TRAVEL THE ANCIENT TEA TRAILS BETWEEN OUR LUXURY BOUTIQUE HOTELS
Tea Horse Road hotels are built along the ancient trails up which horse caravans carried precious Pu’er tea from the tea mountains in the far south of Yunnan to Lhasa in Tibet. Come back with us in time on a journey through spectacular landscapes that link the varied cultures of China’s southwest. Expect old Naxi and Tibetan cultures, high mountains, deep gorges, and unspoiled nature.
ARRIVAL AND WALKING TOUR OF DAYAN ANCIENT TOWN

We pick you up at Lijiang International airport and deliver you to the LUX* Tea Horse Road Lijiang in the heart of Dayan — the ancient centre of Lijiang. After sipping a cup of the tea that made Lijiang an important trading post for hundreds of years, and settling in to your room, take our special guided walk along the winding cobblestone lanes on a tour that will immerse you in this unique 800-year-old town and its culture.

Our specially prepared LUX* guide and town map takes you on a hand-picked route from our hotel in the south of the old town towards Sifang, Dayan’s main square, following Qiyi Street, which has many of our favourite shops (we’ve negotiated discounts for you in a number of these). From the corner of Sifang, climb slowly - we’re at 2,400 metres here, so don’t rush on your first day - and negotiate the winding stone steps to a secret city overlook. From here, down again to the northern part of the old town, crossing small canals that form part of Dayan’s unique hydraulic system, to the oldest teahouse in Lijiang to meet Diana He (pronounced ‘Her’), whose family has for generations traded tea brought up from the mountains in the south.

This is Pu’er tea, unique among China’s six tea types and the reason for the creation of the 13-century-old Tea Horse Road, and after watching it being pressed into cakes by standing and rocking on specially-shaped stones (try this balancing act for yourself!), you’ll be guided through a tasting session and learn the secrets of Pu’er terroir and connoisseurship. Necessary secrets, because the oldest cakes of this aged tea command the highest prices in the world, and Diana and her tea masters are experts.

Return to the hotel along a canal path to relax and have dinner at our restaurant. If you then feel like an evening stroll, there are more lanes to discover, and it’s at night that the old town really comes to life. For photographers, it’s worth a second trip to the city overlook for a sparkling night time view, and for everyone perhaps a drink in a canal-side café or bar.
After breakfast, walk south along the picturesque Zhonghe (Central River), one of Dayan’s three main waterways, past willow trees and over exquisite stone footbridges (the ancient town has 350 of these, in a wonderful variety of designs). This is the quiet, unhurried side of Lijiang life, so stroll at your leisure, following the LUX’s map’s special route that will take you past one of the unique Naxi ‘three-eyed’ wells. Fed by the town’s water system, these are in three descending tiers, with the upper pool used for drinking water, the middle pool for washing vegetables and the lowest for washing cooking utensils and laundry.

Our designed walk brings you back to the hotel, where our chef will lead you to nearby Zhongyi market, a bustling centre of buying and selling, completely authentic, very light on tourism and very strong on Naxi culture. From the wet market, through vegetables and dried goods to copper pans and kettles at the northern end, Zhongyi is the vibrant heart of delicious Naxi cuisine. The chef will explain all as he shops for ingredients for this evening’s meal, our signature Naxi hotpot.

Then it’s off by car for a 45-minute ride to the north, at the foot of towering Yulong (Jade Dragon) Mountain that guards the northeastern side of the high and fertile Lijiang Plain, where China’s most famous movie director, Zhang Yimou (Raise the Red Lantern, Hero, House of Flying Daggers, and more) has created Impression Lijiang, an epic show with a hundred horses and a cast of 500 in an open-air theatre with Jade Dragon Mountain as a backdrop. After lunch close by, enjoy VIP seats at the early afternoon hour-long performance. If you’re a photographer, it’s like having a major production exquisitely framed for your camera.

From here, drive back by way of the small town of Baisha, one of the three old communities that, together with Dayan and nearby Shuhe make up the original Naxi settlement of Lijiang. Visit the temple with its ancient murals, and learn about the old Dongba hieroglyphic script, unique to the Naxi people and the world’s only living pictographic language. From here, it’s a short walk to a school that teaches the weaving of silk pictorial tapestries, a local tradition, and a stroll through Baisha before driving back to LUX Lijiang. Dinner tonight is the Naxi hotpot that the chef and his team have been preparing during the day.
Drive north from Lijiang along the route of the old Tea Horse Road to Shangri-La and Benzilan. An exciting day of mountains, gorges, high passes and a complete cultural shift await us as we move from the lands of the Naxi people to ethnic Tibet. The horse caravans used to take over a week to reach Shangri-La (or Zhongdian as it was known in those days to the muleteers), but it will take us just 3 1/2 hours.

We follow the Yangtze River, known in this section as the Jinsha, as far as Tiger Leaping Gorge, where it cuts a 3,000-metre-deep canyon. Our road veers off to the northwest and we climb until we reach a pass from where you can see Haba Mountain to the southeast towering over Tiger Leaping Gorge, and to the north the high plains that are our destination. From here on we’re in ethnic Tibet, and as the road descends we pass the massive and sturdy Tibetan houses with their intricate window and lintel decorations, finally reaching Shangri-La. After Lijiang, this was the next big staging post for the caravans as they changed horses and teams ready to face the challenge of the dangerous ascent to the Tibetan Plateau. Even higher than Lijiang, we’re now at 3,200 metres.

We head straight for the old town of Dukezong in the heart of Shangri-La, in the process of being faithfully restored following the disastrous fire that swept through it in 2014, and walk around its lanes before climbing to Guishan Temple and its huge Tibetan prayer wheel, the world’s largest. Next to a delicious organic lunch at Akhunynpa Restaurant for an introduction to Tibetan cuisine.

After lunch, we drive northwest out of town to circle the wetlands of Napahai, an important and complex ecosystem that changes dramatically with the seasons. During and after the rains, Napahai (Napa Lake) fills up, and because this high plateau encircled by mountains is on a major flyway, it attracts thousands of migratory birds seasonally, and the rare black-necked crane over winters here. As the shallow lake slowly drains, Tibetan farmers pasture their herds of yak and flocks of horses on the wetlands, as they have for centuries, including the very horses that formed the old caravans.

Leaving Napahai, the road continues to ascend into the mountains before we meet once again the Yangtze River, and follow its winding canyon until we reach LUX* Benzilan, nestled in the gorge by the rushing waters, without doubt the most luxurious modern caravanserai along the Tea Horse Road. Benzilan has its own special micro-climate, warmer and drier than the surrounding plateaus; it never snows, even in the depths of winter. Sit back, relax by the pool or on the roof terrace as our chefs prepare your dinner, and plan for tomorrow’s exploration.
DAY FOUR

DONGZHULIN MONASTERY
AND SHUIBIANHE VALLEY

After breakfast (choose between Chinese, Western or Tibetan), drive 25 minutes to Dongzhulin, an important monastery of the Gelugpa (Yellow Hat) sect. The entire surrounding small village is a religious community. We first listen to the monks chanting their morning prayers, and after they leave the prayer hall, take a guided tour of the temple, including the upper floors with Buddhist images and sometimes sand mandalas. Unlike the larger and better-known Songzanlin Monastery on the outskirts of Shangri-La which is heavily organised for tourism, Dongzhulin sees few visitors, and the monks are happy to take time and explain Tibetan Buddhism to those who are interested. We stay until they return to the prayer hall, donning their distinctive crescent-shaped yellow hats.

We’ll return later in the day, but now we drive back towards Benzilan and take a small valley up into the hills. This is Shuibianhe Valley with three traditional Tibetan hamlets, and we continue up to the middle one, Shuyi, to watch the making of traditional Tibetan incense sticks, then return to the lower hamlet of Bairen to visit the bell-maker. You then have a choice between a Tibetan-style picnic lunch prepared by our hotel kitchen, or a home-cooked Provencal style French lunch in the garden of our friend Estelle Chard’s house, made with local Tibetan ingredients, and accompanied, if you wish, by her local handmade Cabernet Sauvignon wine.

After lunch, drive back to Dongzhulin to attend one of the famous Gelugpa-sect debating sessions (the first of two each day for these monks). These are conducted in a very physical and highly charged debating style between pairs of monks, usually students, in which one sits and the other stands, jumps, dances, and to make his point shouts and strikes one hand with his fist. To stand in the middle of a courtyard of dozens of debating monks is an amazing experience.

Return to the hotel to relax by the pool or on the roof terrace, take dinner, and if you like, enjoy our Cinema Paradiso experience, watching one of our collection of movies al fresco under the stars.
After breakfast, drive 45 minutes to the mouth of the Balagezong Canyon, which leads up to the mountainous interior east of the Yangtze gorge. Our hotel lies at the heart of UNESCO’s Three Parallel Rivers protected area, included on the World Heritage List because of the outstanding landscape of deeply-incised gorges and exceptional biodiversity, and Balagezong is a wonderful introduction to this. A Balagezong bus takes you first on a steep thousand-metre ascent with 30 switchbacks through changing montane zones to the visitor centre in a high valley (a former Tibetan village). After this, descend to the canyon, where you take a spectacular nature walk along a kilometre-plus suspended walkway secured to the cliff wall, high over the river. Return by piloted boat for a water-level canyon experience.

After lunch at the Balagezong entrance complex, drive on another 30 minutes to Tangdui village in Nixi township to visit master potter Luo Sang Enzhu. As was his father before him, Luo is the acknowledged master of the black pottery that is unique to this area. The clay is taken locally, and after firing, the pieces are plunged into a mixture of sand and ashes, which turn them black. Master Luo will be happy to teach you how to fashion a Tibetan tea bowl with your own hands, something to take home as a memory of this special Benzilan land. Return to the hotel to relax by the pool or on the roof terrace, and the last dinner of the trip. Cinema Paradiso is waiting for you by the poolside if you would like another movie night.

**DAY 6 - DEPARTURE**

After breakfast, drive to Shangri-La Airport for your flight onwards.
SOUTHBOUND
FROM BENZILAN TO LIJIANG • 5 NIGHTS | 6 DAYS
DAY ONE
Bajia Snow Mountain

DAY TWO
Pudacuo National Park
Bitahai Lake

DAY THREE
Haba Snow Mountain
Tiger Leaping Gorge

DAY FOUR
Snow Mountain
Lake Dragon

DAY FIVE
LIJIANG

SHANGRI-LA

SICHUAN PROVINCE
ARRIVAL, NAPAHAI WETLANDS AND DRIVE TO BENZILAN HOTEL

We pick you up at Shangri-La airport, after which we drive northwest out of town to circle the wetlands of Napahai, an important and complex ecosystem that changes dramatically with the seasons. During and after the rains, Napahai (Napa Lake) fills up, and because this high plateau encircled by mountains (we’re at 3,200 m) is on a major flyway, it attracts thousands of migratory birds seasonally, and the rare black-necked crane overwinters here. As the shallow lake slowly drains, Tibetan farmers pasture their herds of yak and flocks of horses on the wetlands, as they have for centuries, including the very horses that formed the old caravans. Leaving Napahai, the road continues its ascent into the mountains before we meet the Yangtze River. We follow its winding canyon until after an hour’s drive from Napahai we reach LUX* Benzilan, nestled in the gorge by the rushing waters, without doubt the most luxurious modern caravanserai along the Tea Horse Road. Benzilan has its own special micro-climate, warmer and drier than the surrounding plateaus; it never snows, even in the depths of winter. Settle in, relax by the pool or on the roof terrace as our chefs prepare your dinner, and plan for tomorrow’s exploration.
DAY TWO

DONGZHULIN MONASTERY AND SHUIBIANHE VALLEY

After breakfast (choose between Chinese, Western or Tibetan), drive 25 minutes to Dongzhulin, an important monastery of the Gelugpa (Yellow Hat) sect. The entire surrounding small village is a religious community. We first join the monks chanting their morning prayers, and after they leave the prayer hall, take a guided tour of the temple, including the upper floors with Buddhist images and sometimes sand mandalas. Unlike the larger and better-known Songzanlin Monastery on the outskirts of Shangri-La which is heavily organised for tourism, Dongzhulin sees few visitors, and the monks are happy to take time and explain Tibetan Buddhism to those who are interested. We stay until they return to the prayer hall, donning their distinctive crescent-shaped yellow hats.

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Return to the hotel to relax by the pool or on the roof terrace, take dinner, and if you like, enjoy our Cinema Paradiso experience, watching one of our collection of movies at dusk under the stars.

Shuibianhe Valley with Bala Mountain on the horizon

Monk debating at Dongzhulin Monastery
DAY THREE

BALAGEZONG CANYON AND NIXI BLACK POTTERY

After breakfast, drive 45 minutes to the mouth of the Balagezong Canyon, which leads up to the mountainous interior east of the Yangtze gorge. Our hotel lies at the heart of UNESCO’s Three Parallel Rivers protected area, included on the World Heritage List because of the outstanding landscape of deeply-incised gorges and exceptional biodiversity, and Balagezong is a wonderful introduction to this. A Balagezong bus takes you first on a steep thousand-metre ascent with 30 switchbacks through changing montane zones to the visitor centre in a high valley (a former Tibetan village). After this, descend to the canyon, where you take a spectacular nature walk along a kilometre-plus suspended walkway seamed to the cliff wall, high over the river. Return by piloted boat for a water-level canyon experience.

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Return to the hotel to relax by the pool or on the roof terrace, and then dinner. Cinema Paradiso is waiting for you by the poolside if you would like another movie night.
DAY FOUR

THE TEA HORSE ROAD SOUTH TO SHANGRI-LA AND LIJIANG, AND WALKING TOUR OF DAYAN ANCIENT TOWN

Drive south from Benzilan to Lijiang along the route of the old Tea Horse Road. An exciting day of mountains, gorges, high passes and a complete cultural shift as we move from ethnic Tibet to the lands of the Naxi people. We first reach Shangri-La (or Zhongdian as it was known in those days to the muleteers), a major staging post for the caravans as they changed horses and teams ready to face the challenge of the dangerous ascent to the Tibetan Plateau. We head for the old town of Dukezong in its heart, in the process of being faithfully restored following the disastrous fire that swept through it in 2014, and walk around its lanes before climbing to Guishan Temple and its huge Tibetan prayer wheel, the world’s largest. Next to an early delicious organic Tibetan lunch at Akhustonpa Restaurant, and we then head south across the high plain. The horse caravans used to take over a week to reach Lijiang from here, but it will take us 3½ hours. We pass the massive and sturdy Tibetan houses with their inward-sloping walls and intricate window and lintel decorations, until the road rises to a pass from where you can see Haba Mountain to the southeast. After a brief stop, the road descends, winding until we reach the entrance to Tiger Leaping Gorge, where the Yangtse River, known in this section as the Jinsha, cuts a 3,000-metre-deep canyon. We continue south along the river and then cross the low hills to reach Lijiang, an even more important staging post along the Tea Horse Road than Shangri-La.

We deliver you to the LUX* Tea Horse Road Lijiang in the heart of Dayan—the ancient center of the town. After sipping a cup of the tea that made Lijiang an important trading post for hundreds of years, and settling in to your room, take our special guided walk along the winding cobblestone lanes on a tour that will immerse you in this unique 800-year-old town and its culture. Our specially prepared LUX* guide and town map takes you on a hand-picked route from our hotel in the south of the old town towards Silang, Dayan’s main square, following Qiyi Street, which has many of our favourite shops (we’ve negotiated discounts for you in a number of them). From the corner of Silang, climb slowly and negotiate the winding stone steps to a secret city overlook. From here, down again to the northern part of the old town, crossing small canals that form part of Dayan’s unique hydraulic system, to the oldest teahouse in Lijiang to meet Diana He (pronounced ‘Her’), whose family has for generations traded tea brought up from the mountains in the south.

This is Pu’er tea, unique among China’s six tea types and the reason for the creation of the 13-century-old Tea Horse Road, and after watching it being pressed into cakes by standing and rocking on specially shaped stones (and trying this balancing act for yourself!), you’ll be guided through a tasting session and learn the secrets of Pu’er terroir and connoisseurship. Necessary secrets, because the oldest cakes of this aged tea command the highest prices in the world, and Diana and her tea masters are experts. Return to the hotel along a canal path to relax and have dinner at our restaurant. If you still have the energy for an evening stroll, there are more lanes to discover, and it’s at night that the old town really comes to life. For photographers, it’s worth a second trip to the city overlook for a sparkling night-time view, and for everyone perhaps a drink in a canal-side café or bar.
DAY FIVE

CANAL WALK, ZHONGYI NAXI MARKET, IMPRESSION LIJIANG SHOW AND BAISHA VILLAGE

After breakfast, walk south along the picturesque Donghe (East Stream), one of Dayan’s three main waterways, past willow trees and over exquisite stone footbridges (the ancient town has 350 of these, in a wonderful variety of designs). This is the quiet, unhurried side of Lijiang, so stroll at your leisure, following the LUX* map’s special route that will take you past one of the unique Naxi ‘three-eyed’ wells. Fed by the town’s water system, these are in three descending tiers, with the upper pool used for drinking water, the middle pool for washing vegetables and the lowest for washing cooking utensils and laundry.

Our designed walk brings you back to the hotel, where our chef will lead you to nearby Zhongyi market, a bustling centre of buying and selling, completely authentic, very light on tourism and very strong on Naxi culture. From the wet market, through vegetables and dried goods to copper pans and kettles at the northern end, Zhongyi is the vibrant heart of delicious Naxi cuisine. The chef will explain all as he shops for ingredients for this evening’s meal, our signature Naxi hotpot.

Then it’s off by car for a 45-minute ride to the north, at the foot of looming Yulong (Jade Dragon) Mountain that guards the northeastern side of the high and fertile Lijiang Plain, where China’s most famous movie director, Zhang Yimou (Raise the Red Lantern, Hero, House of Flying Daggers, and more) has created Impression Lijiang, an epic show with a hundred horses and a cast of 500 in an open-air theatre with Jade Dragon Mountain as a backdrop. After lunch close by, enjoy VIP seats at the early afternoon hour-long performance. If you’re a photographer, it’s like having a major production exquisitely framed for your camera.

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DAY 6 - DEPARTURE
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COMING IN 2017

LUX* SHANGRI-LA
LUX* MEILI MOUNTAIN

The next two LUX* hotels along the Tea Horse Road (and there will be more) are opening in 2017. A unique experience: journey along this ancient road, rich in history and culture in the care of LUX* Resorts, who know the road and its secrets better than anyone.

RATES FOR BOTH THE NORTHBOUND & SOUTHBOUND PACKAGES START FROM

RMB 13500
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