

You Need to Know for Traveling in Tibet

Can I travel in Tibet by myself?

No, you can't. This is not allowed by the China policy. For any foreigners, who want to travel in Tibet, they must have a tour agency to arrange their Tibet permits, guide, and the tour itself. After 2008, the restriction has been reinforced by adding many checking-points on the way, particularly if you travel outside of Lhasa or visit some sensitive areas. There are always someone checking your permit, and you must have a tour guide to help you go through those formalities.

Is it safe to travel in Tibet?

Yes, traveling in Tibet is safe. Tourism policy in Tibet is very strict. All tour agencies and agents have to register with local government and follow regulations to make sure the tour industry healthy. That definitely benefits tourists. Besides, Tibetan people generally are very gentle and humble. Although the political tension has been existing between Tibet and China, Tibetans love foreigners to visit Tibet. Your safety can be guaranteed.

What about a bicycle tour in Tibet?

Yes, bicycle trip is available in Tibet, and we can arrange the bicycle tour for you. But the foreign cyclists are very rare, it's really hard to find travel companions, and you need to rent vehicle to accompany your trip. It will cost a lot.

Are there Tibetan tour guides who speak English fluently?

Yes, definitely. Our tour agency have a number of excellent Tibetan guides who can speak fluent English, They are knowledgeable and professional.

What I need to know about the high altitudes and mountain sickness?

Acute Mountain Sickness (AMS) is common at high altitudes, and depends on the elevation, the rate of ascent and individual susceptibility. Most visitors to Tibet will suffer from at least some symptoms that will generally disappear through acclimatization in several hours to several days.

Symptoms tend to be worse at night and include headache, dizziness, lethargy, loss of appetite, nausea, breathlessness and irritability. Difficulty sleeping is another common symptom, and many travelers have trouble sleeping for the first few days after arrival at Lhasa.

An altitude over 3,000 meters (9,843 feet) is usually defined as high altitude. Most places in Tibet are higher than this level. Acute Mountain Sickness, or AMS, is common at high altitudes due to the decreasing availability of oxygen. Most people will suffer differing degrees of symptoms at high elevation. The occurrence of AMS is dependent on the altitude, the ascent rate and individual physical condition. Symptoms of AMS include headache, nausea, dizziness, fatigue, shortness of breath, loss of appetite and disturbed sleep. Most people will experience one or more AMS symptoms upon their arrival in Tibet. The symptoms will usually gradually decrease in severity during acclimatization. Mild AMS usually will not interfere with mild activity.

AMS can be very serious, with the most serious symptoms being High Altitude Pulmonary Edema (HAPE) and High Altitude Cerebral Edema (HACE), which can be fatal. Symptoms of HAPE include weakness, shortness of breath, even at rest, impending suffocation at night, and a persistent productive cough with white, watery, or frothy fluid. Symptoms of HPCE may include headache, ataxia, weakness, hallucinations, psychotic behavior, coma and loss of memory. Both approach and strike at night and can be fatal! Immediate descent is the surest treatment.

AMS can be lessened or avoided with proper acclimatization, which will also ease and reduce AMS symptoms. A gradual ascent will allow your body to acclimatize to higher altitudes and the decreased oxygen supply. Go no higher 300 - 400 hundred meters (984 - 1,312 feet) daily and have a rest after each 1,000 meter (3280 feet) ascent. Medication also helps to prevent AMS. Mild AMS symptoms can be treated with proper medication. If medication does not relieve the symptoms, go to hospital or evacuate immediately to safe altitude.

The following precautions may help to prevent or lessen the effects of AMS:

1. Drink plenty of fluids (3 - 4 liters daily at least) and eat carbohydrate food to keep the body properly hydrated.
2. Do not over exert and only partake in light activity immediate after your arrival.
3. Don't smoke, drink alcohol or take other depressants such as tranquilizers and sleeping pills. These will depress the respiratory drive and limit oxygen intake.
4. Avoid catching cold before you entering Tibet.

Preventive Medication:

1. **Diamox** (Acetazolamide) have been found helpful. It allows you to breathe faster so that you metabolize more oxygen, thereby minimizing the symptoms caused by poor oxygen supply. Since it takes a while for Diamox to have an effect, it is advisable to start taking it 24 hours before you go to altitude and continue for at least five days at higher altitude. The recommendation of the Himalayan Rescue Association Medical Clinic is 125 mg, twice a day (morning and night) but you are recommended to consult your physician for the prescription.
2. **Hongjingtian** - Tibetan herbs are still good preventive and treatment effects for AMS. Honjingtian (Rhodiola Eoccinea) may help sleep at high altitude and thus increase oxygenation at night.

Suggestions before you go to Tibet:

Get as fit and healthy as possible, both physically and psychologically. Visitors having record of heart, lung, other organ problems or anemia should consult their doctor before making the decision to visit Tibet.

Our suggestions for some travelers who have certain health condition:

We suggest people who suffered from high blood pressure and severe heart disease, please check with your doctors before you make your plan to visit Tibet.