



The Kham Riders (Tagong Festival)

CHINA

A **trail ride** in the heart of Kham in eastern Tibet, home to the proud Khampas warriors. After visiting an amazing equestrian Tibetan festival, spend 8 days on horseback riding through high grassy plateaus with your belongings carried by a team of yaks.

Pack Trip	 16 days / 10 days riding	 From £3,643	
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ITINERARY

Highlights

- Unique chance to be involved in the equestrian Tagong festival amongst the Tibetan highlands, where Khampas horsemen dress in their finery to race
- Complete immersion in local culture as we work directly with Tibetans in the Tagong valley
- Spend two nights with a family of nomadic herders in their camp
- A variety of accommodation: camping, nomad camps, Buddhist monastery, mountain retreat and guesthouse

Day 1 — 1: ARRIVE IN CHENGDU - KANGDING - No riding

Morning meet-up in Chengdu. You will be transferred by car to Kangding at 2600m. This journey takes about 4 hours, depending on the conditions of the road.

Kangding is a small mountain city and its inhabitants are mainly Han Chinese although there is a notable Tibetan presence and flair, particularly noticeable in its shops, restaurants and temples. For centuries it has been the meeting place for Chinese and Tibetan culture, and has served as a trading centre for tea and yak hide. It is also seen as a final outpost before the wild Tibetan mountains and passes of the Chengdu-Lhasa highway and the Tibetan region of Kham. Spend the night above the city at a hot springs guesthouse (3100m).

NB. If the weather has been bad and the road damaged by landslides etc. then you will fly up to Kangding instead.

Day 2 — 2: KANGDING - TAGONG FESTIVAL - No riding

Big race day! Drive to Lhakang, a small Tibetan town built around the Lhakang Monastery, surrounded by high grasslands. Mt Zhakra majestically overlooks the mountains and green plains. Attend the horse festival above the town, with morning horse blessings, and then spectacular races of the town, with long races, short sprints, and stunt races.

You will be completely immersed in Tibetan traditions at an equestrian festival that brings together the proud Khampas riders of the Tagong region. The horses are blessed with juniper smoke and then the races begin. Although the Tibetan horses are small, the ground shakes and emotions are high! This is also an opportunity for the Tibetan nomads to show their wealth in a spectacle of colourful traditional clothing. Participants wear colourful, shiny outfits and hats whilst ladies wear jewellery made from jade, amber, coral, ivory, silver and gold.

It is a true honour to be able to observe this festival which is still extremely rare and secretive. Your guide will help you with the local way of life so that you can completely immerse yourself in the warm Tibetan hospitality.

Spend the night at Khampa Nomad Ecolodge (3800m).

Day 3 — 3: KHAMPA - 3 hours riding

Today is an acclimatisation day. You will meet the horses and head out on a short ride near the lodge, at an altitude of 3800m. Spend the night at Khampa Nomad Ecolodge (3800m).

Day 4 — 4: KHAMPA - ZHAKRA MOUNTAIN - 4 hours riding + hiking

 Camp

After a short car ride to the trailhead at Gyergo Nunnery, you will ride out over the high Griffon Pass (4900m) with stunning views of sacred Mount Zhakra, 5900m).

Dismounting, you will then hike back down into the valley to camp at the Zhakra Hotsprings. You will hike for around 3 hours before making camp at 4100m.

Day 5 — 5: ZHAKRA - ZHAKRA YIMTSUO - No riding, 7-8 hours hiking

 Camp

Hiking day! Hike up from the hotsprings (7-8 hours) and cross over a high pass with close glacier views. This area is very wild and full of animals. Sleep near a high lake (4400m).

Day 6 — 6: JARA YIMTSUO - EMPTY VALLEY - GYERGO NUNNERY (3900m) - 6 hours riding

 Monastery

Your day will start with a ride out across the vast grasslands of the so-called "Empty" valley which is punctuated with the camps of nomadic families. Crossing a slightly lower mountain pass, you will arrive at the nunnery at Gyergo, in time for afternoon chanting with the nuns.

You will spend the night in a 'nunnery hut' in the grounds of the monastery at 3900m.

Day 7 — 7: GYERGO - YAK CAMP - 7 hours riding

 Nomad camp

Back in the saddle, you will ride up into the high nomad areas. Today's ride will take to the home yak camp of our guides. You will have the opportunity to watch as the herders bring in the animals, catch and tie the calves, and do the evening milking. Overnight camping near the farm, at an altitude of 4300m.

Day 8 — 8: YAK CAMP - BADI GOMPA - 6-7 hours riding

 Camp

In the morning, you are welcome to try yak milking, cheese and butter processing, yak fibre spinning for string and rope, and yak herding. Later, ride across the grasslands to Badi Gompa, a small nomad temple. Pass many small nomadic camps. Camp with views of deep valleys (4100m).

Day 9 — 9: BADI GOMPA - MEDITATION CAVE - 6 hours riding

 Camp

Ride in remote areas, passing high lakes, to a meditation cave. You will camp here (4500m) or lower as needed by the group according to

acclimatisation.

Day 10 — 10: DRAPA LAKE - 6-8 hours riding + hiking

 Camp

Today is a high ridge ride and walk with stunning views in all directions, reaching 4700m. There are parts of the ridges that are narrow and require walking the horses. This is a hard day for the riders and a challenge for the horses. Today's trail ride ends at Drapa Lake, a beautiful lake in a deep valley, with a small farmer/nomad village, and Choyu speakers.

Day 11 — 11: LAKES AND WATERFALLS - 6-7 hours riding + hiking

 Camp

Retrace your steps back out of the valley, walking part of the way, and then down a steep trail on the other side. You will see extremely remote lakes and waterfalls from this barely-there trail. Again, it is necessary to walk the horses. End at a small village with a lovely gold-roofed temple where you will set up camp for the night. Today you will reach 2900m.

Day 12 — 12: YIBEI LAKE - 5-6 hours riding

 Camp

Back in the easy grasslands, ride back up onto the plateau and to Yibei Lake, a high sinkhole (cenote) lake. Yibei is a great lake for swimming, but cold! Today you will reach an altitude of 4450m.

Day 13 — 13: GENUP GOMPA - 6 hours riding

Ride to Genup Gompa, a 300-year-old nomad temple perched on the side of hill. You will then be transferred by car (a 2-hour drive) to Zhonglu Village, near Danba. Stay in a lovely renovated courtyard hotel here at 1800m.

Day 14 — 14: RETURN TO CHENGDU - No riding

 Buddhazen hotel

Return to Chengdu by car over Balang Shan, and through Wolong Panda Reserve (not stopping, although this can be arranged if the whole group is interested). This is a long drive of around 6 hours.

Day 15 — 15: CHENGDU - No riding

 Buddhazen hotel

The day will be yours to do with as you wish in Chengdu. It might be possible to arrange a visit to the Giant Panda Breeding Centre (which usually welcomes babies in the summertime), the QingYangGong Daoist Temple, or the Tibetan quarter. You will spend the night at the Buddhazen hotel and enjoy a last dinner.

Day 16 — 16: DEPARTURE

You will be taken to the airport to catch your flight back to Europe or the US. You will likely arrive back home today, depending on your flight route.

DATES & PRICES

We are currently updating our dates and prices they will be online soon. If you want details of this holiday, please do not hesitate to contact us.

Price details

No departure for this destination. Please contact our travel advisers for more information.

- International flights are not included but can be booked upon request.

- Rates are per person based on two riders sharing a twin room/tent and communal rooms in gites.

- Groups are comprised of 4 - 8 international riders plus guides.

- The ride can also be booked for 3 riders with the addition of a small group supplement of \$550 / €510 / £425 per person, and for two people with a small group supplement of \$1490 / €1380 / £1150 per person. Once the group has reached 4 people, we will remove this supplement from your invoice and refund you if you have already paid it.

- There is a single supplement of \$1,025 / €950 / £790 if we are unable to find a sharer for you.

- Rider weight limit is 85 kg. Heavier riders please contact us.

- A visa is required to enter China and is your responsibility.

Please Note

The itinerary may be modified at anytime for security reasons, meteorological or events beyond our control such as blocked roads, rivers in flood, drought, strikes and local holidays. Equus Journeys, our local partners and their local guides will always strive to find the best solution and will alter the itinerary as needed.

The names of the hotels and accommodation are given for information only and depending on availability, they may be modified without notice and replaced by another of a similar standard.

Price includes

SUPPORT TEAM

1 Tibetan English-speaking tour leader

1 Tibetan-English interpreter and guide

LOGISTICS

1 horse equipped with saddle and bridle per rider

1 cook

1 horse and yak team

Luggage carried by yaks

INLAND TRANSPORTS

Minibus to and from Chengdu

Airport transfers (if your dates are different from the rest of the group, please contact us)

ACCOMMODATION

Camping - two-man tents and foam mattresses

Local standard 4-star hotel room in Chengdu (double/twin room)

Guesthouse accommodation - sharing a room with 2-5 people

MEALS

Full board during the ride - except meals when travelling to/from Chengdu

ADDITIONAL EQUIPMENT

First aid kit

Oxygen

Price doesn't include

MEALS

Beverages and personal extras

TRANSPORTS

Visa fees

International flights booked on request

EXTRAS

Small group supplement

Tips to local team

INSURANCE

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Cancellation and travel insurance are not included in the above listed price. Please note that insurance is mandatory. We recommend taking out an insurance policy as soon as your trip is booked to cover you in case of cancellation

Optional

ACCOMMODATION

Single room and tent supplement

EQUESTRIAN INFO

Horses

You will ride the local Khampas Tibetan horses which are in good condition. They are small, strong, resilient and ideal for the altitude and difficult terrain. You will ride using local leather saddles which have additional covers to provide extra comfort.

Guide & local team

A local tour guide will welcome you in Chengdu. Once you reach Tagong, you will meet your riding team. Your expedition leader is a Tibetan who married an American so their understanding of Tibetan and Western cultures is excellent.

Minimum riding ability

MINIMUM RIDING ABILITY

This mountainous trail is open to all riding abilities, from beginners to experienced riders. Most of the riding is in single file and the terrain means that the pace is slow. The horses are not difficult to ride although some will be more spirited than others. You have to be sensible with your bags and rainwear, for example, don't put your coat on when mounted as the horses won't be used to it and might be startled.

Rider weight limit is 85 kg. Heavier riders please contact us.

PACE

The ride is walking only - not just because of the altitude but because your belongings are carried by pack animals (yaks or horses) who accompany you each day.

TACKING ABILITY AND PARTICIPATION

The horses are groomed and saddled for you by your Tibetan team.

TRIP CONDITIONS AND REQUESTED EXPERIENCE

You need to be physically fit. You will need to dismount and lead your horse downhill for up to 3 hours at a time on mountain paths. There is also a full day of hiking, meaning you must be fit and able to hike on uneven terrain. You need to be prepared to accept sometimes unfavourable weather conditions - it can be cold at altitude and it may rain.

This ride takes place in a mountainous environment between 3,800m and 4,800m. All nights are spent at an altitude of 4,000m or lower. The altitude is increased gradually to help you acclimatise but you must respect the advice of your guide. You should speak to your doctor before joining the trip particularly if you have any medical conditions relating to your heart, blood pressure or respiratory system. You should prepare for the holiday by increasing your endurance training - fast walking, jogging, cycling, swimming etc.

All your belongings are carried by a team of yaks or horses.

Previous experience of adventurous travel is strongly recommended. An alternative to this ride is the Shamalong race which is less strenuous.

Please note access to medical facilities is limited and helicopter evacuation is not possible in the mountains - in certain cases evacuation may be by motorcycle and horseback until you can reach an ambulance.

Visiting a new country offers the opportunity to meet other cultures with different mentalities, therefore it is important to accept these differences and respect the local way of life.

EQUESTRIAN EQUIPMENT

We recommend taking your own stirrup leathers with you - this is because Tibetans ride very short and there may not be enough length to be comfortable.

We also recommend taking some leather laces so you can tie your coat behind your saddle.

We recommend our riders to wear a helmet to the correct standard and you should bring your own to ensure a proper fit

TRAVEL INFO

COMFORT

You will stay in a variety of accommodation. On some nights you will be camping in two-man tents (mattresses provided but you must bring own sleeping bag). On other nights you might be staying in a monastery, a mountain retreat or a guesthouse. During the ride and when camping, you will have access to different types of washing facilities - bathrooms with running water or rivers for both washing and laundry. You should ride knowing that you will be exploring some very remote parts of the country and that the accommodation will be basic.

In Chengdu, you will be staying in a local hotel.

MEALS

The meals are predominantly Chinese and Tibetan. The base is rice, accompanied by vegetable and meat dishes - with some spices and hot peppers. Meals are essentially savoury and there is no dessert, so we recommend that sweet lovers bring their own supply of biscuits!

During the trail:

Breakfast: coffee, tea, powdered milk, bread, jam, eggs or Chinese food (noodles, fried rice etc)

Lunch: Light picnic (bread, sausage, yoghurt)

Dinner: Rice, vegetables, meat - fragrant Chinese and Tibetan cuisine

In towns and villages you will eat in local restaurants.

Water:

Take care not to drink water from unknown sources. Mineral water is provided at every meal whilst on the trail, or you can refill your bottles using boiled water (or bring water purification tablets). In restaurants it might be possible to get beer or fizzy drinks.

CLIMATE

Rides are run during the summer season (June to September) when daytime temperatures are warm but the evenings and mornings can be cold. July and August are the hottest months with minimum and maximum temperatures of 22 and 30c in Chengdu. Temperatures at altitude can be much cooler and the mountains are the perfect place to escape the summer heat.

TIPS

If you are happy with the service that you receive from the local team then you may wish to leave a tip. To remain consistent with the standard of living in China we recommend a tip of c. £50 per rider which can be distributed amongst all of the staff.

PACKING LIST

Please pack in accordance with local religious and traditional cultures - it is important to keep your shoulders and knees covered when meeting the local people. Please do not wear shorts or strappy tops in towns and villages.

The maximum weight limit on this ride is 17kg per person due to the fact that we are using pack animals. We recommend packing in waterproof packing cubes or duffel bags.

Head

- Equus Journeys strongly recommend that you wear a riding helmet and that you take your own to ensure a correct fit. There are many lightweight options available nowadays
- Sunhat for when not riding
- Sunglasses - with a cord attached so they don't fly off when riding
- Buff or bandana
- Warm hat for cold nights when camping

Upper body

- Thermals (long or short sleeved)
- Long sleeved shirts provide protection from the sun and are an extra layer
- T-shirts

- Lightweight fleece or jumper
- Warm fleece or jumper (and a spare in case one gets wet)
- Warm and waterproof jacket - it can rain at any time of year and the evenings can be particularly cold

Legs

- Lightweight, comfortable riding trousers or jodhpurs - we recommend riding in them at home before taking them on holiday to ensure they don't rub
- Thermals
- Casual trousers for the evenings, such as jeans or tracksuit bottoms
- Waterproof over trousers
- Lightweight, comfortable trousers for non-riding days

Hands and Feet

- Comfortable riding boots. We recommend short boots with half chaps but you may wish to take long chaps as an extra layer against inclement weather. We don't recommend taking your favourite long leather boots in case they get damaged
- Waterproof shoes/boots can be useful for abundant dew in the mornings or when it rains
- Trainers or equivalent light shoes for moving around the camp in the evenings
- Several pairs of warm, thick socks
- Gloves - your hands are particularly exposed to the sun, cold or rain whilst riding. Waterproof gloves can be particularly useful

Nightwear

- Sleeping bag. You need at least a comfort factor down to minus 5 celsius, but would recommend at least minus 8 or 10 celsius.
- Sleeping bag liner - silk, cotton or fleece - adds an extra layer.
- Self-inflating mattress such as a Thermarest. (a thin pad is provided but an additional layer may be welcome)
- Pyjamas or tracksuits or thermals for sleeping in

Other useful items

- Swimsuit - for swimming/bathing in rivers
- Towels - lightweight camping ones will both dry and pack more easily
- Small backpack for accessing items required during the day (carried by support crew)
- Camera and high capacity memory card. Spare battery
- Bumbag for carrying your camera and small items whilst riding
- Headtorch or small torch for moving around camp at night - bring spare batteries and bulbs
- Water bottle (2 litres or 2 x 1 litre)
- Wet Wipes or equivalent (for when washing facilities aren't available)
- Toilet paper and a lighter to burn it with
- Small plastic bags for rubbish
- Ear plugs (for light sleepers)

In your hold luggage

- Any liquids, such as shampoo, moisturiser, deodorant unless they are less than 100ml and all bottles can fit in a small, clear, plastic ziplock bag. We recommend biodegradable washing products where possible.
- Swiss army knife (or equivalent)

In your hand luggage

- Any valuables, such as your camera, ipod, ipad etc.
- Your riding hat

Medical kit

- Sunscreen and lip balm - should be high factor
- Insect repellent, preferably containing deet
- Any medication you regularly take
- Blister plasters in case of any rubs
- Antiseptic cream, plasters, aspirin, anti-histamine, insect-bite salve etc...
- Spare prescription glasses/contact lenses
- Eye drops
- Imodium or similar anti-diarrhoea medication
- Re-hydration sachets
- Water purification tablets
- Antiseptic wipes
- Handwash gel

Our Recommendations

- Please don't take a hard sided suitcase. Your luggage should be soft sided with a capacity of 60-80 litres. We recommend taking a backpack or similar. The luggage limit on the ride is 15kg per person.
- Backpacks cannot be worn whilst riding. We recommend a small bum bag or a coat with pockets so that you can carry small items with you during the day (camera, sunscreen, lipbalm etc)
- We recommend travelling in your riding boots and carrying your hat and some riding clothes in your hand luggage - then if your luggage goes astray you are still able to ride!
- Tall riders may benefit from taking a pair of long stirrup leathers with them (the local stirrups are adjustable but are sometimes limited in length)
- We recommend taking a copy of your passport and insurance documents with you in case you lose your originals
- Please take your rubbish home with you. There are no recycling facilities in Tibet, so take your used batteries, aerosols etc back home and dispose of them appropriately. Try to leave excess packaging material at home before travelling

SUSTAINABLE TOURISM

1. **Travel light.** It's a little known fact, but the lighter you pack, the better for the environment as heavy bags will produce higher emissions (when flying a plane or driving a car!).
2. **Reduce plastic waste.** Take your favorite reusable bottle with you. Avoid single-use bags, cups, or straws.
3. **Preserve nature.** Always take your rubbish with you during the ride and recycle them. Leave all the flowers or plants as you found them, and never get too close when observing wildlife. Make sure to use eco-friendly products such as body wash or laundry detergent (if camping) to protect both your skin and the environment.
4. **Choose your experiences carefully.** Respect animal life by not participating in any activities that abuse wild animals (shows, elephant rides, etc.).
5. **Support local populations.** Buy local handicrafts, be respectful of customs, and learn about the culture of local communities.
6. **Share!** Raise awareness among your family and friends about sustainable tourism.

For more information please [see this page](#) .