown among British climbers.

Shipton's 1951 expedition had at the last minute accepted two New Zealand climbers. One of them was Edmund Hillary, a professional bee-keeper and a man of enormous determination. He was invited again to join Hunt's 1953 expedition. Also joining the expedition was Tenzing Norgay, a Sherpa who had set out on his first Everest expedition at the age of 19 in 1935 and who had subsequently become infected with the dream of conquering the world's highest peak.

On 28 May 1953, Hillary and Norgay made a precarious camp at 8370m on a tiny platform on the southeast approach to the summit, while the other anxious members of the expedition waited below at various camps. That night the two men feasted on chicken noodle soup and dates. At 6.30am the next morning they set out.

Almost immediately they were in trouble, confronted with a vast, steep sweep of snow. It was the kind of obstacle that had turned back previous expeditions, but Norgay agreed with Hillary that it had to be risked. It was a gamble that paid off. The next major obstacle was a chimney-like fissure, which the two men squirmed up painfully. Struggling onwards they suddenly found themselves just metres away from a snow-clad dome. At 11.30am, 29 May, they stepped up to the top of Mt Everest and stood at the closest point to the heavens it is possible to reach on foot.

By 2007, over 3000 people had reached the peak of Everest (including George Mallory II, Mallory's grandson), while more than 200 climbers had died in the attempt. The first woman to reach the summit was Junko Tabei from Japan on 16 May 1975. The youngest person was 15-year-old Sherpa Temba Tseri from Nepal, who reportedly reached the top in May 2001 after losing five fingers to frostbite in a previous attempt. The oldest person to make the climb was Toshio Yamamoto at 63 years and 311 days. The Nepali side is the easier and more frequently used.

In other firsts, 2005 saw a helicopter summit of the mountain by Frenchman Didier Delsalle. In 2006, Tormod Granheim and Tomas Olsson attempted to ski Everest's North Face. Olsson died in the attempt, falling over 1700m.

Of all the controversies that Everest generates in the world of mountaineering, its height is not one that should still be an issue. But in May 1999 an American expedition planted a global positioning system (GPS) at the top of Everest and pegged the height at a controversial 8850m – 2m higher than the 8848m accepted since 1954. The Chinese dispute this claim (and indeed recently lowered the height by 1.5m due to melting of the summit ice cap – see p85), and will have the opportunity to make their case to the world when they attempt to carry the Olympic torch to the summit in 2008.

For the latest news on Everest, check out www.everestnews.com.

does not even mention the word 'Everest'. It reads 'Mt Qomolangma Base Camp' and the Chinese below indicates that it is 5200m above sea level. (Other measurements have it at 5020m or 5150m.) The springs are just to the left of this marker.

Since the dirt road is closed to traffic for the last few kilometres, it's very enjoyable walking to Everest Base Camp. The way up is gentle and the altitude gain is less than 200m: most people can cover the distance in less than an hour. Along the way you pass scree slopes, jagged ridges, and broad glacial valleys flowing with muddy water. If the altitude is bothering you, hire a horse and cart (Y50) at the tent camp. The ride includes an hour stay at Base Camp.

Note that you can get mobile phone reception at Tent Camp and Base Camp. Call a friend. They'll be thrilled.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

There is no public transport to Everest Base Camp. It's either trek in or hire a Land Cruiser.

TINGRI དིང་རི་ འཇིག་རྫོང་

pop 500 / elev 4250m

The village of Tingri (Dingri), 142km from Lhatse, comprises a half-kilometre of brick Tibetan homes, restaurants, guesthouses and shops lining the Friendship Hwy. Sometimes called Old Tingri, it overlooks a sweeping plain bordered by towering Himalayan peaks and is a usual overnight stop for Land Cruiser traffic heading to or from the Nepali border. For newcomers from Kathmandu, the discomforts of the sudden altitude gain are likely to make it an unpleasant stay.

Ruins on the hill overlooking Tingri are all that remain of the Tingri Dzong. This fort was destroyed in a Nepali invasion in the late 18th century. On the plains between Shegar and Tingri, dozens more ruins that shared the same fate can be seen from the Friendship Hwy.

It is possible to trek between Everest Base Camp and Tingri (p299).

Sleeping & Eating

Most places offer basic double rooms around a main courtyard with pit toilets, a hot shower block and a cosy Tibetan restaurant or tea-house. All have English signage out the front.

Amdo Hotel (☎ 826 2701; s/d Y35/25) In the middle of town, with an English sign reading 'On

More Hotel'. There are hot showers (guests/nonguests Y10/15) and a restaurant (dishes Y10 to Y20) that serves decent Tibetan food though some travellers have complained that the kitchen is not very clean.

Lhasa Guesthouse (☎ 890 6396; s Y100, d per bed Y30-45) Prices rise with the quality of mattresses here. An extra Y10 (nonguests Y15) gets you a hot shower. The restaurant (dishes Y5 to Y25) gets better reviews for the cleanliness of its kitchen. The hotel is east of Amdo.

Himalaya Guest House (d per bed Y40) This is a new family-run place with cute cloth-covered walls that make the cheap doubles look rather cheery. It's on the east side of town on the right as you drive in from the Baber. Showers are included in the price.

Tingri Snowland Guesthouse (☎ 892 6017; d per bed Y40) About 800m west of the centre of town, Snowland has excellent views of the Himalayas when you step outside your room into the courtyard. Rooms have cloth-covered walls and are bright and clean. The restaurant has a large menu. Showers are included in the room price.

Snow Leopard Guest House (☎ 826 2711; d with/without bath Y318/180, tr/q Y168/200) Some Land Cruiser drivers and guides try to swing their customers here but look at a few other places in town first before deciding if this place is acceptable. It's a bit tatty and stained for the money.

Namtso Restaurant (☎ 826 2708; dishes Y14-30; ☎ breakfast, lunch & dinner) In the far west side of town, this place serves burgers, pizza, curries and breakfasts. There are also several Chinese restaurants in town catering largely to the local army garrison.

AROUND TINGRI Langkhor Monastery ལྷོང་ལོ་མོར་དགོན་པ་

If you've got time on your hands, you could head out to Langkhor Monastery, 20km southwest of Tingri. The monastery is associated with Padampa Sangye, an Indian ascetic who was an important figure in the second diffusion of Buddhism on the Tibetan plateau. There's not much to see here, but it's a good chance to hire a pony and cart for the bumpy ride out there. Most villagers have a cart, but not everyone will be interested in taking you. Try to negotiate under Y100. It's not a comfortable 4½-hour return ride (bring some padding!), but you'll get to see some fantastic scenery this way.

Tsamda Hot Springs མཚོ་མཁའ་མཉམ་རྩེ་ཚོན་

The odourless, iron-rich springs are about 12km west of Tingri, and are piped directly into the pools of the **Tsamda Snow Leopard Hot Spring Hotel** (☎ 892 6030; dm Y40, d Y200-280). Most travellers are not very impressed with the public pools, but you can rent a private room with bath for Y50 for a couple hours if the place is not busy. The private bath is a bit rough, too, and stained red in places from the iron in the water, but it's just the thing for cleaning yourself off after a day or two at Everest Base Camp.

The hotel makes for a better stop than Tingri. There's a common room on the 2nd floor with outstanding views, and some pleasant easy walks around the nearby hills. And the hot-spring water, despite the basic setup, is actually very good quality and the perfect temperature for soaking in.

The springs are 1km off the Friendship Hwy and are signposted in English near kilometre marker 5206.

NYALAM གཤམ་ལམ་ གཤམ་ལམ་

☎ 0892 / elev 3750m

Nyalam (Nielamu) is a rainy, humid one-street town with a Chinese façade. It's about 30km from the Nepali border, 152km from Tingri, and is a usual overnight spot for Land Cruiser trips to or from Nepal. It's also a base for trekking in the southern Shishapangma region.

There are several **internet bars** (网吧; wangba; per hour Y5) around town, including one across from the Nyalam Nga Dhom Hotel. There are numerous private telecom booths around town for cheap calls.

For those who want to trek, Gary McCue has a section on the area in his book *Trekking in Tibet - A Traveler's Guide*. One possible day hike takes you up the valley behind Nyalam to Dara-tso, a holy lake from which glaciers of the Langtang and Jungal Himal, and maybe even Shishapangma (the only mountain over 8000m planted squarely in Tibet), are visible on a clear day.

Snowland Hotel can help organise porters and sells basic Chinese-made trekking gear from its shop across the road.

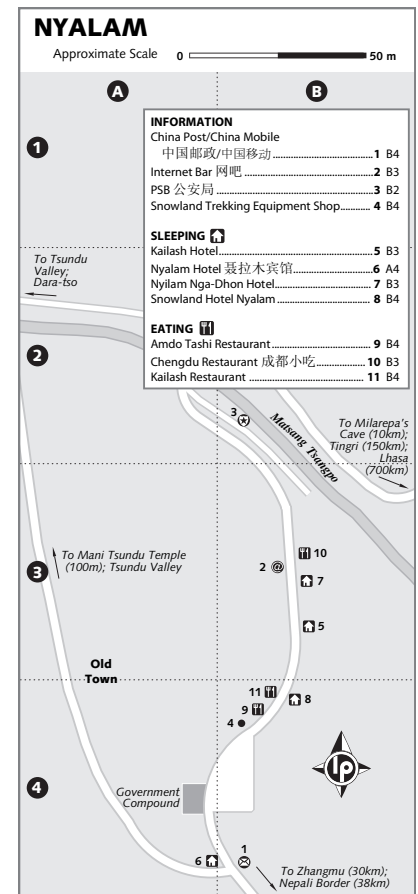
Sights

Wandering around town recording the crazy English signs (Deliciously Fresh Bathroom, The mature and steady is a Rongcheng of

Restaurant, the Hotel of Coloured Beans) can pass an hour.

The only cultural sight close to Nyalam is **Milarepa's Cave**. Milarepa was a famous Buddhist mystic and composer of songs (Tibet's St Francis of Assisi) who lived in the late 11th and early 12th centuries. During his time spent in long meditation in this cave he renounced all luxuries and survived on a diet of local weeds (famously turning green as a result).

At the time of writing the cave was more or less closed due to construction. Expect a shiny new monastery when you arrive, with possible guesthouses. Most people can safely miss the cave without disappointment, though if the guesthouses are built they could make



for a more interesting overnight location than bland Nyalam.

The cave is signposted 'Milaraba Buddhist Practice Cave' and is 10km north of Nyalam, at Gangka village.

Sleeping

None of the guesthouses have showers (浴盆; *yushi*), but you can have one at Chengdu Restaurant for Y20 between 8am and 11pm. All hotels have English signage out the front.

Nyilam Nga-Dhon Hotel (☎ 827 2113; new block d Y100, old block dm per bed Y30) The rooms in the new block are decent enough for a night's stay. The inferior old-block rooms are thinwalled and cramped. The owners are friendly, and there's a clean toilet and washing block.

Snowland Hotel Nyalam (☎ 827 2111; d per bed Y30) The Snowland was undergoing reconstruction at the time of writing. Prices may rise.

Kailash Hotel (☎ 827 2488; d/tr Y50/30) New kid on the block offering clean, bright rooms with new furnishings. East-facing rooms have wonderful mountain views.

Nyalam Hotel (☎ 827 2507; per bed Y30-50) The sign outside this place reads 'Hotel of Coloured Beans' and we hope it never changes. The rooms set around the courtyard are spartan but clean. It's often very busy with Indian tour groups.

Eating

Finding a place to eat in Nyalam is simple: just look around. All serve at least lunch and dinner and have no fixed opening hours. Below are just a few to get you started.

Amdo Tashi Restaurant (dishes Y15-20; ☎ breakfast, lunch & dinner) There are two rooms, one with Western tables and one with Tibetan couches. The menu makes a similar split – you can get a muesli breakfast or good *tenthuk* (noodles). Menu in English.

Chengdu Restaurant (☎ 827 2350; dishes Y15-20) The food is fairly tasty and the Chinese menu has a good range of meat and veggie dishes. Menu in English.

Kailash Restaurant (☎ 827 2485; dishes Y20-25; ☎ breakfast, lunch & dinner) There's a range of Tibetan and Western dishes including set breakfasts (Y20 to Y25). Menu in English.

Getting There & Away

The only way here is by Land Cruiser, hitching (see p344) or cycling.

NYALAM TO ZHANGMU

The landscape along the 30km route from Nyalam to Zhangmu should be touted as one of Tibet's great natural wonders. From Nyalam, the road drops like a stone off the Tibetan plateau into a deep gorge of evergreen forests, waterfalls and thundering rivers. Such noise and colour and drama after the dry, serene landscape of Tibet is a joy to the senses. Perhaps most amazing are the dozen or more falls, many well over 200m long, any one of which would be considered a great attraction anywhere else. During the summer monsoons, the road is submerged in a sea of cloud – no doubt one of the reasons why Nyalam means 'gateway to hell' in Tibetan.

At the time of writing the road was under heavy construction. Landslides and washouts and long waits were common. Expect work to last for years.

ZHANGMU (DRAM) འགྲམ་ ལྗང་མུ་

☎ 0892 / elev 2250m

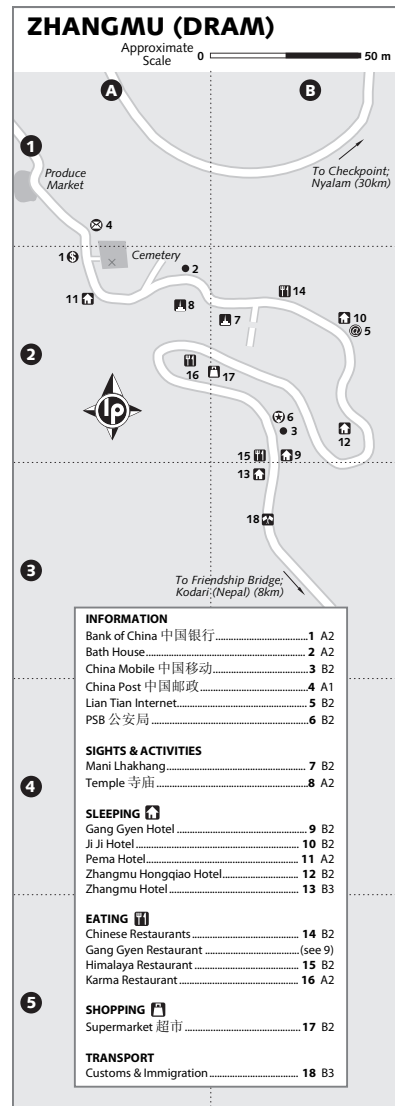
Zhangmu, also known as Dram in Tibetan and Khasa in Nepali, hugs the rim of what seems a never-ending succession of hairpin bends down to the customs area at the border of China and Nepal. After Tibet, it all seems incredibly green and wet.

Zhangmu is a typical border town, much larger than Nyalam, and has a restless, reckless feel to it. There is one far-too-narrow main road through town and it gets backed up frequently. During these times the squealing of Tata truck brakes as the vehicles inch their way down will drive you insane. The town is sadly a poor way to enter or leave Tibet.

Information

For showers head to **Bath House** (Y10; ☎ 9am-11.30pm). For an internet bar (网吧; *wangba*) head to **Lian Tian Internet** (per hour Y5; ☎ 12pm-3am). Note that staff may try to charge foreigners Y10.

Moneychangers deal openly in front of the Zhangmu Hotel and change any combination of Chinese yuan, US dollars or Nepali rupees at better rates than on the Nepali side. **Bank of China** (☎ 9.30am-1.30pm & 3.30-6.30pm Mon-Fri, 11am-2pm Sat & Sun), way up the hill, will change cash and travellers cheques into yuan and also yuan into dollars, euros or pounds if you have an exchange receipt, but doesn't deal in Nepali rupees.



Travel Permit to head north into Tibet unless you have a guide, a driver and the mysterious Tibetan Tourism Bureau (TTB) permit – effectively making it impossible for independent travellers to come up from Nepal without having booked a tour in Kathmandu. The checkpoint just north of town makes sure of this. The PSB cannot extend your visa.

Sleeping

Try to get a room off the road, preferably facing the mountains, as the noise from traffic can be awful.

Zhangmu Hongqiao Hotel (☎ 874 2261; dm Y32, d with/without bathroom Y262/152) For the cheapest beds in town, this local hotel is good value. Dorm rooms are small but clean and the Western-style doubles will do for a night's stay. It's a five-minute walk uphill from customs.

Pema Hotel (☎ 874 2106; fax 874 2605; dm Y40, d with/without bathroom Y300/180) Rooms are small and boxy and the whole place looks like a school dormitory, but the mountain views make up for this. The musty dorms are in the basement and the doubles are up a tiny spiral staircase on the top floor. The hotel is in the north of town – look for its pedestrian overpass, but note you check-in on street level.

Gang Gyen Hotel (☎ 874 2188; dm without bathroom Y50, d with bathroom Y300) The dorms are spacious and reasonably clean, though the shared bathrooms can be a bit smelly. Hot showers are available and are free for guests (Y10 for nonguests). The doubles with bathroom are cosy if overpriced. The hotel is just a stone's throw from customs, however, which may be important if you have heavy bags.

Ji Ji Hotel (☎ 874 5688; tr per bed Y50, d with/without bathroom Y160/100) Rooms are clean and basic. There are no showers for the dorms but you can grab one just up the road at Bath House.

Zhangmu Hotel (☎ 874 2221; fax 874 2220; d/tr Y480/580, deluxe Y680, discounts of 15%) The modern rooms in this government-run hotel are luxurious by Tibetan standards, and back rooms have great mountain views, but it's overpriced. Like the Gang Gyen, though, it's as close to customs as you can get. The hotel runs a legitimate massage centre (foot massage US\$6) two doors up the road.

Eating

There is no shortage of restaurants in Zhangmu. Wander up the hill for an

China Post near the bank has an ATM outside accepting foreign cards on the Visa and Plus networks. For telephone calls try the many private telecom booths around town.

PERMITS

Located above China Mobile, the **Zhangmu PSB** (Gong'anju; ☎ 874 2264) won't give you an Alien

excellent selection of Western, Chinese, Tibetan and Nepali cuisine. All restaurants serve lunch and dinner and have no fixed opening hours. Many restaurants fix lunch boxes, which come in handy on the long ride to Kathmandu.

Gang Gyen Restaurant (Ground floor, Gang Gyen Hotel; dishes Y15-35; ☎ breakfast, lunch & dinner) Looking a little like a Western sports bar, this popular establishment serves a full range of Nepali, Chinese, Tibetan and Western mains, including steaks and breakfast foods. The curries are thick and delicious. The sign above the restaurant reads 'Base Camp Western Food & Coffee Bar'. Menu in English.

Himalaya Restaurant (☎ 874 3068; opposite Gang Gyen Hotel; dishes Y15-25; ☎ breakfast, lunch & dinner) A cheery place for decent Tibetan, Nepali or Chinese food. Menu in English.

Karma Restaurant (☎ 893 5050; dishes Y15-30; ☎ breakfast, lunch & dinner) Another travellers' restaurant serving Western, Tibetan, Nepalese and Chinese dishes. Not as good as Gang Gyen but a little cheaper and friendlier. Menu in English.

Shopping

There are countless small shops on the main road selling drinks and snacks, and equally important in Zhangmu, umbrellas. There's a small basic supermarket five minutes' walk up the hill from customs.

Getting There & Away

TO KATHMANDU

At **Chinese immigration** (☎ 9.30am-6.30pm, sometimes closed 1.30-3.30pm) you will need to fill in an exit form and health declaration and you may be asked for your travel permit.

From customs, go on to Kodari in Nepal, around 8km below Zhangmu. Cars and pick-ups offer lifts across this no-man's land (Y10). The last stretch over the Friendship Bridge has to be walked.

At **Nepali immigration** (☎ 8.30-4pm) in Kodari it's possible to get a Nepali visa for the same price as in Lhasa (US\$30 cash, or the equivalent in rupees, plus one passport photo) although it is sensible to get one in Lhasa just in case.

If you are coming from Nepal into Zhangmu, you won't find Chinese immigration open if you leave the Nepali side after 3.30pm.

There are a couple of hotels on the ramshackle Nepali side of town. A further 12km down the road is the adventure resort **Last Resort** (☎ 4439501; www.tlnepal.com; full board US\$25-35). You can't miss this place for the signs, but also for the insane bungee venue visible to the side of the road over the wild Bhote Kosi.

If continuing straight on to Kathmandu there are buses every hour or so to Barabise (Rs 55, three hours) around halfway, where you change to a Kathmandu bus (Rs 86, three to four hours). The buses will be packed, and you may mysteriously find yourself dropped off before you reach Kathmandu; locals say that sometimes the bus will drive you all the way in and sometimes it won't.

The better option is to hire a vehicle from near Nepali immigration. A ride to Kathmandu (four to five hours) costs Rs 1500 to Rs 2000 per car, or around Rs 375 to Rs500 per person.

Nepal is an odd 2¼ hours behind Chinese time.