The western part of China's Sichuan province is dominated by the mighty Himalayas which, in turn, give rise to the vast open steppes of the Tibetan plateau. To the north, the sweeping grasslands of one of the world's largest natural reserves gradually disappears into the seemingly empty sand plains of the Gobi desert, while to the south, some of the holiest sites in all Buddhism centre on the ancient city of Lhasa, where the vast, citadel-like palace of Potala marks the ancestral home of the Dalai Lamas.

This unique expedition offers you the opportunity to explore the steppes of the Tibetan plateau in search of some of the most isolated and majestic cultures on Earth, whilst at the same time experiencing some of the plant and animal life that calls this region home. With hot and dry summers and some of the coldest winters on the planet, much of what can be found here is endemic, including a vast array of spring flowering alpine plants that include slipper orchids, Himalayan poppies, numerous Primula and peculiar Rheum, all set within a landscape littered with ancient temples, monasteries and stupas, which are integral to Tibetan life.

**COST:** US$4,050 per person for 14D/13N (all inclusive, including return Lhasa flight) (equivalent to approximately UK£3,120 or €3,500). Single supplement US$480

**START POINT:** Chengdu, China

**END POINT:** Chengdu, China

**DATES:** Sunday 30 June to Saturday 13 July, 2019

**GROUP SIZE:** 8

Email [sales@redfernadventures.com](mailto:sales@redfernadventures.com) for more information and to make bookings.

**Optional post-expedition extension:** 3D/2N Beijing excursion (cost dependent on number of participants):

**Day 1:** We explore the Great Wall of China at Mutianyu, before returning to Beijing to experience the city’s vibrant street food night market.

**Day 2:** We visit the extraordinary Forbidden City and Temple of Heaven. The Forbidden City lies at the heart of Beijing and its 8,700 rooms once served as the imperial palace for 24 emperors during the Ming and Qing Dynasties (1368–1911). It was first built over the course of 14 years during the reign of Emperor Chengzu during the Ming Dynasty. It was forbidden to enter the vast structure without special permission of the emperor, hence its name. In the afternoon, we will visit the Temple of Heaven, a world heritage site since 1998 and a site of prayer for Chinese emperors. We finish with a famous Beijing roast Duck dinner.

**Day 3:** Departures from Beijing or a return flight to Chengdu.

**Getting there:** Chengdu International Airport is served by Air Asia, Air China, ANA, China Airlines, China Southern, Etihad, Garuda, KLM, Qatar Airways, Thai Airways and United Airlines among others.
**Day 1:** An orientation day exploring the historic city of Wangjiang and its bamboo park, home to 146 species of bamboo. Wangjiang features Qing Dynasty architecture, including officer’s accommodation and teahouses, with opportunities to sample local food.

**Day 2:** We visit a giant panda research facility, home to over 100 giant pandas of different ages, as well as red pandas and a variety of birds. After a traditional Sichuan lunch, we drive to our destination, Labahe Nature Reserve (1900 m), where we overnight at a hotel where water and sambar deer feed right outside our accommodation.

**Day 3:** We explore the alpine zone above Labahe for alpine flowers, spectacular scenery and birds before descending to a forest habitat known for its red panda. Labahe is also home to giant panda, Sichuan takin, golden monkey, Tibetan macaque, rhesus macaque and Chinese goral. After a late lunch we drive on to Kangding (2600 m), a mixed Tibetan-Han community.

**Day 4:** We explore a nearby mountain for spring flowers before ascending to the Zheduo mountain pass (4300 m) to search for alpine flowers including *Meconopsis*, *Androsace*, *Delphinium*, *Cypripedium*, *Galearis* and *Ponerorchis* orchids. We may have a chance to see Mt. Gongga (7556 m), the highest mountain in Sichuan. We traverse a significant Kangba Tibetan area and see unique Tibetan houses, monasteries, Mt. Yala and beautiful plateau scenery, including Xinduqiao and Daofu, famous for their beautiful Tibetan houses. We overnight in Luhuo (3000 m).

**Day 5:** We visit the home town of King Gesar, subject of the world’s longest epic (*The King Gesar*). We drive past Kasa Lake and make several stops to search for wildflowers. In the Ganzi area, we make a brief visit to the Dajing Monastery, which was built by Angweng Pengcuo, the disciple of the fifth Dalai Lama. We lunch in Manigange before ascending to Xinlu Lake and the Chola Pass (4900 m), the highest pass on our trip. We will explore alpine flowers around the pass, then descend to Dege, making short wildflower stops en route. Overnight in Dege (3270 m).

**Day 6:** We visit the oldest scripture printing house in the Tibetan region and learn about local spiritual practices. We then drive Yushu (3700 m), lunching en route in Siqu county. The scenic drive includes yak herds, alpine lakes, and chances to see Tibetan gazelle and Tibetan fox, white-lipped deer, and possibly blue sheep. Overnight in Yushu.

**Day 7:** In the morning we visit the largest Mani (inscribed prayer tile) pile in the world before visiting Jiegu Monastery with panoramic views. We then proceed to Qumalai (4200 m), a vast county located at the edge of Hoh Xil, the largest nature reserve in China, covering 47,000 sq. kilometres. The region is a wildlife paradise, and the harsh climate will allow us to search in several places for endemic plants like *Saussurea* and *Meconopsis*. Overnight in Qumalai.

**Day 8:** We spend a whole day driving into the Hoh Xil Nature Reserve, from grasslands to the margins of the Gobi Desert in search of plants like *Androsace*, *Rheum rhomboideum* and *Delphinium tangkulaense*, and wildlife like Tibetan antelope, Tibetan ass, wild yak, Tibetan gazelle, Tibetan fox and white-lipped deer. We will have picnic lunch and drive back to Qumalai in the late afternoon.

**Day 9:** Today we drive back to Yushu, stopping en route to search for alpine flowers and wildlife. We check in to our hotel for a well-earned rest.
Day 10: We fly from Yushu to Lhasa (3650 m) and transfer to our hotel. The rest of the day is spent with leisurely walks to famous Barkhor Street, the kora (pilgrimage route) around the Jokhang Temple, and Tibetan markets filled with uniquely clad clansmen from Tibet's outlying regions. We also visit small Buddhist chapels where lamas lecture to their flocks, and finally enter the Jokhang Monastery, the spiritual centre of Tibet. Overnight in Lhasa.

Day 11: Today is a day of cultural exploration, beginning with the iconic Potala Palace, an immense structure that has housed each of the successive Dalai Lamas and served as the headquarters of the Tibetan government since its construction in 1645. The palace is comprised of the secular White Palace and the sacred Red Palace, along with their ancillary buildings, including schools, chapels, a printing house and tombs. It contains more than 10,000 shrines, 200,000 images and 1,000 rooms. After lunch, we explore the Sera Monastery, an important spiritual centre for Buddhist monks. We watch monks animatedly challenge each other's interpretations of the scripture, simultaneously honing their understanding of Tibetan Buddhism and their debating skills. Their lively debate and loud clapping provides a great contrast to the introspective side of Lhasa. Overnight in Lhasa.

Day 12: We visit Xiongse Nunnery to see the endemic Tibetan eared-pheasant, as well as various wildflowers. On arrival, we must access the nunnery via a hiking trail. The Buddhist tradition of being merciful toward life is celebrated here, demonstrating a harmonious coexistence between human beings and wildlife. Around the nunnery, we have good chances of encountering a number of endemic birds—besides the eared-pheasant, we may encounter giant babax and rosefinches. Overnight in Lhasa.

Day 13: Today we return to Chengdu by air. On arrival, we transfer to our hotel in central Chengdu before going for lunch. After lunch at popular local popular, we visit the famous Jinli Market shopping street. Finally, we enjoy a farewell dinner at a local restaurant in the city centre. Overnight in Chengdu.

Day 14: Departures from Chengdu airport.
SIMPLIFIED ITINERARY

Vehicle Transfer

Air Transfer

Chengdu

Labahe

Kangding

Luhuo

Dege

Yushu

Qumalai

Lhasa

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