

15-Day Journey into Yunnan-Guizhou's Ethnic Culture & Scenic Wonders

Trip overview

Delve deep into the vibrant tapestry of Southwest China on this immersive 15-day journey through the heartlands of Yunnan and Guizhou provinces. Designed for travelers seeking profound cultural connections and breathtaking natural wonders, this itinerary seamlessly bridges the iconic alpine landscapes of the Tibetan plateau with the dramatic karst formations and hidden ethnic villages of Guizhou.

Your adventure begins in Kunming, the "City of Eternal Spring," before sweeping through the historic ancient towns of Dali, Lijiang, and Shangri-La. Along the way, you will stand in awe beneath the snow-capped peaks of Jade Dragon Snow Mountain, look down into the roaring depths of Tiger Leaping Gorge, and share quiet moments with resident monks at the grand Songzanlin Lamasery. Transitioning by high-speed bullet train into Guizhou, the narrative shifts toward human ingenuity and living heritage. Witness the thunderous power of Huangguoshu Waterfall—Asia's largest cascade—and explore masterworks of modern engineering. The true soul of the region unveils itself as you enter the tranquil valleys of Kaili and Rongjiang. Here, you will engage in centuries-old traditions: crafting intricate indigo batik alongside Gejia artisans, receiving the hospitable ox-horn rice wine welcome from the Long-Skirt Miao, and diving headfirst into the electric, community-driven carnival atmosphere of the famous Guizhou Village Super League. This is more than a vacation—it is an authentic, sensory-rich voyage into the diverse cultural heritage, ancient rhythms, and untouched landscapes of Southwest China.

- **Durations:** 15 Days
- **Destinations:** Kunming - Lijiang - Shangri-La - Dali - Guiyang
- **Tour inquiry:** <https://asiachinatour.com/15-day-journey-into-yunnan-and-guizhou-for-ethnic-culture/>

Itinerary

Day 1: Kunming Arrival

Welcome to Kunming, the Spring City! Upon arriving at Changshui International Airport, your professional local guide and private driver will greet you warmly at the arrival hall. Enjoy a seamless, comfortable transfer directly to your hotel, while your guide provides a brief introduction to the local altitude and weather to ensure a relaxing start to your Southwest China journey.

Expert Tips

Kunming sits at an elevation of approximately 1,900 meters, so keeping hydrated and avoiding strenuous activity on your first afternoon will help your body acclimate smoothly before heading to higher altitudes in Yunnan. If you arrive early in the day, a gentle stroll around Green Lake Park or the nearby vibrant flower markets offers a wonderful, low-fatigue introduction to the city's perpetual spring charm.

Day 2: Kunming — Stone Forest Discovery

Breakfast & Lunch

Embark on a fascinating journey to the Naigu Stone Forest, renowned as the 'Ancient Black' Stone Forest for its striking, weathered dolomite pillars. Climb to a high vantage platform for a magnificent panoramic view of this geological marvel, then follow a hidden pathway, threading through the narrow spaces between the towering stones to witness the fantastic, razor-sharp formations up close.

In the afternoon, return to the city to explore Yuantong Temple, a serene 1,200-year-old Buddhist sanctuary that offers a profound glimpse into the diverse cultural and architectural heritage of Yunnan Province. Conclude your day with an immersive foodie tour along Kunming Old Street, tasting authentic local delicacies like cold rice noodle salad and crispy deep-fried mushrooms, all while absorbing the city's rich history by admiring the beautifully preserved Qing Dynasty and Republic of China-era buildings.

Expert Tips

Naigu Stone Forest features uneven stone steps and narrow crevices, so wearing sturdy, non-slip walking shoes is essential for a comfortable exploration. Since Naigu is less crowded than the main Shilin section, it offers superior photography opportunities, especially from the high platforms where you can capture the vast, dark limestone waves without tourist interference. When visiting Yuantong Temple later in the afternoon, take a moment to walk around the central lotus pond, as the late-day light reflects beautifully off the ancient pavilions, offering a peaceful contrast to the bustling old street nearby.

Day 3: Kunming — Lijiang | Dayan Town Awaits

Breakfast

Transfer to Kunming Railway Station for a scenic bullet train ride to Lijiang. Upon arrival, your private guide and driver will greet you warmly and escort you to your hotel.

Begin your Lijiang exploration with the tranquility of Black Dragon Pool Park, a spectacular scenic gem. Stroll through the verdant gardens, marvel at the ancient architectural structures, and find perfect serenity as you contemplate the majestic reflection of Jade Dragon Snow Mountain across

the glassy water. Afterward, immerse yourself in Lijiang Ancient Town (Dayan Town), a UNESCO World Heritage site and the historical home of the Naxi people. Wander along its winding, labyrinthine cobblestone streets, lined with beautifully preserved traditional houses, flowing canals, and vibrant local stalls.

Expert Tips

The bullet train journey from Kunming to Lijiang takes about 3 to 3.5 hours, so we recommend packing a few snacks and a book for the ride. Lijiang sits at an elevation of around 2,400 meters, which is noticeably higher than Kunming; take things at a leisurely pace this afternoon, drink plenty of water, and avoid overexertion. To capture the iconic postcard shot of Jade Dragon Snow Mountain reflecting in the Black Dragon Pool, try to arrive at the park by late afternoon when the sun hits the mountain peaks perfectly and the wind usually dies down, leaving the water surface completely still.

Day 4: Lijiang — Snow Mountain Adventure

Breakfast & Lunch

Board the scenic cable car to ascend the majestic Jade Dragon Snow Mountain for breathtaking alpine views. The cable car takes you up 1,100 meters (3,600 feet) to Glacier Park, reaching an altitude of 4,680 meters (15,350 feet) near the base of the sacred Shanzidou Peak. Marvel at the ancient glaciers and dramatic rock formations before descending the mountain.

After your high-altitude adventure, warm up with an authentic Naxi fire pit hot pot lunch, followed by an intimate visit to a local Naxi family in historic Yuhu Village. Immerse yourself deeply in their unique cultural traditions by trying on beautiful, traditional Naxi attire, learning the ancient art of making handmade Dongba paper, and practicing writing original pictographic Dongba characters.

Expert Tips

Glacier Park sits at a very high altitude of 4,680 meters, where temperatures are significantly lower than in Lijiang town and the air is thin. We highly recommend renting a heavy down jacket and purchasing a small, portable oxygen canister at the mountain base before boarding the cable car. Walk slowly once you reach the top, and if you feel any symptoms of altitude sickness, use your oxygen immediately and inform your guide. In the afternoon at Yuhu Village, the Dongba papermaking and writing session provides an incredible opportunity for cultural photography; your Naxi hosts are wonderful storytellers, so feel free to ask them about the symbolic meanings behind the pictographs you are writing.

Day 5: Lijiang — Shangri-La — Witness the Gorge

Breakfast & Lunch

Settle in for a comfortable and private ride from Lijiang to the peaceful, alpine highlands of Shangri-La. En route, explore Tiger Leaping Gorge, one of the world's deepest and most dramatic canyons, where the roaring Jinsha River thunders through narrow cliffs to offer a spectacular view of nature's raw power. Following a hearty local lunch, ascend further into the mountains to reach Shangri-La at an altitude of 3,200 meters.

Enjoy a relaxing, atmospheric walk through Dukezong Old Town in the afternoon. Begin your exploration at the North Gate, where the soul of Tibet greets you in a traditional palette of white, red, black, and gold, and the fluttering rainbow of five-colored prayer flags showcases the sacred geometry of Tibetan architecture. Stop at a specialized Tibetan workshop to handcraft a custom Five-Element bracelet, connecting with the earth's energy as you learn the profound lore behind each selected gemstone. As dusk falls, retreat to a century-old Tusi Mansion for an exceptional culinary experience at the Snow Mountain Kitchen, before concluding your cultural voyage at Sifang Street Square, dancing and spinning hand-in-hand with welcoming locals.

Expert Tips

The walk down into Tiger Leaping Gorge and back up involves a considerable number of steep stairs, so pace yourself carefully and wear sturdy hiking shoes. As you transition from Lijiang to Shangri-La's higher elevation of 3,200 meters this afternoon, you may feel the altitude change; staying well-hydrated during the drive and avoiding alcohol during your mansion dinner will ensure a comfortable evening. When participating in the bonfire dance at Sifang Street Square, it gets chilly rapidly once the sun sets, so be sure to bring a thick fleece or windproof jacket along for the evening activities.

Day 6: Shangri-La — Unveil the Hidden Gems

Breakfast & Lunch

Discover the grandeur of Songzanlin Lamasery, Yunnan's largest Tibetan Buddhist monastery. Explore this towering architectural masterpiece, filled with precious Buddhist statues, intricate murals, and cultural treasures that provide a profound insight into Tibetan spirituality. Afterward, enjoy a rare and private exchange with a resident Tibetan monk in his dormitory, offering a deeper understanding of daily monastic life, beliefs, and practices.

In the afternoon, escape to the pristine alpine wilderness of Pudacuo National Park. Marvel at its exceptionally well-preserved ecosystem as you stroll along the scenic boardwalks of Shudu Lake and Bitu Lake, surrounded by lush coniferous forests, tranquil wetlands, and dramatic mountain reflections.

Expert Tips

Songzanlin Lamasery involves climbing a long, steep flight of stairs to reach the main halls; given Shangri-La's high altitude, take frequent breaks and walk at a measured pace. When entering the prayer halls, remember to remove your hat and sunglasses, walk in a clockwise direction, and strictly refrain from taking photos or touching the sacred relics inside. Later at Pudacuo National Park, the weather can change rapidly and temperatures drop significantly near the lakes, so keeping your windproof layers handy in your backpack is highly recommended for the afternoon walk.

Day 7: Shangri-La — Dali

Breakfast

Wander through Dukezong Old Town, a vibrant Tibetan community, and immerse yourself in its rich culture one last time before boarding a bullet train to Dali. Upon your arrival, a private guide and driver will welcome you warmly at the station and provide a seamless transfer to your Dali

hotel, allowing you to settle in and relax.

Expert Tips

The morning stroll in Dukezong is the perfect time to buy unique Tibetan souvenirs like yak bone carvings or dried yak meat, as the shops are quiet and prices can be more flexible early in the day. The bullet train ride from Shangri-La to Dali takes around 2 to 2.5 hours and descends nearly 1,200 meters in altitude, which usually brings an immediate sense of physical relief and increased energy as you reach the warmer Erhai Lake basin. Once you check into your Dali hotel, take a light evening walk around the lively foreigner street to experience the stark, refreshing contrast between Tibetan alpine culture and the relaxed Bai ethnic minority lifestyle.

Day 8: Dali — Experience Dali

Breakfast & Lunch

Start your day with a vibrant culinary adventure at the bustling North Gate Farmers Market, weaving through colorful stalls packed with fresh, seasonal produce. Savor the authentic morning flavors of Dali by tasting comforting Xidoufen (creamy pea porridge), the irresistible layers of flaky Po-su Baba, and perfectly seasoned Crispy Fried Tofu.

Following your market immersion, stroll through the historic streets of Dali Old Town, where ancient stone walls come alive through your guide's engaging storytelling. Along the way, pause to refresh your palate with traditional Rose Mugua Water and sweet, artisanal Carved Plums. Next, experience the famous Three-Course Tea ceremony, a profound National Intangible Cultural Heritage ritual of the Bai people that symbolizes the stages of life. Conclude your morning with an authentic Bai cuisine lunch served inside a beautifully preserved historic courtyard restaurant. In the afternoon, embrace the natural beauty of Erhai Lake with a leisurely bike ride along its scenic western shore, enjoying the gentle lakeside breeze and the stunning, panoramic backdrop of the Cangshan Mountain range.

Expert Tips

The North Gate Farmers Market is a sensory delight but can get busy and damp underfoot, so wearing comfortable, closed-toe walking shoes is highly recommended. The Three-Course Tea features distinct flavor profiles—bitter, sweet, and a lingering aftertaste—so take small, deliberate sips to fully appreciate the cultural transition of tastes as your guide explains the philosophy behind the tradition. For the afternoon bike ride along Erhai Lake, the sun reflection off the water can be incredibly intense even on overcast days; be sure to apply sunscreen and keep your sunglasses handy for a comfortable ride.

Day 9: Dali — Guiyang — A Change of Scenery

Breakfast

After meeting your guide and driver, you'll be transferred to the railway station for your high-speed train to Guiyang. Upon arrival in the capital of Guizhou Province, a local guide and private driver will meet you warmly at the arrival hall and escort you to your hotel, sharing fascinating insights about the region's rich ethnic culture and dramatic landscapes along the way.

Expert Tips

The high-speed train journey from Dali to Guiyang takes approximately 4.5 to 5 hours, cutting through spectacular karst mountain landscapes, so securing a window seat is highly recommended for the best views. As you transition from the dry, sunny plateau of Dali to the more humid and occasionally misty climate of Guiyang, you will notice a refreshing drop in temperature, making a light jacket or cardigan perfect to keep in your hand luggage. If you feel like exploring on your first evening, Guiyang has a legendary night food culture; ask your guide for recommendations near Erqi Road or Shaanxi Road to sample local specialties like Siwa Wa (Guizhou spring rolls) or sour fish soup.

Day 10: Anshun — Discover Huangguoshu Waterfall

Breakfast & Lunch

Settle in for a comfortable morning ride from Guiyang to Anshun. Upon arrival, take a scenic park shuttle to the iconic Huangguoshu Waterfall, the crown jewel of Guizhou's karst landscapes. The main cascade is a magnificent, thunderous sight, dropping 77.8 meters and stretching an impressive 101 meters wide. You will feel fully immersed in nature's power as you view the roaring torrent from multiple unique perspectives—above, head-on, and from the side.

Next, walk to the famous Water Curtain Cave, a natural 134-meter-long cavern hidden in the cliffside that allows you to walk directly behind the waterfall curtain and witness the cascading torrent from a dramatic interior viewpoint. In the afternoon, transition from natural wonders to human ingenuity as you step onto the massive Baling River Bridge. Enjoy breathtaking, bird's-eye views from its staggering 370-meter height, marveling at how this engineering feat slashed a grueling one-hour valley transit to a single minute. Conclude your day at the Baling River Bridge Museum, a highly specialized facility dedicated entirely to the construction secrets and triumphs of this single mega-project.

Expert Tips

Huangguoshu Waterfall generates an immense amount of heavy mist, especially inside the Water Curtain Cave; we highly recommend purchasing a lightweight poncho at the park entrance and keeping a microfiber cloth handy to wipe down your camera lens between shots. The walk through the cave and surrounding trails involves damp, slippery stone steps, so wearing waterproof shoes with excellent grip is essential for safety. When visiting the Baling River Bridge Museum, pay close attention to the scale models showcasing how the suspension cables were deployed across the deep canyon—it provides great context before you step out to photograph the actual structure spanning the misty gorge.

Day 11: Kaili — Miao Batik-making

Breakfast & Lunch

Meet your private guide and driver for a comfortable transfer to Kaili, the vibrant heartland of Miao and Dong culture. Upon arrival, visit Matang Gejia Village, home to the fascinating Gejia people who proudly maintain a unique identity separate from the main ethnic groups. Their traditional clothing, featuring exquisite batik patterns, intricate embroidery, and distinctive headdresses resembling bows and arrows, beautifully reflects their ancient warrior heritage.

In the afternoon, get hands-on with the traditional art of batik alongside local artisans. You will participate in every step of this intricate process—from meticulously drawing designs with hot wax onto fabric to indigo dyeing and finally removing the wax—and take your finished masterpiece home as a deeply personal and unique souvenir.

Expert Tips

Drawing with hot wax requires a steady hand and a bit of patience; don't worry about minor imperfections, as they give the final indigo-dyed fabric its authentic, handmade character. The indigo dye used in the village is entirely natural and can easily stain clothing, so we highly recommend wearing dark colors or clothes you don't mind getting messy for this workshop. While exploring Matang Village, pay close attention to the silver ornaments on the women's clothing, as they tell visual stories of the community's history and folklore—your guide can help translate the symbolic meanings behind these stunning designs.

Day 12: Kaili — Explore Langde Village

Breakfast & Lunch

Head to Langde Miao Village in the morning, a tranquil sanctuary nestled deep within lush, emerald mountains. Upon arrival, you will be warmly greeted by local villagers dressed in stunning embroidered clothing and elaborate silver headdresses for the traditional Rice Wine Welcome Ceremony, where they will honor your arrival by presenting local rice wine in an ox horn cup.

Following the ceremony, follow the historic stone path to the village's central Lusheng ground for a mesmerizing Miao Cultural Performance. Enjoy a captivating series of traditional acts, ranging from soulful toasting songs to lively, rhythmic Lusheng dances. Afterward, wander among the neatly arranged stilted wooden houses dotting the hillside, where you will encounter the "Long-Skirt Miao" community. They are named for their unique, long, flowing skirts, which are widely regarded as the most magnificent and intricate of all Miao traditional costumes. Conclude your day with a visit to the vibrant Xiulitao Heritage Market to explore a rich variety of authentic intangible cultural heritage handicrafts, including exquisite Miao embroidery, delicate batik, and hand-hammered silver jewelry, before heading back to your hotel.

Expert Tips

The Rice Wine Welcome Ceremony is a highly respected tradition involving multiple toast stations as you enter the village; if you are not a drinker, you can politely express your gratitude by holding the ox horn cup with both hands and taking just a tiny, symbolic sip. Langde Village features original, weathered cobblestone paths and steps that can be uneven and slick when misty, so sturdy walking shoes are highly recommended for navigating the hillside. When browsing the Xiulitao Heritage Market, keep an eye out for pieces featuring the dragon-and-phoenix or butterfly mother motifs, as these are foundational symbols in Miao mythology and make for incredible stories to share when you display your souvenirs back home.

Day 13: Rongjiang — Feel Villagers' Passion

Breakfast & Lunch

Our journey today takes you to Rongjiang, where we will discover an authentic Dong village and join the electrifying atmosphere of the famous Guizhou Village Super League. Step into Dali Dong Village, a hidden cultural gem renowned for its century-old wind-and-rain bridges and beautifully preserved traditional dwellings. Wander the ancient, bluestone-paved lanes to see the unique Han-style Yang Family Courtyard, the village's towering drum tower, and the adjacent historic opera stage.

In the evening, witness a one-of-a-kind Village Football Match ("Cun Chao"), where the players are not high-profile celebrities but local farmers, teachers, and shopkeepers. You will be amazed by their genuine passion for the game, while the boundless enthusiasm of the Rongjiang people turns the entire league into one massive, heartfelt carnival celebration.

Expert Tips

Dali Dong Village is exceptionally well-preserved and built along a steep valley, so wearing comfortable shoes with good traction is highly recommended for the stone paths. When visiting the drum tower, remember it serves as the sacred community heart of the village; it is a wonderful place to sit quietly and observe elders spinning yarn or chatting, but always ask politely before taking close-up portraits. For the Village Super League match in the evening, the stadium gets incredibly packed and vibrant with local food stalls and ethnic musical performances during halftime; arriving early with your guide ensures a great vantage point to safely enjoy the infectious energy and capture spectacular photos of the crowd.

Day 14: Guiyang — City Highlights

Breakfast & Lunch

Relax and enjoy a comfortable, private ride back to Guiyang this morning. Upon arrival, visit the iconic Jiaxiu Pavilion, a magnificent three-tiered wooden structure that has stood gracefully in the middle of the Nanming River for centuries and has become the proud architectural symbol of Guiyang.

In the afternoon, experience the electrified atmosphere of Qingyun Market, a dynamic and lively snacks hub. Walk through its vibrant, neon-lit stalls to sample legendary local street food (at your own expense) and fully immerse yourself in the bustling energy of the city's modern night-economy and local lifestyle.

Expert Tips

Jiaxiu Pavilion is beautifully framed by modern skyscrapers, making it a premier spot for contrasting historical and contemporary architectures; for the best photos, walk across the Fuyu Bridge to capture the pavilions' elegant reflection in the Nanming River. When visiting Qingyun Market later in the day, the venue transitions from a creative cultural park into a massive food paradise, so arriving with an empty stomach is highly recommended. The market can become incredibly crowded on weekend evenings, so keep a close eye on your belongings while navigating the popular food stalls, and don't hesitate to try the localized Guizhou-style spicy snacks if you enjoy bold flavors.

Day 15: Guiyang — Departure

Breakfast

Enjoy some leisure free time to stroll through the city's vibrant streets or pick up last-minute souvenirs before a seamless private transfer to the airport or train station for your onward journey.

Expert Tips

If your departure is in the afternoon or evening, consider spending your final morning visiting Qianling Mountain Park, which is located right within the city; it is a fantastic spot to see locals practicing tai chi and to catch a glimpse of the playful, wild macaque monkeys roaming the forested paths. When packing your bags, ensure that any liquid or paste-based local culinary purchases, such as Guizhou's famous chili crisp or artisanal rice wine, are safely packed into your checked luggage rather than your carry-on to avoid any delays at security. Be sure to coordinate your checkout time with your guide the evening before, as traffic around Guiyang's major transport hubs can peak unexpectedly during mid-day rush hours.

Booking Policy

Cancellation Policy

Cancellation by Customer

- Cancellation received before 60 days: FREE of charge
- Cancellation received from 30 days to 59 days prior arrival date: 20% of total rate
- Cancellation received from 15 days to 29 days prior arrival date: 40% of total rate
- Cancellation received from 7 days to 14 days prior arrival date: 70% of total rate
- Cancellation received less than 7 days prior arrival date or No show: 100% of total rate

Children Policy

The rate for children applicable for one child sharing a twin or double cabin with two adults.

- For infant (<04 years old): Free of Charge
- 04 - 11 years old without bed: 50% adult rate
- 04 - 11 years old with extra bed: 75% adult rate
- Above 11 years old with extra bed: 100% adult rate

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