



## INTERNATIONAL CAMPAIGN FOR TIBET

### China closes sacred temple around Tibetan National Uprising Day

<https://savetibet.org/china-closes-sacred-temple-around-tibetan-national-uprising-day>

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In an apparent attempt to thwart any potential incidents during the sensitive period surrounding the anniversary of the Tibetan National Uprising of March 10, 1959, Chinese authorities have announced the closure of the Jokhang Temple in Lhasa for pilgrims from March 8 to 10, 2023.

The Jokhang is considered the most sacred place for Tibetan Buddhists and lies in the center of Lhasa, Tibet's capital. Many Tibetans visit it daily.

The Jokhang temple has been [the site of protests by Tibetans](#) against Chinese misrule in the past. There [have also been incidents of self-immolations by Tibetans](#) in front of the temple.

Sources said a notification from the Jokhang Management Committee, dated March 6, 2023, that was pasted in public places in Lhasa states there would be no public access to the temple during the period as it will undergo “cleaning up.” The notification added that the temple will be open from March 11 as usual.

#### Reopening

Interestingly, Chinese state media said the Lhasa Traffic Police on March 2, 2023 announced restrictions on certain roads in the city on account of “upgrading and transformation of water supply network.” The announcement said the restrictions will be imposed between March 6 and March 12. These roads are not in the city center, and the stated reasons for restrictions might have a valid basis, but the timing of the work around the sensitive political anniversaries period—including the Tibetan National Uprising of 1959 and pan-Tibetan demonstrations in 2008—raises questions.

However, this year, besides the general lockdown of TAR to foreigners, the authorities have not issued any additional notice barring foreign travelers. In the past, there would have been such a ban for foreigners for a period of several weeks around the sensitive period.

Meanwhile, there are reports that the re-opening of the Tibet Autonomous Region—which spans about half of Chinese-occupied Tibet—for foreign tourism is decided. A posting by the Lhasa Tourism Development Bureau on Chinese social media on March 4, 2023 invited probable visitors to let them know how they would like to arrive in Tibet, whether by train or by plane, saying the bureau is ready.

Sources say travel agencies have been told to get ready, and that the reopening can happen from as early as April 2023, although the permit would be restricted to group tours. Some [travel agencies](#) have already started announcing tours for pilgrimage to the sacred Gang Rinpoche (Mount Kailash) region in Western Tibet, with first group scheduled to leave in April.

## Special permit required

It also seems that the reopening might include permission for foreign students to study in Tibetan institutions. For instance, Canada-based historian Tsering Shakya tweeted on March 5, 2023 that Tibet University in Lhasa will restart a Tibetan language program for international students in September 2023.

The Tibet Autonomous Region has been closed since 2020 to foreign tourists on account of the COVID-19 pandemic. In May 2021 it was announced that foreigners residing in China could get permits to visit the TAR. However, in its latest report, the Foreign Correspondents Club of China said that all three of its member journalists who applied to go to the TAR in 2022 were [denied permits](#). Even those who went to other open Tibetan areas faced restrictions.

In January 2023, China announced the quarantine-free policies for travel. The Chinese Embassy in the United States announced it was reopening its consular service as of Jan. 25, while the Chinese Embassy in Nepal announced that it will resume its consular service from March 6. But there is no mention of a process for permits to visit Tibet, although specific provisions for Hong Kong and Macau are stipulated.

In general, the Tibet Autonomous Region is the only area for which the Chinese government requires foreigners to obtain a specific Tibet Travel Permit issued by the TAR Tourism Bureau, in addition to a visa. Without such a permit, tourists will not be able to enter TAR even if one has a Chinese visa.



International Campaign for Tibet (ICT) | 1825 Jefferson Place NW | Washington, DC 20036 | United States of America  
Phone: (202) 785-1515 | Fax: (202) 785-4343 | [info@savetibet.org](mailto:info@savetibet.org)

ICT Europe  
Funenpark 1D | 1018 AK  
Amsterdam, The Netherlands  
Phone: +31 (0)20 3308265  
Fax: +31 (0)20 3308266  
[icteurope@savetibet.nl](mailto:icteurope@savetibet.nl)

ICT Deutschland e.V.  
Schönhauser Allee 163 | 10435  
Berlin, Germany  
Phone: +49 (0)30 27879086  
Fax: +49 (0)30 27879087  
[info@savetibet.de](mailto:info@savetibet.de)

ICT Brussels  
11, rue de la linière | 1060  
Brussels, Belgium  
Phone: +32 (0)2 609 44 10  
Fax: +32 (0)2 609 44 32  
[info@savetibet.eu](mailto:info@savetibet.eu)