Equus Journeys
HORSEBACK TRAVEL & EQUESTRIAN TRADITIONS SINCE 1972

+44 (0) 1905 388977 info@equus-journeys.com

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The Kham Riders (Gatar Race)

CHINA

A **trail ride in the heart of Kham in eastern Tibet**, home to the proud Khampa warriors. As well as visiting a Tibetan equestrian festival, the **Gatar Race**, you'll spend eight days on horseback, riding through high, grassy plateaus with your belongings carried by a team of yaks. On this adventurous and scenic trail, you will be completely immersed in the local culture, and have a rare chance to spend the night with **a family of nomadic herders** at their camp.

Pack Trip	14 days / 8 riding -	From £0	


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ITINERARY

Highlights

- See the Gatar Race – an equestrian festival in the Tibetan highlands, where Khampa horsemen dress in their finery.
- Spend eight days riding through remote parts of the country.
- Connect with the local culture and spend time with Tibetans.
- Experience a homestay with a family of nomadic herders in their camp (optional).
- Enjoy a real adventure with a variety of accommodation, including camping in tents and a night at a Buddhist monastery.

Day 1 — 1: ARRIVE IN CHENGDU

Buddhazen hotel

International flight to Chengdu (flights not included but bookable on request).

You will be collected from the airport and transferred to your hotel. Dinner is to your own account this evening.

Overnight at the hotel.

Day 2 — 2: CHENGDU - KANGDING - No riding

Today you will be whisked away into the Tibetan highlands of Kham, transferred by car to the mountain city of Kangding at 2600m. The journey takes about 4 hours, depending on the conditions of the road.

Kangding is a small 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.

Overnight at Yala Gou Hotsprings guesthouse (3200m)

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

Day 3 — 3: KANGDING - TAGONG - 2-3 hours riding

Ecolodge

After breakfast, you'll be driven to Tagong (approximately a two-hour drive) and settle into the ecolodge where you'll spend the night.

Then you'll meet the horses and enjoy an introductory ride of around 2-3 hours, before dinner and preparing for the trek ahead.

Overnight at the Khampa Nomad Ecolodge (3800m).

Day 4 — 4: KHAMPA - ZHAKRA MOUNTAIN - 4 hours riding, 3 hours hiking

Camp

You'll start the day with a 20-minute car ride to the starting point of the trail at the Gyergo Nunnery. Then you will ride out over high Griffon Pass (4800m) with stunning views of the sacred Mt. Zhakra (5900m). Dismounting, you will then hike back down into the valley to camp at the Zhakra Hotsprings.

Dinner and overnight camping (4100m).

Day 5 — 5: ZHAKRA MOUNTAIN - YIMTSO LAKE - 5 hours riding, 1 hour hiking

Camp

After breakfast, you will ride down into the valley and to the forest where you will camp overnight. After a picnic there, you'll ride up to the turquoise and sacred lake Yimtso, and do a traditional circumambulation of the lake on foot, visiting the active meditation huts and caves on the far side. Then you will ride back down into the valley.

Dinner and overnight camping (3700m).

Day 6 — 6: YIMTSO LAKE - 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.

Dinner and overnight a 'nunnery hut' in the grounds of the monastery (3900m).

Day 7 — 7: GYERGO NUNNERY - GATAR TEMPLE - No riding

Camp

You'll be driven to Gatar Gompa (temple) today to experience the yearly lama dance there (approx. a 1-hour drive). Your guide will explain the meaning of these amazing masked dances. The rest of the day will be free for you to relax and enjoy the festivities. You will camp nearby.

Dinner and overnight camping (3600m).

Day 8 — 8: GATAR HORSE RACE - No riding

Ecolodge

Today is the Big Race Day! The Gatar Horse Race is a community-based race at the main local farmer's temple near Zhakra. You'll enjoy the various race events: blessing the horses, the long race far across the valley and stunt races in the afternoon. Later, you'll be driven back to the ecolodge to rest, have a shower and sauna, and prepare for the next section of the trek.

Dinner and overnight at the Khampa Nomad Ecolodge (3800m)

Day 9 — 9: KHAMPA NOMAD ECOLODGE - DASHIKA NOMAD CAMP - 4 hours riding

Nomad camp

You'll ride up into the high nomad areas today – it's an easy trail which offers lovely scenery and ends at the home camp of the guides. On arrival at camp, you'll settle in, be welcomed by the nomads and get a taste of their traditional life (with time for yak herding if you're interested).

Tonight, there's also an opportunity for a nomad tent stay. Everyone will eat together, and those who'd like to, can stay with the nomads in their traditional tents -- this is an interesting experience and will give you a better insight into the local culture. Those who would prefer more privacy, can camp as normal.

Dinner and overnight with the nomads. (4200m).

Day 10 — 10: DASHIKA NOMAD CAMP - YIBEI LAKE - 4 hours riding

Camp

You'll spend the morning at Dashika Nomad Camp, enjoying the traditional life. You can try yak milking, butter processing, yak fiber spinning for string and rope. Leaving mid-morning, you'll ride to Yibei Lake, a high sinkhole (cenote) lake. This is a short 4-hour ride across the high plateau where you will see many nomad camps dotted across the area. Yibei is a good lake for swimming, but cold!

Dinner and overnight camping (4450m).

Day 11 — 11: YIBEI LAKE - LOOKOUT - RAGNI LAKE - 6 hours riding

Camp

Today you will ride west to a lookout area, across wolf and gazelle country and the Lhagang plateau's highest area. You'll stop for lunch at the lookout (4600m), with views of isolated hermitages nestled in the mountains. Afterwards, you'll drop down to see sacred Ragni Lake, home of the lammergeier (bearded vulture) that lives in cliffs and the site of many legends. You'll camp nearby.

Dinner and overnight camping (4200m).

Day 12 — 12: RAGNI LAKE - GENUP TEMPLE - KHAMPA NOMAD ECOLODGE - 6 hours riding

Ecolodge

Ride across the Lhagang Plateau's most populated nomadic area today, and if you're lucky, you may happen upon a religious festival. After lunch, you'll ride to Genup Gompa, a 300-year-old nomad temple perched on the side of a hill. Then it's a drive to Khampa Nomad Ecolodge with a quick stop for snacks in Bamei.

Overnight Khampa Nomad Ecolodge (3800m).

Day 13 — 13: TAGONG - CHENGDU - No riding

Buddhazen hotel

Today you will be driven back to Chengdu (approximately a 6-7 hour drive). If the group is keen, it is possible to stop at Bifengxia Panda Reserve, though this will add an hour to the drive. Dinner is to your own account today.

Overnight at the hotel in Chengdu.

Day 14 — 14: DEPARTURE

After breakfast, you'll be transferred to the airport for your flight home.

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 during the ride.

- Groups are composed of a minimum of 4 riders and a maximum of 8 international riders, plus guides.

- It is possible to confirm a departure for 2 or 3 riders on payment of a small group supplement. If the group has reaches 4 people, we will remove this supplement from your invoice and refund you if you have already paid it.

For 3 riders, the supplement is $790 / €685 / £590 per person.
For 2 riders, the supplement is $1450 / €1260 / £1085 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.

- To guarantee your own room in the hotel, the guesthouse and a single tent during camping nights, there is a single supplement of c. $700 / €595 / £520. Other accommodation during the trail is shared. There is no single supplement if you are willing to share a room/tent with another guest of the same sex.

- Airport transfers are included.

- Accompanied minors are welcome from 10 yo, provided they match the riding requirements

- If a visa is required to enter China, please note this 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

Tibetan and English-speaking local teams

LOGISTICS

1 horse equipped with saddle and bridle
1 cook

INLAND TRANSPORTS

Airport transfers

ACCOMMODATION

2x nights at a hotel in Chengdu (double/twin room)
Varied, shared accommodation during the trail, including camping nights

MEALS

Full board during the ride - excluding meals on Day 1 and dinner on Day 13 in Chengdu

ADDITIONAL EQUIPMENT

First aid kit
Oxygen

Price doesn't include

MEALS

Beverages and personal extras, meals on Day 1 and dinner on Day 13

TRANSPORTS

Visa fees (visas must be obtained in advance if required)
International flights

EXTRAS

Small group supplement
Tips to the local team

INSURANCE

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
Sleeping bag rental

EQUESTRIAN INFO

Horses

You will ride the local Khampa Tibetan horses. They are small, strong, resilient and ideal for the altitude and difficult terrain.

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 Djarga is a Tibetan who married an American so their understanding of Tibetan and Western cultures is excellent.

Minimum riding ability

MINIMUM RIDING ABILITY

This trail is open to all riding abilities, from low intermediate riders to experienced riders. Most of the riding is in single file and the mountainous terrain means that the pace is slow.

The horses are not difficult to ride although some will be more spirited than others. You should be sensible with your bags and rainwear, for example, please don't put your coat on when mounted as the horses may be startled.

Rider weight limit: 85 kg / 187 lbs / 13 st 5 lbs.

PACE

The ride is walking only - not just because of the altitude but because your belongings are carried by pack animals (yaks) 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

This ride takes place in a mountainous environment between 3800m and 4800m. The highest sleeping altitude is 4450m. The altitude is increased gradually to help you acclimatise but you should listen to the advice of your guide.

You will need to be physically fit and prepared for the conditions of the trail, including the altitude, unpredictable and changeable weather, camping and basic accommodation, spending many hours outdoors and riding in a remote location. Previous experience of adventurous travel is strongly

recommended.

You will also need to be prepared for some hiking over uneven terrain and for long days in the saddle. You will need to dismount and walk for up to 3 hours at a time on mountain paths, and you may need to lead your horse for some of the time. You should prepare for the holiday by increasing your endurance training - fast walking, jogging, cycling, swimming.

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. Please check with us before booking if you have any medical conditions as you will be far from medical help. Please note that helicopter evacuation is not possible in the mountains - in certain cases evacuation may be by motorcycle and horseback until you can reach an ambulance.

All your belongings are carried by yaks.

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

You will ride using local leather saddles which have additional covers to provide extra comfort.
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.
Saddlebags are available to borrow but there is limited availability, please ask us in advance, or you can bring your own.
Equus Journeys recommends that all guests wear a helmet to the correct standard and you should bring your own to ensure a proper fit.

TRAVEL INFO

COMFORT

You will spend the first and last nights at a hotel in Chengdu. During the ride, accommodation varies. You will spend 1 night in a hot springs guesthouse, 3 nights at an ecolodge, 1 night at a nunnery (staying in huts) and 6 nights camping in tents (with an option to spend 1 of these nights with nomads in their yurts).

For camping nights, basic foam mattresses are provided but if you'd like a blow-up mattress please bring your own. Sleeping bags are available to rent for $40 but should be booked in advance. (Please note that the team has very warm, -30 C sleeping bags. A comfort rating of at least -10 C is needed for this ride). During the ride and when camping, you may wash with running water or in rivers. Please note that you will be exploring some very remote parts of the country, and except for the nights at the hot springs guesthouse, the ecolodge and the hotel in Chengdu, there are no toilets or washing facilities. There will be a Tibetan style dining tent where meals are taken as a group.

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, box milk, bread, jam, eggs and ham.
Lunch: Light picnic (sandwiches, cheese, bread, sausage, yoghurt).
Dinner: Rice, vegetables, meat - fragrant Chinese and Tibetan cuisine.

In towns and villages you will eat at local restaurants.

Water:
Take care not to drink water from unknown sources. Swiss-quality water filtration is provided on the trail. Hot water and tea is also available with every meal. In restaurants, it may be possible to buy 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 10 and 25c on the ride. Temperatures at altitude can be even 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. £50-80 per rider which can be distributed amongst all of the staff.

PACKING LIST

Please pack carefully and sensibly: the following guide is here to give you an idea of what to bring. There is no support vehicle on this ride - all luggage and camping equipment is carried by yaks. Please bring a soft-sided waterproof duffel or dry bag, and note that your luggage for the trail should weigh no more than 15-17kg (excluding a sleeping bag which will be tied to your saddle). You can also take rain gear and a few items in your saddle bags, such as a fleece, warm gloves, water and some snacks (please just check with us about saddle bag availability, as you may need to bring your own).
If you have additional luggage, you may leave it at the ecolodge or at the hotel in Chengdu.
When packing, please also bear in mind local religious and traditional cultures, there is no need to cover shoulders but we recommend wearing trousers (instead of shorts) at camps.

Head
- Riding helmet - Equus Journeys highly recommends that our riders wear a helmet – you should bring your own to ensure a proper fit
- Sunhat
- Sunglasses - with a cord attached so they don't fly off when riding
- Buff or bandana
- Warm hat for cold nights

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. No ponchos or anything that can flap around!

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

Hands and Feet
- Comfortable riding/hiking boots. We recommend short boots with half chaps. We would also suggest something with a good grippy sole as there is some hiking downhill on this ride
- Trainers or waterproof shoes for moving around in the mornings or 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 10 C. It is possible to request a sleeping bag from the local team (limited availability).
- Sleeping bag liner - silk, cotton or fleece - adds an extra layer
- Pyjamas or tracksuits or thermals for sleeping in.
Please remember it can get very cold at night, especially if you are travelling in June/September: pack accordingly.

Other useful items
- Swimsuit - for swimming/bathing in lakes
- Towel - camping one will both dry and pack more easily
- Headtorch or small torch for moving around camp at night - bring spare batteries and bulbs
- Water bottle (2 litres or 2 x 1 litre)
- Small plastic bags for rubbish
- Ear plugs and eyemask (for light sleepers)
- Solar charger/powerbank
- A book

Medical kit
- Water-purification tablets
- Sunscreen and lip balm - should be high factor
- Insect repellent, preferably containing deet

- Any medication you regularly take
- Wet Wipes or equivalent (for when washing facilities aren't available)
- 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
- Antiseptic wipes
- Handwash gel

Please respect local traditions and customs:
- In the nomad tents, please avoid stepping on/over items. The fire, in general, is considered sacred, so guests should not dry their socks and shoes near and above the fire or throw rubbish into it.
- You may wish to take some photographs or postcards of your home with you to show your hosts. You may also wish to take some crayons, colouring books etc. for the children. Be careful not to take card games as these are frowned upon by the adults, who use them for gambling.

Other recommendations:
- We recommend travelling in your riding boots and carrying your hat and some riding clothes / any essentials and valuables in your hand luggage - then if your luggage goes astray you are still able to ride!
- Please print copies of your passport and insurance documents and take them with you.
- Please use a soft sided case / bag which can easily be transported.
- Backpacks should not be worn whilst riding. We recommend a small bumbag or a coat with pockets so that you can carry small items with you during the day (camera, sunscreen, lipbalm etc).
- 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 .