

# Himalaya Film Festival 2010 New York

This visually stunning series about life in Tibet has been three years in the making. Centred around Gyantse, Tibet's third largest town and a neighbouring village, A Year in Tibet has had unprecedented access to ordinary people and gives a remarkable insight into how they cope with living under Chinese Communist rule.

Buddhism runs through the heart of Tibetan society and culture and the Pel Kor monastery in Gyantse is at the centre of the series. During the year's filming, the monastery is thrown into turmoil as it prepares for a rather unexpected visit of the Panchen Lama - the most senior Lama living in China today and a controversial figure in Tibet. The authorities fear the visit will be sabotaged and even the monks have to go through a security check to get into their own monastery. Later in the year, there is a theft at the monastery and suspicion falls on the monks themselves.

Also featured in the main town are stories about a hotel owner, and a local builder - both part of a new Tibetan entrepreneurial class, who find their own way to live successfully cheek by jowl with the Chinese. Also in Gyantse, a local rickshaw driver, who has moved from the impoverished countryside, struggles to make a basic living doing odd jobs.

In Tangmai village, half an hour's drive from Gyantse, a devoted party worker finds that being loyal to the Communist party is no guarantee of a comfortable life as she approaches retirement. The local village doctor gets ill and forsakes Western and Tibetan medicine in favour of a spiritual cure. And the local Shaman spends half his time living in the spiritual world as he confronts evil demons, and the other half working out how to play the system to secure good university places for his children.

Permeating the whole series is the often surprising relationship between ordinary Tibetans and the newly arrived Han Chinese, who now outnumber the native population. It is a chilling but fascinating insight into the invidious power of Chinese colonialism.

A Seven Stones Media and Mosaic Films production for BBC FOUR  
More info at: [www.sevenstonesmedia.com](http://www.sevenstonesmedia.com)

## EPISODE 1: THE VISIT

The Panchen Lama, the highest ranking Buddhist living in Tibet today, pays a sudden visit to the local monastery and throws the monks into turmoil. Responsibility for organising the visit falls on the deputy head lama, Tsultrim. He has to arrange for the wild dogs in the monastery

**Director Sun Shuyun**  
**Executive producers Adam Alexander & Jeremy Gibson**  
**Series written & produced by Peter Firstbrook**  
**Editor Sue Haycock**



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to be rounded up, and gives the buildings their first proper clean in twenty years.

For Tsephun, a novice monk, the visit proves to be the most exciting day of his life when he is asked to be the lead flower bearer in the procession. But the authorities fear the visit will be sabotaged and the atmosphere in town changes dramatically when the police and army move in.

In the town, Jianzang, a local hotel owner, is worried about the lack of business. Despite a last-minute panic with blocked pipes in his hotel rooms and an inspection from the local tourist chief, the Panchen Lama's visit gives him a late-season windfall.

In the nearby village of Tangmai, Deji, a young farmer's wife, is rushed into hospital with complications with her pregnancy. Her family fears for her life and as doctors try to stabilise her condition and save her baby, Tseden, a local shaman, is called into the family house to dispel the evil spirits which he believes are causing her illness.



## **EPISODE 2: THREE HUSBANDS AND A WEDDING**

It is autumn in southern Tibet and everyone is pulling together in Tangmai village to get in the harvest. Like all the farmers, Dundan is worried most about hailstones flattening his crops. In the past his brother Tseden, the local shaman, protected the fields with his spells. Now the local government has installed guns to disperse the clouds and this has put Tseden out of a job.

In the nearby town of Gyantse, Rincheu, a local builder, struggles to find enough workers during the harvest to complete his all important first government commission. The project is so far out of town that he has to house all his workers in tents, which makes his job even more complicated.

At the Pel Kor monastery, the monks recover from a hectic visit by the highest ranking Buddhist Lama in Tibet. After a riotous time celebrating the success of the event, they go home to help with the harvest.

Meanwhile back in Tangmai, Tseden has more than the harvest on his mind. His son has been accepted for university, but the Shaman is not sure if he qualifies for a government student loan. He is also asked to help a local family arrange their daughter's wedding. Despite months of preparation, nobody actually gets around to telling the bride she is going to be wed – nor does anybody mention that she is expected to marry her new husband's brother as well!

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## EPISODE 3: FAITH, HOPE AND CHARITY

In the Pel Kor monastery in Gyantse, the monks begin their elaborate preparations for Losar (New Year), one of Tibet's biggest festivals. First, they have to lower the flagpole – and nothing is ever straightforward at the monastery!

In the main town, Lhakpa, a local rickshaw driver, struggles to earn money as winter approaches. He embarks on a scheme to buy and sell puppies – but with disastrous consequences. Meanwhile his five-year-old nephew Ozer is rushed into hospital with a life-threatening heart condition, which only plunges the family further into debt.

Jianzang, a local hotel owner, gets involved in a court case, which has a surprising outcome. He also wants to expand his hotel, so he decides to drive 800 kms to Kathmandu in Nepal to recruit a new chef. It is a fraught and dangerous journey in the middle of winter, and when he arrives, he finds that he has forgotten the phone number of the chef.

In Tangmai, Lhamo, the local village doctor cannot cure her crippling stomach pains using Western and Tibetan medicine. She fears that her condition results from bad karma in a previous life and she seeks a solution in her Buddhist faith.

As Losar arrives, the monks raise the new flagpole ready for the celebrations, but they have even more problems putting it up than they had taking it down. But with the flagpole eventually secure, everyone puts their worries behind them as they celebrate the fifteen riotous days of their New Year festival.

## EPISODE 4: MONKS BEHAVING BADLY

It is mid-winter in southern Tibet, where temperatures regularly fall 20 degrees below freezing. In the Pel Kor monastery in Gyantse, the director Choephel discovers some irreplaceable statues have been stolen and he suspects it is an inside job. But the theft gives the local Communist Party an excuse to put in a government 'work team' to weed out the monks who they think are behaving badly. Choephel gets the Communist Party message loud and clear and is forced to bring in major changes.

In the main town, Lhakpa, a rickshaw driver in town, is desperately short of money and he heads north in search of a lucrative job on a building site – but he gets more than he bargained for. As it happens, he does meet the girl of his dreams and they plan to settle down and get married.



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In Tangmai, Butri is a life-long die-hard communist party worker. For over forty years, she has strictly enforced the Communist Party regulations in the village. Now, as she approaches retirement, she is called into town to see the local communist party committee and gets a very unpleasant surprise.

## **EPISODE 5: DIARY OF A NOVICE MONK – AGED 15 AND THREE-QUARTERS**

Tsephun is the youngest monk at the Pel Kor monastery. He was just 12 years old when he became a novice; now 15, he lives and works with his master Dondrup, a 77-year-old curmudgeonly lama. They share a single room in the monastery: it is a close relationship, but not an easy one. Tsephun helps his master with the day-to-day jobs of cleaning and tidying; in return, Dondrup teaches Tsephun the sutras and scriptures – an essential part of becoming a monk.

During the filming of *A Year in Tibet*, Tsephun changes from a cooperative and caring little boy to a hormonally-charged rebellious teenager. Girls and television suddenly seem more attractive than chanting and sutras. Inevitably, his relationship with Dondrup deteriorates so badly that his master can cope no longer and he asks the director of the monastery to expel Tsephun. If Tsephun is thrown out, it would be the ultimate disgrace for him and his family.

Meanwhile Tsultrim, the deputy head lama, presides over the funeral rites of one of the lamas, and he organises the monks for the Buddha's birthday, the most important event in the Tibetan calendar.

