



PHOTOGRAPHS COURTESY OF CONSTANTIN DE SLIZEWICZ

## LOST HORIZONS

A throwback to 18th-century expeditions, Caravane Liotard is a four-day horse caravan through the mystical Tibetan countryside

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**I FIRST HEARD** of Constantin de Slizewicz through good friends in Beijing, Luc Richard and Leonardo Griglié, when I was living in the capital. Griglié, an Italian *bon vivant* who lived in a converted Tibetan temple, spoke of Tintin—the endearing name his friends gave de Slizewicz—quite fondly, like a kindred spirit or son he never had. While I found Beijing an exciting place with its chaos and contradictions, apparently Tintin was not impressed by the senseless razing of the old city, and eventually left for Yunnan, in search of a more idyllic life.

I finally met de Slizewicz in France in 2010, when Richard invited us to his summer home

in the Hautes-Alpes along with another friend, Valeilles de Montmirail. It was on one of our hikes that de Slizewicz first told me about his dream to start a caravan tour in Shangri-La. He wanted travelers to experience the mountains of Tibet and Yunnan the way he knew it. I admired his dream but was skeptical, knowing the many hurdles he would have to face in China.

Just a few months later, I was pleasantly surprised when he started sending me pictures from his caravan tours with elaborate meals served with heirloom silverware, a selection of rich wines, and plush rugs. And in the winter, I saw the photographs of the horses and mules carrying their trunks through snow-covered mountains. It was a scene straight from a Joseph Conrad novel of travelers from the last century.

I finally visited de Slizewicz in the Spring of 2014 with a friend, Gaetan Verhegge, spending the first night in the Old Town. In the early morning, as I went to catch a glimpse of the ancient Tibetan town, which many claim is the mythical Shangri-La in James Hilton's novel *The Lost Horizon*, I was surprised to see a scene I unfortunately was too familiar with. The Old Town was completely razed.

De Slizewicz soon walked in with his loyal dog Alfred, and for the first time I connected him to Tintin and his dog Milou, the adventurer from the renowned Belgian comics series. He looked like an explorer from bygone days, complete with the hat and foulard. We drove toward



**TENTS AND TEMPLES**  
**From top:** The Old Town of Lijiang in Yunnan, not long after the fire that razed it in 2014; Constantin de Slizewicz was a photographer for the French and Chinese press before he decided to found Caravane Liotard. He has been living in Yunnan for over 10 years.



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the mountains to start our three-hour hike that would eventually lead us to his renovated farmhouse in the Righa Valley.

When we arrived at his residence, a traditional Tibetan house he and his wife Phoebe had lovingly restored, it was a pleasure to see how he had created a home amongst the Tibetans. Guillaume de Penfentenyo, de Slizewicz's partner, cooked an elaborate three course French meal for us, which was a feat in itself, considering how remote we were.

The following day, we took a long hike after an early breakfast through lush green forests and rivers. And when we took a break for lunch, I couldn't help but wonder if de Slizewicz ever got lonely living in such a remote village. He looked at me surprised. It then occurred to me that Constantin de Slizewicz really did encompass the spirit of adventurers of a bygone era, and Shangri-La was now his home.

I felt privileged to have a glimpse into his life and look forward to returning to Caravane Liotard one day. ■



**EDGE OF THE WORLD**

**From top:** The Aboudje mountains, which can be reached by trekking through a trail of larch and fir trees and rhododendrons; guests of Caravane Liotard set up camp in bell tents on the grasslands.

## CHASING SHANGRI-LA

Following the legendary Tea Road, Caravane Liotard ([caravane-liotard.com](http://caravane-liotard.com)) leads you through a trail of valleys and passes in the heart of Shangri-La, while nights are spent in elegant bivouacs.

**DAY 1**

The crossing of the Ringha plain  
A night on the Monk Grassland

**DAY 2**

Kawagarpo  
Yading Mountain Range  
Aboudje Mountains

**DAY 3**

Aboudje Lake  
Camping at the Muet Grassland

**DAY 4**

Trail of rivers and grasslands  
Ringha plain

