

# **Forbidden City to Shangri-La**

China - Beijing and Yunnan

September 16<sup>th</sup> – 30<sup>th</sup> 2016, October 13<sup>th</sup> – 27<sup>th</sup> 2016  
October 27<sup>th</sup> – November 10<sup>th</sup> 2016



## **Let's join the tour to the beautiful river- and mountain areas of Yunnan.**

Yunnan is famous for its mountains and its absence of plains. During this tour we will walk in the charming city of Lijiang, situated at the foot of Jade Dragon Mountain. Here we will get to know the customs of the Naxi people with their pictographic written language. We will do a hike along the most narrow part of the Yangzi River, Tiger Leaping Gorge, before reaching the Tibetan monasteries of Shangri-La. Yes, it is actually the name and it is the beginning of Tibet.

We will meet some of China's most interesting ethnic minorities, we will have a chance to study how to make dumplings as well as learning tai chi from a master. Our tour will start in Beijing where we will visit The Great Wall, The Forbidden City, The Temple of Heaven and get to see some of Beijing's new architecture and art. The tours will be led by Mikael Hellström, China specialist who has lived for many years in China.

## **Itinerary**

### **Day 1/ Flight to Beijing**

We leave Scandinavia in the afternoon.

### **Day 2/ Beijing**

Arrival Beijing in the morning. The town has been the capital since the end of 13<sup>th</sup> century with a few smaller breaks. With The Olympic Games of 2008 as a catalyst the city has changed dramatically. Today it like to compare itself to the biggest cities in the world with its new and grand architecture. After check in we will have our welcome lunch.

We will follow the main street of Beijing, Wangfujing before we will do a shorter walk through Beijing's oldest parts. In the midst of all the new flashy Beijings we see pockets of the old shining through. We see the great contrasts at close range during our walks through the city.

### **Day 3/ Beijing**

In the morning we will go to Tiantan, Temple of Heaven. In the park surrounding Tiantan we will see all the people gathering for morning activities. Here we meet people doing tai chi, dance tango or playing parts of Beijing- opera. It is early in the morning when Beijing is showing its most traditional face.

We will make a visit to the City Planning Museum by Tian Anmen Square. Here we will find a model of Beijing in smaller scale and it will be possible to see a 3D-film about the new architecture that was created before the Olympics. Here we will also find exhibitions regarding environment, how to keep the old parts of town and how Beijing's subway system is developing in such a swift speed. It is really food for thoughts.

We walk from Tian An Men Square to the Forbidden City where we make a longer visit in the emperor's former home with its 1000 rooms.

There are lots of entertainment to be found in Beijing. If you want to see Beijing Opera, acrobatics or something else our tour leader will help you arrange with these visits.



### **Day 4/ Beijing-Simatai-Beijing**

A full day tour to Simatai, the part of The Great Wall that is best kept and less visited. There is enough wall to be able to walk for a full day. The part that we will walk have a full 16

watchtowers. The wall here is rather steep and for those who find this to be too much of a challenge there is a cable car to use to one way or both.

The views from here are outstanding with views of one wellkept wall for miles after miles. We will need approximately four hours with bus back and forth to Simatai. On the way back we will pass the Olympic Buildings. Back in Beijing late afternoon.

### **Day 5/ Beijing**

We will spend the morning hours to have a good look at the more modern side of Beijing. With bus we will go through Beijing CBD and see the new architecture such as the building for the TV company CCTV built by Rem Kolhals. We proceed to the old industrial compound 798. In these closed down industries a number of artists moved in some 20 years back. In the beginning the authorities tried to get rid of them, but later they turned and instead welcomed more and more artists to establish themselves here. Today it is an art centre of Beijing and a showcase for the new art that has won international reputation. We will get guided sightseeing into this area to get an insight to who is who in the Chinese art scene.

The rest of the day free for own activities. When speaking of Beijing's biggest sights we usually mention four places. Out of those we have not visited so far is the Summer Palace. Maybe you chose to do that today. The Lama monastery Yonghegong is also very nice. There are lots of things to do in Beijing. Shopping anyone? Your tour leader will help you out to do whatever you most want to do.



### **Day 6 / Dali**

In the morning flight cross over China to the province of Yunnan and the city Kunming. We go straight with bus to Dali, where we will arrive afternoon.

After check in at the hotel we will have a shorter sightseeing of the city. We will use the old city walls to get fine views over the old city and the Cang Mountains with peaks reaching over 4000 meters to the east of the city.

We see the old gates to the city. Dali was once the capital of a big empire called Nanzhao. After defeating the Chinese army in the 8<sup>th</sup> century they established a buddhist kingdom that apart from Yunnan also included Sichuan and parts of Burma. Out of the 22 kings that reigned over Nanzhao almost half of them abdicated to become hermits in the mountains instead. The Ethnic Minority Bai was leading this empire and today they are the main inhabitants of Dali.

### **Day 7 / Dali**

We will start the day at the wall surrounding the old town. Here we will ask a tai chi Master to

give us a lesson of the old classic form of morning exercise, tai chi, in the early morning. It's a really nice way to start the day.

After that we will visit the park area where the three famous pagodas are situated. The pagodas are the oldest in Yunnan and was established in the Nanzhao period. The entrance ticket to the pagodas are also valid to the palace for Nanzhao that has been re-established on the hills above the pagodas. When the pagodas were renovated some years back they found lots of old relics in them. In these relics we will see how great the Tibetan influence was on the Nanzhao Kingdom.



For those with an interest you can also visit the local museum in the Old Town. There are lots of stone tablets with scriptures of Sanskrit and relics from the Nanzhao period. In China there are lots of talk about a southern Silk Road and what we see here is a lot of proof of its existence.

Late afternoon we will have the opportunity to get to learn how to make dumplings in a local restaurant. It is usually very appreciated and educational. It is also very delicious.

### **Day 8/ Lijiang**

Surrounding Dali there are lots of exciting markets. Some of them take place every fifth day, others are once every week. Most of these market places are situated in villages by the Erhai Lake, the big lake by Dali. We will decide later which of the villages we will visit, but we see to that it is a village that also got something more to offer. We will spend the morning here.

In the afternoon we leave Dali for Lijiang, situated at 2400 above sea level. Transfer to hotel. We will stay in a hotel in Lijiang with charming inner courtyards built in traditional Naxi architecture.

### **Day 9 / Lijiang**

For many travellers Lijiang is the favorite place in China. It is easy to see why with Jade Dragon Mountain rising to 5596 meters behind the old city with cobbled alleys and canals crisscrossing the town. The beautiful tree houses have colorful gardens with flowers and these days their open to the public as many of them have become shops, restaurants or hotels. The majority of the people in Lijiang belong to the Ethnic Minority of Naxi. Today we will do a guided walk through Lijiang.

We will visit the market and see part of the towns where the traditional life still goes on as before. Among the Naxi women's position is very high and in China they speak a lot about

the Matriarchy that the Naxis used to live under. To this day we see that the women are running the business while the men are home taking care of the flowers in the courtyards.

The town is over 800 year's old and for most of the time the town was headed by the Mu clan. We visit the Mu Palace and visit a height from where we get good views over the old city.

In the evening we will have some entertainment. In Lijiang they have their own tradition of music. We will enjoy a concert with traditional Naxi Music. The orchestra are famous around the globe as they have been invited to play many countries. It might not strike as your regular rock star as a big portion of the members of the orchestra are over 80 years old.



## Day 10 / Lijiang

På morgonen gör vi ett besök vid Den svarta drakens damm, varifrån vi får de bästa vyerna över Jadedraksberget som mäter drygt 5500 meter. Det är en oerhört vacker parkanläggning och vi har tid att strosa omkring här.

I anslutning till parken finns också ett litet forskningscenter i för Naxifolkets speciella skriftspråk. Vi får träffa en kalligraf som visar oss denna mycket märkvärdiga skrift. Språket har i alla tider använts av naxifolkets shamaner och kallas dongbas. Skriftspråket får de kinesiska krumelurerna att framstå som rena alfabetet. Naxis intrikata tecken är faktiskt världens enda idag levande hieroglyfiska skriftspråk. Eftermiddagen egen tid i Lijiang.

We will start the day with a walk to the The Black Dragon Pool from where we will have the best views over Jade Dragon Mountain, 5500 meter high. It is a beautiful park and we will spend time here.

In connection to the park there is also a small research center for the special Naxi written language. We will meet a calligrapher who will teach us this extraordinary language. The language has always been used by the Naxi shaman and is called dongba. The scripture actually makes the Chinese written language feel like a common language. The intricate pictographic characters of Naxi is actually the only today hieroglyphic language that is alive. In the afternoon you will be free at leisure in Lijiang.

### **Day 11 / Tigr Leaping Gorge**

Bus early morning to Qiaotou from where we will proceed further into one of the deepest canyons of the world – Tiger Leaping Gorge. The Yangtze River just made its first bend before it runs into Tiger Leaping Gorge and themost narrow part of the whole river. The gorge situated between the mountains of Haba and Jade Dragon Mountain, both of them exceeding 5000 meters tall. The river itself runs at a level below 2000 meters.

We will do our hike at a path situated roughly 1000 meters above the river. The trek is in total over 25 kilometers which we will cover over two days. The first day we have a rise of 700-800 meters before we reach as high as high as we will get on this trek. The second day will be easier as we will go down about 600 meters down to the road running closer to the river.

It is a very beautiful hike on comparatively small paths. It is not a good option for anyone afraid of heights, but the trek is not dangerous. The first day we will walk with a slow rise until lunch when we will stop by at a nice Naxi house for lunch. After lunch we will proceed to the many bends on the path before reaching our small village where we will stay for the night. It is really beautiful and almost magical when darkness is closing over the two peaks. We are all surrounded by the mountains. Our luggage will travel separately and we will only carry with us what we need for this night.



#### *For those who prefer not to hike*

When the group starts its hike you will instead go by bus to Shigu, from where you will have great views over Yangtze River where it makes its first bend. Also Shigu is a nice classic Naxi village and we will make a shorter walk through the village and eat our lunch here.

We will then return to the Tiger Leaping Gorge. The gorge is sandwiched between Haba Mountain and Jade Dragon Mountain. The river is flowing at a sea level of less than 2000 meters and both mountains rise over 5000 meters. It is an impressive sight to see the force of the water as it is running through the gorges. We will visit one of the three gorges. It is called

Tiger Leaping Gorges as it is so narrow that a tiger should be able to jump between the two sides. It really have have to be a rather impressive tiger if so! We will stay at a hotel in the gorge, but rather than hight up on the path we stay at one down by the road.

### **Day 12 / Shangri-La**

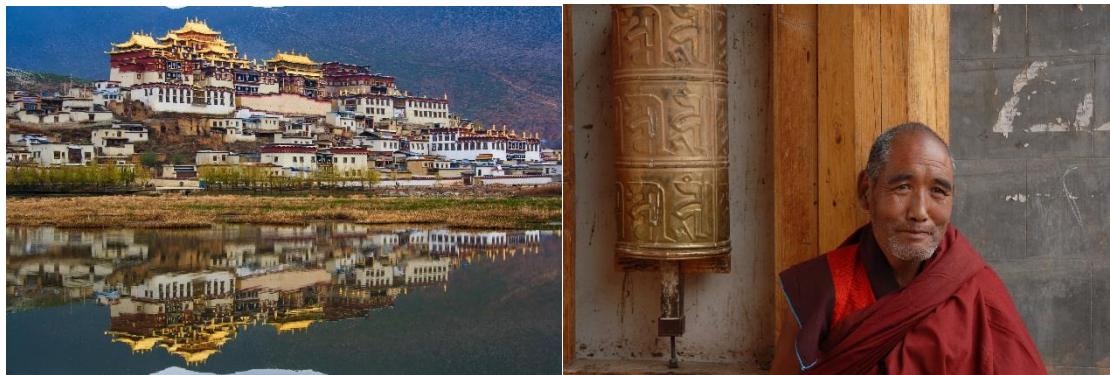
We will continue on the same flat level for about 90 minutes before we will walk down quite steeply back to the same road as we started from. By lunch we will reach there and meet with the rest of the group and have lunch together.

We leave Tiger Leaping Gorge and travel a few hours northwest. Late afternoon we reach Shangri-La. This is the beginning of Tibet, even though we are still in Yunnan Province. The city was named Zhongdian in Chinese or Gyalthang in Tibetan until the authorities decided to re-name the city Shangri-La to make it more attractive. They claim that this is the real place that James Hilton described in his book Lost Horizon when the name Shangri-La was coined.

In the evening we make a guided walk through the old town of Shangri-La. This town got a real uplift some years ago and is today a very attractive part of town. We will make a visit to a local thangka painter (Tibetan religious paintings). Here we can see how they are being made and naturally also buy if you are interested.

### **Day 13 / Shangri-La**

In the morning we will visit the Songzanlin Monastery. Keeping with the traditions we first make a khora or circumambulation of the monastery before entering and visiting the heart of the monastery. This is Southwest Chinas biggest monastery with 600-700 Monks working here. It is an important monastery that was built by the 5<sup>th</sup> Dalai Lama and belongs to the biggest branch of Tibetan Buddhism, Gelugpa, also called the Yellow Hats.



We will visit the main halls, see the colleges and visit a library with sutras. We get to learn the basics of how a Tibetan monastery is built and what to think about when visiting. Since a few years back they also built a manmade lake here. There are nice trails surrounding it and making a “khora” around the lake is a nice opportunity for those who want to have another hour of this environment. The rest of the day free at leisure.

### **Dag 14 / Shangri La – Kunming**

By plane to Kunming, the largest city and capital of Yunnan. Transfer to hotel. Kunming has grown to become a really big city the last ten years. Today there are more than 4 million people calling it home. We will walk through the central parts of town and visit the old pagodas as well as a newly renovated city centre built in old style. We will also visit the Night

Market where we can meet locals making tai-chi.

### **Dag 15 / Flight back home**

Early morning we fly from Kunming to Beijing and continue on to Scandinavia the same day.

## **TOUR FACTS**

**Dates:** September 16th - 30th 2016, October 13 – 27 & October 27th – November 10th 2016

**Single room:** 3 800 SKR

**Price of the tour:** 25 – 32 pax: 30 800 SKR

### **Included in the price?**

- International air fare, (Gothenburg, Stockholm, Copenhagen ok). Other alternatives will be possible to arrange to higher cost.\*
- Half board
- All entrance fees to museums, sights, performances.
- National park fees
- Part of twin room with good standard (except by Tiger Leaping Gorge where it is slightly more simple)
- All transportations with bus, airplanes, subway etc
- Airport taxes
- Swedish tour leader (Mikael Hellström)
- Local guides
- All tips

### **What is not included in the price?**

- One meal per day
- Drinks
- Own activities

\* If you arrange your own flight you can deduct 4500 Swedish kronor from the price. If you can find an own international ticket starting from Kunming on the way back the price you can deduct will be 5600 SKR. The reason why you can deduct so little is because we get a beneficial price on the flight Beijing – Kunming return when flying with Air China as we will use for the main group. In case you will get your own ticket with Air China, please see if you can include those tickets in your own ticket and we can deduct more.