

WILD FRONTIERS



Wild Walk in Old China (Recce Tour) with Ed Jocelyn Yunnan

The Tea & Horse Caravan Trail once rivalled the Silk Road in importance. For more than 1,000 years it connected China with India via Tibet and Burma. Dizzying river valleys and towering mountain ranges made this the toughest caravan route in the world. This unique journey follows one of the loveliest and most significant stretches of this historic trail and in contrast to the modernisation that is sweeping through much of the country, provides a rare (& fading) opportunity to observe a slower paced and more traditional side of China. It begins in the shadow of the great Jade Dragon Snow Mountain, whose 5,596m peak towers above the ancient market town of Shuhe, where Tibetan traders once gathered to meet caravans from the south. From here in the heartland of the Naxi people, we will trek through villages and market towns virtually untouched by tourism, where the traditional lifestyles and character of the Naxi, Bai, Hui and Yi people are still visible. Accompanied by a full caravan of mules and muleteers, we'll take forgotten paths once trod by traders, Buddhist mystics, Christian missionaries, and rebels and revolutionaries of all stripes. After resting halfway in the extraordinary caravanserai at Shaxi, we will follow the hidden trail used by Kublai Khan's army to surprise and destroy the Bai kingdom of Dali. This is an unforgettable adventure through the culture, history and diversity of China's southwest.

*"As soon as I return from one Wild Frontiers adventure I start planning the next one!"
Shubha Chawla*

HIGHLIGHTS

- Traditional villages of the Naxi, Pumi, Yi, Hui and Bai peoples
- Colourful market days in Shaxi and Fengyu
- Pristine mountain and lake scenery along the caravan trail
- Learn the skills of a muleteer!
- Command performance of traditional Bai music in a restored Qing Dynasty temple

Duration: 16 Days

Average group size: 5 - 10

Start: Fri 06 Apr 12

Finish: Sat 21 Apr 12



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Why Wild Frontiers?

As a young, innovative company, Wild Frontiers is delighted to have been voted one of the 'Top 10 Tour Operators' by the readers of both Wanderlust and National Geographic Adventure. We are frequently asked what makes us different from other tour operators, and feel that the factors below answer this important question.

The Traveller's Ethos: WF is a company that has been set up by travellers for travellers, and our ethos is to help adventurous souls get to incredible and inaccessible places in safety and as much comfort as local conditions allow. We are firm believers that travelling is all about the experience and it's the details that make the trip - we specialise in drawing on our own extensive local knowledge and array of contacts to give our clients the very best experience possible.

Personal Service: Our London office is manned by experienced expedition leaders and every trip we run stems from their extensive knowledge - in short, we run the kind of trips that as passionate travellers, we like to do ourselves! When you ring our office, you can be guaranteed to chat to someone that knows the trips and the terrain, and is able to offer sound and practical advice.

Authentic Experiences: Our unique, original itineraries allow our clients to take journeys that venture beneath the surface of the region. Unlike the plethora of 'world specialists' out there who purport to know a hundred destinations, we concentrate on the locations we know and love. We don't run the same tour over and over, thus running the risk of creating a 'tourist circuit' and spoiling untouched regions. Instead, we rarely run any tour more than a couple of times a year and they are on routes we have discovered for ourselves, meaning we are able to give a truly authentic, off-the-beaten-track experience.

Be the First: Our style of travel is all about exploration, and nothing excites us more than opening up new routes to genuine travellers. We keep abreast of new destinations and are often the first to return to places that have vanished from the tourist map. We were the first back into Pakistan after 9/11, the first to return to Kashmir after a decade of tourist isolation, and the first to run a commercial travel trip to Afghanistan for almost 30 years. Since then we have helped bring Colombia, Yemen and Georgia back into the tourist fold, specialising in groundbreaking reconnaissance trips and imaginative expeditions.

Small Group Size: We believe it is imperative to keep the group sizes small. Most trips are limited to a maximum of approximately 12 travellers, thus giving you more access to fragile cultures, better opportunities to interact with local people, and the knowledge you are making less of an impact while there.

Cost of Tours: We believe in an honest, upfront pricing system so you know exactly what the tour will cost before you book. We avoid local payments, 'optional extras' or forcing our clients to split every meal bill. Our tours are provided on a predominantly full board basis, with mineral water, government permits, entrance fees and transport all included.

Added Value: We aim to give our clients the very best (not the least expensive) experience through whatever facilities are available to us. We always try to provide accommodation that is interesting, characterful and convenient, and transport - another important part of any tour - that is as varied and comfortable as possible.

Our clients: Your companions can make or break a trip, and it's lucky therefore that our clients are our greatest asset. Travelling to remote regions is not for everyone, and as such we tend to attract open-minded travellers looking for genuine experiences, and a desire to reach those hard to get to places.

Responsible Travel: Awarded 5 star status by AITO (Association of Independent Tour operators), responsible tourism has always been an integral part of our company ethos and our adventures are designed with the local people, culture and eco-system in mind. For further details please refer to the RT section on this dossier.



Day 1: Join tour in Kunming: The tour begins at the hotel in Kunming this evening.

Hotel (No meals)

Day 2: Kunming - Lijiang - Shuhe: This morning we'll take a short flight from Kunming to Lijiang and then continue on to Shuhe by road. Just 5km from the World Heritage site of Lijiang Old Town, Shuhe was an important interchange on the Tea & Horse Trail and from here to the Tibetan Plateau is only two days' quick march. After lunch we will take a guided tour of the Tea & Horse Trail Museum to learn about the history, culture and significance of our journey. This evening we will dine in a lovingly restored Naxi courtyard in Lijiang Old Town.

Hotel (B,L,D)

Day 3: Shuhe - Songzhilin Village: After breakfast in Shuhe, we drive to Jizi Reservoir, overlooking Lashi Lake and the Jade Dragon Snow Mountain, where our mule team awaits. A gentle climb then takes us over Mt Tiejia to camp at the Pumi village of Songzhilin. At 2,900m above sea level, this is the second-highest camp ground of our journey, and the night could be freezing. The Pumi are said to descend from the people of the Western Xia Dynasty in northwest China: they fled from the armies of Kublai Khan in the 13th century, settling here and finally adopting the language of the Han Chinese and the habits of the Naxi.

*Approx 17kms, 5hrs walking
Camp (B, L, D)*

Day 4: Songzhilin Village - Gaoshanding Village: A wonderful trek along the old "highway" from Lijiang to Lake Jian. The caravan trail runs wide and flat, high above the valley and with views stretching more than 20 kilometres north to Mt Wenbi. Part of this trail is still paved, a rare sight after 50 years of deprecation by villagers in search of free building materials.

*Approx 20kms, 6hrs walking
Camp (B,L,D)*

Day 5: Gaoshanding Village - Dongshan Temple: We descend via a narrow valley close to Lake Jian today. The fertile plain here has caused much strife over the centuries, as the Naxi, Bai and Hui peoples fought each other for control of the land. Tonight we plan to camp by a Buddhist temple and its large "Dragon Spring".

*Approx 14kms, 5hrs walking
Camp (B,L,D)*

Day 6: Dongshan Temple - Hejiang Village: In some ways, this could be the toughest day, as we cross the construction work on the new Dali-Lijiang highway and take the west road around Lake Jian to the small town of Diannan. That road has been sealed and the hard surface will be tough on feet and hooves alike, though traffic is light. But the views will make it all worthwhile, and tonight's camp at Hejiang is lovely.

*Approx 21kms, 6hrs walking
Camp (B,L,D)*

Day 7: Hejiang Village - Shaxi: We enter the beautiful Shaxi Valley today, where Bai people farm the lowlands and the Yi scratch a living on the high hills. This evening is a highlight of our journey, as our caravan arrives on the remarkable market square of Shaxi Old Town, the best-preserved market town on the Tea & Horse Trail. While the mules go for a well-earned rest, we check into the Old Horse Inn on the north side of the square. This is where caravan leaders stayed in times past. It has now been carefully restored and redeveloped as one of the most characterful guesthouses in China.

*Approx 18kms, 5-6hrs walking
Guesthouse (B,L,D)*

Day 8: Rest day in Shaxi: This is market day in Shaxi, when valley farmers and Yi women from the hills mingle and trade as they have for centuries. We are free to wander today, or just sit outside Allen's Bar on the square and watch the world go by. In the evening we watch a command performance of Bai traditional music, which takes place in a restored Qing Dynasty courtyard.
Guesthouse (B,D)

Day 9: Shaxi - Beishan Yakou: A long day's trek out of the valley takes us past the Black Dragon Spring, where locals come to fill bottles with cool, clear mineral water, and on to a broad pasture on the high ridge separating Shaxi from Cibi.
*Approx 16kms, 6hrs walking
Camp (B,L,D)*

Day 10: Beishan Yakou - Liyuan Village, north shore of Cibi Lake: A beautiful walk down toward the lake, passing through a handful of isolated Yi minority hamlets. We stay this evening in a pleasant guesthouse a stone's throw from the water.
*Approx 10kms, 3-4hrs walking
Guesthouse (B,L,D)*

Day 11: Liyuan Village - Shangcun Reservoir: Today takes us along a quiet dirt trail around the west shore of Cibi Lake, then briefly through Eryuan County Town and back onto a dirt road to Shangcun Village, where we dine on fish from the reservoir. Lodgings are very basic this evening, as we borrow some spare space in the village home where we eat. We can expect to be three to a room tonight.
*Approx 15kms, 5hrs walking
Camp/Homestay (B,L,D)*

Day 12: Shangcun Reservoir - Fengyu - Qingyuandong: Today is market day in Fengyu, once an important staging post on the Tea & Horse Trail. We'll be up early for our longest day's walk, joining the locals as they take their goods and animals to market. After lunch in Fengyu and a chance to soak up the atmosphere, we push on to one of our finest campsites, by the pond at Qingyuandong. The water here flows straight out of a cave, which we can also visit, and is famous throughout the area. People drive

all the way from the county town to fill up with this peerless drinking water.
*Approx 22kms, 6hrs walking
Camp (B,L,D)*

Day 13: Qingyuandong - Huadianba: Today sees the steepest and longest climb of our journey. From approximately 2,200m above sea level at breakfast, we climb over the Cangshan range to camp on the high pasture at approx 3,300m, high enough possibly to feel a touch of altitude sickness.
*Approx 12kms, 6hrs walking
Camp (B,L,D)*

Day 14: Huadianba - Xizhou: Our final day on the road is all downhill, trekking through a rhododendron forest until the view opens up over one of China's great lakes, Erhai. Our caravan accompanies us all the way to the door of our magnificent courtyard lodgings, on the edge of the famous Bai town of Xizhou, which preserves some of the finest examples of Bai architecture to be found anywhere.
*Approx 18kms, 6hrs walking
Hotel (B,L,D)*

Day 15: Xizhou - Dali - Kunming: After breakfast and a rest this morning we will transfer to Dali Airport for the short flight back to Kunming, where you'll have a free afternoon to relax and explore before our farewell dinner tonight.
Hotel (B,D)

Day 16: Tour ends in Kunming: The tour ends after breakfast this morning.
(B)

Wild Extensions:

Arrive early to adjust to a new time zone or just to get a feel for the country before your tour starts. Explore the country after your tour on a bespoke Wild Extension or just allow a few days to relax afterwards. Maybe choose all of the above and get cheaper flights mid-week?

Contact the office for extension specifics.

ED JOCELYN

Having completed a PhD in Soviet History, Ed moved to China in 1997 where he's settled into a steady walking pace that has taken him to more remote corners of the country than he could ever remember. Ed masqueraded as a journalist in Beijing for five years before his love of history and an itch for adventure suggested an alternative path: together with a likeminded old friend, he decided it would be a good idea to retrace the legendary Long March - on foot. In the following five years, Ed trekked 8,000 miles through far-flung parts of China, creating a unique documentary record of the Long March trail and the people who lived along it. His first book about that journey ignited controversy in China; Ed promises the second instalment will be even more fun - if he ever finishes it! Since 2008 he has been too busy exploring the ancient trading paths of southwest China, where he now lives. As well as leading treks for Wild Frontiers, he is busy pursuing his own mule-powered expeditions to document the old trails, and has spent years studying the history and culture of this area. His writing and photography appear regularly in the Chinese media, and his articles have also featured in international publications including The Guardian, Outside, and The South China Morning Post.

TOUR DETAILS

Version: CWW/D

Tour price: All our tours are priced on a LAND ONLY basis, giving you maximum flexibility when deciding how to get to and from your tour.

Single Supplements: These are NOT compulsory for any Wild Frontiers tour. Where single supplements are available please note that a single room cannot always be guaranteed for every night of the tour as depending on the destination, rooms may be limited. On this tour we are happy to offer an optional single supplement that will cover you for all nights of the tour except when we stay in homestays.

NB: for those nights when we are camping you will get a single tent.

Flights: If you would like us to send you a quote for the suggested tour flight (see GETTING THERE) or on any alternative flight that may suit you better, please let us know.

In all cases, for the latest prices, please refer to our website or contact the office.

Please remember that all Wild Frontiers tour prices mean NO hidden extras, NO local payments or kitty and NO compulsory single supplements.

WHAT IS INCLUDED?

- Full services of a Wild Frontiers Tour Leader with local guides and drivers.
- Meal plan as detailed in the itinerary (B=Breakfast, L=Lunch, D=Dinner) with mineral water as required.
- All transport as outlined in the itinerary.
- All accommodation
- All entrance fees, as per itinerary

WHAT IS NOT INCLUDED?

- Visas (if applicable)
- Local airport taxes
- Tips
- Beverages & any costs of a personal nature.
- International Flights
- Airport transfers (unless booking suggested flights through WF office)

GETTING THERE

For this trip our suggested flights (subject to change) are:

05APR CA938 LHR-PEK 20:25/13:40 +1
06APR CA4174 PEK-KMG 21:10/00:35 +1
21APR CA4171 KMG-PEK 08:25/11:30
21APR CA937 PEK-LHR 13:30/17:45

Key:

LHR - London Heathrow

PEK - Beijing

KMG - Kunming

CA - Air China

NB If you wish to arrange your own flights you are completely free to do so and in this case we can arrange any transfers or supplementary accommodation that you may require.

Please note that if you are making your own flight arrangements, we recommend that you only purchase flights that are totally flexible and refundable as due to the nature of adventure travel, itineraries can change at any time. For more information, please refer to our booking conditions.

PRACTICALITIES

Accommodation will be in guesthouses in Shuhe, Shaxi and Xizhou, homestays where they are available and in tents for the remainder of the time.

Any accommodation mentioned in the itinerary is subject to availability and if not available substitutes will be of a similar quality.

Transport on this tour includes minibuses/coasters, domestic flights and on foot.

Trip Grading:

Adventure Rating ❖❖❖❖❖

Comfort Grade ❖❖❖❖❖

Fitness Level ❖❖❖❖❖

Cultural Interest ❖❖❖❖❖

Please note that this grading is an indication only and should you have any concerns please contact the office.

Recce Tours: As we all know, the world is a constantly changing place - destinations & routes that were once cutting-edge now regularly find themselves appearing in mainstream brochures. Coming up with truly original tour ideas is a constant challenge but at Wild Frontiers we are committed to offering you a real alternative to the mainstream and each year we plan to run a handful of new and original adventures. These are our so-called Recce Tours and since the very beginning have proven incredibly popular with those of you who like to act as our "guinea pigs" and join us on these tours. Fantastic fun and highly rewarding, Recce Tours will assuredly not go 100% to plan and it is not uncommon for clients to take an active role in tweaking the itineraries along the way. More challenging than our normal tours, these will often require a greater degree of flexibility...they will not be for everyone.

Fitness...

Anyone in a good state of health, with an open mind and a sense of adventure should be perfectly able to cope with this tour. The walking is moderate and you should be comfortable with continuous days of approx 5hrs walking.

It may sound obvious but...

Wild Frontiers tours are not always for everyone and it is important to us that the tour you choose is the most suitable. Please therefore take time to read the dossier carefully. All our tours are graded to give an overall picture of the trip but these are only guidelines and you should check the daily itinerary. Should you have any concerns about your ability to partake in any aspect of the tour then please contact the office.

Insurance: Insurance that provides cover for emergency repatriation in case of a medical emergency is compulsory for all tours. You should be aware that many standard insurance policies may not cover you adequately for all aspects of a Wild Frontiers trip and so we strongly recommend that you purchase a suitably designed insurance policy. One such policy is the "Wild Frontiers" policy underwritten by Travel & General Insurance Company plc, which is available to UK and Republic of Ireland residents through our website or via the insurance company direct on 0845 408 0583. Under this policy there are two different levels of cover available and for this trip the minimum requirement would be the Standard policy.

Cover explained:

Standard policy: a comprehensive travel insurance policy that provides cover for all Wild Frontiers activities, including trekking up to 6,000m. This policy does not provide cover for travel to areas where the FCO is advising against all or all but essential travel.

Elite policy: provides the same comprehensive level of cover as the standard policy. In addition the Elite policy also provides cover for travel to areas where the FCO is advising against all or all but essential travel. The policy will not provide cover for any claims arising from or relating to the reasons why the FCO is advising against travel.

If purchasing the Elite policy you also have the option to **extend the cover** provided by the policy to include cover for claims arising from a terrorist act in an area where the FCO is advising against travel. You can add this cover to your policy when purchasing online or over the telephone.

These policies are only available to those travelling on a Wild Frontiers holiday.

For more information and to purchase your policy online please visit the Insurance section of our website.

The cover is underwritten by the International Insurance Company of Hannover Limited (IICH), who are authorised and regulated by the Financial Services Authority (FSA). Wild Frontiers Limited is an Introducer Appointed Representative of Travel & General Insurance Company plc, details of which can be found at the FSA's website www.fsa.gov.uk.

If you do decide to purchase alternative insurance, then you must ensure that it covers you for every aspect of this trip.

Visas: Visas are necessary for many of the destinations we travel to and while we aim to provide you with the most up-to-date information, requirements frequently change and as such we advise that you check with the relevant embassies or contact our recommended visa agency, Travcour (020 7223 5295) www.travcour.com for the latest advice.

For this tour, UK passport holders currently require a visa for China.

Non-UK passport holders should contact the relevant embassies for individual requirements.

Further details will be sent out to you on booking, however ensuring that correct and valid visas are obtained remains the sole responsibility of the client.

Responsible Travel: Responsible travel and sustainable tourism are fundamental ideas that Wild Frontiers has been committed to since our birth. It is our strong belief that these words should not be simply 'tagged on' to dossiers and websites but should be at the very core of each trip, and our adventures are

therefore designed with the local people, culture and eco-system in mind. We believe that a successful trip not only delivers a unique and unsurpassable journey for our clients, but that it also benefits the peoples whose lands we are privileged to visit.

The Wild Frontiers Foundation: In order to facilitate an enduring support structure for the communities we visit, and to show a commitment to these values, Wild Frontiers has set up a charitable foundation through which we can channel funds to both existing NGOs and our own development projects. In addition to organising ethically sensitive tours, having our own charitable foundation allows us to raise money - through the cost of our tours, charity trips and fund raising events - which can then be used to fund various projects in education, sanitation, reforestation and a number of other important issues facing developing communities. Wherever possible we are happy for our clients to visit these projects to see for themselves where and how this money is being spent. For a full list of partner NGOs please visit our website. Should you wish to donate to the foundation please contact the office for details.

The Environment: Trying to do our bit for the environment, in 2005 we were among the first UK-based travel companies to automatically offset every client's international flight (if booked with us) with a payment to Carbon Clear to help promote sustainable energy.

Climate: We expect there will be many dry warm days, up to the mid-20s in the valleys, but temperatures will drop rapidly in the evenings, especially on the higher campsites where it may well fall below freezing at night. This is the dry season and the most comfortable time of year to trek in this region.

Foreign & Commonwealth Office (FCO): The FCO travel advice highlights potential hazards people might experience when travelling abroad. Given the nature of destinations offered by Wild Frontiers it is inevitable that from time to time some itineraries contravene this advice. Whilst WF takes the safety and security of its clients extremely seriously, we will not necessarily cancel a trip because of the

FCO advice. It is recommended therefore that clients check this advice before booking and contact us if they have any queries or concerns. Please see our website for further information.

Further information:

When you make a confirmed booking with Wild Frontiers we will send you our confirmation pack with complete pre-departure information giving you details on visas, health and vaccinations, packing lists, suggested reading on the region, insurance, photography and other useful tips to make your trip more enjoyable.

YUNNAN - THE FACTS



Yunnan: Meaning 'South of the Clouds' Yunnan was so named because it lies below the Tibetan plateau and the Province of Sichuan, where clouds and rain predominate. It stretches down from the northern snow mountains forming the watersheds between the great rivers running south out of Tibet; the Salween on the Burmese border, the Mekong and the Yangtze which, just above Lijiang, turns north running through a cleft in the mountains known as 'Tiger Leaping Gorge'. The Province extends down through the temperate central region around Kunming, into the tropical south to the borders of Laos and Vietnam, this area is known as Xishuangbanna, meaning 'one thousand rice fields'. China has 56 recognised nationalities; the Han comprise 92% but the other 8% reside in 60% of the land and Yunnan has the greatest physical, cultural and ethnic diversity of all the provinces.

Yunnan has always been on the periphery of China, both literally and figuratively. It is the oldest inhabited part of China with

evidence of the Kunming area having been populated millions of years ago. The Chinese emperors regarded the region as barbaric, populated by uncivilised tribes known collectively as the 'man'. The process of bringing Yunnan into the Chinese fold was first recorded by the Han Dynasty administration in 280 BC, at which time the Southern Silk Road through Yunnan connected China with India. However the forbidding terrain and distance from the Han capital prevented Chinese consolidation of power and over the centuries rebel warlords continued to rule like kings, exacting taxes and controlling the huge opium trade, becoming particularly powerful during World War II until the formation of the People's Republic of China in 1949, when they fled the country.



In the mid 13th century Kublai Khan's army swept through the area, establishing a strong Muslim community in Dali. The Italian merchant Marco Polo, who was in the Great Khan's employ, was despatched to Yunnan and was thus the first known Westerner to visit the region. He spoke about Dali and was much impressed by the *'large and excellent horses which are taken to India for sale'* thus cowry shells from the Indian Ocean were used as small change currency, alongside gold panned from the Jinshajiang or Upper Yangtze (meaning 'River of Golden Sand') and mined in the mountains to the north. Marco Polo was less impressed by the Khamba Tibetans in northern Yunnan who used salt blocks as currency (salt is still mined today in the Mekong River gorge in northwest Yunnan). The Khambas traded in musk, the musk deer being plentiful, but he found the area desolate and full of wild beasts and resorted to the local practice of burning bamboo on his campfire at night, the explosions of the burning canes warding off big cats, wolves and bears.



By the mid 19th century the area was attracting European interest. The French explored and mapped the upper reaches of the Mekong River and French and British botanists explored the areas around Lijiang and Diqing. By 1900 Kunming was opened to foreign trade, made easier by the completion of the French built Indochina railway from Hanoi to Kunming, which is still in use.

In 1937 the famous 620-mile Burma Road from Lashio to Kunming was carved out of the mountains by 160,000 local people with virtually nothing but their bare hands. The road was used in World War II to carry supplies sent by Anglo-American forces to Nationalist troops entrenched in Sichuan and Yunnan until 1942, when the Japanese captured Lashio, cutting the supply line. Thereafter, until 1945, US planes known as the 'Flying Tigers' piloted by volunteers undertook the dangerous mission of flying in supplies, crossing the 'Hump' of the towering mountain ranges between India and Yunnan to land at Kunming. Many pilots were killed, their planes crashing into the mountain barriers in bad weather, one or two who survived were enslaved by the Yi and not found until many years after the end of World War II. With all coastal China in Japanese hands, the Tibetans set up a lucrative trade route, sending goods down through Lijiang to Kunming, supplying the American and British troops with luxury goods. It was estimated that some 8,000 mules and horses and probably 20,000 yaks were used on this dangerous and spectacular caravan route.

The civil war between the Nationalists and Communists had less impact on Yunnan than elsewhere in China, although the Red Army's Long March came through the area in 1935-6, camping in Zhongdian for the winter and crossing the Yangtze River on its first bend at Shigu. The tribal peoples of Yunnan, having largely resisted

the best efforts of Christian missionaries, were finally brought to heel by Communism, for although areas in which distinct nationalities lived were given autonomous status, the central government abolished head-hunting and slavery and by 1961 the province was firmly under Beijing's authority. Bands of Red Guards did their best to destroy displays of ethnic identity and few cultural relics survived, except in very remote areas. Post-Mao China set about repairing the ravages of the Cultural Revolution and by 1979 Yunnan's ethnic minorities, who had lived for centuries in isolated pockets in the mountains evolving their own religious systems, customs and taboos, were once again free to live according to their traditional beliefs.



The peoples of Northwest Yunnan: Yunnan Province is a patchwork of peoples, containing 42 of China's 56 official ethnic groups. The northwest region borders Sichuan Province, Tibet and Burma. Centuries of trade and cultural interchange have left a rich a varied heritage.

Naxi: Although they are thought to share a common ancestry with the Tibetans, the Naxi fought their neighbours for control of northwest Yunnan for many centuries. They are the most celebrated of this region's peoples, mainly because of their principal city, Lijiang, which is now a World Heritage-listed site. The Naxi are mostly Tibetan Buddhists, but are also famous for the hieroglyphic script used traditionally by Naxi shamanist priests.

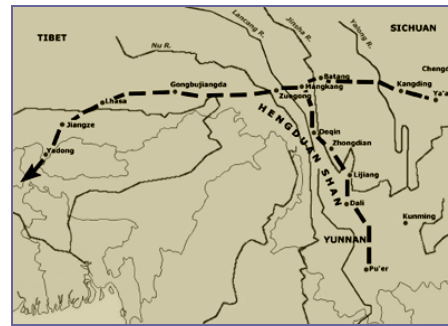
Bai: Masters of the region south of Lijiang, the Bai country was part of an independent kingdom that ruled much of southwest China from the 9th century until its elimination by Kublai Khan's Mongol Empire in the 13th century. Dali, 15 kilometres south of Xizhou, was the capital of this kingdom. In rural areas, the Bai have preserved their own language and elements of their traditional culture.



Yi: Scattered through much of northern Yunnan, southwest Sichuan and northwest Guizhou provinces, the Yi are one of the oldest and most interesting of China's peoples. On this journey they may appear as poor and cut off from the mainstream, but in other areas where their settlements were larger, they were the ruling class for many centuries. The pre-Revolutionary governors of the whole province were Yi. The Yi are also one of the only Chinese peoples to have developed their own script, in which their scholars wrote works of astronomy and mathematics.

Hui: Descended from Muslim traders along the Silk Road who settled and intermarried with locals, the Hui have preserved their Islamic heritage while adopting the Chinese language. They have also maintained their historic attachment to trade, originally moving into northwest Yunnan in search of opportunities on the Tea & Horse Trail.

The Tea & Horse Trail in History:



For more than 1,000 years, this trading route connected west and southwest China with India via Tibet and Burma. Goods, people and ideas flowed both ways, starting in the Tang Dynasty (AD 618-907) and reaching a climax during the Second World War, just a few years before the trail's demise in the 1950s. It rivalled the Silk Road in terms of its historical importance to China's communications with the outside world. Its dizzying river valleys and towering mountains made this the toughest, most dangerous caravan route in the world.

The modern name of the "Tea & Horse Caravan Trail", taken from the Chinese *chama gudao*, describes more than a single, well-defined route from A to B. It embraces a complex network of trails, all of which served to move trade across this vast region. But not only traders used these paths. In the seventh century AD, Tibetan troops marched along them to take control of areas of northwest Yunnan Province now known as Shangri-la and Lijiang. Buddhist monks headed west to study and collect sacred texts; many centuries later, Christian missionaries followed these treacherous routes into the most remote corners of China. In the 1930s, the revolutionary Red Army fled this way on its Long March. During the Second World War, when Japanese occupation had blocked other supply lines, vast caravans brought supplies into China from India via Lhasa. Bandits preyed on travellers throughout this history. In some places, they still do.

By the time of the Tang Dynasty, tea was already becoming an important part of Tibetan life. As it could not be grown anywhere in the Tibetan lands, tea had to be imported from agricultural areas of Yunnan and Sichuan. As demand grew,

the Chinese imperial court took an interest - especially as the Tibetans had something the empire wanted in return for tea: warhorses. The Song Dynasty lacked good horses for its mounted troops, which it needed to repel threats from nomadic people to the north and west. Strong and fast, Tibetan horses were greatly prized. In 1074, the Song central government established a Tea and Horse Office to oversee the trade. During the period of the Northern Song (960-1127), up to 20,000 horses per year were exchanged for tea.



Not only tea and horses passed along this route. Salt was another vital commodity carried into Tibet and beyond, while clothes, jewellery and other fine goods came back from Lhasa, which was once a great trading capital. Routes led from Lhasa to Nepal, Pakistan, Afghanistan and India. As dynasties came and went in China, the Tea & Horse Trail continued to flourish. In 1661, at the Dalai Lama's request, the Qing court set up a large market for tea and horses in Yongsheng, close to Lijiang in northwest Yunnan. That same year, it has been estimated that 1.5 million kilograms of Yunnan tea were transported into Tibet. Although the Chinese imperial court stopped buying Tibetan horses in 1735, trade in tea and other goods continued to prosper.



The last hurrah of the Tea & Horse Caravan Trail came during World War II, when the coastal cities of China and Burma were occupied by the Japanese

army. While the Flying Tigers flew their celebrated supply missions over the Himalayas, an enormous, parallel effort went overland via the ancient trading route. After the War and the victory of the Communists in 1949, motor roads began to supplant the caravan trails. By the 1970s, the caravans and muleteers were mostly out of business, and the old trails fell into disuse.

How to book:

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