

Yunnan-Tibet Road by bicycle 2006

Resources

You can buy detailed province maps in big Xin Hua Bookshops in **big** cities in Yunnan, and Lahsa, about ¥20. Usually, there are no mileages on the maps. *Map of The People of People's Republic of China* (Chengdu Cartographic Publishing House) is a Roman alphabet-Chinese China Map, it only shows main roads, 10¥. You could get maps from BikeChina (<http://www.bikechina.com/p-maps.html>) before you go.

Road & Traffic

Roads surface varied a lot. There are bitumen, dirt roads, dirt roads that have a lot of small up and down on the surface, and roads have rocks about 50mm square and there is 50mm square between each rock(bumpy). 27kms after Deqing to 10kms before Zuogong is a 350kms continuous dirt road. There are intense long ups and downs to cross Yangtze, Lancang, and Nu River. 14kms after Bangda (Yela Pass) is 57kms very bad dirt road, and very few places to camp.

From Kunming to Dali, the traffic is heavy; the road is bad and narrow. In Tibet, there are fewer cars.

Sometimes army are shifted elsewhere for garrison duty, there could be hundreds of trucks at a time. The roads would be blocked and they would cast up dust.

Always be careful, drivers don't have any idea of the good manners on roads. Dangerous overtaking is a norm. No rules on roundabouts. China has one of the worst road safety records in the world. Watch out for the falling rocks/landslide, due to animals walking around, human activity. There are very few bike shops in Tibet. Except in capitals, no 700c or French-style valve tubes or fancy bike parts.

You can carry/send your bike on train for small charge. Remember, not all stations offer this service. From Lahsa, you could only send your bike on the same train as far to Lanzhou. For example, if you want to send it to Guangzhou, it takes 2 weeks to arrive. (It might change in the future) Otherwise, you could bring bike on train with you if you take sleeper. Take the front wheel off, turn the handlebar, make it smaller. You can put it under the bed, the top luggage storage place, or leave next to the doors which are not going to be opened during the travel.

Hazards: China has rabies—injection are recommended. Dogs do bark and bite.

Water

Hot water is always available: it's vital for Chinese daily life, the same in Tibet. (Chinese drink green tea all the time, without sugar and milk. Tibetan drink Yak butter tea with salt.) Any hotels, restaurants will offer you free boiled water in a vacuum bottle. There are not so many factories or human in Tibet, it seems that the river there is less polluted. Bottled drinking water is 1L=¥2-5, but not reliably safe. I don't recommend buying bottled drinking water, it produces too much trash.

Food

Food in Tibet is more expensive than Yunnan. A Chinese meal usually is plain rice with several side dishes and a soup. One vegetable dishes is ¥8-10. Rice is 1-2¥, eat as much as you want. Fried rice with egg(¥4-8). They are usually Sichuan cuisine. In sizable towns, there are migrants from all over China, especially Hui people in the towns close to Lahsa, they have hand-made noodles(¥5-10) and mutton(¥50/kg). They always put MSG, ask them not to put it if you don't want it. (bu yao fang wei jing) You'd better ask for price before you order. People in Tibet wake up very late (8-9am), you have to prepare your own breaky if you leave very early. Noodle soup, steam buns is common for breaky. There are tourist restaurants with menu in English but they are expensive; some simple restaurants usually don't have menu, they put fresh food in the kitchen, you can

indicate what you want to eat. Tibetans eat more meat and dairy products. There are free range black pigs, yaks, and goats. Chickens are imported from other provinces. Now Tibetans also have a lot of rice. But they still eat roasted barley flour with yak butter tea in the morning. You could ask villagers for roasted barley flour for free. Barley wine and yak butter tea are common drinks. There are tea houses along the way (sometimes no sign), ¥4-10(depends on the quantity). Dairy products from market are usually not good quality. Buy yak milk, butter, cheese from herdsman's tents. In Lahsa, they sell yoghurt in glasses, plastic bottles, wooden bowls on streets, in grocery stores. Coffee is not common. Bigger towns have grocery stores that label the price. Supermarkets are not necessarily cheaper. Standard unit of weight is "jin=500g." Cooking on your own is much cheaper.

Accommodation

Accommodation is cheap, though Tibet is more expensive than Yunnan. Towns in Tibet are usually very tiny, it's very easy to find place to stay. You could usually find a bed for ¥10. They're very basic and might be dirty. In Tibet, where there are very few residents, and has very beautiful nature, camping or staying with herdsman or villagers is the best choice. Towns are usually occupied by Chinese immigrants and military camps, they are very ugly compared to the nature just close by. You could understand Tibetan more if you stay in small villages or stay with herdsman. In general, Tibetans are very friendly. Bring some gifts to give them if they accommodate you. Even small gifts like pens or snacks make them very happy. You can also stay at Tibetan tea house. You could sleep on the huge wooden Tibetan sofas they use in the day time, which are also used as bed. It's a good idea to bring a sheet sleeping bag from home. In bigger towns, you could take hot shower(¥5) or bath(¥15?) in special shops. In Lahsa, "Dongcuo International Youth Hotel" on 10 Beijing E Road give cyclists discount. "Cyclist Station" is there, you could get cycle information, meet other cyclists.

Permit

So far, it seems that foreigners still could get caught if cycling on this route. It's a good idea to cycle with Chinese as a group. It's a popular route for Chinese, July- Aug in particular.

Graphs

Coming....

Side trip from Lijiang to BaoShan Stone Town and Daju, Shangli-la

From Lijiang, you could cycle to Jade Dragon Snow Mountain, continue to Bao-Shan Stone town, a small village built on a big rock next to YangTze River. From Daju, you could take boat to cross YangTze River. Then you could choose to cycle west to Tiger Leaping Gorge, or north via Ha Ba to Shangli-la/ZhongDian. It's a very nice ride.

Day 1: Lijiang-Jade Dragon Snow Mountain Toll Gate, 23kms

To go to BaoShan, you have to go through Jade Dragon Snow Mountain Toll Gate(¥120). The only way to avoid the unreasonable fees on bike, is to go through it before sunrise. Camping near the gate is nice, bring water. All flat.

Day2:Toll Gate-Mao Niu Ping-Daju/Mingyin Junction-Mingyin-BaoShan , 83kms.

Leave before sunrise. After toll gate, the road starts to go up. Then go down, up and down, up to the last tourist spot "Mao Niu Ping" (cable cars). About 28kms, there is a junction. A dirt road go north to Daju, bitumen go east to Mingyin. Take the road to Mingyin. The ride passes farms and forest, it's beautiful. After Mingyin, it becomes road that has square rocks on it. 11kms up and 15kms down to Baoshan. You could camp in the forest before or after Baoshan.

Day3:Baoshan-Baoshan Stone town, 22kms

Baoshan Stone town is 22kms away from Baoshan, dirt road, 8kms up, 14kms down. Many foreigners tourists come here. Not many Chinese tourists yet.

There are trucks running between Stone Town-Lijiang daily.

Day4: Stone Town-2kms before Mingyin(transformer station)-Daju, 71kms

Go back to 2kms before Mingyin, there is a transformer station on the left. Take a small country road west down to Daju. Very bad dirt road. Beautiful. In Daju, stay in friendly Snow Flake GS. (¥10, English speaking)

Day5:Daju-ferry(¥20 including bike)-Haba, 31kms

Go down to the river to take ferry to cross YangTze River. Go up to the bitumen. Go west, it's Tiger Leaping Gorge. Climb north to Ha Ba. It's where people start to go trekking to Haba Snow Mountain. Haba Snow Mountain GH has trekking gear to rent.

Day6: Haba-Bai-Bai Shui Tai(San Ba)- 64kms from ZhongDian, 73kms

A lot of ups and downs. Bai Shui Tai is a Chinese tourists sopt. After that, you'll pass through several Yi villages.

Day7:-Jiu Long -ZhongDian(Shangeri-la), 64kms

After crossing the last high pass, you are entering Tibetan world. Dragoncloud GH(¥15, 94 North Door St, in the old town, near YHA)

Oct 2006 by Ting @ Taipei ,Taiwan

(<http://www.tingrides.net>, <http://www.beijingtoparis.com>)