

# Top 4 Religious festivals in Tibet

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Tibet travellers are greeted well with a unique environment and a unique culture. When you will come here to do [Tibet Tour and Travel](#), you will really feel like you are on some other planet. The cultural aspects of the place are driven from Buddhist literature but most of them have their roots from the [pre-Buddhism period](#). You may get the best influence of Tibetan culture from Tibetan festivals and cultural events of [Tibet](#). The Animistic and Shamanistic elements of Tibetan Buddhism have shaped the Tibet religious festivals and traditions.

None of the time is better than the religious festivals to visit and experience the unique Tibetan alpine scenery and Buddhist culture. Joining these festivals during your Tibet visit will add up to your memories of Tibet. Tibetan festivals are rich in contents like social recreation, agriculture, celebration and religion etc.



Below are listed 4 Tibetan festivals that people enjoy in Tibet.

# Tibetan New Year (Losar)

Tibetans were basically nomads who coexist with harsh environmental conditions on the Tibet plateau with harmony. Husbandry is the basic living for Tibetans since generations. When the crops had good harvest, they celebrated this happiness with singing and dancing. As time passed away, they mark the time of barley harvest as the beginning of New Year. Tibetan New Year is the most important festival of Tibet. It is the occasion which brings family reunions and prayer activities. Tibetan [New Year](#) is also called [Losar](#) which means “New Year”. The festival begins from the first day and last till the third day of the 1st month of lunisolar calendar of Tibet. The festival starts either in February or in March. The New Year offers a great opportunity to the travellers to enjoy the rich culture of Tibet with the locals.

At the time of Losar, people celebrate by some ancient ceremonies that revolve around the theme of good versus evil. You can see activities like Lamas passing through crowds, performing dance, amusing battles between ministers and kings and lots of merrymaking and singing.

Earlier the Tibetan New Year was celebrated for 15 days but the main celebrations are made in the first 3 days of the festival. Tibetans make special offerings to deities of the family shrines, eat Guthuk which is a barley crumb food with fillings and paint religious symbols on the doors. During breakfast, people dress up to go to monasteries and offer prayers.

Beverage made from Chhaang is served on the first day of the festival. This Chhaang is like a cousin of beer in Tibetan flavour. Festival's 2nd day is called King's Losar or the gyalpo Losar. On 3rd day, the old flags of prayers are replaced with the new ones. At the time of Losar the Tibet's ancient capital is filled full with dances, songs, firecrackers and a joyful atmosphere.



## **Sage Dawa Festival**

The Saga Dawa festival falls on the fifteenth day of the 4th month of the Tibetan calendar. This day is believed to be the birth day of Lord Gautama Buddha, stepped into the buddhahood and attained parinirvana. The month is known as the Saga Dawa itself which means the month of merits. 15th day of the month is the holiest month as it is full moon on that day. The entire month is dedicated to merits including pilgrimages to sacred and religious places, dana practise, donations to individual monks or temples. Donations are also given to beggars and poor people. On the 15th day, meat is not consumed by the people of Tibet. They only eat vegetarian food. Tibetans also refrain themselves from hunting and killing of animals in the entire month.

Also the Tibetan people are busy in visiting to various monasteries. After going to monasteries, Tibetans go for picnic to Lhasa. The best way to experience the festival is to join the crowds and to visit the Dzongyab Lukhang Park located at the base of the Potala Palace for a picnic in late afternoon.

Hundreds of people can be seen circling around Mt. Kailash, Lingkor, Tsekhor and the Barkhor. The festival honours the Buddha life. The traditions say that at the time of Buddha's death, he instructed his followers to not to honour him with

flowers and lights but the real honour to him is following his teachings to live a noble, compassionate and kind life. He urged to not to weep on his death but should remember that all the compound objects will eventually disintegrate. Different Buddhist countries celebrate this festival in their own way.

Every year near Kailash Kora, the flagpoles are hung with thousands of multi colored flags. Each flag represents the prayer which one wants to get fulfilled. The flags are allowed to fly in the air so that their potential of answering is increased. It is said that if the pole is not set upright, the Tibet is soon going to be in trouble. It is very important to make the pole stand up right. People feel joyous and relieved if the pole is set upright.

The other thing to do is to pray for the longevity of gurus of all religions. People light many butter lamps. The butter lamps are clarified with vegetable oil or yak butter with a wick in the bowl. Smokey lights are produced by the lamps. According to the Buddhist tradition in Tibet, if lot of lights are burned together they are conducive for focusing and meditating the mind.

Buddhist across the world knows this day as Vesak or Vesakha.

## Shoton Festival

It is again an important festival of Tibet. It occurs annually in August or in the late 6th month or the beginning of 7th month as per the Tibetan calendar. It is also called Yoghurt Festival and has its roots in the 17th century when the pilgrims served yoghurt to monks who came for a summer retreat. Afterwards, local opera performances were also added to amuse the monks in the event. It is an occasion for tourists to enjoy well in Tibet. This festival will give you special feeling of Tibetan culture. It is also the peak time of tourists travelling to Tibet. The main activities of celebration are concerned to the western Lhasa at the Norbulingka Summer Palace. In the Drepung Monastery, the Giant Thangkas of Buddha are unveiled. This is one of the largest and mysterious festivals of Tibet. Shoton festival is a showcase to the rooted traditions of Tibet and appealing culture. Global travellers urging to [discover the snow capped mountains](#) and turquoise lakes on the forbidden land come here at this time every year. The festival has three parts, yak race, horsemanship show, and the Tibetan Opera Show. They together represent the best tradition, culture and religion of Tibet.

The main attractions of the festival are- crowd of people near giant Thangka and throwing the white Khada on them, sangsol in the entire city, large number of journalists from all round the world, horsemanship display and Yak Racing, opera performance at the Norbulingka Palace, Jampa thangka hanged at the Sera and

Drepung Monastery, sutra bugle's sound reverberating in the valley, and hundreds of pilgrims gathering at the Sera and Drepung Monastery.

You may shoot the unveiling ceremony of Tangka at the Drepung Monastery during evening and at Norbulingka, you can shoot the Tibetan Opera Performance.



## **Tsongkhapa Butter Lamp Festival**

Chunga choepa or the butter lamp festival is in the first month as per the Tibetan calendar. The festival marks the event of commemoration of Shakyamuni Buddha's victory against heretics during a debate over the religious matters about 2500 years ago. During this festival, numerous butter lamps are enlightened and sculptures of birds, flowers, animals, buddhas made of butter are displayed.

The festival offers a very interesting sight. The best experience can be gained at Lhasa in the Barkhor Street. It is an ancient street that surrounds the Jokhang Temple. It is a magical street which shows the original outlook of the country and is more colourful during festivals.

As the darkness falls, stands are placed and butter lamps are lighted on it. The stand is as high as a three story building. The lamps can be either small or grand. The streets are bright. People dance and sing with lamps. This festival is also called the Lantern Festival. Puppet show event is also organised at night. Under the lamp shine, brilliant lights, colourful and crowded masses revolve here and there and the street appears very bustling.

The butter lamp festival is organised in every monastery of Tibet and form a great

fair. When the lanterns are lit, it seems like stars are falling to earth and twinkling there. The people enjoy this festive holiday very happily. The Jokhang [temple](#) also conducts many religious activities. Each of the monasteries conducts similar commemoration activities.