

A Photographic Exercise on "Top of the World"



Ta'er Monastery, Qianghai, China 青海塔尔寺

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A Photographic Diary of our "Special Western China Tour 2007"
by Yau-Sun Tong

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Preface

In the “modern digital” world, taking pictures has become so “easy”, but in the same time good photos have not at all any easier to come by, because the creation and conception of good images still remains the need of the photographer’s brain, not the modern digital “technology”... in fact the modern techno... often just helps to do the opposite...

The following images within this “Photographic Diary” of 《Special Western China Tour 2007》 were taken straight with a little **Leica D-Lux 3**. The images are intended **to capture and to document the events, our travel routes, the joy and fun of our tour members** during this lifetime experience of a fantastic visit to China, especially with the highlight of riding the world highest altitude railroad train from XiNing of Qinghai province to **Tibet Autonomous Region!**

The little “point and shoot” **D-Lux 3** has a lot of limitations in picture taking, little performance in terms of optical quality (certainly not compared to the **Leica R and M** systems with slide-films I am so often used to and fond of using), but in the same time posts as a challenge to myself for still trying to create meaningful images with it.

Amongst the goals I am trying to achieve in my photography, that include:

- *True to the moments in nature and culture;*
- *Natural and candid;*
- *Compositionally challenge and unique;*
- *Meaningful in subjects and topics;*
- *Story telling with good impacts;*
- *Not to disturb and intrude into local human subjects’ life.*

Brief intro

Gathered in **Beijing** just after mid May, I led our tour group flew to **Qinghai** province, adjusting/preparing for higher altitude condition while enjoying local sightseeing and traveling. Then took the famous newly completed **Qinghai-Tibet railroad train** for the near 2,000km spectacular journey to **Lhasa in Tibet Autonomous Region** as the core visit during this special tour. Followed with a few days in **Sichuan** province for an adjustment after our high altitude travel in Tibet region. Then finalized with another few days of relaxation and sightseeing in the eastern seaboard region of the **Yangzi River** delta area before exiting from **Shanghai** back to North America...

The following images in chronological order intend to share the enjoyments from some of the events and highlights of our journey of this over 20 days tour – another successful one of my ongoing specially arranged cultural/photographic tours.

My sincere appreciation and many thanks to all participants of this very special tour!



The MaxMara Couple in Beijing Photo by: Yau-Sun Tong 湯友新

The beautiful MaxMara couple of our group

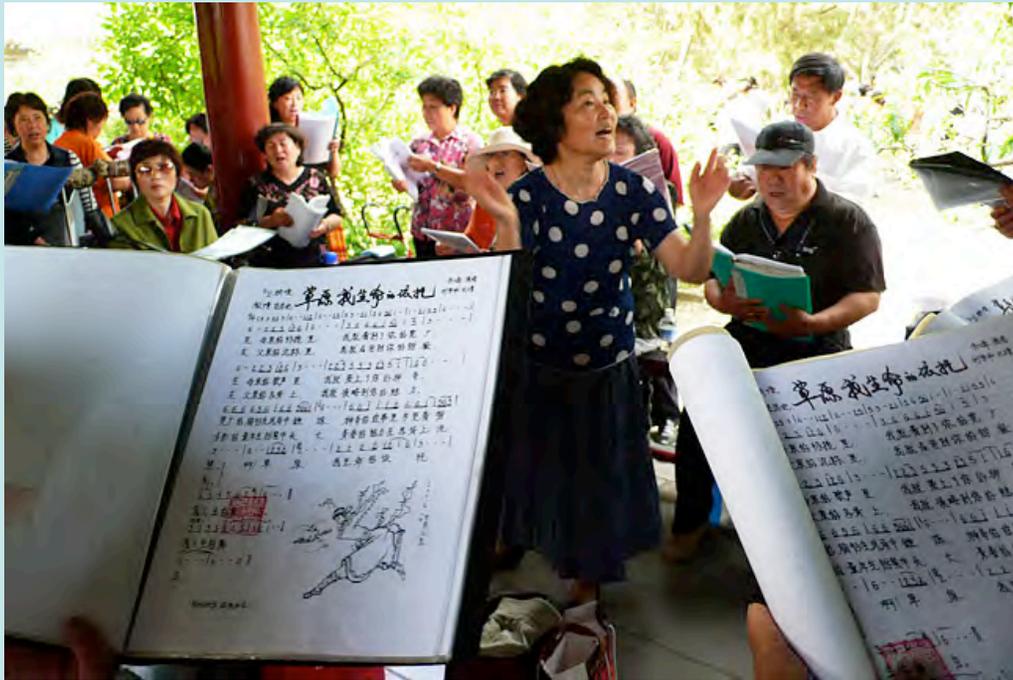


Execution style in public...



It's unfair that George shooting from behind...

Just arrived Beijing, lots of excitement, lots of fun and lots of “shootings...”



天坛公园小景 folk scenes in Temple of Heaven Park



In no time most have done very well with chopsticks. Good and healthy foods three meals daily during our tour for sure. (still healthily lost weight for many of us...!)



Morning in XiNing City, Qinghai 西宁市清晨

Photo & Copyrights by: Yau-SunTong 湯友新

We arrived XiNing - the capital city of QingHai province from Beijing on May 22nd. At around 2,300m of elevation, it is my designed location for our group members to acclimatize and prepare for the much higher elevations on route by train to Lhasa and during in Tibet Autonomous Region. For the next few days we will have some very interesting and worthwhile nature sightseeing and cultural visits. Treats for cameras...Foods for taste buds and stomachs...



Muslim "shooting" Muslim...

Speeding on Liji Xia reservoir nature area



Yellow on Purple, Qinghai 青海



Photo & Copyrights by: Yau-SunTong 湯友新

Qinghai is a huge province with lots to offer in Nature and cultures. Though most of ordinary tours do not know or do not offer good visits to Qinghai.

Here we visited some interesting places including The native Qinghai minorities unique to Qinghai region, such as the Muslim Sala nationality and the Buddhist Tu nationality etc.



On route Qinghai, 青海路上

Photo & Copyrights by: Yau-SunTong 湯友新

Some of our member may remember that day when we passed and stopped by that area, there were many wild pheasants in the field roaming freely. Certainly in my binoculars their beauty were detailed without obstruction - treats to the eyes.



a Muslim villager's home in Qinghai, China 在一位青海穆斯林老乡家的庭院里

Photo & Copyrights by: Yau-SunTong 湯友新

In the morning we visited Xunhua county, a Sala Muslim area. We had some wonderful family visits to villagers' homes as well.



Sala village, Xunhua county, Qinghai 青海循化撒拉族村镇

Photo & Copyrights by: Yau-SunTong 湯友新

维护社会 four kids and the four words



Sala Muslim children in Xunhua county, Qinghai, China 青海循化撒拉族孩童

Photo & Copyrights by: Yau-SunTong 湯友新

“The one...”



Wutun Temple, Qinghai 青海同仁吴屯下寺

Photo & Copyrights by: Yau-SunTong 湯友新

In that afternoon we were in HuangNan area. Wutun Tibetan Buddhist temple.

Who would like to be that perfect bridegroom...?



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Selecting the perfect bridegroom...在青海互助土族自治县

A day of visiting the minority Tu nationality. HuZhu county is a Tu Autonomous County in Qinghai with Tu people population in majority. Tu people have very colorful costumes and cultural identity, their religion is Tibetan Buddhism.



A lot of good foods!

That's what had left over...!

The meal we had while in the Tu people's village was fantastic, local flavour for sure, tasted great, and more than plentiful... Wish we could have such a meal even just once a month back home here in North America... (no luck for sure...)





YouNing Monastery, Qinghai 青海互助佑宁寺

Photo & Copyrights by: Yau-SunTong 湯友新

YouNing monastery in Qinghai Huzhu county was once a very important monastery locally. Each year there are several religious events held here that offer great cultural and photographic opportunities.



YouNing Monastery, Qinghai 青海佑宁寺

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Youning Monastery, Qinghai, China 青海佑宁寺

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Three at prayer...



A bazaar day north of XiNing 白马寺四月八集市上

Photo & Copyrights by: Yau-SunTong 湯友新

On our way back to XiNing we ran into a local bazaar under the hill of the “WhiteHorse Temple”, the event provided lots for our members to troll around...; the date is a local celebration in lunar calendar.



Ta'er Monastery, Qinghai, China 青海塔尔寺

Photo & Copyrights by: Yau-SunTong 湯友新

A morning visit to the Te'er Monastery, just half an hour by coach outside XiNing - a large and a very important Tibetan Buddhist monastery.



Don and the friendly uniformed...

After another fantastic meal in a well-known local Muslim cooking restaurant for a lunch, we set out to the XiNing train station, ready on board the much anticipated highlight of our trip - Riding on the world highest altitude specialized train for a 24 hour journey to Lhasa...a great way for traveling to the top of the world!

The kid in XiNing Railroad Station



XiNing Railroad Train Station - the beginning of the QingHai-Tibet Railroad





青藏线上蓝天白云，时而雪山皑皑，时现明媚高原湖泊，时而牛羊成群，时现野生藏羚羊... 近2千公里之行程确是人生一大经历！
On board of the famous Qinghai-Tibet highland train. Truly a lifetime experience!

The nearly 2,000-kilometer QingHai-Tibet train ride was a highlight of our tour. Fascinating sceneries along side of the highland plateau, snow capped mountains, highland Lakes, scores of wild animals, the once endangered Tibetan antelopes, herds of yaks and sheep on Grazing lands with herdsmen in colorful clothing spotting the vast fields. The comfortable train that's Specially designed for the tough environment of the low oxygen high elevation Qinghai-Tibet region. We had passed through the highest spot on the railroad at 5,200 meters...



Lhasa Train Station 拉萨火车站
拉萨火车站

Photo & Copyrights by: Yau-Sun Tong 湯友新

24 hours later, we arrived Lhasa Train Station with high spirits. A ready coach picked us up and checked into a comfortable garden style hotel with very nice condition; a welcoming arrangement for our members after the long high-altitude train ride.

An initial evening strolling in front of the Potala Palace, Followed with a good meal of the first of many during our stay in Tibet region.





Norbulingka, Lhasa 罗布林卡, 拉萨

Photo & Copyrights by: Yau-Sun Tong 湯友新

The next morning started with a visit to the tranquil and beautiful Norbulingka. It is part of the UNESCO World Heritage Site of Culture - “Potala Palace, Jokhang Temple Monastery and Norbulingka”. Norbulingka, the Dalai Lama's former summer palace, constructed in the 18th century, is a masterpiece of Tibetan art.

inside Norbulingka 罗布林卡小景



Photo & Copyrights by: Yau-Sun Tong 湯友新

Gardens, royal residences, temples...;
rich plants, flowers, multi species of
birds...running rabbits inside the grass
And bushes...
Colorful cultural and historical
displays...; All make Norbulingka a
must to visit in Lhasa.

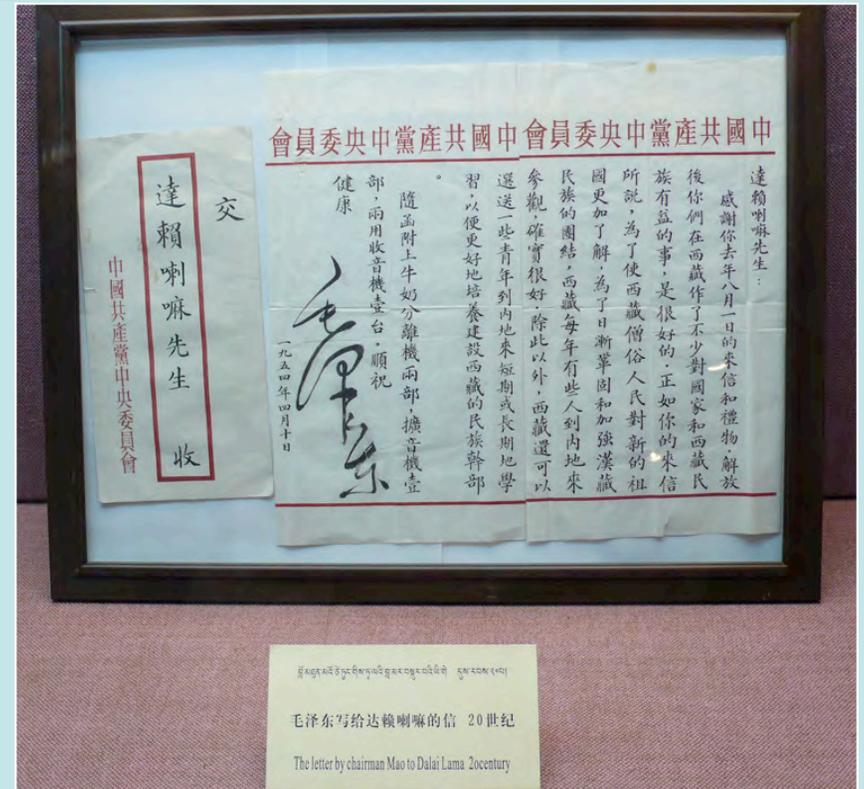


Tibet Autonomous Region Museum, Lhasa

Followed with a visit to the Tibet Autonomous Region Museum which was also an excellent experience and well worth time spent. There are so many valuable cultural and archaeology artifacts, really is a rich museum to visit.

Today's activities were designed for relaxing and easy going, helping to adept to the first arrival in this city of 3,600 meters altitude.

A letter by Chairman Mao to Dalai Lama in 1954





可口美味老鴨湯

A lunch in this inspiringly retro styled Sichuan flavour restaurant was a delight! The duck soup meal tasted great with all healthy ingredients. The service was wonderful too...



Mo and our pretty servers...



On the roof of Jokhang Monastery 大昭寺上

Photo & Copyrights by: Yau-SunTong 湯友新

Followed with an afternoon visit to the Jokhang Monastery, it is part of the UNESCO World Heritage Site of Culture - “Potala Palace, Jokhang Temple Monastery and Norbulingka”. Founded in the 7th century, the Jokhang Temple Monastery is an exceptional Buddhist religious complex; all pilgrims to Lhasa would come to pay tribute in Jokhang Monastery.



难舍难分 *hard to say goodbye...*



Showing us the traditional Tibetan highland barley wine-drinking ceremony 青稞酒仪式

在拉萨作客白玛家

In late afternoon, some of our group members followed me for a visit to a Tibetan family that is amongst some of my friends in Tibet.

The family visit was truly genuine and the cultural hospitality, the yak-butter-tea, the Tibetan style snacks, the exchanges... an unforgettable experience indeed.

It was difficult to say “goodbye”...



A visit to a Tibetan family in Lhasa 在拉萨作客白玛措姆家

Photo & Copyrights by: Yau-SunTong 湯友新



Potala Palace Square 布达拉宫广场

Photo & Copyrights by: Yau-Sun Tong 湯友新

The next morning was a visit to a major UNESCO site - the Potala Palace. Located in the centre of Lhasa valley, at an altitude of 3,700m, is the palace of the Dalai Lama since the 7th century.

To many people, Potala Palace is the must to visit site when coming to Tibet...



Nowadays, the visit to Potala Palace has become a not so easy task with the obtaining of entrance tickets, and the restriction in the amount of time that one can stay inside the Palace.

All those are part of the efforts in protecting and restoring this imposing great building and museum, by limiting the otherwise overly huge amount of visitors wanting to get into this popularity site.



in Front of Potala Palace Square 布达拉宫广场前

Photo & Copyrights by: Yau-Sun Tong 湯友新

在布达拉宫广场上 *at Potala Palace Square...*

a view in Sera Monastery 色拉寺小景



Photo & Copyrights by: Yau-Sun Tong 湯友新

The afternoon was a visit to the Sera Monastery in northeast part of Lhasa city.



in Sera Monastery 色拉寺小景

Photo & Copyrights by: Yau-Sun Tong 湯友新



Solar in Lhasa 太阳灶, 拉萨

Photo and Copyrights by: Yau-Sun Tong 湯友新



A View of Lake Yamzho Yumco 羊卓雍湖

Photo & Copyrights by: Yau-SunTong 湯友新

Today we are on our way to the western part, traveling towards Gyantse, Shigatse area...
On route we are visiting one of the four sacred lakes in Tibet... fantastic views along the way and lots to see and photograph for...



Boys and their tractor 午间树阴下

Photo & Copyrights by: Yau-Sun Tong 湯友新

During our roadside lunch picnic, I chatted with those two village boys with their tractor...



Spring Plowing in Gyantse area 江孜地区春耕忙

Photo & Copyrights by: Yau-Sun Tong 湯友新

江孜地区农耕忙

a view in Gyantse Palkhor Monastery 江孜白居寺小景



Photo & Copyrights by: Yau-SunTong 湯友新

The next morning in Gyantse Palkhor Monastery.

Gyantse area is fertile for agriculture; while the township of Gyantse is traditionally an interesting place for visiting, this well-know monastery is one of the few must see sites.



Gyantse Palkhor Monastery 西藏江孜白居寺

Photo & Copyrights by: Yau-SunTong 湯友新

Quick action and a ready-in-mind designed image are the keys in capturing this “perfect” moment of a “perfectly” natural and strong picture with the using of lighting.



A View in Gyantse Palkhor Monastery 江孜白居寺与宗山城堡

Photo & Copyrights by: Yau-SunTong 湯友新

That distanced figure did not come by easily or readily, but it was all important to make this image to be “the image”... the key is the capturing of the moment...



A view in Gyantse 江孜小景

Photo & Copyrights by: Yau-SunTong 湯友新



The cloud...

Photo & Copyrights by: Yau-Sun Tong 湯友新

Today we are on road to the city of Shigatse...

a view in Tashilunpo Monastery 扎什伦布寺小景



Photo & Copyrights by: Yau-Sun Tong 湯友新

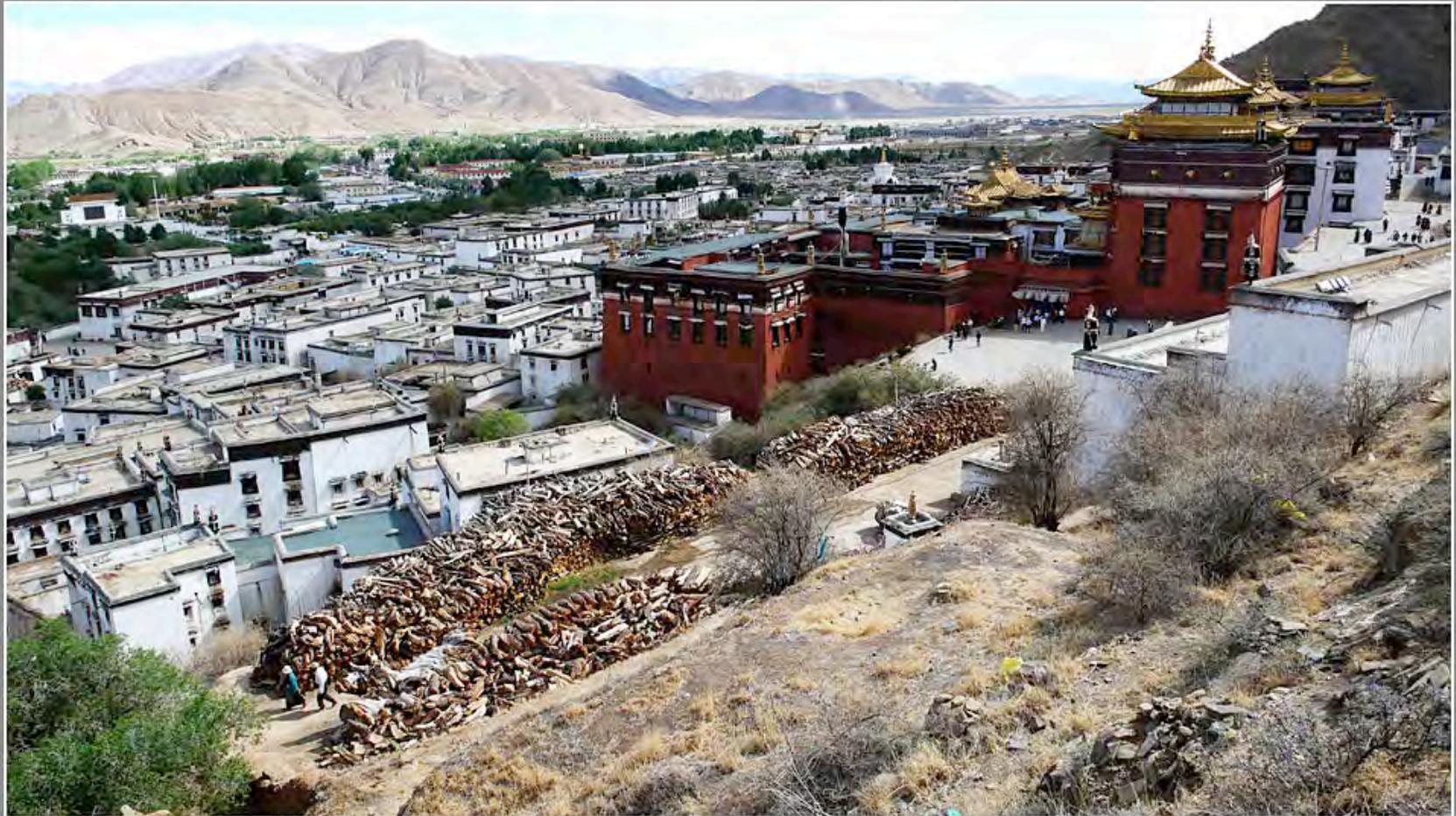


A View of Tashilunpo Monastery 扎什伦布寺一角

Photo & Copyrights by: Yau-Sun Tong 湯友新

扎什伦布寺小景，日喀则

Established in 1447, Tashilunpo Monastery was an icon for Shigatse which was the site for Benchen Lama's residence and where he conducts religion and political activities. It is one of the most imposing structures in Tibet second to the Potala Palace.



Tashilunpo Monastery 日喀则扎什伦布寺

Photo & Copyrights by: Yau-Sun Tong 湯友新

扎什伦布寺全景，overview in Tashilunpo Monastery



A view in Tashilunpo Monastery 扎什伦布寺小景

Photo & Copyrights by: Yau-SunTong 湯友新

扎什伦布寺之我見, my view in Tashilunpo Monastery



village field in gyantse area 江孜地区村旁庄稼地

Photo & Copyrights by: Yau-SunTong 湯友新

The next morning our coach continued the journey by driving southeast toward the southern Tibet area...
Again on route lots of refreshing and interesting views...



A village view in gyantse area 江孜地区一村庄小景

Photo & Copyrights by: Yau-SunTong 湯友新

Frequent stops of our coach provided good opportunities to everyone in our group for interesting visits, photos, resting and stretching the body...

雍布拉康山下



Yumbulagang 雍布拉康 西藏山南

Photo & Copyrights by: Yau-Sun Tong 湯友新

In the afternoon we arrived Tsedang in the Yarlung Valley - known to be the birthplace of Tibetan Civilization; with this “first palace” of Yumbulagang way up on top of a hill, originally built many centuries ago.



Early next morning we are preparing to cross the mighty Yarlung Zangbo River to visit the Samye monastery in south side of the river.

The one hour and a half ride on a primitive wooden boat provided some unsettled wild fun...



A group of off school students rushed on board in the last second on their way back home in the other side of the river, their presence presented some genuine joy and laughter for the crossing journey... They were all herdsmen or peasants' children.

雅鲁藏布江上... on the Yarlung Zangbo River ...



Crossing the Yarlung Zangbo River 雅鲁藏布江上

Photo & Copyright by: Yau-Sun Tong 湯友新

The highest elevation river in the world 雅鲁藏布江 — 海拔最高的河流

桑耶寺路上



On Route to Samye Monastery 桑耶寺路上 西藏山南地区

Photo © Copyrights by: Yau-SunTong 湯友新

After the river crossing, on route to Samye Monastery...

山南地区桑耶寺一景

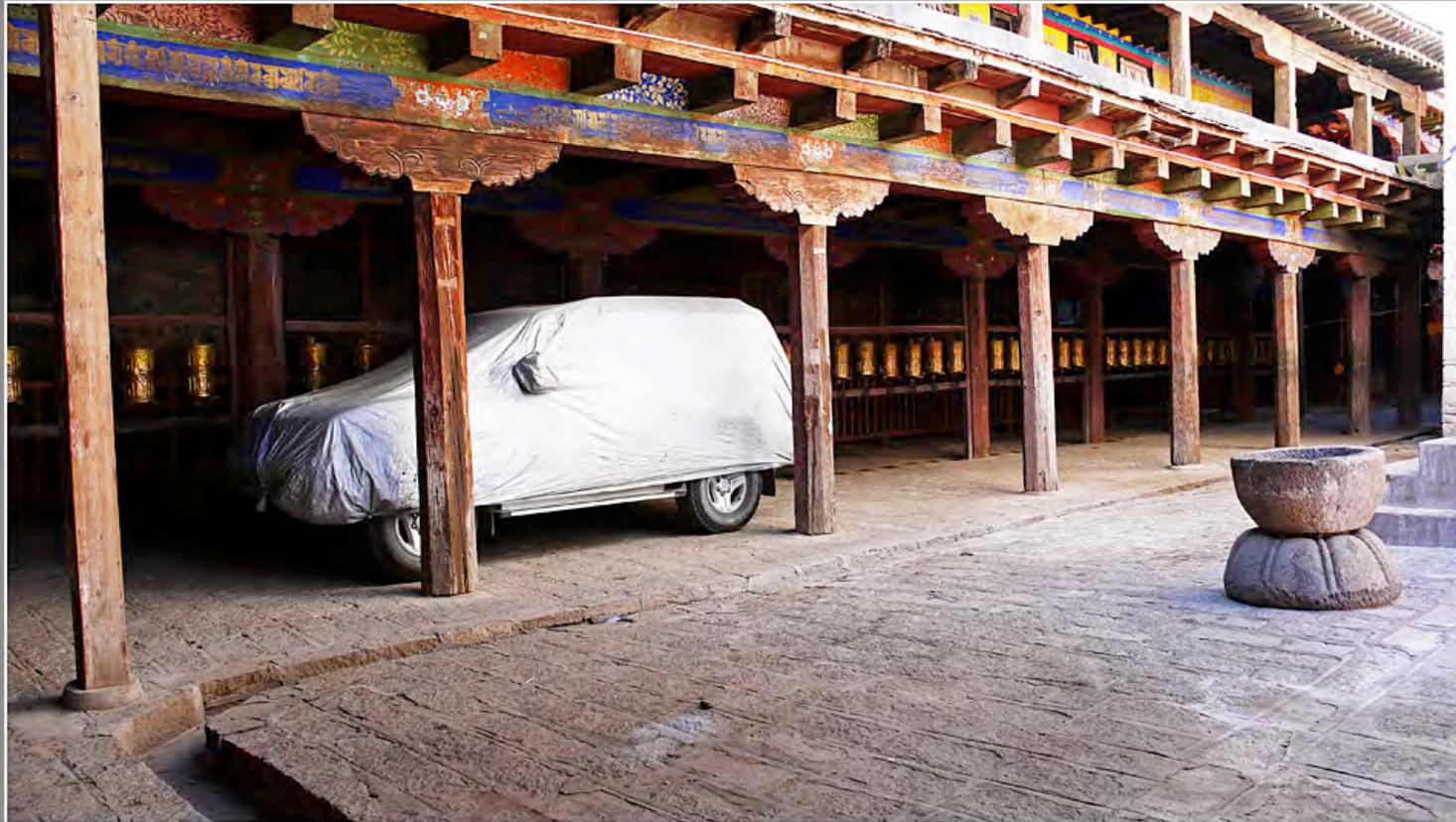


Samye Monastery 桑耶寺 西藏山南

Photo & Copyrights by: Yau-SunTong 湯友新

A Scene in Samye Monastery. Built in 761, Samye's buildings are arranged in the shape of a mandala representing Buddhist cosmology. Inside the main temple are Tibetan, Chinese and Indian artworks depicting legends and events from history.

桑耶寺小景 - 不知佛主喜欢使用什么牌子的车...*a view in Samye Monastery...*



a view in Samye Monastery 桑耶寺小景

Photo & Copyrights by: Yau-Sun Tong 湯友新

...wondering what model of vehicle is preferred by Buddha...?

看到我了吧...



"That's me there", Tibet Autonomous Region, China 山南到贡嘎机场路上

Photo & Copyrights by: Yau-SunTong 湯友新

Our last day travel in Tibet region, on route to Lhasa airport for a flight to our next destination.
I must take a photo with myself in it before leaving...



Lhasa airport - the highest elevation airport in the world 贡嘎机场海拔最高的机场

Today at noon we fly from here to ChengDu in SiChuan province, completing our unforgettable and successful journey of a visit to the Top of the World!



an evening of Sichuan style cultural performances 川剧特色表演

Photo & Copyrights by: Yau-Sun Tong 湯友新

Arriving Chengdu - the hub for traveling in southwestern China. An evening of great tasting Sichuan style cuisine and performances. We had a good evening of resting in a lower altitude of only 540m... Tomorrow morning we travel by coach south of Chengdu for an interesting part of Sichuan sightseeing.



LeShan Buddha, Sichuan 四川乐山大佛

Photo & Copyrights by: Yau-SunTong 湯友新

This morning by coach we are traveling towards the “Mt. E-mei and LeShan Giant Buddha” area. It is a “UNESCO World Heritage Site of Nature and Culture”, one of those only few “double sites” on UNESCO’s list.

LeShan Giant Buddha is the world tallest, started in 713 AD, took 90 years to complete.



Mt. E-Mei silver temple at 3,077m peak 峨眉山金顶银殿之清晨

Photo & Copyrights by: Yau-SunTong 湯友新

峨眉金顶之银殿清晨 *Mt. E-mei Golden-peak Silver Temple morning*

We were up early at 5am for the Golden-peak
Sunrise...

峨眉金顶之金殿晨曦 *Mt.E-mei Golden-peak Golden Temple sunrise*

Staying in the nice mountain top hotel of the
Golden-peak in Mt. E-mei. The hotel is
at 3,077m elevation. Great views...



Mt. E-Mei Golden Peak, Sichuan 四川峨眉山金顶金殿晨曦

Photo & Copyrights by: Yau-SunTong 湯友新

Wanfo Peak is at 3,099 meters, over looking the Golden-peak on the other side...

万佛顶上望金顶...



远眺万佛顶



座人力三轮到夜市去



Upon descending from Mt. E-mei, we had another very relaxing and restful stay in a nice hotel on the Foothill of the mountain. Tricycle rickshaws took us to an interesting area where locals gather for night life, a valued evening of activity for our group members to see some ordinary people's life.



夜市景观

古镇水乡西塘



Xi Tang watertown 西塘古镇

Photo & Copyrights by: Yau-SunTong 湯友新

Before exiting Shanghai back home to North America, I wanted to arrange our group to have few days of good and healthy relaxing adjustment in the Yangzi River delta water township area in eastern seaboard of China, to buffer some of the contrast between western China and the western world... An incredible place for photography too...

XiTang morning 西塘小景



Photo & Copyrights by: Yau-SunTong 湯友新

Those charming little townships possess some of the character that's so nerve calming for modern city-dwellers.

For our group mainly it is another photographic opportunity, while soaking up more of the ancient culture...



a view in XiTang 西塘小景

Photo & Copyrights by: Yau-SunTong 湯友新

Alleyway of XiTang 古镇西塘



Photo & Copyrights by: Yau-SunTong 湯友新

西塘古巷道
the alleyways in XiTang township



a view in Xitang 西塘小景

Photo & Copyrights by: Yau-SunTong 湯友新

“红装一点尽嫣然” that red figure is what sets the picture...

a view in SuZhou 苏州小景



Photo & Copyrights by: Yau-SunTong 湯友新

Suzhou is one of the oldest towns in the Yangzi River Delta area, history can be traced back 2,000 Years ago. The city is renowned for its beautiful stone bridges, webs of canals, pagodas and the masterpieces of Chinese landscape garden design in which art, nature and ideas are integrated perfectly to create ensembles of great beauty and Peaceful harmony...



a view in SuZhou 苏州山塘街小景

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Suzhou ancient canal



人在画图中... pictures within the picture... a Suzhou canal scene

苏州双面绣, *a Suzhou double sided embroidery*



Suzhou is known as the “Capital of Silk”. Our group had a eye-opening tour of the Silk factory and the Suzhou Silk Embroidery Research Institute.



TongLi watertown 同里水乡

Photo & Copyrights by: Yau-SunTong 湯友新

Ancient township *TongLi*, 同里古镇水乡 - "一泓月色含规影, 两岸书声接榜歌"



a view in TongLi watertown 同里水乡小景

Photo & Copyrights by: Yau-SunTong 湯友新

TongLi - a township with over a thousand years of history..., a great place for those who are interested in photography too...

退思园, *a part of Classical Suzhou Gardens*



Suzhou Garden "TuisiYuan", TongLi 同里退思园揽胜阁眺望

Photo & Copyrights by: Yau-SunTong 湯友新

“Classical Chinese garden design, which seeks to recreate natural landscapes in miniature, is nowhere better illustrated than in the nine gardens in the historic city of Suzhou. They are generally acknowledged to be masterpieces of the genre. Dating from the 11th-19th century, the gardens reflect the profound metaphysical importance of natural beauty in Chinese culture in their meticulous design.” This garden is part of the UNESCO World Heritage Site for Suzhou Classical Gardens.

by Tongli Lake Resort Hotel 同里湖度假村之晨



Photo & Copyrights by: Yau-SunTong 湯友新

By the TongLi Resort Hotel 同里湖度假村之晨



Those who laugh last...

The last evening for our tour in China was in a wonderful resort hotel located by the beautiful TongLi Lake.

Here we set out in the morning by coach to Shanghai...
onto each member's home return trip...

What a wonderful 20 days together, what a wonderful memory...

Surely in our mind today is only the first of many
"last days" in China...

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“Special Western China Tour 2008”

For Year 2008 “Special Western China Tour” in the month of May
the itinerary will be uniquely different then ever before, while the Qinghai-Tibet highland
Train ride and the Tibet region visit is still the core of the tour:

Shanghai entry - (*from here we begin our tour*) by air to LiJiang in YunNan province;

YunNan province - (*a true part of the southwestern China...*) “Lijiang Old Town” is a World Heritage Site township, at 2,400m elevation we will be here for acclimatization, prepare for Tibet region’s higher altitude. Unusual local cultures, nature sightseeing in this northwest area of YanNan known to be the “**Shangri-la**” region. A fantastic place to begin our western China exploratory journey;

YanNan to Lhasa - (*northwestern YanNan area, great nature and cultures...*) by coach to the very northwestern part of YunNan bordering southeast Tibet, along way fantastic scenery. Then by air we go from there to Lhasa;

Lhasa visit - (*The centre of Tibet, city of Lhasa’s elevation is at 3,600m*) some must seen sites;

Eastern Tibet exploration - (*the very different part of Tibet with large areas of original forests...the world deepest canyon...beautiful lakes...holy mountain...rivers...local cultures...lower altitudes*) an extraordinary part of the Tibet Autonomous Region, very pleasant to explore and to enjoy the experience.

Lhasa by train to XiNing - (*The world highest altitude railroad*) a spectacular train ride of a lifetime experience, with incredible scenery and animals sightings along sides the Qinghai-Tibet railroad.

ShannXi Province - (*a true part of the northwestern China...*) by air from XiNing of Qinghai province to XiAn of ShannXi province. Here we are for an adjustment after the Tibet high altitude travel, visiting some of the many attractions here, including the world-wonder of “Terra-cotta Warriors and Horses”. Also the unique “Yellow-earth Highland landscapes and culture” of northern ShannXi etc.

Beijing exit - (*fly from XiAn to Beijing*) for connecting to home return trip, or arrangements for individual needs.

This hand-picked itinerary is again designed for unique culture, nature and photographic opportunities.

For details and registering for the limited space in this tour / or to purchase large size file images or prints

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