



# Qīnghǎi

POPULATION: 5.4 MILLION

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## Best Places to Eat

- » Black Tent (p867)
- » Yīpínguó Nóngzhuāng (p873)
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- » Qīnghǎi Tǔ Huǒguō (p867)

## Best Places to Drink

- » Rebkong Teahouse (p871)
- » Greenhouse (p867)
- » On the bank of the Yellow River (p872)
- » Black Tent (p867)
- » Sǔjī Nímǎ (p867)

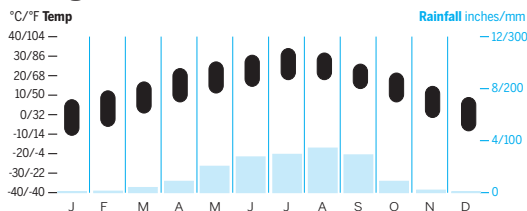
## Why Go?

Big, bold and beautifully barren, Qīnghǎi (青海), larger than any European country, occupies a vast swathe of the northeastern chunk of the Tibetan plateau. In fact, as far as Tibetans are concerned, this isn't China at all; it's Amdo, one of old Tibet's three traditional provinces, and much of what you'll experience here will seem very much Tibetan rather than Chinese; there are monasteries galore, yaks by the hundred and nomads camped out across high-altitude grasslands.

Rough-and-ready Qīnghǎi is classic off-the-beaten-track territory, often with that last-frontier feel to it. Travelling around is both inconvenient and uncomfortable, and you can go for days without meeting another tourist. But those wonderful moments of solitude, those middle-of-nowhere high-plateau vistas and the chance to discover some of the more remote communities of China's ethnic minorities make the long bus rides, the cold weather, and the often head-achingly high altitude well worth bearing.

## When to Go

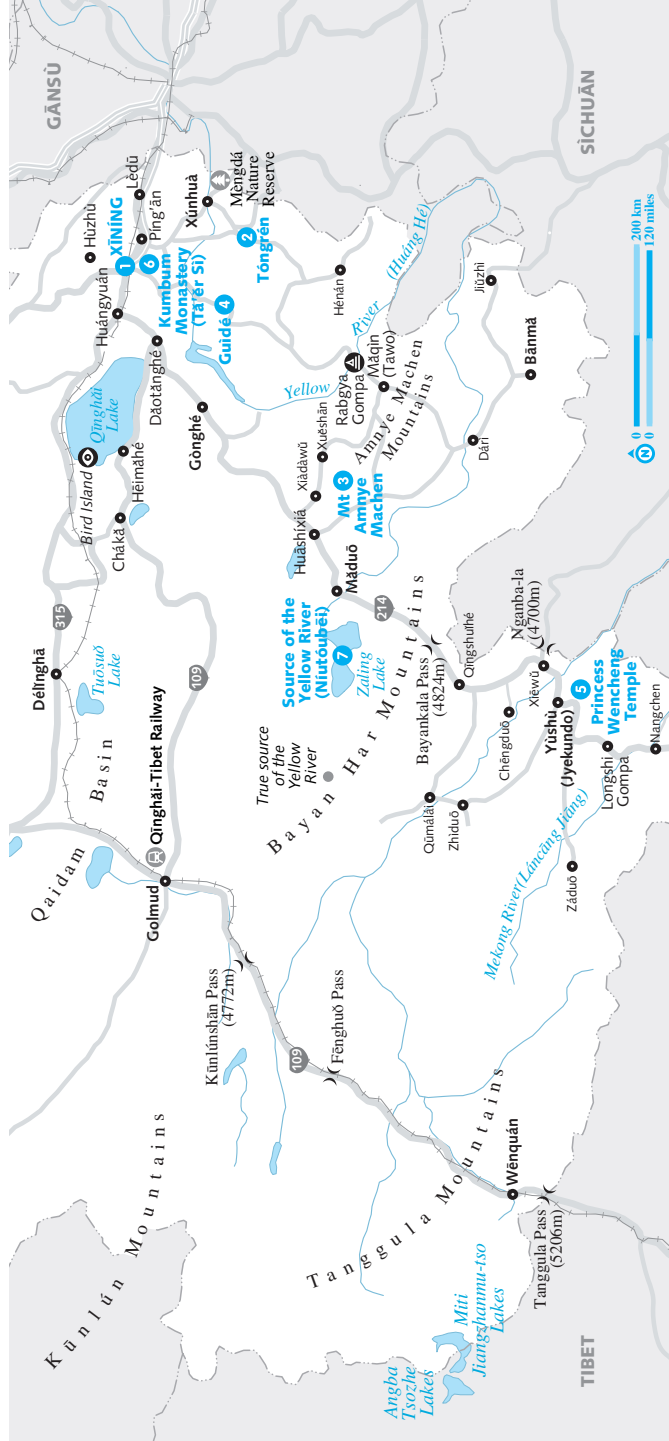
### Xīníng



**January & February**  
Tibetan New Year (Losar), with lots of pilgrims and celebrations at monasteries.

**July–September**  
Grasslands at their greenest; landscape dotted with nomad tents.

**September**  
Safest and most comfortable time for trekking around Mt Amnye Machen.



## Qinghai Highlights

- 1 Sample the culinary delights of **Xining** (p864)
- 2 Buy a Tibetan *thangka* straight from the artist's easel in **Tongren** (p870)
- 3 Complete a high-altitude trek on the slopes of eastern Tibet's most sacred mountain, **Amnye Machen** (p870)
- 4 Stay in a farmers-style courtyard inside the

walled old town of **Guidé** (p873)

- 5 Sidestep the spider's web of prayer flags on a hike around the hills beside **Princess Wencheng Temple** (p874)

- 6 Join the pilgrims, monks and yak-butter sculptures at **Kumbum Monastery** (p868)

- 7 Venture across the Qinghai-Tibet plateau to the

remote **source of the Yellow River** (p872)

- 8 Take one of the world's great train rides, the **Qinghai-Tibet Railway** (p868) to Lhasa, at Xining or Golmud

## History

The northern Silk Road passed through what is now Qīnghǎi province, and in 121 BC the Han dynasty established a military base near modern Xīníng to counter Tibetan raids on trading caravans.

During the Yarlung dynasty, a time of great expansion of Tibetan power and influence, Qīnghǎi was brought directly under Lhasa's control. After the collapse of the dynasty in AD 842, local rulers filled the ensuing power vacuum, some nominally acting as vassals of Song-dynasty emperors.

In the 13th century all of Qīnghǎi was incorporated into the Yuan empire under Genghis Khan. During this time the Tū began to move into the area around Hūzhū, followed a century or so later by the Salar Muslims into Xīnhuà.

After the fall of the Yuan dynasty, local Mongol rulers and the Dalai Lamas in Lhasa wrestled for power. The Qing emperors restored the region to full Chinese control, setting it up as a prefecture with more or less the same boundaries as today. As in the past, however, they left administrative control in the hands of local elites.

Qīnghǎi officially became a province of China in 1929 during the republican era, though at the time it was under the de facto control of the Muslim Ma clan. Qīnghǎi was again made a province in 1949 with the establishment of the People's Republic of China.

In the late 1950s an area near Qīnghǎi Lake (Qīnghǎi Hú) became the centre of China's nuclear weapons research program. In the next 40 years, at least 30 tests were held at a secret base, the Qīnghǎi Mine.

In April 2010, Yùshù, a Tibetan town in remote southwest Qīnghǎi, was devastated by

a 7.1-magnitude earthquake. Thousands of people died, some say tens of thousands. For more information, see the boxed text (p941).

## Language

Most of the population in Qīnghǎi speaks a northwestern Chinese dialect similar to that spoken in Gānsù. Most Tibetans here speak the Amdo dialect. It's possible to travel almost everywhere using Mandarin.

## Getting There & Around

Most people arrive by train, usually into Xīníng, but after that train lines are limited so long-distance buses are the order of the day. In more remote areas you'll often have no option but to hire a private vehicle or hitch. Off-the-beaten-track overland routes include south into Sìchuān, at Aba or Sērsu (Shíqú), and north into Gānsù or Xīnjiāng from Golmud. Routes southwest into Tibet are even more remote but are often closed to foreigners.

## Xīníng

西宁

 0971 / POP 2.1 MILLION / ELEV 2275M

Perched on the eastern edge of the Tibetan plateau, this lively provincial capital makes a perfect springboard from which to dive into the surrounding sights and on to the more remote regions of Qīnghǎi and beyond. The food and lodging are good, the air is fresh, and the populace is an interesting mix of Muslim (Hui, Salar and Uighur), Tibetan and Hān Chinese.

## Sights

### Tibetan Culture Museum

MUSEUM

(藏文化博物馆; Zàng Wénhuà Bówùguǎn; admission Y60; ☉9.30am-5pm) Previously known as the Tibetan Medicine Museum, this unusual place still focuses on traditional Tibetan medicine and includes old medical instruments, bags, scrolls and, in the astronomy section, a very large sand mandala. The highlight, though, is the incredible 618m-long *thangka* scroll – the world's longest – which charts pretty much the whole of Tibetan history. Completed in 1997 it's by no means an ancient relic, but it is unfeasibly long. It took 400 artists four years to complete and is ingeniously displayed in a relatively small hall. Bus 34 (Y1) comes here from West Gate. Bus 1 also goes close. A taxi's about Y15 from the centre.

### Běichán Si

TEMPLE

(北禪寺; ☉8am-4pm) The main temple at the foot of this barren hillside is noth-

## PRICE INDICATORS

The following price indicators are used in this chapter:

### Sleeping

- \$ less than Y150
- \$\$ Y150 to Y300
- \$\$\$ more than Y300

### Eating

- \$ less than Y30
- \$\$ Y30 to Y50
- \$\$\$ more than Y50

ing special but halfway up the steep climb to the top you pass cave temples and shrines that are thought to be 1700 years old. A pagoda, and great views of the city await you at the top. Turn left after you pass under the railway line and follow the road round to the temple entrance, or take a Y6 cab.

**FREE Qinghai Provincial Museum** MUSEUM  
(青海省博物馆; Qinghai Shěng

Bówùguǎn; Xínníng Sq, 58 Xiguan Dajie; 新宁广场西关大街58号; ☎9am-4.30pm Mon-Sat) Scaled down in recent years, but still has some nice pieces recovered from excavations in Qinghai. The Tibetan carpet exhibition is worth seeing. Bus 1 goes here, or take bus 22 from Dongguan Dajie.

**Great Mosque** MOSQUE

(清真大寺; Qīngzhēn Dàsì; 25 Dongguan Dajie; admission Y15; ☎7am-8pm) About one-third of Xining's population is Muslim and there are more than 80 mosques across the city. But this is the big one. In fact, it's one of the largest mosques in China. Friday lunchtime prayers regularly attract 50,000 worshippers who spill out onto the streets before and afterwards. And during Ramadan as many as 300,000 come here to pray. Non-Muslims can't enter the main prayer hall, but can stroll around the grounds. The mosque was first built during the late 14th century and has since been restored.

**FREE Golden Stupa Temple** BUDDHIST TEMPLE

(金塔寺; Jīntǎ Sì; 19 Hongjiesi Jie; 宏觉寺街19号; ☎8am-4pm) Small temple named after long-destroyed golden *chörten* (Tibetan stupa). Used as place of study by monks at Kumbum Monastery.

**City Wall** RUIN

(城墙; Chéngqiáng; Kunlun Zhonglu; 昆仑中路) One or two isolated sections of Xining's old city wall still remain, the most accessible being a short stretch on Kunlun Zhonglu.

**Sleeping**

**Lete Youth Hostel** YOUTH HOSTEL \$

(理体青年旅舍; Lǐtǐ Qīngnián Lúshè; ☎820 2080; www.xnlete.com; 16th fl, Bldg No 5, International Village Apartments, 2-32 Jiancai Xiang; 建材巷2-32号国际村公寓5号楼16层; dm Y30-35, s/d Y40/80, d with bathroom Y120; @☎) This friendly hostel has the best backpacker vibe in Xining and is a great place to get the low-down on travelling in Qinghai and on to Tibet. The modern,

multifloor layout includes cafe/bar, wide-screen TVs, laundry, kitchen and a small terrace that you can sleep out on in summer (Y10). Rooms are clean, bright and spacious, although singles are tiny. Staff members speak good English and the travel agency Tibetan Connections is two floors up. One black mark: the showers are either cold, or a trickle.

**Chéng Lín Hotel** HOTEL \$\$\$

(成林大厦; Chénglín Dàshà; ☎491 1199; Dong Dajie; 东大街; tw/d Y260/280; ☎) Spacious, well turned out rooms with ensuite shower come with dark-wood furniture, TV and kettle and are great value after discounts. Twins were going for Y133 when we were there. No internet in the rooms, but there's an internet cafe (per hour Y2 to Y4) on the third floor. Limited English.

**Jiànyín Hotel** HOTEL \$\$\$

(建银宾馆; Jiànyín Bīnguǎn; ☎826 1539; 55 Xi Dajie; 西大街55号; d/tw Y468/668; ☎@) There are fancier hotels in town, but we like the old-school feel to this place with its gaudy maroon and gold carpets snaking through gloomy corridors. The rooms themselves are bright and spacious (although bathrooms are pokey) and come with a computer (Y20 extra) or just internet access (per hour Y2.40). Staff are friendly and discounts are superb; twins can drop to Y300.

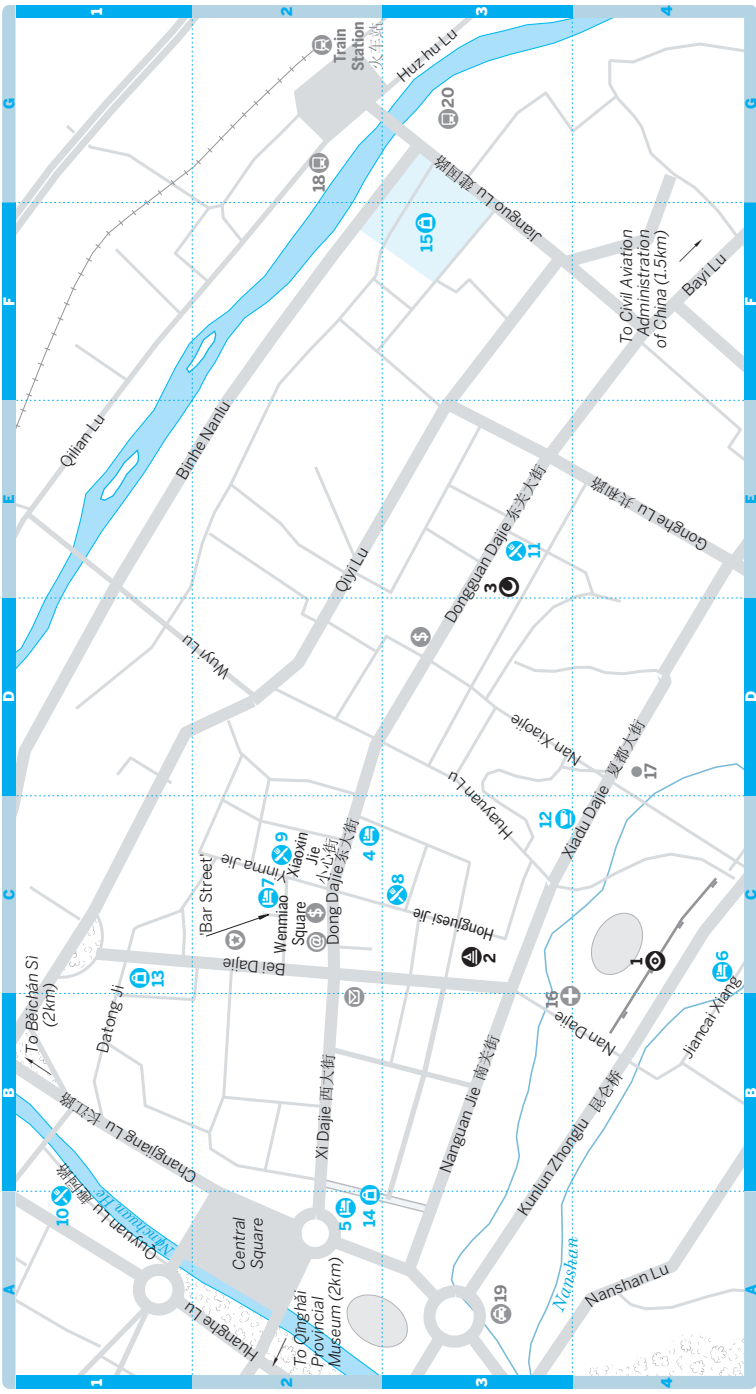
**Sunshine Pagoda International Youth Hostel** YOUTH HOSTEL \$

(塔顶阳光国际青年旅舍; Tǎdǐng Yāngguāng Guóji Qīngnián Lúshè; ☎821 5571; www.tdyg-inn.com; Wenmiao Square 3rd fl, off Wenhua Jie; 文华街文庙广场3层; dm Y35-55, r Y80; @☎) More popular with Chinese travellers than Westerners, this OK hostel is in the thick of the action if it's drinking you're after. Rooms are basic but tidy and there's a cosy cafe area.

**Eating**

Xining has a great range of food. Try the Tibetan district around the train station for cheap Tibetan fare. For Muslim food head to Dongguan Dajie, near the Great Mosque, or the northern stretch of Nan Xiaojie. For snacks, try one of the cheap barbecue places (烧烤; *shǎokǎo*) on Xiao Xijie that stay open until the early hours, or head to Mo Jia Jie Market (墨家街市场; Mòjiājiē Shìchǎng) where you can also sample a local favourite: spicy cold noodles (酿皮; *niàng pí*; Y4).

Xining

 0 500 m  
 0 0.25 miles


## Xining

## 📍 Sights

- 1 City Wall .....C4  
2 Golden Stupa Temple .....C3  
3 Great Mosque .....E3

## 🏠 Sleeping

- 4 Cheng Lin Hotel .....C2  
5 Jiānyín Hotel .....A2  
6 Lete Youth Hostel .....C4  
7 Sunshine Pagoda International Youth Hostel .....C2

## 🍴 Eating

- Black Tent .....(see 7)  
8 Mo Jia Jie Market .....C3  
9 Qinghai Tū Huǒguō .....C2  
10 Sūjī Nímǎ .....A1  
11 Zhènyà Niúròu Miàn .....E3

## 🍷 Drinking

- 12 Greenhouse .....C3

## 🛒 Shopping

- 13 Amdo Café .....C1  
14 Shuǐjīng Xiàng Market .....A2  
15 Tibetan Market .....F3

## Information

- 16 Qinghai Red Cross Hospital .....B3  
17 Snow Lion Tours .....D4  
Tibetan Connections .....(see 6)

## Transport

- 18 Buses to Kumbum Monastery .....G2  
19 Taxis to Kumbum Monastery .....A3  
20 Xining Bus Station .....G3

## Black Tent

TIBETAN \$\$

(黑帐房藏餐吧; Hēizhàngǎng Zàngcānbà; ☎823 4029; 18 Wenmiao Sq, 3rd fl; 文庙广场18号3层; dishes Y15-40; ☎9.30am-10.30pm; 🍷) Authentic Tibetan nosh, including *tsampa* (roasted barley; Y17), *momo* (dumplings; Y25 to Y30) and yak-butter yoghurt (Y12) as well as some tasty Nepalese dishes. Also serves yak-butter tea (per pot Y20) and Qinghai's favourite local tippie, barley wine (青稞酒; qīngkē jiǔ).

## Qinghai Tū Huǒguō

HOTPOT \$

(青海土火锅; ☎491 0881; 31 Yinma Jie; pots Y58/78/98; ☎11am-10pm) Unlike its fiery Chóngqing cousin, Qinghai's chilli-less hotpot, which comes in attractive copper pots, won't burn your head off when you eat it. This place has three different pot sizes, all of which include 10 different ingredients.

If you can read Chinese, you can add more from the menu. The Y58 version is plenty for two or three people. Dipping sauces – either chilli (香辣; xiānglà) or garlic (蒜泥; suànní) – are Y2 extra.

## Sūjī Nímǎ

TIBETAN \$\$\$

(苏姬尼玛风情宫; Sūjī Nímǎ Fēngqíng Gōng; ☎610 2288; Quyuan Lu (off Huanghe Lu); 趣园路(黄河路); dishes Y30-80, beer from Y15; ☎3pm-midnight) The main reason to come to this canal-side restaurant is to watch the evening performances of Tibetan dancing (9.30pm to midnight) which are free as long as you buy drinks or a meal. The Tibetan food is also very good. There's no English menu but the *kāngbā niúpái* (康巴牛排; Khampa beef steak; Y58) and *zàngxiāng mènǚjī* (藏乡焖土鸡; Tibetan clay pot chicken; Y46) are highly recommended.

## Zhènyà Niúròu Miàn

MUSLIM \$

(震亚牛肉面; 24 Dongguan Dajie; noodles Y5/6.5; ☎9am-10pm) Join the local Muslim population for their noodle fix at this busy place by the Great Mosque. There's no menu, but there are only two dishes: beef noodles (牛肉面; niúròu miàn; Y5) and minced-meat noodles (干拌面; gān bànmiàn; Y6.50). A small peppery soup (酸汤; suān tāng) comes free.



## Drinking

If you like your bars to come with loud music, neon lights, booth seating and scantily clad waitresses head to Xining's so-called **bar street** (酒吧街; jiǔ bā jiē; beer from Y6); three floors of bars, cafes and restaurants are set around Confucius Temple Sq (文庙广场; Wénmiào Guǎngchǎng) off Wenhua Jie.

## Greenhouse

CAFE

(古林房咖啡; Gǔlínfáng Kāfēi; 222-22 Xiadu Dajie; 夏都大街222-22号; coffee from Y13; ☎8am-10.30pm; ☎) Rustic split-level wood interior and easily the best coffee in town. Also serves smoothies (Y20) and snacks (Y4 to Y25).



## Shopping

In the lively Tibetan market (西藏市场; Xīzàng Guǎngchǎng) near the train station you'll find stall after stall selling traditional fabrics and clothing.

## Amdo Café

HANDICRAFTS

(安多咖啡屋; Ānduō Kāfēiwū; ☎821 3127; Datong Jie; ☎9am-6pm Mon-Sat; ☎) Profits from the lovely handmade Tibetan gifts (from Y6) sold here go back to the local

craftswomen. There's also decent coffee (from Y8).

### Shuǐjǐng Xiàng Market SOUVENIRS

(水井巷商场; Shuǐjǐng Xiàng Shāngchǎng;  
☉9am-6pm) Lively market running north-south between Xi Dajie and Nanguan Jie.

## **i** Information

**Bank of China** (中国银行; Zhōngguó Yínháng;  
☉9am-5pm Mon-Fri, 10am-4pm Sat & Sun)  
Branches on Dongguan Dajie, Dong Dajie and next to CAAC on Bayi Lu all change cash and travellers cheques and have foreign-friendly ATMs.

**Post office** (中国邮政; Zhōngguó Yóuzhèng; Da Shizi, cnr Xi Dajie & Nan Dajie; ☎8.30am-6pm)

**Public Security Bureau** (PSB; 公安局; Gōng'ānjú; 35 Bei Dajie; ☎8.30-11.30am & 2.30-5.30pm Mon-Fri) Can extend visas.

**Qīnghǎi Red Cross Hospital** (青海红十字医院; Qīnghǎi Hóngshízi Yiyuán; ☎824 7545; Nan Dajie) English-speaking doctors available. Outpatients (门诊部; ménzhěn bù) has a 24-hour pharmacy (药店; yàodiàn).

**Snow Lion Tours** (☎134 3932 9243; www.snowliontours.com; Suite # 1212, Chenglin Dasha, 成林大厦 (Chéng Lín Hotel) Run by knowledgeable English-speaking Tibetan guy; arranges treks, camping with nomads and Tibet permits.

**Tiāntángniǎo Internet** (天堂鸟网络; Tiāntángniǎo wǎnglù; Dong Dajie; per hr Y2-3.50; ☎24hr) Second and 3rd floor.

**Tibetan Connections** (☎820 3271; www.tibetanconnections.com; 2-32 Jian Cai Xiang, International Village Bldg 5, 18th fl) Foreign-managed agency organising treks, camp-outs and cultural tours in Qīnghǎi, as well as Lhasa train tickets and permits. Above Lete Youth Hostel.

## Getting There & Away

### Air

Flights include Běijīng (Y1550), Chéngdū (Y1090), Shànghǎi (Y1950), Gōlmud (Y1420, three weekly) and Xī'ān (Y720). There are no direct flights to Lhasa. You must fly via Chéngdū.

The **Civil Aviation Administration of China** (CAAC; 中国民航; Zhōngguó Mínháng; ☎813 3333; 32 Bayi Xilu; ☎8.30am-5.30pm) has a booking office on the eastern edge of town.

### Bus

Destinations from **Xīníng Bus Station** (车站; chēzhàn):

**Bǎnmǎ** Y160, 15 hours, one daily (4pm)

**Lánzhōu** Y56, three hours, every 30 minutes (7.20am to 6.30pm)

**Mǎqīn** (Tawo) Y100, 12 hours, three daily (8.45am seats only, 5pm and 6pm sleepers)

**Píng'ān** Y6.80, one hour, every seven minutes (7am to 6.30pm)

**Tónggrén** Y32.50, four hours, every 30 minutes (7.30am to 5pm)

**Xiàhè** Y50, six hours, one daily (7.15am)

**Xúnhuà** Y30, five hours, every 30 minutes (7.20am to 4.20pm)

**Yùshù** sleeper Y175, 16 to 17 hours, six daily

**Zhāngyè** slow bus/fast bus Y97/Y59, six hours/eight hours, two/three daily (9am and 3pm/7.30am, 5.30pm and 6.30pm)

## Train

Lhasa-bound trains pass through Xīníng (Y395, 25 hours, six daily from 2.56pm to 7.40pm) on their way towards the now world-famous **Qīnghǎi-Tibet Railway** stretch of China's rail network, but the K9801 (2.56pm) actually starts here, so is usually easier to get tickets for. You will, of course, need all your Tibet papers in order. Other destinations from Xīníng train station (火车站; huǒchē zhàn) include the following:

**Běijīng** sleeper Y416, 22 to 24 hours, two daily (10.19am and 12.02pm)

**Chéngdū** sleeper Y300, 25 and 20½ hours, two daily (9.24am and 11.48am)

**Gōlmud** seat/sleeper Y113/201, 9½ hours, eight daily (2.56pm to 10pm)

**Lánzhōu** Y33, 2½ hours, 17 daily (8am to 10.20pm)

**Xī'ān** seat/sleeper Y116/207, 10½ to 12½ hours, nine daily (9am to 10.20pm)

## **i** Getting Around

The airport is 27km east of the city. Shuttle buses (Y21, 30 minutes) leave roughly two hours before flights from the CAAC office on Bayi Lu.

Handy Bus 1 (Y1) runs from the train station and along Dongguan Dajie to Central Sq before heading north to the Tibetan Culture Museum. Taxis are Y6 for the first 3km and Y1.20 per kilometre thereafter.

## Around Xīníng

### KUMBUM MONASTERY (Tǎ'ěr Sì)

塔尔寺

One of the great monasteries of the Gelugpa (Yellow Hat) sect of Tibetan Buddhism, the **Kumbum Monastery** (Tǎ'ěr Sì; admission Y80; ☎8.30am-6pm) is in the small town of Huángzhōng (湟中), 26km south of Xīníng. It was built in 1577 on hallowed ground – the birthplace of Tsongkhapa, founder of the Gelugpa sect.

## BIRD-WATCHING AT QINGHAI LAKE

China's largest lake, Qinghai Lake (青海湖; Qinghai Hú; Lake Kokonor; elevation 3600m) has become an over-touristy big-draw destination for large tour groups, but bird-watchers may still enjoy a trip here.

**Bird Island** (鸟岛; Niǎo Dǎo; admission Y115), on the western side of the lake, about 300km from Xining, is worth visiting from March to early June. The island (now in fact a peninsula) is the breeding ground for thousands of wild geese, gulls, cormorants, sandpipers, extremely rare black-necked cranes and other bird species. Perhaps the most interesting are the bar-headed geese that migrate over the Himalaya to spend winter on the Indian plains, and have been spotted flying at altitudes of 10,000m.

The closest accommodation to Bird Island is **Niǎo Dǎo Bīnguǎn** (鸟岛宾馆; ☎0970-865 5098; r with breakfast from Y380). You are still 16km from the island here, but you should be able to hire a taxi (Y50 return). Camping is another option.

Every travel agency in Xining offers trips to Qinghai Lake. At the time of research, Tibetan Connections was offering a two-day camping trip for Y700 (transport costs only). You could get to the lake much more cheaply if you hired a private minivan or taxi from Xining with a group of travellers.

It's of enormous historical significance, and hundreds of monks still live here but, perhaps because it's such a big tourist draw for this part of Qinghai, the atmosphere pales in comparison with other monasteries in Amdo. The artwork and architecture, however, remain impressive.

Nine temples are open, each with its own characteristics. The most important is the **Grand Hall of Golden Tiles** (大金瓦殿; Dàjīnwǎ Diàn), where an 11m-high *chörten* marks the spot of Tsongkhapa's birth. You'll see pilgrims walking circuits of the building and prostrating outside the entrance. Also worth seeking out is the **Yak Butter Scripture Temple** (酥油画馆; Sūyóuhuà Guǎn) which houses sculptures of human figures, animals and landscapes carved out of yak butter.

Buses to Huángzhōng (Y3, 45 minutes) leave every six minutes from the small bus station opposite Xining train station, starting at 7am. The bus you want doesn't have a number so look above the front wind-screen for the characters: 西宁火车站—专线—湟中汽车站 (Xining train station to Huángzhōng bus station). Get off at the last stop and keep walking up the hill to the monastery. The last bus back is at 7pm. Shared taxis (拼车; *pīnchē*; Y8 per seat, 30 minutes) leave from the southeast corner of Kunlun Bridge.

### YOUNING SI

佑宁寺

Well known throughout the Tibetan world, but rarely visited by tourists, this sprawling

17th-century hillside monastery in the Hùzhù Tǔzú (互助土族) Autonomous County is also considered one of the greats of the Gelugpa order.

Famous for its academies of medicine and astrology, its scholars and its living Buddhas (*tulku*), Yǒuning Sì (Rgolving in Tibetan) was instrumental in solidifying Gelugpa dominance over the Amdo region. The monastery was founded by the Mongolian 4th Dalai Lama, and over time became a religious centre for the local Tǔ (themselves a distant Mongolian people). At its height, over 7000 monks resided here; these days there are probably less than 200, all of whom are Tǔ.

The monastery lies at the edge of a forested valley, and many chapels perch wondrously on the sides of a cliff face. Give yourself a couple of hours to explore the whole picturesque area.

The easiest way to the monastery is to take a bus to Píng'ān (Y6.80, one hour), then hire a taxi (one way/return Y50/90, 30 minutes). For just over Y200 you should be able to include a visit to the birthplace of the 14th Dalai Lama, but make sure you're clear on how long you want to spend at each place. It is possible to bus it from Píng'ān, but it involves a lot of waiting: take a bus bound for Hùzhù (互助) but get off at the turn-off for Yǒuning Sì (Yǒuning Sì lùkǒu) then wave down a bus to the monastery. The monastery is about 25km north of Píng'ān.



## BIRTHPLACE OF THE 14TH DALAI LAMA

达赖故居

About 30km southeast of the town of Píng'ān, in the remote, sleepy village of Taktser (红崖村; Hóngyá Cūn), set in a ring of high snow-brushed mountains, is the birthplace of the 14th Dalai Lama (Dá-lài gǔjū). The building is open to foreign visitors only when there are no political tensions in Tibet, and it's been closed to foreigners during March and April in recent years because of a number of sensitive dates during those months.

Assuming you are allowed in, you'll be able to visit the room where his Holiness was born (marked by a golden *chörten*), as well as a restored chapel that contains his former bed and throne. A side room displays some old family photos, including those of the Dalai Lama's parents, sister and brothers.

The Dalai Lama last visited here in 1955 en route to Běijīng to meet with Chairman Mao. The previous (13th) Dalai Lama paused here en route to Labrang just long enough to predict his own next reincarnation. You can spot the building (No 055) by its large wooden gate tied with *katags* (white ceremonial scarves).

Take a bus to Píng'ān (Y6.80, one hour) then take a cab (Y150 return; 50 minutes).

## Tónggrén (Repkong) 同仁

☑0973

For several centuries now, the villages outside the monastery town of Tónggrén (Repkong in Tibetan) have been famous for producing some of the Tibetan world's best *thangkas* (Tibetan sacred art) and painted statues, so much so that an entire school of Tibetan art is named after the town. Visiting the Wútún Sì monastery not only gives you a chance to meet the artists, but also to purchase a painting or two, fresh off the easel.

Tónggrén is set on the slopes of the wide and fertile Gu-chu river valley. The local populace is a mix of Tibetans and Tū. The valley and surrounding hills are easily explored on foot.

Everything in town is walking distance from the five-way junction by Repkong Bridge (热贡桥; Règòng Qiáo). If you have your back to the bridge, take the first right to the bus station (50m), the second right to Tónggrén Holiday Hotel (500m), go straight on for Zhongshan Lu and turn left for Rongwo Gonchen Gompa (750m).

### 👁 Sights

**Rongwo Gonchen Gompa** MONASTERY (隆务寺; Dehelong NanLu; 德合隆南路; admission Y50) Tónggrén's main monastery (Lóng-wù Sì) is a huge and rambling maze of renovated chapels and monks' residences,

## TREKKING ON SACRED MT AMNYE MACHEN

The 6282m peak of Machen Kangri, or Mt Amnye Machen (阿尼玛卿山; Ānīmǎqīng Shān), is Amdo's most sacred mountain – it's eastern Tibet's equivalent to Mt Kailash in western Tibet. Tibetan pilgrims travel for weeks to circumambulate the peak, believing it to be home to the protector deity Machen Pomra. The circuit's sacred geography and wild mountain scenery make it a fantastic, though adventurous, trekking destination.

The full circuit takes a week, or five days on a horse, though tourists often limit themselves to a half circuit. Several monasteries lie alongside the route.

With almost all of the route above 4000m, and the highest pass hitting 4600m, it's essential to acclimatise before setting off, preferably by spending a night or two at nearby Mǎqīn (Tawo; 3760m). You can make a good excursion 70km north of town to **Rabgya Gompa** (拉加寺; Lājīā Sì), an important branch of Tibet's Sera Monastery. The best months to trek are May to October, though be prepared for snow early and late in the season.

Most trekkers will be on an organised tour. The travel agencies we list in Xīning (p932) can arrange trips, including English-speaking Tibetan guides. Expect to pay around US\$75 per person per day, all-inclusive.

If you decide to head out on your own, take the bus to Mǎqīn (Tawo) and then hitch or hire a minivan out to Xuěshān (雪山), the traditional starting point of the *kora* (pilgrim path), where you may be able to find a guide, but don't count on it.

dating from 1301. It's well worth a wander, and you'll need one or two hours to see everything. Your ticket includes entry into six main halls, although you may be able to take a peek inside others too. There are more than 500 resident monks and every day dozens of them go into the courtyard outside the Hall of Bodhisattva Manjusri to take part in animated, hand-clapping debates. There's a map in English on a wooden board just inside the main gate.

### Wútún Sì

MONASTERY

Sengshong village, 6km from Tónggrén, is the place to head if you're interested in Tibetan art. There are two monasteries, collectively known as **Wútún Sì** (吾屯寺), that are divided into an **Upper (Yango) Monastery** (上寺; Shàng Sì; admission Y10), closest to town, and a **Lower (Mango) Monastery** (下寺; Xià Sì; admission Y10). The monks will show you around whatever chapels happen to be open and then take you to a showroom or workshop. The resident artists are no amateurs – commissions for their work come in all the way from Lhasa, and prices aren't cheap. Artwork at the Upper Monastery is of an exceptionally high quality, but expect to pay hundreds of rénminbì for the smallest *thangka*, thousands for a poster-sized one and tens or even hundreds of thousands for the largest pieces. Remember, though, that an A4-sized *thangka* takes one artist at least a month to complete, and larger pieces take two artists up to a year to finish. Around the more touristy Lower Monastery there are more showrooms and you'll find cheaper versions here (from Y300), although the quality is still high.

The Lower Monastery is easily recognisable by eight large *chörten* out front. While there, check out the 100-year-old Jampa Lhakhang (Jampa Temple) and the new chapels dedicated to Chenresig and Tsongkhapa.

The Upper Monastery includes a massive modern *chörten* as well as the old *dukhang* (assembly hall) and the new chapel dedicated to Maitreya (Shampa in Amdo dialect). The interior murals here (painted by local artists) are superb.

To get here, take a minibus (Y2 per seat) from outside Tónggrén bus station ticket office. The walk back from here is pleasant.

### Gomar Gompa

MONASTERY

(郭麻日寺; admission Y10) Across the Gu-chu river valley from Wútún Sì is the mysterious 400-year-old Gomar Gompa (Guómári

Sì), a charming monastery that resembles a medieval walled village. There are 130 monks in residence living in whitewashed mud-walled courtyards and there are a few temples you can visit. The huge *chörten* outside the monastery entrance was built in the 1980s and is the biggest in Amdo. You can climb it, but remember to always walk clockwise. There are photos of the 14th Dalai Lama at the top.

To get here, turn left down a side road as you pass the last of the eight *chörten* outside Wútún Sì's Lower Monastery. Follow the road 1km across the river and turn right at the end on a main road. Then head up the track towards the giant *chörten*. Further up the valley is **Gasar Gompa**, marked by its own distinctive eight *chörtens*.

## Sleeping & Eating

### Tónggrén Holiday Hotel

HOTEL \$\$

(同仁假日宾馆; Tónggrén Jiàri Bīnguǎn; ☎872 8277; Dehelong Beilu; 德合隆北路; tw & d from Y198) Along with Yǐnlóng Hotel opposite, this is the most comfortable place to stay in town. Rooms are clean, bright and spacious, and discounts bring standard ones down to Y120.

### Huángnán Bīnguǎn

HOTEL \$

(黄南宾馆; ☎872 2293; 18 Zhongshan Lu; 中山路18号; dm Y20, tw without/with bathroom Y110/130) For something cheaper, but grittier, try this OK place on Zhongshan Lu. Twins with bathroom usually go for Y80. Note, the common bathrooms don't have showers. It's on the left as you walk away from the bridge.



### Rebkong Teahouse

TIBETAN \$

(热贡茶艺; Règòng Cháyì; Zhongshan Lu; dishes Y12-35; ☎8.30am-11pm; ☺) There are a few Tibetan teahouses in town but this is hands down the coolest. There's a small range of well-presented Tibetan dishes as well as snacks (from Y3), tea (including yak-butter tea; Y12), fresh coffee (from Y10) and beers (from Y6). Some English is spoken. It's at the far end of Zhongshan Lu from the bridge. First floor.

## Information

**China Construction Bank ATM** (建设银行; Jiànsè Yínháng; Zhongshan Lu; 中山路) Foreign-card friendly.

**Internet cafe** (网吧; wǎngbā; per hr Y3; ☎24hr) Opposite bank, inside China Telecom building.

## **i** Getting There & Around

The scenery on the road from Xīning is awesome as it follows a tributary of the Yellow River through steep-sided gorges, but the way out to Xiàhé is even better, passing dramatic red rock scenery and the impressive Gartse Gumpa, where local Tibetan herders board the bus to sell fresh yoghurt. Buses from **Tóngren Bus Station** include the following:

**Línxià** Y36.50, three hours, two daily (7.30am and 8am)

**Xiàhé** Y25, three hours, one daily (8am)

**Xīning** Y31, four hours, every 40 minutes (7.20am to 5pm)

**Xúnhuà** Y15, two hours, four daily (9.30am, 11am, 1pm and 3pm)

## Around Tóngren

A nice side trip from Tóngren is to **Xúnhuà** (循化), a town in the Xúnhuà Salar Autonomous County, about 75km northeast of Tóngren. The Salar Muslims have their origins in Samarkand and speak an isolated Turkic language, giving the region a Central Asian feel (and cuisine).

About 30km from Xúnhuà is Heaven Lake (Tiān Chí) at **Mèngdá Nature Reserve** (孟达自然保护区; Mèngdá Guójiā Zìrán Bǎohùqū; admission Y50; ☀7am-6pm). The tiny

lake is sacred for both Salar Muslims and Tibetan Buddhists, and is much hyped locally. There are, in truth, more picturesque lakes around Qīnghǎi, but the road to the reserve – which follows the coppery-green Yellow River as it cuts its way through a fantastically scenic gorge of rust-red cliffs – is worth the trip alone. You'll find stunning photo opportunities around every turn.

From the main gate of the reserve, you can ride horses (Y50, 30 minutes) to the lake or take a gas-powered buggy (free) to a small parking area, then walk the rest of the way.

To get the reserve you'll need to hire a taxi from outside Xúnhuà bus station. Expect to pay at least Y80 return, including waiting time. There are plenty of noodle restaurants opposite the bus station. **Miàn piàn** (面片; noodle squares; Y5) is a local favourite. If you get stuck here, **Jiāotōng Bīnguǎn** (交通宾馆; ☎0972-881 2615; d/tw Y188/228), beside the bus station, has comfortable rooms often discounted to less than Y100.

There are four buses a day back to Tóngren (Y15, 2½ hours, 9am, 11am, 1pm, 2pm), six to Línxià (Y23, three hours, 8am, 9am, 10am, 11.30am, 1pm, 3pm) and buses every 20 minutes to Xīning (Y25, four hours, 7am to 4pm).

## THE SOURCE OF THE YELLOW RIVER

For an adventurous side-trip into remote Qīnghǎi, and a chance to experience some stunning, barren, high-plateau scenery, head towards Zaling Lake (扎陵湖; Zǎlíng Hú) where it's possible to find the source of arguably China's most revered waterway, the Yellow River.

The scenery around the two lakes here, and en route, is awesome. Wildlife you may spot includes foxes, marmots, eagles, antelope and, of course, plenty of yaks. There's nowhere to stay or eat, so most people visit the lake as a day trip from the two-street town of Mǎduō (玛多). It is possible to camp here in the summer but you'll need to be completely self-sufficient.

Remember this area, including Mǎduō (4260m), is over 4000m high so altitude sickness is a real risk. Consider coming from Yùshù (3680m) rather than Xīning (2275m) so you don't have to ascend too much in one go.

In Mǎduō it's easy to find Land Cruisers to take you to the lake and back (Y800 per vehicle; three hours one way). Just left of Mǎduō bus station is **Liángyóu Bīnguǎn** (粮油宾馆; ☎0975 834 5048; s/tw Y128/168) with clean, simple rooms and shared bathroom.

Note, the widely accepted source of the Yellow River, which is marked by an engraved stone tablet, is actually just the most accessible of a number of sources. Locals, and your driver, will refer to it as **niútóubēi** (牛头碑). If you want to get to the very-hard-to-find true source of the Yellow River (黄河源头; Huánghé yuántóu) you'll need a two-day round trip from Mǎduō (sleeping in the jeep) and it will cost around Y3000 per vehicle, assuming you can find a driver willing to take you.

The bus back to Xīning from Mǎduō leaves at 7.30am.

## Guidé

贵德

So often a dreary muddy brown, the Yellow River (黄河; *Huáng Hé*) sparkles a jade shade of green as it powers its way past historical Guidé. Sitting on the riverbank here at sunset, with a beer in hand, is a great way to end the day. The old town (古城; *gǔchéng*), still largely enclosed within its crumbling 10m-high mud walls, also makes for a pleasant stroll and is a good base for your stay.

### 👁 Sights

The focal point of the old town is **Jade Emperor Temple** (玉皇阁; *Yùhuáng Gé*; admission ¥25; ☉8.30am-6pm), a small complex first built in 1592 and restored most recently in 2001. It includes a three-storey pagoda, which can be climbed for good views, and a Confucius Temple (文庙; *Wén Miào*). The square beside it contains the small **Museum of Guidé County** (admission free with temple ticket; ☉8.30am-6pm) which houses a handful of interesting Ming and Qing artefacts recovered from the local area, but lacks English captions.

Around the back of the old town is Jìngǎng Xiàn (进港线), a dirt track that leads down to the **Yellow River**. A large suspension bridge was being built at its far end at the time of research. Once finished, it will open up the chance to explore the far side of the river. Until then, walk left from the bridge, with the river on your right until you find a nice spot. If you continue for about 2km you'll reach the huge, recently built wooden **water wheel** (水车; *shuǐchē*) by a paved riverbank area that's popular with locals.

If your legs need a rest after all that walking, hop in a taxi (¥15 to ¥20 one way) to Guidé's **hot springs** (温泉; *wēnquán*), known locally as *rèshuǐ gōu* (热水沟), which are a 13km-drive from town past some mightily impressive barren scenery. Here you can join the local Tibetans for a free outdoor bath. There are four or five small pools and everyone just piles in. It's not for the shy.

### 🍴 Sleeping & Eating

Another highlight of a stay in Guidé is bunking up for the night in a farmers-style courtyard (农家院; *nóngjiā yuàn*). There are a handful in and around the old town offering good food and basic rooms set around a shaded garden. None have showers, but there are plenty of modern hotels that do if you can't live without one.

The delightful **Yipīngguó Nóngzhuāng** (伊品国农庄; ☎0974 855 4465; beds per person ¥20; dishes ¥15-75) is inside the old town, in the small lane to the right of the square as you're facing the pagoda. Just behind the old town walls, on the corner of the road leading down to the river is the equally cute **Qīng Xiāng Yuán Farmhouse** (清香源农庄; Qīngxiāngyuán Nóngzhuāng; ☎0974 855 4271; beds per person ¥30; dishes ¥10-60).

### 📍 Information

**China Construction Bank ATM** (建设银行; Jiànshè Yínháng; 14 Yingbin Xilu, 迎宾西路) Accepts foreign cards. Turn left from the bus station and keep going.

**Internet cafes** (网吧; *wǎngbā*) On both Yingbing Xilu and Bei Dajie.

### 📍 Getting There & Around

The old town is 1.5km from the bus station. Turn left out of the station on Yingbing Xilu, then left again along Xi Jie and left once more down Bei Dajie and it will be directly in front of you. Three-wheel motorised rickshaws ply the streets of Guidé. Most short trips cost ¥5.

There are regular buses back to Xining (¥25, 3½ hours, from 7.40am to 5.40pm). Annoyingly the Xining-Māqin bus doesn't stop here as it passes through, so you have to go back to Xining if you want to head south from here on public transport.

## Yùshù (Jyekundo)

玉树

☎0976 / ELEV 3680M

Up until the spring of 2010, Yùshù (Jyekundo in Tibetan) and its surrounding areas seemed to be becoming one of Qīnghǎi's hottest new adventure-travel destinations. This very remote, but exceptionally friendly town, whose population was 97% Tibetan, offered one of the best opportunities for visitors to experience genuine, undiluted Tibetan culture. And the surrounding area was dotted with dozens of impressive monasteries, famous pilgrim sites and gorgeous wooded valleys that cried out for exploration. All that changed at 7.49am on 14 April, when a 7.1-magnitude earthquake devastated the town, leaving much of it in ruins and, according to official accounts, killing 2698 people (although some believe the true figure across the whole region to be more like 20,000). For more, see the boxed text (p941).

The slow task of rebuilding the town was already well underway when this book was being researched. And we feel travellers can

play a small part in helping Yùshù recover by pumping tourist dollars into the local community.

However, it was impossible for us to gauge how quickly and to what extent the town would recover, so we recommend that before you decide to visit, you check the latest, either with hostels in Xīníng, or online through Lonely Planet's Thorn Tree forum ([www.lonelyplanet.com/thorntree](http://www.lonelyplanet.com/thorntree)).

## Sights & Activities

First built in 1398, the **Jyekundo Don-drubling Monastery** (Jiégǔ Sì) suffered heavy damage from the earthquake (the main prayer hall was completely destroyed and a number of resident monks were killed), but at the time of research it was hoped it could be repaired and remain in its original, dramatic location in a natural bowl overlooking the town. It's possible to walk here from town via the atmospheric **mani lhakhang** (chapel containing a large prayer wheel).

The hard-to-miss statue in Yùshù's central square represents King Gesar of Ling, a revered Tibetan warrior-god whose epic deeds are remembered in the world's longest epic poem of the same name. It was undamaged by the earthquake.

## Festivals & Events

Traditionally, every 25 July, for three days, Yùshù would burst at the seams as tens of thousands of Tibetans swaggered into town for the horse festival. The 2010 event was cancelled because of the earthquake, so double-check the latest before you make this part of your itinerary.

## Getting There & Away

### Air

Yùshù Bātáng Airport is 25km south of town. At the time of research there were three weekly flights to Xīníng and one to Xī'ān. Before the earthquake, there had been plans to open routes to Chéngdū and Lhasa, but these had been put on hold.

### Bus

At the time of research, daily bus services for Xīníng, Sērsu (Shiqú), Gǎnzī, Kāngding and Chéngdū had resumed.

Minivans were leaving throughout the day from various parts of town to other, even more remote parts of Yùshù prefecture such as Chēngduō (称多; Trindu), Qūmálái (曲麻莱; Chumarleb), Zhiduō (治多; Drido), Nángqiān (囊谦; Nangchen) and Zádúō (杂多; Dzado).

## Around Yùshù

### SENG-ZE GYANAK MANI WALL

嘛尼石城

Just outside Yùshù, on the road to Xiēwū, is what is thought to be the world's largest *mani* wall, the Seng-ze Gyanak Mani (Māní Shíchéng). *Mani* walls are piles of stones with Buddhist mantras carved or painted on them. Founded in 1715, the Seng-ze Gyanak Mani is said to now consist of an estimated two billion mantras, piled one on top of the other over hundreds of square metres. It's an astonishing sight that grows more and more marvellous as you circumambulate the wall with the pilgrims, turn dozens of prayer wheels, and head into the pile itself for a moment of quiet reflection.

Sadly, Seng-ze Gyanak Mani suffered heavy damage from the Yùshù earthquake, but was not completely destroyed and the plan was to repair it on its original site, 3km east of Yùshù in Xīnzài (新寨) village.

### PRINCESS WENCHENG TEMPLE

文成公主庙

History credits the Tang-dynasty Chinese Princess Wencheng as instrumental in converting her husband and Tibetan king, Songtsen Gampo, to Buddhism in the 7th century. In a valley 20km south of Yùshù, a famous temple (Wēnchéng Gōngzhǔ Miào) marks the spot where the princess (and possibly the king) paused for a month en route from Xī'ān to Lhasa.

The inner chapel has a rock carving (supposedly self-arising) of Vairocana (Nampa Namse in Tibetan), the Buddha of primordial wisdom, which allegedly dates from the 8th century. To the left is a statue of King Songtsen Gampo.

The temple, which suffered minor damage from the Yùshù earthquake, is small, and few linger in it long, but allow time to explore the nearby hills. Here a sprawling spider's web of blue, red, yellow, white and pink prayer flags runs up the slopes, down the slopes and over the ravine, covering every inch of land, and is one of the most extraordinary sights imaginable.

A steep trail (a popular *kora* route for pilgrims) ascends from the end of the row of eight *chörtens* to the left of the temple. At the end of the trail head up the grassy side valley for some great hiking and stunning open views.

Minibuses run here from Yùshù.

## SURVIVING THE YÜSHÜ EARTHQUAKE

Jamin York, an American who has lived for many years on the Tibetan plateau, was living in Yüshü (Jyekundo) in 2010 with his wife and two young sons when the town was devastated by a massive earthquake that destroyed most of the buildings and killed thousands of people. Jamin, his wife and his youngest son, who was just 18 months old at the time, had been woken by a much smaller earthquake at around 4am and had been unable to get back to sleep. Then, at 7.49am, the 7.1-magnitude earthquake struck.

'Our 3rd-floor apartment began to shake violently,' he said. 'My wife and younger son were in the living room and were tossed across the room, hitting the concrete floor. My older son (three years old) was in the back bedroom, still asleep, while I was near the front door of our apartment. My wife quickly grabbed our younger son off the floor and staggered to the doorway. I ran to the back bedroom, navigating my way through shattered glass, overturned furniture and broken water pipes, to get our older son. My wife and I, each with a child in hand, opened the door of our apartment where we were met by a neighbour running down the stairs who graciously took our older son from us and helped us out of the building.

'The air was filled with dust, making it impossible to see more than 15 or 20 metres. As the dust began to settle, though, we realised this was a major earthquake. People were screaming all around us for help. Injured people, some quite severe, were crawling out to the road from the twisted mess that was once their home. Most of the buildings around us were completely destroyed. Many had fallen all the way down while others were still standing, but had extensive cracks and holes. We stood, in a state of shock in the freezing morning wind, wondering what to do next.

'Fortunately our 4WD vehicle was undamaged so for the next hour my family and I sat inside it trying to put together a plan. There were several small aftershocks so our biggest concern was finding a safe, open area to be in. We saw that hundreds of people were walking towards Gesar Sq in the middle of town, so we followed them. As we drove to the square, most of the buildings along the way were heavily damaged. Thousands of injured people lined the road and we saw many who had been killed. The town of Jyekundo, as I knew it, was gone. The entire area was destroyed.

'A friend of ours found us and offered to look after my family while I went back to our apartment to try and get some necessities – we had no food, water or adequate clothing for the bitterly cold weather. I walked roughly 1km back to our complex. Along the way, I passed a makeshift hospital. A van pulled up and two guys were carrying a man to one of the handful of nurses who was helping the injured. I decided to lend a hand. When I began to help carry the man, I realized that he was already dead. There were close to 75 people in the makeshift hospital, but half of them were already dead. It was turning into a makeshift morgue.

'The police soon asked everyone in town to move out to the horse festival grounds on the far west end of town. When we arrived, we saw that thousands of people were already there, most with just the clothes they had on their backs. Most people lost all of their possessions. Everyone we talked to had lost at least one loved one, if not more. After spending over seven hours in the earthquake zone, we finally heard a report that the highway to Xining was open. We spent the next two days driving back to the city, thankful to be alive.'

### NANGCHEN

囊谦

The scenic county of Nangchen (Nángqiān), a former Tibetan kingdom, is the end of the line for most travellers. While some attempt to continue across the Qinghai-Tibet border into Riwoche and Chamdo, without the proper permits (and guide and driver) you are most likely to be turned

back (and fined). In any case, the drive here and back to Yüshü is scenic enough, and the charming little county capital of Shar-da (3550m) about as off-the-beaten-path as you can get.

Minivans and the odd Land Cruiser leave for Nangchen from Yüshü when full. The paved road to Nangchen goes over three

## MONASTERIES AROUND YÙSHÙ

The road from Yùshù to Xiāwǔ is dotted with monasteries set among beautiful landscapes, perfect for hiking. Worth visiting is **Sebda Gompa** (赛巴寺; Sàibā Sì), about 15km from Yùshù. The main assembly hall at the monastery is impressive, but most surprising is the new chapel featuring a huge 18m statue of Guru Rinpoche, with smaller statues of his various manifestations on either side. The adjacent **ethnographic museum** (admission Y10) has some offbeat gems like traditional clothing, swords and stuffed animals. If you have more time you can explore the ruins of the old monastery on the ridge behind the gompa or do some great hiking in the opposite valley.

At Xiāwǔ village, by the turn-off to Sěrsu, is the Sakyapa-school **Drogon Gompa** (歇武寺; Xiēwǔ Sì), in a fine hillside location. Atop the hill is the scary *gōnkhang* (protector chapel), adorned with snarling stuffed wolves and Tantric masks. Only men may enter this chapel.

Minivans ply the route between Yùshù and Xiāwǔ from where you should be able to get onward transport to Sěrsu.

passes and via **Lungshi Gompa** (龙西寺; Lóngxī Sì) en route.

In Sharda, you can find basic accommodation at the **Sān Jiāng Yuán Bīnguǎn** (三江源宾馆; ☎159 0976 6903; d/tr without bathroom Y80/210, d with bathroom Y150). There are no common showers, but ask the owner politely and he may open up the shower in a double room if the place isn't busy.

## Golmud

☎0979 / POP 200,000 / ELEV 2800M

No tourist sights, little in the way of entertainment and located 150km away from... well...anything, the small town of Golmud (Gé'ěrmù) exists for most travellers simply as a transportation hub for Lhasa, Dūnhuáng (in Gānsù) and Huātūgōu (on the way to Xīnjiāng).

## Sleeping

Very few of Golmud's many hotels accept foreigners. The following are exceptions.

### Golmud Mansions

HOTEL \$\$

(格尔木大厦; Gé'ěrmù Dàshà; ☎845 0968; 33 Yingbin Lu; 迎宾路33号; d & tw from Y218; @)

A decent choice if you need to be close to the train station, standard rooms are big, clean and comfortable and can be nabbed for Y198. Better quality rooms with internet access cost an extra Y70. The triple-bed dorms (Y298 before discounts) have no common showers.

### Dōngfāng Hotel

HOTEL \$

(东方宾馆; Dōngfāng Bīnguǎn; ☎841 0011; 7 Bayi Lu; 八一一路7号; d & tw from Y216) In the

more lively end of town, Dōngfāng has neat and tidy rooms that go for Y108 after discounts and some staff who speak a bit of English.

## Eating & Drinking

Bayi Lu and Kunlun Lu are lined with small restaurants, as is the train station area.

### Álán Cāntīng

MUSLIM \$

(阿兰餐厅; 48-1 Bayi Lu; dishes Y5-48;

☎8.30am-9pm) Great noodles (Y5 to Y10).

Try *gānbàn miàn* (干拌面; spaghetti-style noodles with meat sauce; Y6) or *niúròu miàn* (牛肉面; beef noodles; Y5). Has other dishes in a separate photo menu.

### Xiāngsīhǎi Xiǎochǎo

SICHUANESSE \$

(香四海小炒; Kunlun Lu; dishes Y12-40;

☎10am-10pm) Well-run restaurant across from main gate of Golmud Hotel. Part picture menu.

### Dio Coffee

CAFE

(迪欧咖啡; Dí'ōu Kāfēi; Yuhong Xiang; 育红巷;

☎9am-1.30am; coffee/tea from Y28/Y20; ☎) Get your laptop out, order a latte and forget for a moment that you were ever in Qīnghǎi.

## Information

**Bank of China** (中国银行; Zhōngguó Yínháng; cnr Kunlun Lu & Chaidamu Lu; ☎9am-5pm Mon-Fri, 10am-4.30pm Sat & Sun) Changes travellers cheques and cash. Foreign-friendly ATM.

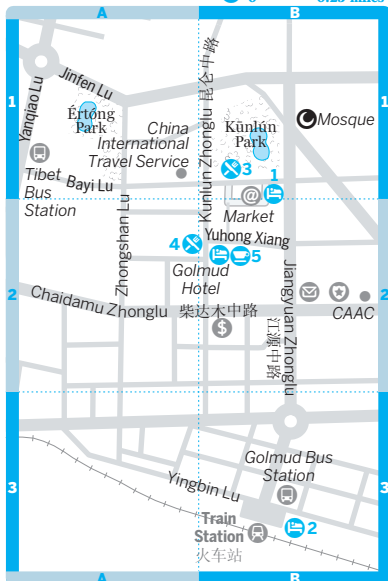
**CAAC** (机场售票处; Jīchǎng Shòupiàochù;

☎24hr booking line 842 3333; Chaidamu Lu; ☎8.30am-6pm) The place to come for flight tickets if you don't book online.

**China International Travel Service** (CITS; 中国国际旅行社; Zhōngguó Guójì Lúxíngshè; ☎849

## Golmud

0 500 m  
0 0.25 miles



## Golmud

## Sleeping

- 1 Dōngfāng Hotel..... B1
- 2 Golmud Mansions..... B3

## Eating

- 3 Ālán Cǎntīng..... B1
- 4 Xiāngshìhài Xiǎochǎo..... A2

## Drinking

- 5 Dio Coffee..... B2

6275; 60 Bayi Zhonglu, 4th fl; 八一中路60号4层; ☎8.30am-6pm Mon-Fri) The only place in town that can arrange Tibet permits. At the time of research they were only sold as part of all-inclusive tours. No CITS sign outside. Look instead for the characters 中国旅游 (Zhōngguó Lúyóu; China Travel).

**China Post** (中国邮政; Zhōngguó Yóuzhèng; Chaidamu Lu; ☎9am-5.30pm)

**Public Security Bureau** (PSB; 公安局; Gōng'ānjú; 6 Chaidamu Lu; ☎8am-noon & 2.30-5pm Mon-Fri) Can extend visas, and sells Dūnhuáng permits (lǚxíng zhèng; Y50).

**Ruiqīng Internet** (Ruiqīng Wǎngluò; Bayi Lu; 八一一路; per hr Y2; ☎24hr) Next to Dōngfāng Hotel. No English sign.

## Getting There & Away

### Air

Only four flights a week (Monday, Wednesday, Friday and Sunday) leave Golmud airport. They all first go to Xīníng (Y1400 before discounts), then to Xī'ān. Taxis are the only way to get to the airport (Y20, 30 minutes).

### Bus

There are two daily buses to Dūnhuáng (Y93/Y108, eight to nine hours, 9am/6pm). The eve-

ning one is a sleeper. At the time of research, foreigners still needed to first buy a Dūnhuáng travel permit (旅行证; lǚxíng zhèng; Y50) from Golmud PSB. Likewise, there are two daily buses to Huàtǔgōu (Y97/Y125, five hours, 10.30am/midday), the second again being a sleeper (just in case you fancy an afternoon nap). From Huàtǔgōu you can catch buses to Charklik (Ruòqiāng) in Xīnjiāng.

These days most people prefer to take the train to Lhasa, but there is still one bus a day that leaves from the **Tibet Bus Station** (西藏汽车站; Xīzàng Qìchēzhàn; ☎157 1979 5134; 11 Yanqiao Zhonglu) between 11am and 2pm (they decide the evening before). It takes 16 to 18 hours. If you're Chinese, a ticket costs Y240. If you're not, it costs Y1000! That doesn't include your Tibet permit which, if you haven't prearranged, you must get through CITS.

### Train

Golmud marks the start of the **Qīnghǎi-Tibet Railway**, although most passengers get on their Lhasa-bound train earlier down the line in places such as Xīníng, Chéngdū or Běijīng. As with anywhere, you'll need your Tibet permit to be in order to use the Lhasa train. Trains tend to pass through Golmud late in the evening or at night. Destinations include the following:

**XīNÍNG** Y201, 10 hours, eight daily from 9pm to 2.19am

**LÁNZHŌU** Y242, 12 hours, six daily from 9.50pm to 2.19am

**LHASA** Y254, 15 hours, seven daily from 12.40am to 5.48am

## Getting Around

Bus 1 (Y1) runs from the train station to the junction with Bayi Lu and Kunlun Zhonglu. Bus 2 (Y1) goes from the Tibet Bus Station along Bayi Lu and eventually on to the train station. Taxis start at Y5.



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