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Dali, Revealed

A Land Nurtured by Mountain and Lake

5 Days / 4 Nights

Overview

Dali is a land shaped by mountain and water. The nineteen peaks of the Cangshan range send eighteen streams tumbling down to Erhai, the great highland lake the Bai people call a "sea." Along the way they feed terrace after terrace of rice paddies and the Bai villages scattered across the plain.

The Linden Centre was born here eighteen years ago, and this journey shares what we've come to love most: the real rhythm of Bai life. You'll shop the morning markets, honor the village guardians, cook with local aunties, and gather around the fire as a guest, not a tourist.

Five days. Three Linden Centre courtyards. One unhurried loop. Along the way, you'll see how the mountain nurtures, how the hearth sustains, how culture endures, and how time itself slows down.

Day 1 | The Mountain Nurtures — Arrival & Wuwei Temple

Stay: Linden Centre Dali Old Town

Your journey begins at our newest hotel, a graceful courtyard at the edge of Dali's old town, tucked at the foot of the Cangshan Mountains. Shade trees, a koi pond and soft mountain breezes create a quiet refuge: the bustle of the old town outside, the stillness of the mountain within. Settle in with a fresh cup of Yunnan coffee and let the journey catch up with you.

In the afternoon, we climb into the forests of Cangshan's Lan Peak to Wuwei Temple. The temple is tied to one of Dali's most remarkable stories, the kings of the Dali Kingdom who gave up their thrones to become monks. Ancient cedars tower overhead, and a spring here has never

run dry. Your guide will bring the old stories to life, from the temple's role as the kingdom's "imperial hospital" to the couplets carved into its wooden pillars.

Then we slow down completely. Among the cedars, we set out a private tea ceremony. Temple bells drift from the eaves as your tea cools in the cup. There's no schedule and no checklist, just the mountain gently lifting away whatever you carried in with you.

Dinner is served in the quiet of the courtyard.

Day 2 | The Hearth Nurtures — Market, Coffee & the Family Table

Stay: Linden Commons, Xizhou (Baocheng Mansion)

Begin the morning at the North Gate market, home to Dali's most authentic food stalls. Your guide will introduce you to ingredients you've likely never seen: edible white flowers, wild greens, forest mushrooms, lichens and earth ginseng, all gifts of the mountain and the lake. Choose your favorites, then return to the hotel, where local aunties will turn your finds into a home-style Dali lunch. It's the truest taste of this land.

In the afternoon, a 30-minute drive brings us to Xizhou and the Linden Commons, once home to the Yan family, one of Xizhou's great merchant clans. Two courtyards follow the classic Bai "three rooms and a screen wall" design. A third holds a Western-style building, a reminder of the caravans that brought the wider world home to this village.

Next, we visit the village's best coffeehouse. The owner will introduce you to Yunnan's distinctive coffee beans, each with its own personality, and teach you to brew your own pour-over. You'll discover that coffee here is more than a drink. It grows from this soil, passes through local hands, and ends up in the cup in front of you.

The evening brings our Linden Family Farm-to-Table Dinner, with one simple rule: nothing from far away. Every ingredient is local and seasonal, picked from our garden or bought at the market that day. In summer, you might taste tender water bamboo shoots, porcini and termite

mushrooms, fresh lake fish, and a black sticky-rice dessert with tropical fruit. By autumn, the menu has changed completely, because our table follows the seasons, not trends.

Day 3 | Culture Nurtures — Market, Village Temple & Bonfire

Stay: Linden Centre Shaxi (Rammed Earth Hotel)

At dawn, explore the Xizhou morning market, this time through its stories. Your host will explain how Xizhou became the wealthiest merchant town in western Yunnan and how its four great families brought home flavors from far beyond. You'll also learn why local palates are so refined: a bowl of sour-spicy fish calls for seven or eight seasonings, and raw pork comes with a carefully balanced sauce of pickled plum, Sichuan pepper, garlic and chili oil.

Then we bicycle north along the Erhai lakeside greenway to the village of Shacun. There we visit its Benzhu temple, the spiritual heart of every Bai village. The Bai believe each village has its own guardian deity. Caring for that faith are the grandmothers of the Lianchi Association. On the first and fifteenth of each lunar month, and on the guardian's birthday, they gather in blue cotton clothes to light incense, chant and pray softly in the Bai language, prayer beads moving through their fingers. In their quiet devotion, offered year after year on behalf of the whole village, you'll see what faith means here.

Lunch is a simple vegetarian meal cooked over the temple's wood-fired stove: fresh greens, tofu, hot soup and rice.

In the afternoon, we drive to Shaxi and our rammed-earth hotel, set in the forests of the Shibaoshan mountains. Mornings here bring mist, and on clear nights the Milky Way stretches overhead.

As darkness falls, we gather around a bonfire. A Bai elder from Shilong Village strikes the first notes on his three-stringed sanxian and tells the legend of the dragon-headed sanxian and the king's whip dance. Then the village aunties pull you into the circle to teach you the joyful tiaotiao dance.

Day 4 | Time Nurtures — Horseback, Grottoes & Old Town

Stay: Linden Centre Shaxi (Rammed Earth Hotel)

This morning, ride on horseback along the ancient route once traveled by Shaxi's salt and tea caravans. Horse bells jingle as the mountain wind moves through the pines. Deep in the hills, a picnic lunch waits for you in the open air.

After lunch, we hike to the Shizhongshan Grottoes, carved more than a thousand years ago during the Nanzhao and Dali kingdoms. Here you'll find a rare stone portrait of a real Nanzhao king, surrounded by attendants and officials in the dress of their time. You'll also see a gentle Guanyin, the Bodhisattva of Compassion, whose serene smile has earned her the nickname "the Mona Lisa of Shaxi." A local teacher guides you through each cave as a thousand years of history comes into focus.

In the afternoon, we descend to Shaxi Old Town. First, stop at a cheese workshop, one of our community partners, to taste a traditional fermented cheese found nowhere else. Then the rest of the day is yours. Shaxi is small but rewards slow wandering: the ancient locust tree on Sideng Street, the soaring eaves of the old theater stage, and the quiet lanes beyond.

Day 5 | A Farewell in Three Cups — Departure

Begin your last morning with a leisurely breakfast in the courtyard.

Then join a Bai Three-Course Tea ceremony, the highest form of Bai hospitality. Your host guides you through three cups: first bitter, then sweet, then one with a lingering aftertaste, each a reflection on life. Sip by sip, the journey comes together in three cups of tea.

Before you go, try your hand at jiama woodblock printing. Choose a block carved with wishes for blessing and peace, and print your own to take home. It's a talisman the Bai have treasured for generations, and a final blessing from this land to its guest from afar.

Around midday, check out at your leisure and transfer to the airport.

Why You'll Love This Journey

• Live it, don't just see it. Step into daily Bai life through its markets, temples, kitchens and bonfires.

• Three courtyards, one loop. Stay in three distinct Linden Centre homes: an old-town courtyard, a historic merchant mansion and a forest retreat.

• Seasonal by design. Menus and experiences change with what the land offers.

• Slow and personal. No packed schedules, no rushed sightseeing. Just mountain wind, firelight, and the rhythm of Dali.