

1996 THE ROOF OF THE WORLD TIBET

October 11-12, 1996. Scotti went on the Travcoa air through Los Angeles, but Meg went Delta, and thanks to a one class upgrade coupon, first class! Delta no longer flies to Hong Kong, so the itinerary was Atlanta/Portland/Seoul, where I connected to Cathay Pacific into Hong Kong. Scotti was already at the hotel enjoying a spectacular view of Hong Kong harbor from our window at the Kowloon Shangri La. Thanks to melatonin, I felt pretty good and after one more pill went to bed and slept until morning.

Sunday, October 13. It seems there are only three of us in Hong Kong, we will meet the other tour members in Guillin. We inform,

Cecilia, the Travcoa representative, that we do not want the city tour and set out on our own. A taxi took us to a wonderful food market, with live chickens in cages waiting to have their necks wrung and be plucked, and all kinds of vegetables being sold in booths along the street. Our goal was the Bird market, a long narrow alleyway with songbirds of every type and description in cages. From here we walked to the jade market where an assortment of jade was being sold. Then our walk continued toward the harbor, but it was hot and although Scotti wanted us to walk through the botanical garden, Meg's interest and feet were lagging, so we went on to the Peninsula Hotel and had sandwiches for lunch in the wonderful ornate lobby. Browsed in a few shops and then returned to the hotel for a nap.

That night we, and several other Travcoa tours in town, were loaded onto an excursion boat for an evening cruise through Aberdeen. It was interesting to hear where everyone had been or were going, but nothing sounded as interesting as our trip to Tibet! We dined at the hotel's Napa roof restaurant with a panoramic view and good Indonesian food.

Monday, October 14. Took a cab to Hollywood Road on Hong Kong Island where antique shops abound. Found some Tibetan Buddha's but the price seemed a bit high. We'll come back if we don't find some in Tibet! After a coke at the Mandarin Hotel, we caught the Star Ferry and spend some time shopping the alleyways of Kowloon.

Scotti is planning a dinner party the weekend after she gets home and wanted souvenirs for everyone. Returned to the Shangri La and had wonderful massages in the spa, followed by a late lunch, before it was time to be taken to the airport. We were so relaxed from the massages that we almost forgot to empty out our hotel safe, but luckily remembered in time.

The flight to Guillin took about an hour. Once there, Susie Kealy, the third member of our group was refused entrance into China since she had already used her visa two weeks before when she took another

Travcoa Tour. I had a two-entry visa but she only had a one-entry visa. After some unpleasantness, they finally let her in, sans passport, and she has to straighten it out tomorrow. Since Scotti is here with a visa that expires two days before we end our trip, it seems Meg is the only one that is really prepared to come. The local guide decided we would all fit into one taxi for the ride to the hotel, and we were really jammed in. I was in the middle of the back seat with the entire luggage piled around me, ... not at bit happy, and when we finally caught up with our tour escort, we had plenty to tell him. His name is Marc Kupper and he turns out to be one of the best escorts I have had, but that is the end of the story.

We check into the Guillin Sheraton and hear that the other 10 people, supposedly on our tour, are actually finishing their trip in Guillin, so there will only be three of us in Tibet with Marc. Wow, an almost private tour! How did we get so lucky? We order Won Ton soup in our room before crashing for the night.

Tuesday, October 14. After a brief stop where Susie gets her Visa problems ironed out (for \$250!), our bus takes us to our "dragon boat" and a four-hour cruise down the Li River. The boat has tables for 8 on the lower deck and an observation deck above. The Li River is spectacular, with "karst" limestone-like formations from a prehistoric inland sea. It is very picturesque as along the banks are small villages, children swimming, water buffaloes and cormorant fishermen. As we go down the river the chefs prepare a lunch in giant woks on the after deck of chicken, pork, bok choy, pickles, soup, rice, candied water chestnuts and so forth. The Li River is quite clear and very shallow. Skiffs attach themselves to our boat and try to sell us carvings and shirts. On the

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upper deck a Japanese tourist entertains us with his flute music. Even though this is the third time I have gone down the river, it is still a wonderful experience.

That night we had a farewell dinner for the group that will be leaving us tomorrow and we realize again that we are very lucky, since the four couples are very unattractive and not very friendly. The two Indian girls, however, are fun and would have made good companions. After dinner, Scotti and I browsed the night market across the street from the Sheraton, bargaining and buying various small items.

Wednesday, October 16. Our tour this morning took us to a chairlift up a mountain for us to see the panoramic view, but it was pretty foggy and we couldn't really see much. Some of us opted to ride the toboggans down (small carts on wheels that ran in a metal trough) which were great fun. Marc tells us we are the first Travcoa tour to ever try the toboggans.

Next we went to Fubo Hill (Mount Fuboshan) where several grottos have Buddhist carvings, and one has a "hanging rock" where the water from the river has worn away where the rock would have been attached to the floor. Scotti and the Chinese guide climbed to the top of this karst formation, while the rest of us waited below. After lunch we went to Reed Flute Cave and enjoyed the stalactite and stalagmite formations. As an illustration of why we are glad this group is leaving us, one of the men carried a coke bottle into the cave, and, after inquiring frequently and petulantly several times, "Are we almost through yet", left his coke can prominently in one of the formations. Scotti picked it up and carried it out.

At the airport, Marc saw the ten of them off to Hong Kong and then we went to the waiting room for our flight to Chengdu. And we waited and waited. After two hours, the airline produced refreshments and an hour after that, as we were preparing to bed down in the waiting room, announced the flight was cancelled and that we were being taken to the airport hotel for the night! Fortunately the hotel was brand new and comfortable in a Motel 6 sort of way. An out-of-place and ornate crystal chandelier lit the lobby and the rooms were equipped with hard beds and western bathrooms. Breakfast the next morning was instant noodles and tea.

Thursday October 17. Our flight to Chengdu finally took off about 11:15. Once there we went to the hotel for a late lunch of salmon sandwiches and at four o'clock headed for the Panda Institute. It was closed by the time we got there, so we didn't get to see the museum, but we did see a number of sleeping pandas in cages as we tramped through the bamboo forest around the place. Marc ordered a lovely welcome Szechwan dinner to let us try the specialties of this province and we went to bed early for our 4:30AM wake-up call.

Friday October 18. There are only a couple of planes a day to Lhasa, one from Chengdu and one from Katmandu in Nepal. We are a day behind schedule, but Marc has arranged that we will skip our scheduled day in Chengdu on our return in order to have the full week in Tibet. We all had window seats in the plane and could look down on the bleak and forbidding Himalayan landscape as the sun came up. It has only been since the Chinese takeover in 1959 that roads have connected Tibet to the rest of the world. Looking at the landscape it is quite apparent why Tibet was closed off for so many years.

Lhasa's airport is about two hours from Lhasa, since the valley around Lhasa is too narrow for an airport. Since it is at 12000 feet altitude, there is also a noticeable lack of oxygen. I had taken diamox before I went and did not have any headaches, but Scotti had some troubles with headaches and was even sick in her stomach. I had trouble breathing the entire time I was in Tibet, but managed. It takes about a week to adjust to the altitude and that is all the time we have!

Our local guide Dalma was very sweet and dressed in Tibetan clothes, a long hand woven wool skirt with a bright colored apron. We drove two hours from the airport to Tsedong, which is down at 11000 feet. The drive follows the Bramaputra River, a wide and beautiful, very shallow, blue/green river, with groves of golden willows planted by the Chinese along its shore. There are almost no trees in Tibet and since it is fall, almost no greenery except these trees, which are turning golden in their fall colors. The houses are mud bricked, each with prayer flags on the roof. The Tibetans are devout Buddhists and the prayer flags are everywhere. The people, all wearing their native dress, are farming with their herds of yaks and sheep the way their ancestors

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have for centuries. We saw little motorized equipment, except "tractors", which looked like riding lawnmowers, pulling carts. The barren mountains were subtly colored in shades of red and brown. Sand dunes, sagebrush, donkeys, these are the sights we enjoyed. The road was paved about three years ago with hand labor! We had lunch and rested in the Tsedong Hotel.

Shannan province is considered the origin of the Tibetan people and they point out a sacred mountain where in a cave a monkey and an ogress gave birth to the eight children who were the progenitors of the Tibetan tribes. It was a long dusty dirt road trip out to Yambu La Kang Temple. The last part of the trip was up a nearly impassible road where our four-wheel drive van finally became mired down and we had to walk the last few hundred feet. Several children appeared out of nowhere to help us with our climb. My helper entertained me by singing Frere Jacques, apparently the only non-Tibetan words she knew. Scotti's escort was an eight-year old boy named Pema Yangtso, which means "Lotus Celestial". They were sweet children but had probably never seen soap before in their lives. Yambu La Lang Temple is built on the site of the first palace of the kings of Tibet. It was destroyed during the "Cultural Revolution" but has been rebuilt. Some of the Buddha's are original. We climbed all the way to the roof, with Meg panting and puffing the whole time. The view was lovely from the top.

On our way back into Tsedong we stopped at Changehu Monastery where we were greeted by red robed monks and children and toothless old women. Part of this monastery was also destroyed but has been rebuilt and now houses about 140 lamas or monks. You always walk clockwise in a Buddhist temple and there are always several rooms ... a gathering or chanting room, with an inner sanctuary housing several Buddhist figures. There are usually several side chapels. Above is another chapel housing another sacred image or images. All are ornately decorated, usually in red with tonkgas (paintings of Buddha's in scroll form on brocade backgrounds). In front of the Buddha's are candles, burning in yak butter, and often there is incense which all adds to the mystical feeling.

Late October is the time of the annual pilgrimages and the people came from all over the country to pay homage to their Buddha's. They came spinning their prayer wheels and bringing butter to add to the burning candles. Often they would present the Buddha with the traditional white scarf and give money and wheat seed or tsampo (the staple food of Tibet) to the monastery. The Dalai Lama had to flee Tibet in 1959 and now lives in Daremsala, India, but he is still considered the spiritual leader of the Tibetans. The Chinese, however, are trying to phase out the Dalai Lama and replace him with the Panchen Lama, who is in their control. Just two months ago, all pictures of the Dalai Lama were removed from the temples and the Panchen Lama's picture replaced them. The Tibetan people don't like this and some secretly carry pictures of the Dalai Lama under their robes. The Dalai Lama is the reincarnation of the Buddha of Compassion; the Panchen Lama is the reincarnation of the Buddha of Wisdom. We passed two military bases on our way back into town. Dalma tells us that 90% of the population is Tibetan but we had heard a large percentage is now Han Chinese as the Chinese have resettled many people there and are trying to stamp out the native Tibetan culture.

Dinner was a "light" supper of some 8-10 dishes; surprisingly good considering where we were, and in retrospect much better than some of the Chinese dinners we had later on in the trip. That night our space heater kept us warm. Tibetan hotels are not centrally heated and the corridors aren't heated at all!

Saturday, October 19, 1996. Scotti is feeling pretty bad with headaches, but she is a good sport and keeps going despite it all. She says she feels like she has been run over by one of the Chinese military trucks! About an hour on the road back to Lhasa, we came to a ferry across the river. This was an open flat-bottomed, seatless barge, driven by a tractor motor, which had to be primed with hot water. Loaded with supplies and beer for Samye monastery across the Bramaputra, we fought our way through currents and sandbars for an hour and a half to reach the other side. From there we were loaded into an open four-wheel-drive truck (I was lucky and got a seat in the cab), for the 45-minute drive to the monastery. The road was unpaved, very badly rutted, and almost non-existent in places. The back of the truck provided a wild ride!

Finally we got to the monastery, the oldest in Tibet, originally built in the seventh century. It has been rebuilt three times. Indian, Chinese, and Tibetan architecture is reflected in the three levels of the main temple. Inside was an incredible sight. Every square inch was covered with paintings,

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prayer flags, and thangkas. By flashlight we walked the inner circumambulatory and viewed the paintings on the walls depicting Tibetan history. We heard a monk chanting his prayers and playing a drum. The chapels were full of Buddha's and bodhisattvas and we climbed the many ladders to the roof where we had a good view of the stupas. Four large ones, north, south, east and west, were rebuilt and feature large painted eyes overlooking the mud brick village and the many smaller stupas on the wall around the monastery. At the top we were allowed into a room with many sacred relics and just by viewing them we were "blessed". This monastery sits below one of the holiest mountains in Tibet and is a very spiritual place.

We caught the truck back to the boat and had our picnic lunch while crossing the river. Then drove the three hours back to Lhasa with Mr. Liu, our driver, on the wrong side of the road most of the way, laying on his horn when occasional traffic appeared. Tibetan drivers all seem to drive this way and without a horn, they would all be dead I am sure!

The Holiday Inn in Lhasa is where all the foreign visitors stay and is quite large with at least four restaurants, elevator and so forth. We tried the Hard Yak cafe and had good minestrone soup and filet of Yak for dinner. We requested a heater for our chilly room, but it only worked for about five minutes so we burrowed under our yak hair blankets for the night.

October 20. We overslept but were awakened by the maid asking if we had any laundry to go out, just 45 minutes before we were to leave for our tour. We were taken to the Drepung Monastery on a hillside overlooking Lhasa. This is the largest monastery in Tibet, housing at one time 10000 monks. The Chinese used it as a barracks after the take-over so it has remained fairly intact. Narrow cobblestone alleys led us up to the various temples and great hall. Many pilgrims were there that day. Apparently each village will sponsor a family to make the pilgrimage and pay homage to each of the temples in Lhasa. Their devotion is wonderful to watch. At one chapel a monk was pouring holy water from a conch shell (one of the holy signs of Buddhism). He poured some in my hand and I drank and put a little on my head like the other pilgrims, which seemed to please him. Incidentally, bottled water in Tibet is labeled "magic water" and comes from a special spring.

The monastery was very interesting with beautiful painted walls, pillars and doorways. The pilgrims were also fascinating since they wore many different native costumes. Often the women wore turquoises in their hair and braided it into many tiny braids, each one supposedly representing one year in their life (but I think some of them forgot to count). The headdresses were also interesting.

We returned to the hotel for tuna fish sandwiches at the Yak Cafe and then browsed the small bazaar outside the hotel.

In the afternoon we went to the holiest place in Tibet, the Jokhang Temple. In the seventh century, King Songtsen Gampo had five wives, three were Tibetan, two were a Nepalese and a Chinese princess. He built temples for each of the last two, who each brought a sacred image with her to Tibet. The Jokhang's door faced Nepal and the Ramoche Temple's door faced China. The Jokhang was a grander place than the Ramoche, and after the king died, the Chinese wife switched the two and had her idol moved to the Jokhang. When the Chinese took over Tibet they more or less destroyed the Ramoche Temple, but kept the Jokhang since it was the "Chinese" princess' temple. There were throngs of pilgrims at the Jokhang this afternoon, prostrating themselves in front of the door. Meg decided this was an appropriate place to buy a prayer wheel. This is a cylinder, containing scriptures, on a stick, which is twirled, causing the prayers in the cylinder to be automatically read so to speak. Since everything in Buddhism is clockwise, the cylinder had to turn clockwise. I had a hard time getting my wheel to turn correctly, but several of the monks and pilgrims came to my assistance. Later on, if I stopped it spinning, they would come to my assistance again to help me keep it spinning. It was a delightful way to have a "relationship" with these friendly people. The main Buddha in the temple was being filmed with an actress in a shimmering gold dress and veil. From the roof we had a great view of the Potala Palace, which is closed today but will be open when we return to Lhasa later in the week.

Then we shopped in the market square in front of the temple but some of the women were overly aggressive trying to sell necklaces, which took some of the fun out of it. Scotti bought a wonderful eight-foot long horn, which fortunately compresses for easy packing! Marc stopped and bought a whole case of "magic water" for the van since Meg, in particular, is going through 3 or 4 bottles a

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day in the desert-like climate. Marc teased a small beggar boy by taking a Yuan out of his hand .. and then returned it along with a bar of soap which the little fellow obviously needed. However, he will probably sell it rather than use it. The children are incredibly dirty in Tibet. We had a rather bad buffet dinner in the Everest dining room and went to bed. Scotti is still having bad headaches.

October 21. Today we set out for Gyantse. We have a new driver and guide since Dalma became ill. He is Mr. Jiang, a Han Chinese, but married to a Tibetan. The driver is a lot better than Mr. Liu, which is good since driving is quite hazardous on the unpaved roads and people driving on the wrong side. We passed a dead donkey, which had been hit, whose foal was munching grass alongside the road and a burned-out van. We stopped and visited a Tibetan home which consisted of a courtyard where the animals are kept for the night (sheep were being shorn in one corner .. somewhat late in the season, so we presume they were headed for the cook pot), a private privy, several open air rooms for sleeping (in winter time they move into the kitchen for warmth), a storage room, kitchen, and a private chapel for the daily prayers. Extended families are the norm, with several generations sharing such a house. Despite the dirt floors, everything was neat and clean and this was obviously a well-off family who had a small shop for the village outside the door of their house.

The countryside was spectacular with terraced fields and villages as we climbed to a 15000 foot-high pass, Khamba La Peak, which overlooks a beautiful emerald green lake. At the peak were many piles of rocks with prayer flags. Later by Lake Yamdrok Tso we had our picnic. Two children soon arrived, then a man came with his "tractor" who sat down beside me, then two women, and finally a shepherd and his hundred or so sheep. We shared our ample lunch with them all. It was great fun. I am sure they had never seen cheese sandwiches before!

The road was very dusty and rutted and the trucks whizzed along. One sideswiped us, fortunately only denting our rear fender and knocking off our left taillights. Such an argument arose between the drivers that it looked as if we might be there all day. Finally Marc interceded, pleading he had an old lady in his van (me) and needed to get me on to the hotel. Later another van full of Canadian tourists on their way from Katmandu also got hit, much more seriously, which blocked the road for an even longer time. Later in Gyantse, these tourists told us they had been hit four different times, and even after they got a replacement van, it lost its leaf springs going over one high berm. So we count our blessings that our accident was so minor. The next mountain pass was over 15000 and by a beautiful glacier, but Scotti's headaches were very bad by then and I could hardly breath so we did not linger much longer than the necessary pit stops behind a sheltering rock. The mountains were lovely but we were happy when the ten-hour drive ended in Gyantse.

We had a Tibetan room in the Gyantse Hotel with brightly painted furniture and beds covered with Tibetan carpets, which they use for mattress pads. Marc supplied pillows filled with oxygen, which helped with the breathing and headaches, and space heaters that actually worked. The only problem with the hotel was the inedible Chinese buffet for dinner. Fortunately we are not very hungry.

Wednesday, October 22. Gyantse is a magical sort of town, unspoiled by the Chinese or tourists. It is an historical town for the Tibetans with Tibetan style houses and stone paved streets. It is Tibet's third largest city and is noted for being the site where the Tibetans stood off Younghusband's army when the British came to conquer Tibet.

Above the town are the remains of a fortress castle. We walked through the market street to the Pelkor Chode monastery, which was built in 1415, and the Kumbum Stupa, which is built in the shape of a 108-sided mandala and had many small chapels filled with statues and murals. Since no one wanted to climb up to the fort we decided to drive to Shigatse for lunch, over two hours away, via dusty bumpy roads through farmland dotted with the ruins of monasteries. The Chinese destroyed the majority of the Tibetan monasteries during the Cultural Revolution and only a fraction of the original has been rebuilt.

At the Shigatse Hotel we had another Tibetan room, this one complete with its own shrine. The Panchen Lama is the reincarnation of the Buddha of Wisdom and since Shigatse is his traditional home, Scotti and I bought two 50-year old gods of wisdom, Buddha's brandishing a sword, in the

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hotel shop. After an inedible Chinese buffet lunch, Meg elected to get her hair done for the enormous sum of \$3.50. The shampoo bowl was a sink in which I ducked my head under the water, and I am sure the girl had never dealt with curls before, but at least my head was clean after the two dusty days on the roads getting here.

About 4:00 we set out for Tshahilunpo Monastery, founded in 1447. This is where all the Panchen Lamas are buried in their silver stupas, all that is except the last one, who the Chinese have entombed in a gold incusted stupa. Gold was always reserved for the Dalai Lamas but as we have said before, the Chinese are trying to invest the Panchen Lama with the Dalai Lama's powers. First we viewed the temple with the spectacular 37-foot high bronze Sakyamuni, the future Buddha, which was made during World War 1. Then we paid our respects to each of the Panchen Lama's stupas as well as smaller stupas for lesser monks. Our goal was the assembly hall where at 6:00 PM the monks all gather for their evening chanting.

Unfortunately we are early and must wait about an hour sitting on the cold stone steps. A horn blew and the monks started coming in their yellow hats. Many were young boys, say about 10-14 years old, and like boys everywhere they were full of fun. Marc pulled my guidebook out of my purse and soon the young monks were clustered around us enjoying the pictures in the book of the monasteries in Tibet. The older lamas seemed to enjoy it too. It used to be that almost every family sent one son to a monastery, but nowadays, with fewer monasteries and less monks, it has become much harder to become a monk. The yellow hat sect is celibate.

Finally everyone took off their hats and shoes and entered the assembly hall where they put on red robes while sitting cross-legged on carpeted benches. We sat against the back wall and watched the older monks chant while the younger ones, who felt so inclined, repeated or responded. Many were obviously not interested but no one seemed to care and no discipline was offered. Periodically the doors would open and in would come other monks with huge pitchers of yak butter tea which they poured in the monk's bowls and which they drank with relish. I never tried this Tibetan treat, which is made with rancid yak butter and salt. I think you must be born Tibetan to appreciate it. Some of the younger ones poured tea into their thermoses for a later night treat. Incense was also brought in as the chanting continued for over an hour.

Then it was time to return to the hotel and another inedible Chinese buffet. Think of the weight we must be losing!

Before we went to bed the two girls came from the beauty shop to our room and gave each of us a Tibetan massage, in our beds. This was quite an experience as they really worked on our extremities like fingers, toes and head (there went my hairdo!), before the more traditional back rub, ending by pounding on us. However, it all felt wonderful when it was over and we really slept! I learned later they are very proud of their massages, which are designed to help arthritis.

October 23. I have been fighting a cold all week and it is worse, but Scotti is finally becoming acclimatized which is great. We loaded up our trusty van and set out for another Tibetan adventure as we are returning to Lhasa. The "new" road was under construction and we elected to take the long road back to Lhasa. After a ferry ride across the river, we hit a detour through the river bottom and our van became stuck in the sand. Some spectacular scenery later we hit more road construction and got stuck even worse. Several trucks pulled up behind us and everyone got out and pushed until we were through. Finally the road became better, though still unpaved, dusty and rutted, and we went up and up into the mountains, where there were few villages or people. Our lunch site had a view of a snow-covered mountain and soon a shy peasant boy appeared. He at first refused the food we offered, not being sure what it was, but soon was prevailed to accept it. Then a peasant couple in their hand-sewn skin jackets and hand woven clothing came. They had probably never seen people like us, as tourists don't use this road. The Tibetans are beautiful innocent people. We passed nomads with their herds of yaks loaded down with their tents and goods.

A mere eight hours later we arrived back in Lhasa, where Susie insisted we visit the rug factory, where she bought a sweater and

Scotti bought a small rug mat. Then finally back to the Holiday Inn, where we found our rooms warm (the temperature outside is warmer than when we arrived) and we had really hot water and water pressure for a change.

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Thursday, October 24. Our last day. Scotti's headache is gone, and Meg's cold is better. We are acclimatized and it is so sad we must leave.

We finally get to the Potala Palace, the symbol of Lhasa. King Songsten Gampo built a small palace on the hill in the 7th century. The Fifth Dalai Lama enlarged the palace starting in 1645. He died but they kept his death a secret for 12 years until the palace could be finished. The present structure is thirteen stories tall with over a thousand rooms, although many are now unoccupied. Premier Chou En Lai decreed the palace be protected so it was not destroyed during the Cultural Revolution. Fortunately most of the tour was downhill as our van took us to the top of the hill to start. All the Dalai Lamas are memorialized here in gold encrusted stupas. The fifth Dalai Lama is enshrined in the largest stupa with the Bodhisattva of Compassion, Chenrezig, at his side. The Dalai Lama is considered the reincarnation of Chenrezig. We toured lovely chapels where the Dalai Lama worshipped when he lived here. Two rooms date from the time of Songtsen Gampo. One was his meditation cave. We climbed to the roof where the present Dalai Lama watched the world with binoculars when he was isolated here as a boy. Then we went into the residential palace where the audience chambers of the 13th and 14th Dalai Lamas can be visited. After descending to the street we visited the museum shops before visiting the plaza across from the palace for pictures. Then it was back to the hotel for a delicious pizza lunch in the Hard Yak cafe.

The afternoon tour took us to Sera Monastery, which is known as a free thinking monastery where the monks engage in debates over theology and where, from time to time, the monks have protested political events. As a result Sera was almost totally destroyed but has been rebuilt. We had hoped to see the debates but they were not going on while we were there. We did, however, find a group of monks chanting and playing their drums and bells, which was interesting to watch. We then visited Norbulinka Palace in a lovely wooded park. The present palace was built in 1956 for the present Dalai Lama to use in the summer time. The palaces of some of the other Dalai Lama's are also there but they are not on view. The palace was very comfortable with Tibetan carpets on the walls and much art deco furniture. Murals depicting the history of Tibet were on the walls. Here we could see the Dalai Lama's golden throne, his bed, radio, and some of his personal belongings. Nearby was his mother's apartment, where she was allowed to come visit him each day. It is so sad that he can never come back to Tibet. One interesting note. Even though the Dalai Lama's picture has been removed from all the other temples in Tibet, here at Norbulinka his image is clear in one of the murals on the wall.

Our last night we were taken to another hotel in Lhasa where a group of four young people gave us a private presentation of Tibetan dancing while we drank weak tea and ate peanuts. They made a good effort but the show needed a little work before it goes on tour!

Back to the Holiday Inn where we had a Tibetan dinner with delightful lamb stew. The banana split deserts, however, did not seem authentic!

Friday October 25. We are up before dawn for the two-hour drive to the airport and our flight to Chengdu. We have a four-hour layover in the airport restaurant where the local guide regales us with tales of Chinese medicine. He was given up for dead but saved by the herbal remedies and acupuncture.

Then it was on to Hong Kong where we were delighted to get back to the comforts of the Shangri La. We had dinner in our room and repacked for the last time.

Saturday, October 26. A 10:00AM flight to Seoul, where I had a three-hour layover (Delta was late) and then 10 hours across the Pacific. I slept almost all the way. A very quick change in Portland and I slept the four hour flight back to Atlanta. Home and in bed about 9:00PM (26 hours after I got up). It was four days before I overcame the jetlag!

This has been a very special trip. Tibet is one of the few unspoiled parts of the world and although it is probably one of the most strenuous trips I have ever made, it is certainly one of the most memorable.