

Qinghai Lake - Big Sky Ride

Introduction

Qinghai Lake, "Blue Sea" in Tibetan and Mongolian, sits high atop the Tibetan Plateau: one of the most remote, rugged and spectacularly beautiful regions on earth. At 3195m, Qinghai Lake gives its name to the province it occupies and is China's largest saltwater lake. The region forms the headwaters of several of Asia's major rivers including the Yellow River, the Yangze River and the Mekong River making it incredibly important to vast populations across Asia. Predominately populated by hardy Tibetan semi-nomadic herders, Qinghai also has populations of Mongolian, Hui (Chinese Muslims), Tu, and Sala ethnic minorities as well as the majority Han Chinese.

Qinghai Lake has long attracted naturalists and tourists and, more recently, has become the setting for the international Tour de Qinghai Lake, the highest race of its type in the world. This itinerary is designed using this spectacular setting and unique race to offer the opportunity to experience both the challenging cycling this region offers as well as its remarkable people and incredible scenery. With two days of optional day rides to warm up and acclimatize to the altitude and 8 challenging cycling days this trip is for the adventurous cyclist and the intrepid traveller.

Itinerary

Day	Activity	Location	Meals	Km cycled
1	Arrive Beijing. Flight to Xining.	Xining	D	
2	Set up bikes. Warm up ride/ acclimitisation.	Xining	BLD	30
3	Warm up ride/ acclimitisation.	Xining	BL	20
4	Xining to Tongren	Tongren	BLD	182
5	Tongren to Xunhua	Xunhua	BLD	77
6	Xunhua to Xining	Xining	BLD	160
7	Xining to Qinghai Lake	Qinghai Lake	BLD	155
8	Qinghai Lake to Bird Island	Bird Island	BLD	120
9	Bird Island to Xihai Zhen	Xihai Zhen	BLD	182
10	Xihai Zhen to Menyuan	Menyuan	BLD	180
11	Mengyuan to Huzhu	Huzhu	BLD	165
12	Depart to Beijing.	Beijing	BLD	
13	Depart		B	
	Total			1271 km

*Whilst every endeavour will be made to run the itinerary as stated, Bike Asia reserves the right to change any part of the itinerary at any time without notice due to weather, political, health or safety concerns.

Day 1 - Beijing

Arrival in Beijing. Domestic flight to Xining (2 hour 40 minutes). We'll arrive in the evening and head out for a welcome feast and group meeting where we'll discuss the upcoming ride and go over any questions that people may have.

Day 2 – Xining (Cycling 30km)

Today is set aside to set up the bikes and take up a warm up ride and a little sightseeing out to Taer Monastery (Kumbum Monastery in Tibetan) which is the birthplace of Tsong Kha-pa, the founder of the yellow sect, one of the six major lamaseries of yellow sect in Tibetan Buddhism. It will be important to acclimatize to the altitude for the first couple of days and the day rides are designed to be optional for those that need to take longer to acclimatize.

Day 3 - Xining (cycling 20 km)

We've set aside a second day for a warm up ride and light activity as at 2300m we are likely to be starting at an altitude unfamiliar to many participants.

Day 4 - Tongren (cycling 182km)

The start of our epic takes us out of the provincial capital of Xining and into the grasslands for the first time. It's a big challenging climb today – 30 kilometres of climbing – to a height of 3050m! An equally long downhill is the reward though and we spend the afternoon cycling through villages and rural scenery before arriving in the town of Tongren.

Day 5 – Xunhua (cycling 77 km)

A shorter day today but the challenges keep coming! An easy 40 kilometres takes us out of Tongren before we hit another 800m pass! The rest of the day is downhill into Xunhua where we should finish out the day reasonably early with enough time to put the feet up for a well earned rest or do some exploring of this interesting town.

Day 6 - Xining (cycling 160 km)

Today is a massive day. We'll leave early to begin our ride today as we are climbing for around 65km's taking in two of the steepest passes of the tour. A long downhill of 40kms gives us time to freshen the legs for the last 30 km incline back into Xining and a well earned beer!

Day 7 – Qinghai Lake (Cycling 155 km)

Today's ride is one that takes us to the shores of the famous Qinghai Lake. It's a good 50 km of incline to the top of Sun and Moon Mountain at 3440m above sea level

and our first views of the lake up close. After the hard work of the morning and a hearty lunch it's an easy ride along the lakeshore to Qinghai Lake Town.

Day 8 – Bird Island (cycling 120 km)

This is our first relatively easy day - 118km of flat to undulating terrain along the shores of the lake! There's plenty of time today to take it a bit easier and soak up the views and the landscape of this amazing region. Once we arrive in "Bird Island", an attraction for bird watchers with its huge numbers of cormorants and other aquatic species, there'll be free time to explore the village and nearby Bird Island for which the town is named.

Day 9 – Xihai Zhen (cycling 182 km)

We continue along the lake today making our way around the northern point and head east to Xihai Zhen. It's a big day with a few medium climbs and rewarding views of the lake, finishing with a great downhill into town and a good opportunity to get some rest for the next day's epic ride.

Day 10 – Menyuan (180 km)

One of the most challenging days on the tour – big climbs, high altitude and fast downhills – an early start will see us hit the road for a 30km/600m climb to a height of 3890m before dropping 1100m over the next 40km. And that's all before lunch! When we hit the road again it's straight into the hills with a climb up to 3780m, our highest point, over 50 grinding kilometres. If you were up for a challenge then this is your day! The scenery is spectacular here and the last 40km allows you to hit the high gears and fly into town for a well-earned beer and feast!

Day 11 - Huzhu (cycling 165 kms)

Our last day on the bikes is something of an encore after the last day's ride! We have an easy 100km slight descent to warm up the tired legs before the last climb of the ride. This time it's only 20km long but also a 1100m ascent which makes it the steepest of the tour! Easy does it to the top and we can coast downhill over 50 km to the end of this incredible ride. We'll celebrate our feats tonight over a banquet and a refreshing ale or two!

Day 12 – Beijing

In the morning we transfer to Xining Airport for the flight back to Beijing. There'll be free time in the afternoon to explore some of Beijing's sights. In the evening we'll head out for a traditional Beijing Duck meal and our last meal together.

Day 13 - Depart

Today is departure day. We transfer back to Beijing Airport for our international flight home.

Bike Asia Travel Style

We think cycling through a region for the first time with a group of like-minded people is a great way to travel in Asia. Our aim is to provide you with the opportunity to meet new people, learn about new cultures, and experience different landscapes and most all to have some fun. Cycling is a major part of our trips – they are cycle tours after all. We have designed them so that they are accessible to people with a reasonable level of fitness. Different trips will require varying degrees of physical ability. Each trip dossier has specific details on terrain, cycling conditions, distances covered each day and an altitude profile. All of our trips are fully supported, so should you want or need to take a rest, there will be a seat for you and a place to put your bike. Our trips are also designed to allow you the opportunities and time to appreciate the environment, scenery and culture around you, and to participate in any activities that may be on offer.

Responsible Travel

An integral part of travelling is to have a positive impact on the country that you are visiting. On this trip there are a number of things you can do to have a positive impact on the communities that we visit.

Dress: Parts of China are still quite conservative. In rural areas and temples overly revealing clothing is considered offensive. You should make an effort to dress more conservatively in these situations. Walking around a village in bike shorts is not appropriate so if you wish to cycle in just bike shorts you should have something with you, on the bike, to put on over the top (long loose shorts or a skirt/sarong). When visiting temples shorts are acceptable providing they cover the knee. Singlet tops are not acceptable in temples.

Phrase Book: A highly memorable part of your travels will be the local people you meet. In the tourist areas some people will speak English but away from these areas you should learn a few words of Chinese. We will teach you some of the basics but if you want to really interact we recommend bringing a phrase book.

Donations: Often when coming on trips overseas people like to bring items such as sweets, pens and books for children or old clothing for families. While this is a fantastic idea, if distributed in the wrong way it can actually create more problems. Giving away anything to local people can create an expectation that visiting foreigners equals free give-aways. In some communities in Asia this has created whole villages where the only interaction is the locals asking for things. If you would like to donate anything to the communities that we visit we suggest that you give the items to us and we will then pass them on to development organizations, schools or whole communities. In this way items are distributed to those really in need by those working in the communities.

Poverty: In China there is poverty which you may see. If you choose to give something to a beggar you must bear in mind the value of money in the country you are visiting. There are organizations which are working to alleviate this poverty and

may be able to do more good with donations that you make. Your Tour Leader will be able to provide more information about this.

Support Organizations: In China there are a number of organizations that we hope you can support in one way or another. Your Bike Asia Leader will provide more information on these as you travel through China.

For more information about Bike Asia's commitment to ethical and sustainable travel practices, please read our [Responsible Travel Policy](#).

Accommodation

There is a mix of accommodation styles on this trip - standard hotels/guesthouses - twin share, private bathrooms, hot water, television, air-conditioning etc. Basic style accommodation – shared washing and toilet facilities, some have dormitory sleeping arrangements. We are staying in these places because, travelling by bike, we get to travel through some of the smaller, rural areas, and this means of course that we are limited in our choice of accommodation – sometimes we are staying in the ONLY guesthouse. Whilst not of a service standard that you may be accustomed to at home, we can safely say that these small, family-run places make up for that in location, views, atmosphere and friendly service. All the sleeping arrangements are for twin share so if you are a single traveller you will be paired up with someone of the same sex. This ensures that whether you are travelling solo or with friends, everyone is paying the same rate. We choose hotels (where possible) that are comfortable, centrally located places which are adequate in every way.

Transport

All transport listed is included in the trip price: the return domestic flight to Xining, all support vehicles (one or two depending on the group size). You will need to pay for any transport taken during free time.

Inclusions

- 12 nights accommodation
- All transport en route (whilst cycling) including the domestic flights between Beijing and Xining (excess luggage costs are not included) and group airport transfers
- All meals listed
- All water and snack food whilst cycling
- Bike Asia tour leader
- Local cycling guide, driver
- Bike tools
- Support vehicle

Because we travel with a support vehicle it is not necessary to carry many things when on the bike. You may like to carry a daypack with personal belongings, camera, sunscreen etc., or you may prefer to leave a daypack in the support vehicle and carry only a camera & rain jacket (perhaps in a seatpost bag) when cycling.

Food

Food is a very important part of any travel experience. Most of the meals are included in the trip cost, with a few exceptions. To see which meals are included, read the inclusions list or the itinerary. Vegetarians and vegans are well catered for and should you have any other dietary restrictions, you just need to inform us. Chinese breakfasts usually include one or more of the following; noodles soup, steamed buns, fried bread, fresh soy milk and green tea. Lunch we try to keep relatively simple, so it is usually vegetable fried rice or meat/vegetable noodles. Dinner is always banquet style with plates of meat, fish, vegetables, tofu and rice. The food is healthy, very fresh and very tasty, so don't worry, we'll make sure you have more than enough fuel to get up those mountains!

Money

You will need to bring money on the trip to pay any for the following; drinks, activities and transport in free time, departure tax, airline excess baggage, and of course shopping. We suggest you utilise a variety of methods for accessing money. There are:

- ATMs in Xining where you can access money using your Maestro, Cirrus, Visa and Mastercard.
- Banks to exchange major foreign currencies and Traveller's Cheques.
- Almost no credit card facilities.

The amount you bring is going to depend on how much you plan to spend. To give you an indication of prices:

Beer would cost CNY 4 (local), 15 (bar)

Dinner at local restaurant CNY 10 – 20

Dinner at foreign restaurant CNY 25 - 40

The Chinese currency is the Chinese Yuan (CNY), also known as Renminbi (RMB). Exchange rates at the time of writing are;

1 AUD = 5.69 CNY

1 USD = 6.82 CNY

1 EUR = 9.76 CNY

1 GBP = 11.73 CNY

1 CAD = 6.3 CNY

1 NZD = 4.65 CNY

As there will be very few opportunities to spend money whilst cycling, most of your shopping will be likely to be done in Beijing and Xining.

We also recommend that you bring US \$100 in emergency funds, to be used when circumstances beyond the control of Bike Asia necessitate a change in itinerary.

Insurance

Obtaining your own travel insurance is required in order to participate on a Bike Asia tour. It will need to include a minimum coverage of medical expenses with emergency evacuation, personal liability and accident insurance. Your group leader will need to see a copy of your insurance at the group meeting on the first day.

Two well known travel insurance providers are: [World Nomads](#) and [Covermore](#).

Fitness

You will need to have an excellent level of fitness to participate in this trip and be a relatively experience cyclist. There are ten cycling days in total, with most days cycling over 100km and one day over 180km some on unsealed roads. This trip involves a lot of long mountain climbing. The cycling is done at an altitude between 2000 – 3800 metres above sea level. It is a great idea to do at least some cycling in the month leading up to your tour. This is up to you but we highly recommend some training as it will alleviate saddle soreness and leg fatigue, and you may enjoy the tour more if you find the cycling easier.

Cycling Conditions

The terrain is 100% sealed surfaces. Traffic is mostly quiet but with some busy sections. In China you need to be constantly alert for vehicles, potholes, animals, people... everything really! Much of the terrain is mountainous with climbs on most days.

Health

In order to make the most of your holiday, the healthier you are the more you will enjoy it! For a list of vaccinations we recommend that you seek advice at a travel clinic at least six weeks prior to departure. Our group leader will have Senior's Level first aid training and will travel with a first-aid kit, however it is also recommended that individual travellers have a basic first aid kit with any personal medical requirements. Our group leader is not authorised, for legal reasons, to administer any kind of drugs, including pain relief tablets, antibiotics etc so be sure to pack a supply of your favourite pain-killers. Pharmacy products vary in different countries and you may not be able to buy products that are widely available at home. Include the following: plasters, dressings, bandage, calamine lotion (a must for soothing sunburn), oral re-hydration treatment (in case of bouts of diarrhoea), insect repellent, insect sting relief, antiseptic cream and antiseptic wipes.

For more information on travel health, you can click on the links below:

[Australia](#) - [United States](#) - [United Kingdom](#)

Visas

Travellers of all nationalities will need to obtain a Chinese visa, either through a travel agent or direct with a Chinese embassy or consulate. For the latest information, see your travel agent.

Luggage / Packing List (Guide Only)

We strongly advise against using a hard shell suitcase for this trip. China is not suitcase or wheelie-bag friendly. A soft backpack would be the most suitable, and the easiest to transfer in/out of the trucks in the morning and evening, up and down staircases and in and out of airports. Keep in mind when you are packing that often our local crew are lifting our bags in and out of the luggage truck that several of the hotels we use do not have lifts, and that the luggage allowance on the domestic flight is 20kg. Therefore please try to pack as lightly as possible. Please check our climate charts to assess your clothing requirements, or contact us if you are unsure.

Personal	Travel	Cycling
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Long trousers• Shorts• Shirts• Warm jacket• Thermals• Woollen socks• Jumper• Hat• Sandals/light shoes• Swimming costume• Light rain coat• Toiletries• Tampons (hard to get)• Small towel• First aid kit• Mosquito Repellent• Camera and film• Contact solution• Gloves/scarf	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Passport with 6 months validity and spare pages• China Visa• Passport photo• Travel insurance details• Flight tickets• Money - travellers cheques / cash / credit card• Guide/phrase book• Money pouch• Sleep sheet• Medication (eg. cold tablets, headache, tablets, sleeping tablets)• Day pack• Alarm clock• Plastic bags• Pocket knife• Torch	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Bike• Optional daypack, bumbag or handlebar bag.• Helmet• Cycling gloves• Sunglasses• Sunscreen• Water bottle/bladder• 2 x Padded bike shorts with something to put on over the top when off the bike• Your own seat, pedals, cleats (optional)• Light wind-proof jacket for cycling• Cycle shoes (with cleat attachment if you use them)• Optional gel seat cover and or handlebar extensions

Pre/post trip accommodation

If you would like us to organise some extra nights accommodation either before or after the trip at our start or finish point hotel, just let us know when you book the trip.

Tipping

One of the reasons that our trips run so well and are so much fun is the effort and energy put in by our local crew. On this trip, we will have a driver and local cycling guide, and with larger groups a bike mechanic. Their mix of professionalism, enthusiasm and sense of fun are infectious. We recognise that the wages in an economically developing country are vastly different from ours and if you are satisfied with the service then please show your appreciation with a tip. Your group leader will collect this at the end of the trip and organise a small thankyou presentation. As a guide only, we recommend you allocate USD 30. Tipping is NOT compulsory and it is meant to be a reward for good service.

Safety

Our cycling tour leader has the authority to change or cancel all or part of this trip if it is deemed necessary due to safety concerns. This decision would not be taken lightly, and where possible it would be made in consultation with our local crew, local operator and Bike Asia management. Your leader will be present on all included activities, staying at all the same hotels, guesthouses and of course cycling with you. During free time, should you choose to participate in any optional activities that are not part of our itinerary, please note that we cannot give any representations or guarantees about the safety of the activity, the standard of the operators running them or the equipment that they use.

In the group meeting on day 1, your tour leader will run a session on cycling safety. Whilst some travellers will have had years of touring experience, for others this might be their first cycling trip. We need to cater for a range of abilities and experience and it is in everyone's interest to learn about the particulars of cycling in this region from someone who has already done it. It goes without saying that by running and participating in a cycling trip, both parties accept an inherent level of risk. However, we take the safety of our passengers very seriously and we ask that you cycle in a safe and responsible manner and that you look out for the well-being of your fellow travellers. Cycling helmets must be worn by all cyclists at all times whilst cycling.

Most national governments provide a regularly updated advice service on safety issues involved with international travel. We recommend that you check your government's advice for their latest information before departure. The links for some major travel advisories and updates are listed below

[Australia](#) - [United Kingdom](#) - [Canada](#) - [New Zealand](#) - [United States](#)

We recommend the use of a neck wallet or money belt while travelling in the cities, for the safe keeping of your passport, money, credit cards and traveller's cheques. Utilise the hotel's safety boxes or safe where these are available.

Communication

In Beijing and Xining you will be able to access email, phone, fax and post offices. Outside these cities there will be little chance to email and the main communication will be phone. You should leave your family or friends the Bike Asia contact details. Our office staff will be able to get in touch with us in an emergency.

Bike Asia Tour Leader

Our leaders are passionate about Asia and cycling ... phew! They love what they do and take their job seriously. They will make every effort to ensure you have a safe, enjoyable trip with as much fun as possible. They bring many qualities and skills to this role; knowledge of group cycling, safety, management, and liaising between you and the local crew. In working for us, they have made a commitment to learning as much about the culture, language and customs of China as possible, and they are happy to share any of this knowledge with you. However, please keep in mind that they are not local and will not know everything.

Rules

We don't have many, but the ones we do have are important. We always abide by the laws of the country that we are travelling through. This means you are not to use any illegal drugs or use prostitutes. Any passenger who does so will be asked to leave the tour immediately.

Feedback

After you have completed the trip, we want to know what you thought about it. This is important to us, as it is through your feedback that we monitor our trips and make improvements for the future. Log on to our website and click on the feedback link. It will take you a minimum of 3 minutes, or should you feel like writing in more detail, then a little longer. If you fill in the feedback form, we'll give you an automatic 5% discount on any of our trips in any other region.

Photos

We are always looking for good photos of the regions which we travel through. If you have some that you would like to send us, we would love to have a look