

By using the railway tourists provide financial and moral support for China's efforts to increase control over Tibet, thus leading to the irreversible destruction of Tibetan culture, religion and identity. For all these reasons Free Tibet Campaign advises people not to travel on the railway.

How can I maximise the benefit of my trip for Tibetans?

Help to keep Tibetan culture alive. It is very important to use Tibetan resources such as hotels, restaurants, guides and souvenir stalls, as Tibetan culture is being destroyed by the Chinese. It is also important to benefit financially the Tibetans, who are rapidly becoming a disadvantaged minority in their own country.

When visiting temples, monasteries or shrines you may wish to leave a donation, which will help their upkeep. It is best to leave it on the altar or give it directly to a monk or nun. This will ensure it stays in the temple. You may also wish to give a small donation to pilgrims from rural Tibet.

How can I help when I get back home?

- Join Free Tibet's campaign campaign to end the Chinese occupation of Tibet.
- See our website for details of campaigns that you might like to get involved in.
- Consider starting up a local Free Tibet group.
- Tell your friends about your experiences and encourage them to support Tibet.
- Think about sponsoring local organisations working in educational, medical or other relief and development areas. In the case of individual sponsoring outside a recognised organisation it is important to make sure there is a clear aim and purpose for the money.
- Consider writing an article to send to your local newspaper or a travel magazine.

You are welcome to join Free Tibet Campaign if you live outside the UK. Or, go to **www.tibet.org** for a list of Tibet Support Groups throughout the world.

We would strongly advise you not to take this leaflet into Tibet in case your luggage is searched. The Chinese would probably assume that you were going to engage in subversive activity and would investigate any contacts that you had made with Tibetans, however innocent they may have been.

Free Tibet campaigns for the right of Tibetans to decide their own future. We want an end to the Chinese occupation of Tibet and for the fundamental human rights of Tibetans to be respected. We are independent of all governments and are funded by our members and supporters.



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Tibet

the alternative travel guide

Free Tibet Campaign's guide to travelling ethically in Tibet



What is the situation in Tibet?

Tibet was invaded by the Chinese Peoples' Liberation Army in 1950. The Dalai Lama, the spiritual leader of the Tibetan people, fled the country in 1959. Since then thousands of Tibetans have followed him. A Tibetan government-in-exile has been established in Dharamsala, Northern India.

From the 1950s until the end of the Cultural Revolution 6,000 monasteries, nunneries and temples were destroyed. Hundreds of thousands of Tibetans have died as a result of the occupation. Repression and interference in the cultural and spiritual life of Tibetans continue to this day. In 2006 the Chinese Government spoke of a "fight to the death with the Dalai Clique". The Dalai Lama has said on many occasions that he is not seeking independence for Tibet, but wants Tibetans to have genuine autonomy and to be able to control their own internal affairs.

When the Chinese government refers to Tibet, they invariably mean the Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR). Free Tibet's definition of Tibet includes not only the TAR, but also former Tibetan provinces, which were amalgamated into the Chinese provinces of Sichuan, Gansu and Yunnan.



Should I go to Tibet?

There is no simple answer regarding the ethics of travelling to Tibet. Ultimately, it is up to the individual traveller. We would strongly advise you to go, but if you would rather not, then consider visiting the Tibetan areas of India, such as Dharamsala or Ladakh.

Arguments for travelling to Tibet:

- The Dalai Lama encourages foreigners to witness the oppression in Tibet and to inform others of their experiences on their return.
- Tourism provides a window to the outside world for Tibetans and a first step towards a more open policy.
- Tibetans find the presence of tourists in Tibet encouraging.

Arguments against travelling to Tibet:

- Tourism provides legitimacy to the occupying Chinese.
- Most of the money you spend will go into Chinese pockets.
- It is hard to travel in Tibet without tacitly complying with the Chinese regime.

What should I know before I go?

The political climate in Tibet is sensitive and the situation (and consequently your plans) could change overnight. The Chinese security network is extensive, with plainclothes police and security cameras everywhere.

What endangers Tibetans?

Do not take pictures of the Dalai Lama into Tibet. Possession of such photographs is an offence under Chinese law, and giving them out could have serious consequences not only for you, but more importantly for the recipient. Do not hitch-hike as heavy fines may be given to drivers found giving lifts to tourists.

Do not actively seek political information. While the absolute worst that will happen to a tourist if found to have engaged in any political activity is likely to be a couple of days of interrogation followed by deportation, any Tibetan found receiving or distributing political material could face a lengthy jail sentence and possibly torture at the hands of the Chinese authorities.

Should I travel on the Gormo-Lhasa railway?

The Gormo-Lhasa railway opened in June 2006. It is the world's highest railway and links Tibet and the rest of the Chinese rail network for the first time. It is a political project (as stated by China's former president Jiang Zemin), constructed by the Chinese government to consolidate China's presence in Tibet.

The railway has already accelerated Han Chinese migration into Tibet. China's official news agency Xinhua has reported that 1.1 million people arrived in the Tibetan Autonomous Region (TAR) in the first six months of 2007, an increase of 86% over the same period in 2006 before the railway opened. Xinhua has subsequently reported that more than four million people are expected to arrive over the course of 2007 – more than the overall population of the TAR.

Such tourism is impacting on the environmental, social and cultural integrity of the areas affected and putting an intolerable strain on ancient Tibetan buildings such as the Potala Palace. The Dalai Lama recently noted that the rise in Lhasa's population from 60,000 to 300,000 (of which 200,000 are Han Chinese) represented a form of "demographic aggression" and has described the railway as "some kind of cultural genocide".

It has also enabled increased militarisation of the country and easier exploitation of Tibet's natural resources. Xinhua has announced that vast deposits of copper, iron, lead and zinc have been found by Chinese government geologists along the route of the railway.