

The Best Time to Book a Tibet Holiday to Reduce the Costs

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As one of the hottest tourist destinations in [Asia](#), Tibet gets thousands of tourists every year, from all corners of the earth. And with it being a high-altitude region, with relatively poor transportation across the whole region, costs are much higher than similar tours in [China](#) and other parts of Asia. By planning your [Tibet tour](#) and Tibet holiday within your budget, you can cut down on costs, still have an amazing vacation, and be, literally, on top of the world.

Traveling to Tibet is normally expensive, and to accommodate all the things people normally want to do makes the tour even more expensive. As foreign tourists are not permitted to travel alone in the region, the cost of a guide can be quite prohibitive, especially if you are touring alone. On average, the guide costs around US\$30-US\$35 per day, and the cost of the vehicle is charged on a per-kilometer basis. So the longer the tour, the more expensive it gets.

The best way to counter this expense is to join a group tour, or get several friends who also want to visit Tibet to come with you. The more people that are in the group, the lower the cost per person. Tibet Vista has many group tours that you can join, traveling around your expected dates, which can help to cut the costs. Traveling with 8-9 other people reduces the individual cost of the guide and expenses.



Why travelling to Tibet needs careful budgeting

The unique landscape of the Tibetan plateau means that the costs of transporting passengers and goods across several [mountain ranges](#) and wide, expansive plains, is a costly business. Even for the shortest trip from [Xining](#), in Qinghai Province, the train journey covers around 1,956 kilometers, which is a massive distance to cover in a single train ride. Travel within the region can also be quite costly, especially since foreign visitors are not permitted to travel alone or use public transport. Roads are the only option for travel inside Tibet, and the main cities that you will visit are far apart, meaning days of intense driving to get there.

The cost of foods and commodities in Tibet can also be expensive, especially if you are not up to eating the local food, such as butter tea, yak meat, tsampa, etc. With very little in the way of vegetables, a lot of produce has to be imported for consumption by tourists, and the cost of importing things is quite high. The same can be said for the things that many foreign visitors take for granted at home. Simple things like batteries, camera film, and even medicines have to be imported from [China](#), making them more expensive than anywhere else you would buy them.



Travel in Tibet in winter seasons

The first, and probably the easiest way to cut down on the cost of a tour in Tibet is to plan your tour in the off-peak season for Tibetan tourism. Winter, from the end of October to early in February, is the low season in Tibet, and it means that you can save a lot on the cost of the tours, hotels, travel, etc.

Traveling in the winter may mean that there are some far-flung places that you would not be able to access due to heavy snow, though if you time it before the heavier snows come in late January, then even places like [Mount Everest](#) can still be reached easily. Many of the tour operators have lower costs for the period from late October to early February, which can mean around 35% less than during the peak period, which runs from April to the end of October.

Where you stay in Lhasa is also a feature of the trip that can be used to cut down on the costs. As much as it is nice to stay in the best hotels in the city, in reality, even in Tibet these top-class hotels are going to be very expensive. One example is the Shangri La Hotel, which, in the off-peak season, costs around US\$195 per person, per night. There are many other hotels in Lhasa where you can stay for as little as US\$30 per night, and which offer a good standard of accommodation as well as having all modern facilities. If you really want to work on a tight budget,

there are some hotels you can find that are as low as US\$11 per night, or budget backpacker-type hostels or guest houses, with dormitory rooms, that can cost as little as US\$4 per night.

Traveling to Tibet is another way of cutting down on the overall costs. As much as it is quick and convenient, flying is not always the best option for getting to Lhasa, unless you are traveling through [Nepal](#), which does not have an overland route at the moment. The most popular way for travelers to get to Tibet these days is on the special trains that run from seven different cities in China to Lhasa.

The main reason people prefer to take the train, though, is not the cost, since it is not that much cheaper than flying. From Chengdu, for example, the cheapest flight to Tibet will cost around US\$102, one way. For a hard sleeper bed in the Tibet train from [Chengdu](#), it will cost around US\$100 in the peak season, although this price can drop drastically in the low season, which means a greater saving compared to flying. However, the train does have plenty of attractions that an airplane does not. While it can take from one to four days to travel to Tibet by train - depending on your departure location - the trip is filled with amazing sights that you would not see on a plane.

Finally, with winter being the low season, the attractions in Tibet are less costly as well, especially in the more remote areas where tourism is normally only popular in the summer. The winter months tend to see a distinct drop in the cost of [entering the temples](#), monasteries, and other such sites that are spread across Tibet. Mount Everest also becomes cheaper in the winter than in the summer, for everything from the cost of the tent hotels at the Base Camp site to the food you can buy there, and especially the actual cost of the tour that includes a visit to Everest Base Camp.



Other benefits:

Crowds are a big issue for some people, and if it is one of your pet hates to visit places that are filled with milling tourists, then winter is the best time to visit Tibet. If you are not overly concerned with it being hot, and want to avoid the rains, then winter is the perfect time for you to visit Tibet.

Many of the best religious festivals are held in the late fall and winter seasons. The Ongkor Festival is in the eighth month of the Tibetan Calendar, or late October. Late in October is also the time for the Unveiling Festival of the Tibetan Thangka paintings, and the festival of Tsong Khapa's death is held in December. Losar, the Tibetan [New year](#), normally occurs around the 3rd-4th week of February, and is the biggest celebration in the Tibetan year.

Winter is also the time of year when the skies are clear, and it does not rain. Less clouds means better visibility, which in turn means better photography. And there are literally millions of things to photograph in Tibet.



Travel documents needed

For anyone visiting Tibet, the main document you will need, aside from the visa to enter China, is the Tibet Visa, more popularly known as the Tibet Travel Permit. This document is needed to be able to board the train or flight to Tibet, and will be asked for whenever you reach a checkpoint in the region, as well as being necessary to obtain the permits for other areas you may want to visit.

Other permits required are the Alien Travel permit, which is required to get into restricted areas in Tibet, and the Military Permit, which is needed for the military-sensitive areas. These permits are obtained by your guide in Lhasa, and will require your passport and Tibet Travel Permit to obtain.



Highly recommended tour itineraries in winter season

Some of the best tours in winter are those around the region's capital, Lhasa, or out to Shigatse, the second largest city in the region. These tours are designed to maximize your time, and can be useful to be able to see a lot of the people, culture and religion in a limited time.

New Year is the best time for festivals in Tibet, as Losar, the Tibetan New Year is the most popular and important festival in the Tibetan calendar. A short, five-day tour allows you to join a local family for the festivities, and eat traditional local food. You will also be able to visit the most important temples and monasteries in and around Lhasa, such as the Jokhang Temple, Potala Palace, Norbulingka, and the Drepung, Sera, and Ganden monasteries. The tour gives you ample time to thoroughly enjoy the celebrations and experience the unique aspects of the Tibetan New Year, like the prayers in the monastery and circling the kora around Jokhang Temple with the pilgrims.

Another great five-day tour for winter, is the short-tour Lhasa option, which allows you to spend a lot more time visiting the holiest of monasteries in Lhasa,

such as Jokhang, Sera, Drepung, and the Potala Palace, as well as getting out of the city to visit the beautiful Tsurphu monastery, as well as the spectacular Hot Springs at Yangpachen.

If you want to go a little further afield, a six-day trip through central Tibet is ideal, and winter is a great time to visit such places as Gyantse, Shigatse, and holy Yamdroktso. The tour also includes the best of the Lhasa temples, the pristine whiteness of the Karola Glacier, the famous Pelkor Monastery, and the holy Mount Nyenchen Khangsar, as well as the home of the Panchen Lama, at Tashi Lhunpo Monastery.

Despite what people may say, Everest can be visited during the winter, and an 8-day tour that covers the same sights as the six-day tour extends that extra two days to make a visit to see the majesty of Mount Everest, and the famed Rongbuk Monastery.