



Location: Tibet lies at the centre of Asia, with an area of 2.5 million square kilometers. The earth's highest mountains, a vast arid plateau and great river valleys make up the physical homeland of 6 million Tibetans. It has an average altitude of 13,000 feet above sea level.

Capital: Lhasa

Population: 6 million Tibetans and an estimated 7.5 million Chinese, most of whom are in Kham and Amdo.

Language: Tibetan (of the Tibeto-Burmese language family). The official language is Chinese.

Tibet is comprised of the three provinces of Amdo (now split by China into the provinces of Qinghai, Gansu & Sichuan), Kham (largely incorporated into the Chinese provinces of Sichuan, Yunnan and Qinghai), and U-Tsang (which, together with western Kham, is today referred to by China as the Tibet Autonomous Region).

The Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR) comprises less than half of historic Tibet and was created by China in 1965 for administrative reasons. It is important to note that when Chinese officials and publications use the term "Tibet" they mean only the TAR.

Tibetans use the term Tibet to mean the three provinces described above, i.e., the area traditionally known as Tibet before the 1949-50 invasion.

Today Tibetans are outnumbered by Han Chinese population in their own homeland, there are est. 6 million Tibetans and an estimated 7.5 million Chinese, most of whom are in Kham and Amdo. The official language is Chinese. But those Tibetans living in exile still speak, read and write in Tibetan (of the Tibeto-Burmese language family).

The National Flag of Tibet has been outlawed by Communist China, but you can see it flying where Tibetan communities live in exile. The largest community of Tibetans reside with their religious leader, The 14th Dalai Lama in Dharmasala, India. Many others live in southern India, near Mysore, and all over Asia, Europe and the Americas.

Potala Palace



On the hill in the middle of Lhasa City, you can find the most interesting architectural structure of all Tibet, the Potala Palace. It is built on the top of the hill Marpo Ri and that is why it can be seen from almost everywhere in town. Two huge steps lead to the entrance of the palace. During the days of Songtsen Gampo, his palace was built at the same spot where the Potala Palace is now.



Nobody knows how the palace looked in those days, but small parts can the former Palace still remain inside the present Potala. During the life of the fifth Dalai Lama the palace was drastically changed. The Potrang Karpo was built first. This part of the Palace is also known as the White Palace. The work on the Red Palace was about half way when the Dalai Lama died. The death of the Dalai Lama was kept secret and the work on the Red Palace continued. Only after the work on the Red Palace was finished did they pronounce the death of the fifth Dalai Lama.

He was buried in the red part of the Potala Palace. From that moment on, all Dalai Lamas lived in the Potala Palace and were also buried there. After the construction of the Norbulingka summer palace the Dalai Lamas were living in the summer palace in the summer and in the Potala palace in the winter. The 13th Dalai Lama undertook a renovation on the Palace in the early 20th century.

In 1959, the Chinese shelled the palace but there was not much damage done. Also during the Cultural Revolution, the Potala Palace was spared.