



The illuminated Potala Palace dominates the skyline of Lhasa, capital of the Tibet autonomous region.

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Finding bliss in Lhasa

Cultural shows in the capital of the Tibet autonomous region fill a tourist's evenings with delight while roadside shops serve up some delicious and inexpensive local delicacies. **Bidisha Bagchi** reports.

Upon landing at Lhasa's Gonggar airport on a full moon night, we were greeted by our local tour guide with a *hada* — a white silk scarf that signifies, goodwill, purity and good fortune.

It was quite late when we reached our hotel, conveniently located near Barkhor Street which felt like the hub of activities in the city. I thought I would see a Lhasa that is fast asleep. Well, I was wrong. The entire place was alive with people's chatter, well-lit shops and roadside stalls selling local delicacies.

I instantly knew that evenings in the capital city of the Tibet autonomous region were delightful.

We spent our days visiting the city's various tourist spots, and once back at the hotel, took a shower and went out for walks. Our hotel was within walking distance from Potala Square, the city's main public space. The awaiting rickshaws tempted me but I preferred to walk. A cool breeze forced us to wear light jackets.

The Potala Palace and the stupa in front are both lit up in the evenings. The sight is gorgeous. We spent a lot of time just walking around the square which is opposite the palace. Musical fountains entertained tourists and local people alike.

Hundreds of people were there at the square. Many of them strolled, some just sat around, and others leisurely talked to their friends.

On our way back, we took a rickshaw. Although this environment-friendly, simple vehicle is commonly seen across Asia, and is of little novelty value to me, I still loved the ride back to the hotel.

On the second night of our stay, we went out again. Even though we were told that the Tianhai night market had better options for street food and shops, we preferred Barkhor Street, mainly because it was closer to our hotel.

There were rows of make-shift stalls selling a variety of things from prayer beads to traditional jewelry and from embroidered hand bags to skirts and scarves.

Bargaining was easy, too. I bought a hand bag for 20 yuan (\$3) when the female vendor had asked for 35 yuan. Both of us — the buyer and the seller — looked happy at the end.

Vegetables and meat that were skewered and cooked in front of us at roadside shops were delicious and unexpectedly cheap. The only problem was the language. As English isn't spoken or understood by the local people, it was difficult to hold conversations except for exchanging a few pleasantries.

But even then, we relied on guessing the meaning of Tibetan words and enjoyed the food.

The roadside eateries did brisk business by offering not just local food but Nepalese and Korean barbecue as well. Blissful indeed!

The best part of evenings in Lhasa was perhaps going to the cultural shows. *Himalaya* — a daily exhibition of Tibetan culture through songs and dances — was held at the Lhasa People's Cultural and Art Museum. A similar show titled *Happiness on the Way* also ran for about 100 minutes every evening at the Tibet Drama Theater.

For one such show, we reached the theater a little ahead of show time so as to avoid rush hour. With tickets for the fourth row, we had seats with a full view of the stage in front of us. Two screens on either side of the stage explained every scene in Mandarin and English. That made it easy for us to fol-



BIDISHA BAGCHI / FOR CHINA DAILY

The daily show in Tibet Drama Theater, *Happiness on the Way*, is a showcase of Tibetan music and dance.

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low onstage performances.

The show opened with a ceremony, and went on to depict Tibetan culture through five themes and five different colors, based on the Tibetan philosophy of five elements of nature — water, earth, wind, fire and sky (space).

We were mesmerized for about 100 minutes as we watched the well-choreographed dances, the beautiful play of lights, vibrant sets and colorful costumes of the dancers. The Reba drum dance, Lama dance, wheat cultivation, making wine from barley and wedding scenes were all explained through the performances.

The show ended with a song that everyone in the audience ended up singing, including me. Music truly does not have any borders, be it cultural or religious. We all sang aloud and sometimes hummed even though we did not know the meaning of words or how to pronounce them correctly.

Our evenings in Lhasa were packed with shopping, eating and watching cultural shows. It was money well-spent. We definitely need to plan another trip, soon.

Contact the writer at features@chinadaily.com.cn



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Prayers clad in traditional costume are a common sight in Barkhor Street, the hub of activities in Lhasa.

Treasure trove of history

By **WANG QIAN** in Jinan
wangqian2@chinadaily.com.cn

Archaeologist Wang Yongbo, 61, still clearly remembers the day 25 years ago when he and his colleagues discovered a large ancient chariot and horse burial site in Linzi, Shandong province.

Remains of 38 horses and 13 carts lie in a 300-square-meter tomb from the Spring and Autumn Period (770-476 BC) on a river bank. Much of the carts' wooden frame and horse bodies have rotted away, but relics of wheels, bones and bronze decorations still remain, hinting at their once-mighty presence.

"It was spectacular! We were thrilled by the find as it was the first time such a large scale chariot and horse burial pit had been excavated in the province," recalls Wang, a researcher with the Shandong provincial institute of cultural relics and archaeology.

In ancient China, the death of a royal or nobleman was often accompanied by the sacrifice of horses and chariots, to show the master's status and to help him on the last journey into the land of the immortals, Wang explains.

The tomb had once been robbed so most burial articles were missing, and its master has not been identified. "But the scale and burial style lead us to believe the master must have been a high-ranking official or a monarch during the Spring and Autumn Period," Wang says.

The site was included in the top 10 list of archaeological discoveries in China in 1990 by the State Bureau of Cultural Relics (now the State Administration of Cultural Heritage). Today, a museum has been built at the site of the remains, just five meters underneath an expressway connecting the cities of Jinan and Qingdao.

With a collection of relics, ruins and other displays, the museum tells the story of chariot-making and styles in ancient China. It is regarded as one of the first and the most complete facilities of its kind in the nation, Wang says.

To Chinese archaeologists and history buffs, Linzi, where the burial site is located, has long been a treasure trove. Now a district of Zibo city, it was the capital of Qi, one of the most powerful states during the Spring and Autumn Period and the Warring States Period (475-221 BC) for more than 800 years.

Statistics from the local cultural relics bureau show that more than 300 historical sites, 150 large ancient tombs and numerous pieces of valuable cultural relics have been unearthed in the area, earning it a reputation of being an "underground museum".

"Ancient jades, coins, bronze and ceramic products were often found by local farmers who were working in the nearby land several decades ago. The discoveries were so common that not many people treated them as valuable things at the time," says Cao Yuanliang, a local from Tianjia village in Linzi.

"My farther once dug out two jars of *dao-bi*, a kind of knife-shaped bronze coin used by Qi State, and sold them at a very low price. But now, a single one is worth as much as 100,000 yuan (\$16,000)."

Jiang Jian, an expert on Qi culture, attributed the appearance of so many cultural relics to the prosperity of Qi State. Linzi was one of China's most flourishing cities from the Spring and Autumn Period to the Han Dynasty (206 BC-AD 220), he says.

Jixia Academy, established by Duke Huan of Qi State reached its peak under the rule of Duke Xuan (350-301 BC). It is said to be China's earliest think tank and often compared with the Platonic Academy in Athens, Greece. It invited gifted men from different backgrounds and schools of thought to give lectures and participate in political decision making.

On Sept 12 every year, the birthday of the first ruler of Qi State Jiang Ziya, a memorial ceremony is held in Linzi, attracting thousands of his descendants, scholars and tourists from home and abroad to pay their respects to the master and share thought on the research of Qi culture.



JU CHUANJIANG / CHINA DAILY

Remains of chariot and horses unearthed in a Spring and Autumn Period (770-476 BC) tomb in Linzi, Shandong province.