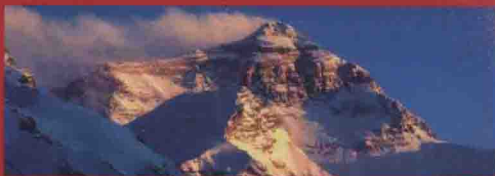




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T ravel in Tibet



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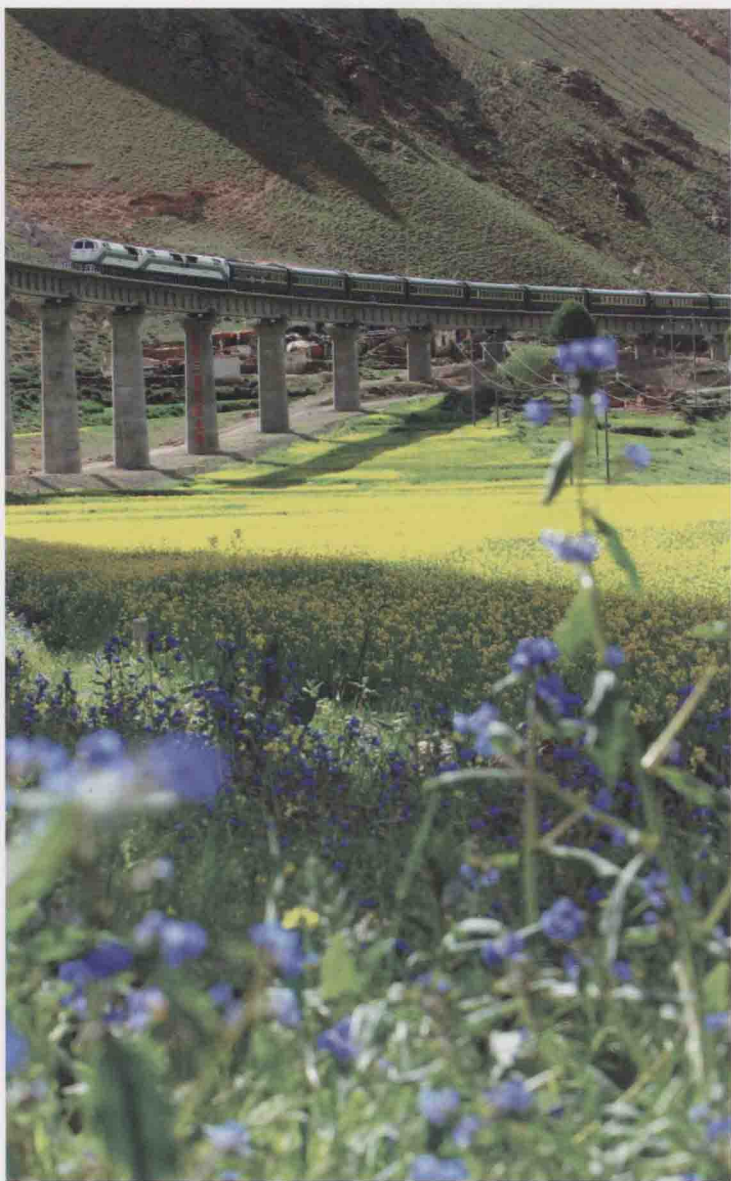
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■ Blossoming wild flowers along the Qinghai-Tibet Railway.

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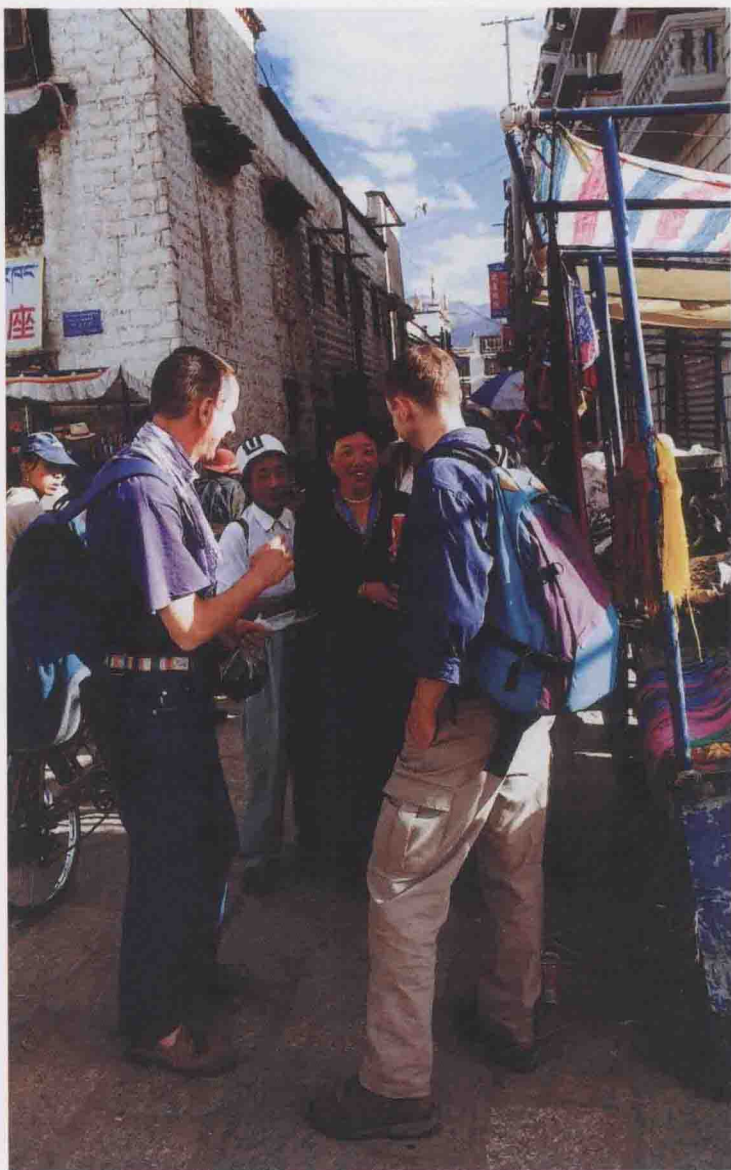
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I

Tourism Resources

Tibet is richly endowed with tourism resources. Its varied landforms can be roughly divided into the following three types: the Himalayas mountain area; southern and northern Tibet plateau lake areas; and eastern Tibet high mountain and valley area, featuring grasslands, wetlands, lakes, meadows, river valleys, forests, highland glaciers, snow-capped peaks, geothermal fields, etc. The region boasts more than 50 peaks each with an elevation of 7,000 meters above sea level, in addition to five that are over 8,000 meters above sea level. These include Qomolangma, the highest peak throughout the world, which is famed as "The Third Pole of the Earth." The Tibet plateau is the source of four major rivers in Asia. Tibet also has three lakes each covering an area of over 1,000 sq km. The forest area and the total reserves of living wood in Tibet rank fifth and first respectively in China. With abundant





■ Foreign tourists at Barkhor Street in Lhasa.

forest resources, the forest coverage rate reaches 9.8 percent in the autonomous region.

Furthermore, Tibet boasts three world-class nature reserves, namely, the Qomolangma Nature Reserve, the Northern Tibet Changtang Nature Reserve, and the Eastern Tibet Yarlung Zangbo Grand Canyon Nature Reserve; and one state-class scenic area, that is, the Yarlung State-class Scenic Area. Its natural scenery mainly includes the snowy mountainous areas of the Himalayas, the grassland scenic area featured by the Changtang Grassland in northern Tibet, the natural scenic area characterized by dense forests and deep gorges in eastern Tibet, and the highland lake and mountain scenic area characterized by sacred mountains and holy lakes in Ngari. The sacred mountains and holy lakes epitomize the



■ Tagten Migyur Potrang in Norbu Lingka, built in 1954 by the central government for the 14th Dalai Lama.

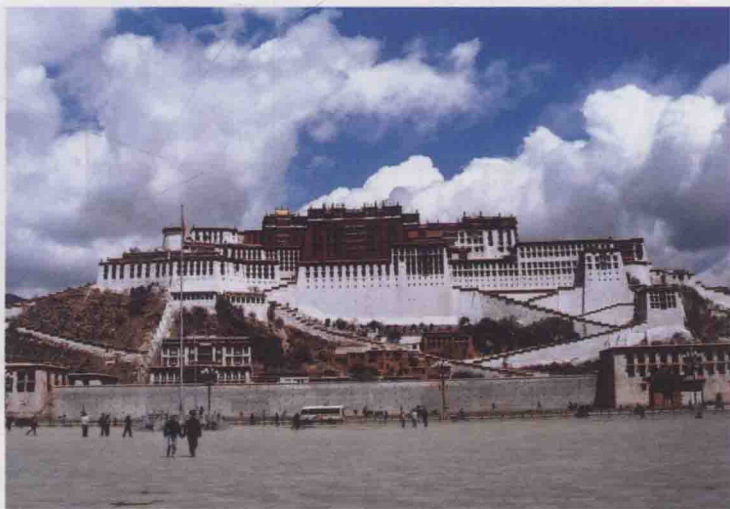


scenery of the highland snowy mountains and lakes. Nam Co is representative of grassland lakes while Basum Co is representative of the highland forest lakes.

The long history resulted in a rich cultural heritage for the Tibet Plateau. Abundant humanistic resources have already developed into a spotlight in the development of Tibet's tourism industry. Now, Tibet prides itself on more than 1,600 well-preserved and well-managed monasteries. These monasteries house numerous invaluable classics that are of great values for research and the eye. The varied simple and unaffected folkways of the Tibetans give rise to five distinct humanistic tour areas and they are the Tibetan political,

■ Tibetan women in their festival best in the pasturing area of Damxung County.





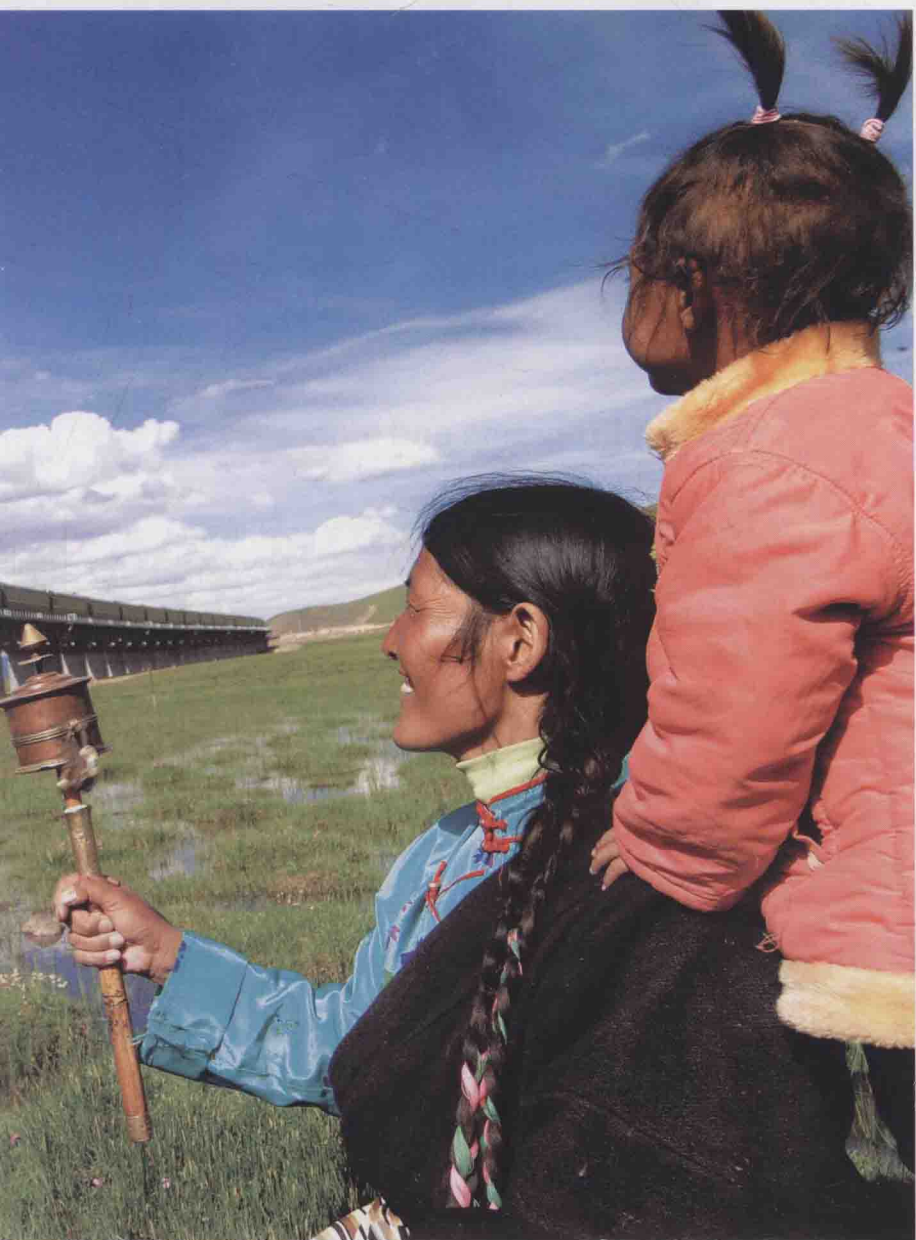
■ Potala Palace.

economic, religious, historical and cultural tour area centering around the Potala Palace and Jokhang Monastery in Lhasa; the Tibetan culture cradle area represented by the Yongbulakang, Samye Monastery, Qamzhub Monastery and Tombs of the Tibetan Kings in Ngari; the religion and culture tour area featured by the Tashilhunpo Monastery and Sagya Monastery in Xigaze; the cultural relic and ancient site tour area represented by the “ruins of the Guge Kingdom capital” in northwest Tibet; and the Kham culture tour area epitomized by the “tea-horse trade route” in Qamdo, etc.

In addition, Tibet boasts three world-class cultural heritages — the Potala Palace, the Jokhang Monastery and the Norbu Lingka; three state-class historical and cultural cities — Lhasa, Xigaze and Gyangze; one 5A scenic area — the Potala Palace; four 4A scenic areas — Jokhang Monastery, Norbu Lingka, Tibet Museum and Basum Co Lake; one state-class



■ A speeding train on the Qinghai-Tibet Plateau.





outstanding tourist city — Lhasa; some 2,000 cultural relic sites under regional-level protection, and 35 cultural relic sites under state-level protection, and 168 cultural relic sites under protection at the prefecture and county levels. The Lhasa-Xigaze-Gyangze “golden triangle” history, religion and culture tour area has been opened and a plan has been drawn to extend the route to Ngari in northern Tibet and some places in southeast Tibet.

Tourism Programs and Itineraries

Tibet has kept developing new tourist programs focusing on its local characteristics and unique folkways since the

■ A sliding cable over the Yarlung Zangbo Grand Canyon.





■ A view of the Sera Monastery in Lhasa.

21st century. These programs include, apart from the traditional sightseeing, culture, folklore and eco-environment tours, such unique ones as mountain climbing, skiing, exploration, automobile driving, biking and hiking, horse riding, boating, hunting, fishing, hot balloon, sunlight bathing and hot spring bathing, etc. Currently, four unique tourism itineraries have been opened, and they are: Lhasa-Nyingchi-Shannan eco-tour circuit; Lhasa-Xigaze-Ngari sightseeing and pilgrim route; Lhasa-Xigaze-Tingri-Zhangmu sightseeing route; and Lhasa-Nagqu-Qinghai Grassland sightseeing route. Centered on Lhasa, the services bring together Xigaze and Shannan and extend to Nagqu, Ngari and Nyingchi, offering over 60 scenic spots for tourists.

Located in a low latitude zone, Tibet has big daily difference but small annual difference in temperature. Especially in southeast Tibet, the climate is pretty mild in winter, like late autumn in north China. Thus, having a sunshine bath on the Qinghai-Tibet Plateau in winter may turn out to be a unique experience for any tourist. In order to effectively promote Tibet tourism in the slack season and make it possible





for more tourists to come and enjoy the charm of Tibet's unique culture and natural beauty in winter, the tourism department in the autonomous region is hard at work to improve an action plan to promote tours in the slack season by way of holding various promotion events.

In fact, there are many things for tourists to see in Tibet during winter. It is especially so in the Nyingchi Prefecture where there are the Yarlung Zangbo Grand Canyon, the Maindui Glacier and Bokam Town Spruce Forest, just to name a few. In autumn and winter every year, the land of Nyingchi presents an extremely beautiful view when it is in colorful hues, with the best time to visit being the turn of the year.

Moreover, in winter the people in Tibet hold many celebrative activities, such as the Festival of Lights and the Tibetan New Year. Watching them with their own eyes, the tourists are sure to have a more profound feeling of the thick religious atmosphere of Tibet.

Qomolangma stands at 8,844.43 meters above sea level and is thus universally held as the highest peak in the world. Rongbuk Monastery, a famous one of the Nyingma Sect of Tibetan Buddhism and standing at an altitude of 5,100 meters, is named "the monastery at the highest altitude in the world." The Qomolangma National Nature Preserve boasts more than 2,300 species of higher plants and over 270 kinds of animals, of which 33 are rare ones put under state protection. All these hold a great appeal to visitors from home and abroad. In 2007, the tourism department in Tibet made great efforts to develop tourism around Mt. Qomolangma, hosting some 40,000 tourists in total, an all-time high. In 2008, Tibet plans to launch three new tour routes in conjunction with the torch relay activities for the Olympic Games in Beijing.

II

Folk Customs

Tibet is rich with festivals. According to the Tibetan calendar, the Tibetans celebrate over 100 major or minor festivals in a year, each with different content and different activities. They include those offering sacrifice to gods or ancestors, farming, commemorations, celebrations, social contact, so on and so forth. In general, the numerous festivals can be divided into two major types, that is, traditional ones and religious ones. Of course, many traditional festivals are also tinted with religious hues.



■ Little Tibetan sisters.





Major Festivals in Tibet

Festival	Time (Tibetan Calendar) and Major Content
Tibetan New Year	First day of the first Tibetan month; the most important festival for Tibetans
Grand Summons Festival	In the first ten-day period in the first Tibetan month; lamas and nuns gather in the Jokhang Monastery in Lhasa for prayer and sutra debate
Lantern Festival	The 15th day of the first Tibetan month; people light butter lamps and put up lamp frames and shelves to worship Buddha; they also make human figures, flowers, animals and birds with butter for visitors to see
Bathing Festival	In the first ten-day period of the 7th Tibetan month and lasting for about a week; Tibetans go to nearby rivers to bath in groups, hence the name of the festival
Shoton (Yogurt) Festival	Late June and early July in Tibetan calendar; mainly Tibetan opera performances, hence its other name "Tibetan Opera Festival"; now, it has become an annual event that combines Tibetan opera performance with trade talks, mass recreation activities, tourism promotion, etc.
Horse Racing Festival	July and August in Tibetan Calendar; now, horseracing is combined with folk dancing, traditional costume show, art performance, trade fair and various promotion activities
Ongkor (Bumper Harvest) Festival	Celebrating bumper harvest when crops are about to ripe; activities include horse racing, archery and Tibetan opera performance
Sagya Dawa Festival	15th day of the 4th Tibetan month; marking the birthday of Sakyamuni; Tibetan Buddhism believers go out their homes to hold grand sutra-chanting gatherings
Tsangmoling Gyisang Festival	Meaning "World Burning of Aromatic Plants" and held on the 15th day of the 5th Tibetan month each year; Tibetans visit "linka" woods to sing and dance, and picnic