

Tibetan Cultural Festivals

Tibetan cultural heritage suffered greatly during the Cultural Revolution. Many traditional festivals, once important highlights of the Tibetan year, are only now starting revive. Tibetan festivals are held according to the Tibetan lunar calendar.

The Tibetan lunar calendar usually lags at least a month behind our Gregorian calendar. We have included forth coming dates for some of the festivals listed, but you will need to ask around for the exact dates of many festivals because these are often only fixed by monasteries a few months in advance.

Festival	2006	2007
Tibetan New Year	Feb 21	Mar 3
Monlam Festival	Feb 28-Mar 7	Mar 11-Mar 19
Butter Oil Lantern Festival	Mar 6	Mar 18
Saga Dawa Festival	Jun 3	Jun 14
Horse Racing Festival, Gyantse	June	June
Chubacexi Festival	Jul 21	Jul 2
Yalong Cultural Festival	July 25	July 25
Shoton Festival	Aug 15-Aug 22	Aug 27-Sep 3
All dates are subject to change according to individual monasteries.		

Annual Festival Calendar

January

Shigatse New Year festivals held in the first week of the 12th lunar month.

February-March

Year End Festivals: Dancing monks can be seen on the 29th of the 12th lunar month in this

festival which is held to dispel the evil of the old year and auspiciously usher in the new one.

New Year Festivals (Losar): Taking place in the first week of the first lunar month, Losar is a colourful week of activities; Lhasa is probably the best place to be. There are performances of Tibetan drama and pilgrims making incense offerings, and the streets are thronged with Tibetans dressed in their finest.

Lantern Festival: This is held on the 15th of the first lunar month; huge yak-butter sculptures are placed around Lhasa's Barkhor circuit.

Monlam (Great Prayer Festival): Held midway through the first lunar month (officially culminating on the 25th). Monks from Lhasa's three main monasteries assemble in the Jokhang and image of Jampa (Maitreya) from Lhasa's Jokhang is borne around the Barkhor circuit, attracting enthusiastic crowds of locals and pilgrims. The festival was first instituted by Tsongkhapa in 1409 at the Gaden monastery.

May-June

Birth of Sakyamuni (Sakya Thukpa) : This is not exactly a festival. But rather the seventh day of the fourth lunar month and is an important for pilgrim in the Holy City of Lhasa, and other sacred areas in Tibet. Festivals are held at this time at Tsurphu, Gaden, Reting and Samye Monasteries.

Tsurphu Festival : Cham dancing (ritual dancing carried out by monks)and Chang drinking are the order of the day at this festivals on the 10th day of the fourth lunar month. The highlight used to be the dance of the Karmapa (the spiritual leader of the Karma Kagyupa suborder, now in India) so it remains to be seen how the festivals continues.

Saga Dawa (Sakyamuni's Enlightenment) : The 15th day of the fourth lunar month (full moon) marks the date of Sakyamuni's (Sakya Thukpa's) conception, moment of enlightenment and entry into nirvana . It is an occasion for outdoor operas and also sees large numbers of pilgrims climb Gephel Ri, the peak behind Drepung Monastery, to burn juniper incense. Saga Dawa is also a particularly good time to be at Mt. Kailash. Any kora is bursting with extra pilgrims.

June-July

World Incense Day: A day of incense burning and picnicking

Gyantse Horse -Racing Festival: A traditional festivals whose date authorities are trying to fix to the middle of June to boost the number of tourists. The fun and games include dances, picnics, archery and equestrian events.

Worship of the Buddha during the second week of the fifth lunar month, the parks of the Lhasa , in particular the Norbulingka, are crowded with picnickers.

Tashilhunpo Festival: During the second week of the fifth lunar month, Shigatse's Tashilhunpo Monastery becomes the scene of a three-day festival, and a huge thanga is hung.

Samye Festivals: Held from the 15th day of the fifth lunar month (full moon) for two days Special ceremonies and cham dancing in front of the Utse are the main attractions. The monastery guesthouse is normally booked out at this time so bring a tent.