



CLASSIC  
EDELWEISS TOURS

FASCINATION YUNNAN - RIDE THE DRAGON

” RIDING THE DRAGON IS A ONCE-IN-A-LIFETIME EXPERIENCE! “

## RIDING DAY 1 : KUNMING

### Standard Route (0 km / 0 miles)

Thanks to its location on the Yunnan Plateau, over one mile above sea level, Kunming enjoys a pleasant climate year-round. Despite sitting at the same latitude as Dubai or Florida, the "Spring City" hardly ever gets very hot, and cold days in winter are rare, too. Yunnan Province's capital counts about 5.5 million inhabitants, 20 universities, and an airport that is the 4th busiest in China in terms of passenger numbers, even ahead of Shanghai and Beijing.

Kunming will enchant you with its laid-back atmosphere, its many attractions, and a large number of cool bars, craft breweries, and restaurants. The city boasts numerous parks which are dotted with ponds, temples, and pagodas. Cui Hu ("Green Lake") Park is the one you shouldn't miss, it features 22 hectares of landscaped gardens and reflecting ponds, connected by winding walkways lined with trendy cafés and teahouses. What a great place to while away the day, recover from your jetlag, and get immersed in Chinese culture.

### Highlights:

#### #1: Kunming



Kunming, situated at an altitude of 1892 meters, has around 5.5 million inhabitants, the entire metropolitan region even has 8.5, which corresponds to a population density of over 400 inhabitants per km<sup>2</sup>. The city has borne its name since 1276, but 1500 years before that there was already a settlement on the shores of Dian Lake, around which the city is now slowly growing. It is the undisputed political, economic and cultural center of Yunnan Province

and attracts millions of tourists and business travelers every year. They all feel very comfortable here, not least thanks to the year-round spring-like climate.

## RIDING DAY 2 : KUNMING - MI'LE

### Standard Route (202 km / 125 miles)

Finally, our first riding day has arrived! We make our way through the outskirts of Kunming, past a golf club, the Arts University, and around Yangzong Lake. This rather shallow lake used to be very clean but in 2008, arsenic was found in the water and a serious pollution scandal ensued.

At Beigucheng, we cross the Nanpan River and soon change our direction of travel from east to south. We're now heading for one of Yunnan's main tourist attractions, the famous Stone Forest.

South China Karst is a UNESCO World Heritage Site encompassing 1,000 km<sup>2</sup> of karst landscape. The variety and size of all those dolines, caves, gorges, pinnacles, and so on are very impressive and you could spend days here exploring. The most famous, most beautiful, and most interesting section is the Stone Forest of Shilin which is divided into seven sections. We are going to one of them to see this rock wonderland up close and personal. The formations will definitely stimulate your imagination!

After sightseeing and lunch, we head south toward Mi'le, our destination. This city is home to 570,000 people and almost half of them are part of an ethnic minority, mostly Hani and Yi people. Overall, there are 55 ethnic minorities in China. Our hotel is a beautiful resort next to a small lake and features beautiful surroundings, lush gardens, and several pools. Don't get there too late!

### Highlights:

#### #1: Stone Forest



The approximately 500 km<sup>2</sup> (120,000 acres) stone forest (Chinese 石林, "Shílín") is located around 90 km east of Kunming. The most beautiful and impressive areas are protected as a "National Scenic Area".

270 million years ago, there was a shallow primeval sea here, at the bottom of which sediments accumulated that were compressed into sandstone and limestone over millions of years. Later, the land was raised, the sea disappeared and erosion could begin its creative work.

The stone forest consists of tall, slender columns that resemble stalagmites or - especially from a distance - petrified trees. Walking between them is an unforgettable experience!

## RIDING DAY 3 : MI'LE - JIANSHUI

### Standard Route (261 km / 162 miles)

Looking at our route on a map you can clearly see that today it's all about the ride. Curvy roads lead us into the mountains, away from built-up areas and traffic. The city of Xinshao is our only obstacle this morning.

The S312 takes us into the hills, we find another arm of the Nanpan River which we follow for a while. In Zhonheyang we hop on the G323 and head west and eventually south to find the town of Shadian. In 1975, Shadian was the scene of a massacre committed by the People's Liberation Army which was sent here to suppress an uprising of the local Hui people. As we all know, the PLA wasn't really supposed to liberate anyone. The Grand Mosque was destroyed in those days but rebuilt later. It is an astonishing sight, making you wonder if you're still in China or rather somewhere in Central Asia.

Halfway between Shadian and our destination, Jianshui, we visit a cave as no Mystery Tour is complete without one.

Jianshui counts about half a million people and is famous for its "Hutongs", which translates as "old neighborhoods" and features cobbled streets, traditional buildings, and plenty of charm. There is also a huge Confucian temple, an enchanted garden, a medieval bridge, and much more to look and marvel at. Jianshui is a really neat place!

### Highlights:

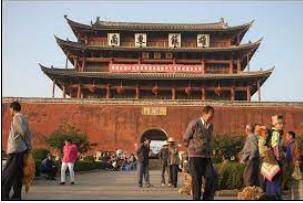
#### #1: Great Mosque of Shadian



The Great Mosque of Shadian is one of the largest and most impressive mosques in the whole of China. Originally built in 1684, it was destroyed in 1975 when the Hui minority rebelled against the closure of mosques during the Cultural Revolution. The uprising was quelled brutally, but after its reconstruction, the mosque stood even taller and more beautiful than before. It is large enough for 10,000 worshippers, has a 42-metre high dome with a diameter of

20 meters and four 93-metre high minarets. However, it is to be sinicized, i.e. torn down and completely rebuilt, this time in the Chinese style. There are protests against this, but - as usual in China - they have no prospect of success.

## #2: Jianshui



Jianshui is a dream of a small Chinese town. Old buildings, a huge Confucian temple from 1285, and the incredible garden of the Zhu family make the little town perfect. It is also famous for its steam pot dishes and the best barbecue in Yunnan.

Very interesting is the classic architecture, which is a mixture of various central Chinese styles.

## RIDING DAY 4 : JIANSHUI

### Standard Route (0 km / 0 miles)

Jianshui has been a center for Confucian studies for almost eight hundred years and possesses China's third-largest Confucian temple complex. The area is also home to several ethnic minorities, the largest populations of which are the Hani, Yi, Dai, Hui, and Miao.

Because of all the cultural mixing, Jianshui is an excellent place to indulge in some of Yunnan's finest cuisine, observe the skills of traditional artisans, and track down a few well-preserved architectural gems. Its subtropical highland climate doesn't hurt either.

Most of the sights in Jianshui Old Town are centered around Lin'an Lu and Hanlin Jie. These are two of the main roads situated between two of the town's more attractive gates. The main roads have several buildings with the 'new-old' facelifts that are so common to tourist hotspots Dali and Lijiang.

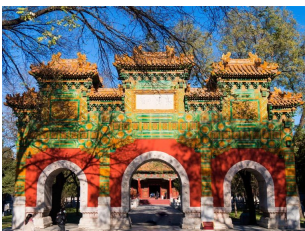
Buildings such as these are interspersed amid the falling facades of much older buildings. Adding to the altogether charming atmosphere is the arch of green created by trees lining the streets.

([www.gokunming.com](http://www.gokunming.com))

In short: Jianshui is perfect for spending a rest day. Relax, unwind, walk around, marvel at all the attractions, and sample the local delicacies.

### Highlights:

#### #1: Confucian Temple



Jianshui's most famous temple was modelled after the temple in Confucius' hometown of Qufu (Shandong province) and finished in 1285; it covers 7.5 hectares and is the third-largest Confucian temple in China. The temple operated as a school for nearly 750 years – its academic credentials were such that more than half of all Yunnan's successful candidates in imperial examinations during this period came from Jianshui. ([lonelyplanet.com](http://lonelyplanet.com))

## #2: Zhu Family Garden



This spacious 20,000-sq-metre complex, which includes 42 separate courtyards, is a fascinating example of Qing-era architecture. Comprising ancestral buildings, family homes, ponds and lovely gardens, it took 30 years to build. The Zhu family made its fortune through its mill and tavern, and went on to dabble in everything from tin in Gejiu to opium in Hong Kong, eventually falling victim to the political chaos

following the 1911 revolution.

## #3: Chaoyang Gate



Newly refurbished, Chaoyang Gate is an imposing Ming edifice that guards the entrance to the old town. Modeled on the Yellow Crane Tower in Wuhan and the Yueyang Tower located at Dongting Lake (洞庭湖; Dòngtíng Hú) in Hunan, it bears more than a passing resemblance to the Gate of Heavenly Peace in Beijing. (lonelyplanet.com)

## RIDING DAY 5 : JIANSHUI - YUANYANG

### **Standard Route (151 km / 94 miles)**

We head south all day today, on a rather short ride that gives us enough time to stop frequently and enjoy the stunning scenery along the way. Before we leave, we can visit the sights and attractions we didn't have time for last night. Early morning is a wonderful time to walk around Jianshui's old town and take advantage of the soft morning light. Of course, we can't leave without taking a few photos of the famous Shuanglong Bridge that - at least in parts - dates back to the Qing Dynasty.

Then, finally, we're on the road. The G245 is a beautiful road, it leads us up to almost 2,000 m and then down again, to the Red River ("Hóng Hé"), losing more than a mile of altitude in the process. Needless to say, there are many, many curves leading down to the river.

We follow the Red River for a while and also cross it, then another twisty road - known as Aiwu Highway - brings us back up to higher elevations and to one of the most iconic and spectacular landscapes in all of China, if not in the world. The Honghe Hani Rice Terraces are masterpieces of engineering and land management - and a sight to behold. Gorgeous views open up again and again on both sides of the road and frequently you can see the Hani people's typical houses with their mushroom-shaped roofs. Our hotel tonight is not in a city but out in the countryside, surrounded by rice terraces. It is safe to say that you can expect some rice dishes for dinner...

### **Highlights:**



## #1: Shuanglong Ancient Bridge



This bridge, also known as the "Double Dragon Bridge" and the "Bridge of 17 Arches", dates back to the time of Emperor Qianlong, who ruled from 1735 to 1799. However, it was only built with three arches and was only extended by 14 arches towards the end of the 19th century after the Tacun River changed its course. The bridge is 153 meters long and consists of over 100,000 stone blocks. A richly decorated three-story pagoda rises in the middle of the bridge and the ends are also marked by pagodas. The Shuanglong Bridge is not only the longest, but without doubt also the most beautiful historical bridge in the whole of Yunnan.

## #2: Honghe Hani Rice Terraces



Honghe Hani Rice Terraces.

It is often said that the Great Wall of China is the only man-made object visible from space. It's not true, of course; the crumbling, frequently overgrown structure is mostly no wider than a country road. But if the unaided human eye really can spot some of Earth's engineered marvels from low orbit, then in China they must surely include the

Hacked from mountains in the country's south-western Yunnan province, the sprawling terraces – hundreds of thousands of them – stack up over more than 160sq km to create one of the most spectacular and jaw-dropping landscapes on the planet.

Refined through trial and error over more than a millennium, the rice terraces are an inspiring example of an entire community working symbiotically with nature, with land use arranged by elevation into distinct ecological zones. Rainfall and moisture from dense mountain fog are collected in forested catchment areas high on the slopes, recharging groundwater; spring water is channeled to irrigate the terraces; pooled water evaporates to form clouds; and clouds gather to shed rain on the high forests. The hydrologic cycle then repeats ad infinitum. (bbc.com)

## RIDING DAY 6 : YUANYANG - PU'ER

### Standard Route (395 km / 245 miles)

Our ride today brings us from the land of rice to the realm of tea, to Pu'er, home of some of the world's most famous and most expensive tea. It's a beautiful but very long ride, so make sure you are well-rested.

Rice terraces line the road as we head back down to the valley of the Hóng Hé where we turn left to follow the river upstream. The water is heavily laden with silt and reddish-brown; even on Google Maps this striking color is noticeable.

In Yuanjiang, we leave the river behind and head back into the mountains. The road G 213 is very, very twisty and reaches over 1,400 meters of elevation. And there is very little traffic on this road since the brand-new motorway G 8511 also connects the Red River to Pu'er. So, nothing stands in the way between you, your motorcycle, and a whole lot of riding fun. Don't get too ambitious, though, you're still in China!

### Highlights:

#### #1: Pu'er



Pu'er is a city and a tea variety at the same time. After being renamed Simao in 1950, the town returned to its old name in 2007 in an effort to boost tourism. After all, every avid tea drinker in the world knows the name Pu'er, or Pu'erh as it used to be called. Pu'er tea is fermented and oxidized in a quite complicated way and stored for quite a long time, making it a pricey choice in tea shops around the

world. Due to the unique cultivation process, its cultural significance, and its unbroken history of at least eleven centuries of growing it, Pu'er tea was included in the UNESCO World Heritage list in 2023.

But Pu'er is not only famous for tea, coffee also plays a big role here. Over 50% of China's coffee is grown around the city, almost 56,000 tons of it were harvested in 2022. More than half of the city's population work in tea or coffee-related jobs; there is even a coffee-themed hotel! Needless to say, the tea- and coffeehouse density in Pu'er is pretty high...

## RIDING DAY 7 : PU'ER - JINGGU

### Standard Route (162 km / 101 miles)

Today's ride is much shorter than yesterday's so we can relax a little in the morning before heading north. Pu'er is the southernmost point of our tour.

For many centuries, tea from southern China was transported up to Tibet and sturdy Tibetan horses were brought down in long, exhausting, dangerous treks. Accordingly, the route was named Tea Horse Road even though it had not much in common with anything we would associate with a road today.

Nakeli, a village just north of Pu'er, is one of the most beautiful and authentic villages along the Tea Horse Road, one of only four villages in all of Yunnan to be inscribed in the prestigious list of the "Most Beautiful Chinese Villages for Leisure". Of course we stop, take a look around, and have a cup of tea. Or coffee.

We pass the small city of Ning'er, then turn left on the G 215 which follows the route of the old Tea Horse Road. It's still an important trade route today, so there will be a bit of traffic on this otherwise gorgeous road. 60 miles later, we reach Jinggu, a town of about 15,000 people. Everything here revolves around tea.

Our hotel is not in the rather bleak town but up in the mountains, 2000 ft above the valley. Sometimes even above the clouds.

### Highlights:

#### #1: Tea Horse Road



Tea was first brought to Tibet, legend has it, when Tang dynasty Princess Wen Cheng married Tibetan King Songtsen Gampo in A.D. 641. Tibetan royalty and nomads alike took to tea for good reasons. It was a hot beverage in a cold climate where the only other options were snowmelt, yak or goat milk, barley milk, or chang (barley beer). A cup of yak butter tea—with its distinctive salty, slightly oily, sharp

taste—provided a mini-meal for herders warming themselves over yak dung fires in a windswept hinterland.

By the 11th century, brick tea had become the coin of the realm. The Song dynasty used it to buy sturdy steeds from Tibet to take into battle against fierce nomadic tribes from the north, antecedents of Genghis Khan's hordes. It became the prime trading commodity between China and Tibet.

(Read the full article here: [nationalgeographic.com/magazine/article/tea-horse](http://nationalgeographic.com/magazine/article/tea-horse))

## RIDING DAY 8 : JINGGU - FENGQING

### Standard Route (260 km / 161 miles)

The ride that awaits us today is essentially a transfer stage. We follow the Jinggu River north on a small, winding road until we reach Zhentai. From here, a brand-new expressway takes us west towards Lincang. This city of 2.2 million people has a long history of growing and trading tea, so don't be surprised if you see some more tea plantations along our route.

We leave the expressway in time to enjoy the twistiest parts of route G323, have lunch somewhere along the way, and finally take route G214, heading north once again. The mountains that surround us are becoming higher and we gain some altitude, too, as Fengqing sits about 5,500 ft above sea level.

Our hotel tonight is - once again - brand new but it is much bigger than last night's place. It's a luxury resort that you would expect anywhere but here in this dusty little town of merely 380,000 people...

### Highlights:

#### #1: Lincang



Lincang City is in the southwest of Yunnan province at the far western edge of China near the border with Myanmar. At a latitude of 23 degrees north, Lincang sits right on the Tropic of Cancer. But it has a mild subtropical highland climate, with comfortably warm daytimes throughout the year.

Lincang sits on the banks of the Lancang River, in a gloriously mountainous region about 600 kilometers (367 miles) from Yunnan's capital, Kunming. Hengduan and Nushan mountains rise right outside the city. It is a land of many rivers, lush vegetation, and a wide variety of beautiful and fascinating landscapes.

23 of China's ethnic minorities live here, the largest of which is the Wa people. Two-thirds of the Wa people in all of China live in Lincang, making it the perfect place to experience the ancient Wa culture. ([visityunnanchina.com](http://visityunnanchina.com))

## RIDING DAY 9 : FENGQING - TENGCHONG

### Standard Route (288 km / 179 miles)

Another beautiful ride lies ahead of us today. Leaving Fengqing, we cross a nameless 6,000-foot-pass, then another one, and then yet another one before we reach the southern outskirts of Baoshan, the largest city around here. But no worries, we don't have to go in or ride through.

Instead, we turn to a south-westerly direction and approach another mountain chain. This one seems to be a bit higher than the ones we've seen before. The river that flows alongside this chain is the Nujiang, one of the biggest rivers coming down from the Tibetan highlands. We are going to see more of it during the coming days.

The mountain chain is known as Gaoligong Shan and the only road across it is the G556 which brings us up to 7,100 ft, the highest point we've reached so far on this tour. We dip down on the other side and after only one more pass, we finally reach the city of Tengchong, our home for the night.

### Highlights:

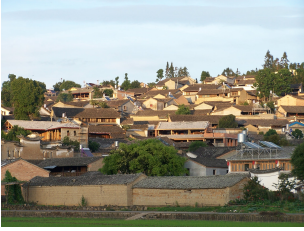
#### #1: Nujiang River



"Nù Jiāng" translates as "angry river" and the name says it all, as the water-rich river, which is roughly as long as the Danube, roars its way from the highlands of Tibet to the Indian Ocean. It plunges down almost 5,500 meters (18,000 ft), the Danube for comparison only a little more than 1,000 meters.

Together with the Yangtze and the Mekong, the Saluen, as the Nujiang is also known, forms the "Three Parallel Rivers National Park". As the name suggests, they flow in parallel from north to south, separated by mountain ranges with peaks as tall as 6,000 meters (19,700 ft).

## #2: Heshun Ancient Town



The delightful traditional village of Heshun is a suburb of the city of Tengchong and is located in the immediate vicinity of our hotel. The village once had over 6000 inhabitants, but most of them have sought their fortune elsewhere. Since tourism has been booming in Yunnan, many have returned, as Heshun has been spruced up and is now an attraction. The small alleyways between the traditional houses, the ponds full of lotus blossoms, and the

many small details are a feast for photographers.

## RIDING DAY 10 : TENGCHONG

### Standard Route (125 km / 78 miles)

After seven days of riding, it is about time to take another break and stay in the same place for two nights. Tengchong suits us just fine since there is a lot to see and do around here. For instance, you could sleep in, then play a round of golf at the Gaoligong International Golf Course, have lunch in the pretty village-cum-open-air museum, and spend the rest of the day soaking in a thermal spa pool. But you could also take your bike out for a big loop around the city, look at or even climb on one of those volcanoes, and visit a thermal area with hot pools, fumaroles, and a big waterfall in the middle. You could also try to combine and do everything. Just ask your tour guide!

### Highlights:

#### #1: Tengchong



Tengchong is the westernmost "real" city in southern China and became known in 1935 as the end point of the so-called Heihe-Tengchong Line, which was referred to as the "geo-demographic demarcation line". The area to the west and east of the line is almost equal (57% to 43%), but the population is extremely unevenly distributed at 6% to 94%. From a tourist point of view, the city is particularly interesting because of its hot springs, the young volcanic cones in the surrounding area, and the flourishing jade and amber trade. Did somebody say "souvenir"?

## RIDING DAY 11 : TENGCHONG - ZHIZILUO

### **Standard Route (325 km / 202 miles)**

A long ride lies ahead of us today, so in order to save some time we utilize the fast-growing Chinese network of expressways. Southeast of Tengchong, an elegant suspension bridge was built across the Longjiang Valley, shortening the drive from Baoshan to Tengchong by at least one hour. We cross this bridge in the morning and then change to another expressway before finally exiting to smaller roads.

The S237 follows the "Angry River" and takes us north, always wedged in between the river on our right and the Gaoligong Mountains on our left. Needless to say, the scenery is absolutely gorgeous and it's worth stopping here and there to take a look around.

The only town of any size in the valley is Lushui, counting about 200,000 people. About two-thirds of them are Lisu or Bai people, Han Chinese are a minority around here. With a bit of luck, you can see women in beautiful, colorful traditional dresses in the streets.

However, we are not going to spend any time in Lushui but continue north, towards our hotel. To get there, we have to master 13 hairpin turns. It's worth the effort, the lodge and its location are simply breathtaking!

### **Highlights:**

#### **#1: Longjiang Bridge**



At 1,196 meters, the suspension bridge, which has spanned the Longjiang River valley since 2016, is (currently) one of the 25 longest suspension bridges in the world. The roadway is 280 meters above the river, making it also one of the world's 25 highest bridges, almost all of which are located in China. The current record holder is the Duge Bridge, which stretches a whopping 565 meters above the

valley floor.

The Longjiang Bridge is definitely worth a quick photo stop!



## #2: Nujiang Valley



The Nu, which is also called the Salween or Saluen and is known by many other names - after all, it flows through areas belonging to many ethnic groups - is the largest free-flowing river in Southeast Asia. For now, it has to be said, because a whole series of huge dam projects are planned. In the border area between China and Myanmar and further downstream, where the Saluen forms the border between Myanmar and Thailand, areas the size of Luxembourg are to be flooded to produce "sustainable" electricity. Protests have led to most of the plans being put on hold for the time being, at least officially.

## RIDING DAY 12 : ZHIZILUO - DEQIN (DEQEN)

### **Standard Route (367 km / 228 miles)**

We continue our quest north, still inside the mighty canyon of the Nujiang. The mountains to our left and right are becoming higher and higher, soon reaching 4,000 Meters or more. Just a few miles to the west is the border with Myanmar, but there is no road to the other side. This is a very remote area.

In Pengdangxiang the road leaves the Angry River and crosses a mountain pass at over 3,500 Meters above sea level. Down the other side, we reach Lancang River and follow it northward. Soon, we can see the snow-clad peaks of Meili Snow Mountain rising to our left, a sight to behold. Given the long distance we traveled today, there may not be enough time left to take a closer look or even ride the funicular up to one of the glaciers, but tomorrow is another day.

Deqin, often spelled Deqen and not to be confused with Dêqên, is the northwesternmost city in Yunnan and the last outpost for those traveling on to Tibet. Translated from Tibetan, the name of the town appropriately means "auspicious place". Travelers can also test their resilience there against thin air as Deqin is situated at an altitude of about 3,300 m (18,800 ft). Our hotel sits another 400 m higher - we have reached the highest point of our tour. The views from the hotel across the valley over to Meili Snow Mountain are absolutely mindblowing!

### **Highlights:**

## #1: Three Parallel Rivers of Yunnan



Three of Asia's largest rivers, which flow from the Tibetan highlands through the deep gorges of the eastern Himalayas down to the sea, come very close to each other in northern Yunnan. The Nujiang (or Saluen/Salween), the Lancang (later called the Mekong), and the young Yangtze, still known here as the Jinsha, are separated from each other only by narrow but high mountain ranges, including the famous Meili Snow Mountains, whose highest peak rises to 6,740 meters. In 2003, an area measuring around 310x180 km was added to the UNESCO World Heritage List, not least because of its diverse flora and fauna, which is among the richest and most untouched in the world. After all, there are over 6,000 plant, 417 bird, and 173 mammal species here, many of which are endemic. These include the famous snow leopard and the red panda, aptly known as the cat bear.

South of the protected area, the paths of the three rivers diverge. The Saluen flows directly south into the Andaman Sea, the Lancang becomes the Mekong and reaches the South China Sea at Ho Chi Minh City and the Jinsha turns east, changes its name to Yangtze and flows into the East China Sea at Shanghai. It is the third longest river in the world, with the Mekong in 11th place and the Saluen in 26th place.

## #2: Meili Snow Mountain



Meili Snow Mountain Range has six peaks of 6,000 m or more. The highest one, and also Yunnan's highest peak, is Kawagarbo, or Kawa Kharpo in Tibetan, measuring 6,740 m (22,113 ft). Tibetan Buddhism considers the mountain to be the home of a warrior god and therefore sacred. In 1990 the local Tibetans protested heavily when a team of mountaineers from China and Japan attempted to climb the peak. All 17 members of the expedition died in an avalanche and to this day Kawa Kharpo, as well as all other major peaks of the range, remain unclimbed. From Thirteen Pagoda Viewpoint, the range looks stunning, especially during the morning hours.

## RIDING DAY 13 : DEQIN (DEQEN) - SHANGRI LA

### **Standard Route (206 km / 128 miles)**

Today is a rather short one, distance-wise at least, but don't be mistaken, the road is very curvy for most of the way.

Waving goodbye to Meili Snow Mountain, we leave our beautiful hotel and take the main road south. There is a brand-new 3.2-mile tunnel followed by another one which is 2.8 miles long, but - thankfully - the old road across the pass is still open for traffic. This twisty, spectacular mountain road takes us to 4,320 m of elevation ( 14,170 ft), making this the highest road point we reach on our tour. For reference: this is higher than Pikes Peak (14,110 ft)!

After rejoining the new road, we continue descending to the third one of the Three Parallel Rivers, the Jinsha. A beautiful vantage point gives us a panoramic view of this mighty river as it rushes through its deep gorge. We follow the river for a while, then cross it and leave it behind on our way to Shangri-La.

The city formerly known as Zhongdian is home to many minorities but is dominated by Tibetan culture. Tibetan Buddhism is all around, temples and houses are built in Tibetan style, and there are Tibetan food and typical souvenirs. In 2001, the city was renamed and called Shangri-La to boost tourism - and yes, tourism was boosted big time! The city's old town, which is not really old, is loaded with tea houses, souvenir shops, and restaurants, all trying to accommodate an ever-growing number of tourists. It's all very pretty, just not really real...

### **Highlights:**

## #1: Dongzhulin Monastery



Dongzhulin Monastery was originally built in 1667 but was partially destroyed during the Cultural Revolution. In 1985, it was restored to its former glory. Situated about 40 km southeast of Deqen in almost 3,000 m elevation, the large monastery complex can easily be mistaken for a small town. More than 300 monks live here today!

Many precious cultural relics from Tibetan Buddhism can be marveled at here, like gilded statues, script rolls,

instruments, and much more. The two largest Buddhas, 10.5 and 6.8 m tall, came as gifts from Sera Monastery in Lhasa.

So, turn some prayer wheels, smell the scent of yak butter candles, and listen to the monks chanting - and your mind will travel to Tibet. Oh, wait, you are in Tibet! Or at least within its traditional borders...

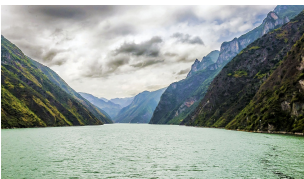
## #2: Great Bend of Jinsha River



The Yangtze, the world's third-longest river, has its source on the Tibetan Plateau and is called Jinsha River for the first 2,290 km (1,423 miles) of its course, losing 4,200 m (14,000 ft) of elevation along the way. It runs inside deep gorges for much of the way and carries large amounts of silt. 25 hydroelectric power stations are operating, under construction or in the planning stage, making the Jinsha one of the most productive rivers worldwide. The Great

Bend of the Jinsha, located about half-way between Lijiang and Deqin, is where the river is at its most scenic.

## #3: Yangtze River



The Yangtze River, known in China as Jinsha Jiang or Chang Jiang, is the longest river in Asia and the third longest in the world. It springs at the glaciers of the Qinghai-Tibet Plateau and has a length of 6,418 kilometers.

One third of the population of China lives along the Yangtze River and it empties into the East China Sea at Shanghai.

## #4: Shangri La



Shangri-La, formerly known as Zhongdian, is the capital of Diqing Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture and is located in Yunnan Province, in southern China. Shangri-La is a Tibetan word meaning 'land of holiness and peace'.

Shangri-La is unique for its Tibetan culture and mountainous landscape and is known for its snow-capped peaks and spectacular gorges. More than 20 national minorities live there; the Tibetans make up the majority of the population. The place offers an opportunity to get in tune with the Tibetan lifestyle and religion.

The best place to do this is the famous Sumtseling Monastery, which stands on a hill north of the city of Shangri-La. It was built in 1679 by the fifth Dalai Lama, largely destroyed in 1959 and restored in 1983. The largest monastery of Tibetan Buddhism in Yunnan used to be home to up to 2,000 monks, today around 700 live here and fill the place with life. Due to its size and importance, the monastery is often referred to as the "little Potala Palace".

## RIDING DAY 14 : SHANGRI LA - LIJIANG

### Standard Route (295 km / 183 miles)

The scenery that surrounds us along our way from Shangri-La to Lijiang is spectacular! Tiger Leaping Gorge, supposedly the world's deepest gorge, is just north of Lijiang and is our major highlight today. We follow the E Ring Road, across passes that reach 3,700 m, along wild rivers, and past countless impressive mountains. There is very little traffic along this road since the direct route along the modern expressway is much faster. But we're not here for speed...

After crossing the Yangtze on a brand-new bridge, the already twisty road becomes even twistier and climbs to an elevation of over two miles one more time before finally dropping into Lijiang. Along this stretch of road, you can frequently catch breathtaking glimpses of the Jade Dragon Snow Mountain and its 18,360 ft peak, Shanzidou.

Lijiang, our home for night, has a UNESCO-listed historic city center and quite a few things to do and see in the vicinity. We highly recommend staying here for an extra day!

### Highlights:

#### #1: Pudacuo (Potatso) National Park



Shangri-La became famous through James Hilton's novella "The Lost Horizon", which described the landscape as mysterious, with majestic snow-capped mountains, endless pastures, deep and steep gorges, blue lakes, and rural settlements. The Pudacuo National Park could be the real Shangri-La.

It is China's first national park according to the standards of the International Union for Nature Conservation. It is a UNESCO World Heritage Site with its lakes Shudu and Bitu, which are part of the landscape of the Three Parallel Rivers in Yunnan.

The park measures 1,295 km<sup>2</sup> and is famous for its untouched primeval landscapes full of lakes, swamps, forests, meadows, streams, and rare animal and plant species. Meanwhile, Tibetan culture and customs are also part of the park's concept.

## #2: "Tiger Leaping Gorge"



The Tiger Leaping Gorge is 16 kilometers long and the elevation difference between the Yangtze River and the snow-covered peaks of the mountains of Haba Shan is about 3,900 meters. It is possible to ride down the gorge by motorcycle and stop at Tina's Guesthouse.

From the guesthouse, there is a 40-minute walking trail down to the Tiger Leaping Stone.

A legend says that a tiger once jumped over the Yangtze River from this stone ...

## #3: Jade Dragon Snow Mountain



From Lijiang, you can see a huge, snow-capped mountain that looks like a jade dragon, sleeping up in the clouds. This is, you guessed it, Jade Dragon Snow Mountain. Its highest peak (there are 13 of them) rises 5,595 m above sea level and towers over the northern hemisphere's southernmost glacier. A gondola can whisk you up from 3,356 m to 4,580 m in minutes and you can walk to 4,680 on a spacious

walkway. Yes, there are many, many people up here when the weather is clear. When it is not clear it's not worth coming up as you won't see much.





We wish you a wonderful tour.

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