

Earthbound Expeditions

Kailash Mansarovar Yatra via Lhasa, Driving Out

14 days, from US$2,947 per person

Duration
14 days

Grade
Moderate to strenuous

Max altitude
5,630 m

Start and end
Kathmandu

On the trail
5 to 8 hours a day

Best season
May to Sep

Accommodation
Guesthouses

Meals
Full board, vegetarian

Group size
5 to 20

Getting there
Fly to Lhasa

Kailash Mansarovar Yatra via Lhasa, Driving Out Overview

One of the most sacred journeys in Asia: walk around Mount Kailash and bathe at Lake Mansarovar on the Tibetan plateau.

Tour overview

This is a pilgrimage rather than a trek, and the difference affects what it requires of you. Ten of the fourteen days are spent flying, driving and acclimatising; three are spent walking the 52 km circuit of Mount Kailash, crossing a 5,630 m pass on the second day. Kailash is sacred to Hindus as the abode of Shiva, to Buddhists as the home of Demchok, to Jains as the place where Rishabhanatha attained liberation, and to followers of Bon as the seat of their spiritual power. Nobody has climbed it, and climbing it is not permitted.

The kora

The kora is fifty-two kilometres over three days, walked anticlockwise by followers of Bon and clockwise by everyone else. Day one is 14 km along a gradually rising valley to Dirapuk, directly below the north face. Day two is the most difficult: 18 km over the Dolma La at 5,630 m, past Gauri Kund lake, followed by a long, steep descent. Day three is 8 km on easy ground to Darchen. Horses and yaks are available for the whole circuit and many pilgrims use them, but everyone walks over the Dolma La, because horses cannot be ridden across it.

Why the altitude makes it demanding

The whole trip is at high altitude, and almost all the height is gained by aircraft and vehicle rather than on foot. You fly from Kathmandu at 1,400 m to Lhasa at 3,656 m in one morning, then drive to 4,350 m at Saga and 4,600 m at Mansarovar, sleeping higher each night. By the time you start the kora, you have spent five nights above 3,600 m without walking to any of them. This is more demanding for acclimatisation than any of our treks, which is why the itinerary is fourteen days rather than ten.

2026, the year of the Horse

The Tibetan Fire Horse year runs from 17 February 2026 to 5 February 2027. A kora walked in a Horse year is believed to carry the merit of thirteen ordinary koras. This happens once every twelve years, and Kailash is much busier as a result. If the merit is important to you, this is the year to go. If you prefer a quieter visit, next year will be less crowded.

Key highlights of the Kailash Mansarovar Yatra via Lhasa, Driving Out

- Kailash kora (parikrama) trek
- Sacred Lake Mansarovar
- Overland journey across the Tibetan plateau
- All permits and logistics arranged

Itinerary

Day	Route	Hours	Distance	Altitude
1	Arrive Kathmandu	-	-	1,300 m
2	Pashupatinath puja, drive to Nagarkot	-	-	2,175 m
3	Nagarkot sunrise, back to Kathmandu	-	-	1,300 m

4	Fly Kathmandu to Lhasa	1h 35m	-	3,656 m
5	Lhasa, Potala and Jokhang	-	-	3,656 m
6	Drive to Shigatse, Tashilhunpo monastery	6–7 hrs	-	3,900 m
7	Drive to Saga	8–9 hrs	-	4,350 m
8	Drive to Lake Mansarovar	8–9 hrs	-	4,590 m
9	Mansarovar, puja and acclimatisation	-	-	4,590 m
10	Darchen to Dirapuk, kora day one	6–7 hrs	14 km	4,900 m
11	Over the Dolma La to Zuthulphuk	7–9 hrs	18 km	5,630 m
12	Out to Darchen, drive to Saga	3 hrs walking	8 km	4,350 m
13	Drive to Kerung border and Kathmandu	10–12 hrs	-	1,300 m
14	Fly home	-	-	-

Day 1

Arrive in Kathmandu (1,300 m)

We meet you at the airport and take you to your hotel. In the evening there is a briefing about the tour.

Altitude: 1,400 m On foot: None, arrival day Night: Hotel, Kathmandu Meals: Dinner

Day 2

Pashupatinath Temple and drive to Nagarkot (2,175 m)

Morning puja and rituals at Pashupatinath Temple and a visit to the Sleeping Vishnu. Then drive to the hill station of Nagarkot for the views and acclimatisation.

Altitude: 2,175 m On foot: Easy walking, 1–2 hrs Night: Hotel, Nagarkot Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

Day 3

Nagarkot sunrise and return to Kathmandu

Watch the sunrise and mountain views from Nagarkot. On the drive back, visit Doleshwor Mahadev and Patan Durbar Square.

Altitude: 1,400 m On foot: Easy walking, 2–3 hrs Night: Hotel, Kathmandu Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

Day 4

Fly to Lhasa, Tibet (3,656 m)

Early morning flight to the holy city of Lhasa in Tibet. Transfer to the hotel for the night.

Altitude: 3,656 m On foot: None, flight day Night: Hotel, Lhasa Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

Day 5

Lhasa sightseeing

Visit the Potala Palace, the former residence of the Dalai Lama, and the Jokhang Monastery, and explore the Barkhor market.

Altitude: 3,656 m On foot: Easy walking, 2–3 hrs Night: Hotel, Lhasa Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

Day 6

Drive to Shigatse (3,900 m)

Drive to Shigatse, the second-largest city in Tibet, and visit Tashilhunpo Monastery, the seat of the Panchen Lama.

Altitude: 3,900 m On foot: None, 6–7 hr drive Night: Hotel, Shigatse Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

Day 7

Drive to Saga (4,350 m)

Drive through colourful landscapes to Saga. Overnight in Saga.

Altitude: 4,350 m On foot: None, 8–9 hr drive Night: Hotel, Saga Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

Day 8

Drive to Lake Mansarovar

Your first views of Lake Mansarovar and Mount Kailash from the Horr Chu Pass. Complete the circuit of the lake by bus and stay overnight on the lakeshore.

Altitude: 4,590 m On foot: None, 8–9 hr drive Night: Guesthouse, Lake Mansarovar Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

Day 9

Full day at Lake Mansarovar (puja and havan)

An acclimatisation day with bathing and religious ceremonies, and preparation for the three-day Kailash trek.

Altitude: 4,590 m On foot: Optional 2–3 hrs Night: Guesthouse, Lake Mansarovar Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

Day 10

Drive to Darchen and Tarboche, trek to Diraphuk

Drive to Darchen and then to Tarboche (Yama Dwar), and begin a 14 km trek with close views of the north face of Kailash. Horses and yaks are available.

Altitude: 4,900 m On foot: 14 km, 6–7 hrs Night: Guesthouse, Dirapuk Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

Day 11

Trek to Zuthulphuk Gompa via Dolma La

The second trekking day covers about 18 km, climbing to the Dolma La Pass (5,600 m) for prayers and descending to Zuthulphuk Gompa. Horses and yaks are available.

Altitude: 4,790 m On foot: 18 km, 7–9 hrs Night: Guesthouse, Zuthulphuk Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

Day 12

Trek from Zuthulphuk to Darchen and drive to Saga

A final 8 km trek completes the circuit, followed by lunch at Darchen and the drive to Saga.

Altitude: 4,350 m On foot: 8 km, 3 hrs Night: Hotel, Saga Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

Day 13

Drive to the Kerung border and on to Kathmandu

Drive to the Nepal and China border and complete the immigration procedures. Continue to Kathmandu and stay overnight in a hotel.

Altitude: 1,400 m On foot: None, 10–12 hr drive Night: Hotel, Kathmandu Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

Day 14

Departure

Transfer to the airport for your international flight.

Altitude: 1,300 m On foot: None, departure day Night: No overnight Meals: Breakfast

What's included

- Airport transfers and ground transport
- Licensed English-speaking guide
- Accommodation throughout the trip
- All permits and national park fees
- Meals as per the itinerary

Not included

- International flights
- Travel and rescue insurance
- Personal trekking gear
- Tips and personal expenses
- Nepal entry visa (on arrival)

Permits and other costs

Permit	Fee	Issued by
Tibet Travel Permit (TTB). Applied for once the itinerary is confirmed and paid, with your hotels and guide named on it. Allow 15 to 20 working days, longer in the season. You cannot obtain one yourself.	Inside the trip price	Tibet Tourism Bureau, through a licensed agency
China group visa, issued in Kathmandu. This is not a standard Chinese visa, and it cancels any Chinese visa already in your passport. It takes five working days, or three for urgent processing. Current practice requires a group of at least five on one list.	$51 for most nationalities, $140 for US citizens	Chinese Embassy, Kathmandu
Alien's Travel Permit. Still required for the Ngari prefecture, where Kailash and Mansarovar are. It has not been required for Shigatse, Nyingchi or Shannan since June 2025.	CNY 50, inside the trip price	Public Security Bureau, Lhasa or Shigatse
Military area permit. Ngari is a border-sensitive zone. 10 to 15 working days, and this is the document that determines the lead time on a Kailash trip.	Inside the trip price	Tibet Military Command, Lhasa

Foreign affairs permit. Required on Kailash itineraries routed through Lhasa.	Inside the trip price	Foreign Affairs Office, Lhasa
Qomolangma nature reserve entry. This itinerary does not enter the Everest reserve. Kailash has its own Ngari entry fees, which are included in the price.	Not on this route	-

Other cost	Amount	Note
China group visa, Kathmandu	$51–140	$140 for US citizens, $85 for Canadians, $51 for most others
Tibet Travel Permit	$70–120	Applied for by the agency once the itinerary is paid
Alien's Travel Permit	$8	CNY 50. Still required for Ngari, but not for the Everest side
Military and foreign affairs permits	$60–100	Ngari is a border-sensitive zone
Kailash and Mansarovar area fees	$180–240	Ngari prefecture entry and the Darchen kora fee
Kathmandu to Lhasa flight	$380–460	One way, weekdays, on Himalaya or Sichuan Airlines
Land Cruiser and support truck	$450–650 a head	Nine days of vehicle hire across the plateau, with driver and fuel
Licensed Tibetan guide	$45–60 a day	Compulsory for the whole time you are in the region
Hotels in Lhasa, Shigatse and Saga	$50–110 a night	Four-star in Lhasa, much simpler at Saga
Guesthouses on the kora	$25–40 a night	Dirapuk and Zuthulphuk, shared rooms, and there is no alternative
Full board, vegetarian	$30–45 a day	Included throughout, and vegetarian as is customary on this pilgrimage
Oxygen and a pressure chamber	$60–90 a head	Carried in the support vehicle. Essential on this route
Horse and porter on the kora	$180–260	Not included. Arranged at Darchen, and most pilgrims hire one
Travel insurance to 6,000 m	$140–220	Must cover evacuation. There is no helicopter rescue in Tibet
Tips, guide and driver	$120–180	Per traveller, at the end

Packing list

No porters, and your main bag stays in the truck

A support vehicle carries everything for eleven of the fourteen days, so there is no porter weight limit. What matters is your daypack for the three kora days: everything else stays in the truck and meets you at Darchen. Keep it to 25 to 30 litres and carry your own water in it.

For the kora

- Worn-in walking boots with ankle support, for three days of walking and the loose descent from the Dolma La
- Trekking poles, even if you do not use them at home
- A daypack of 25 to 30 litres for the three kora days. Everything else stays in the vehicle
- Four pairs of wool socks

For four unheated nights above 4,500 m

- A sleeping bag rated to -15°C. Dirapuk has no heating and is the coldest night of the trip
- A silk or cotton liner, for warmth and because the rooms are shared
- A down jacket, to wear in the evenings as well as on the pass
- Earplugs and an eye mask. You will share a room with several people

Clothing

- Three or four merino or synthetic base layers, not cotton
- Two mid layers, one fleece and one light insulated jacket
- Waterproof jacket and trousers
- Warm hat, liner gloves and insulated outer gloves
- Sunglasses, category 4. The light on the plateau is stronger than on any of our other trips
- Sunscreen SPF 50 and lip balm with sun protection, in generous quantities

Health

- Diamox if your doctor agrees, plus any medicines you take regularly, in their original packaging
- Personal first aid kit: blister kit, painkillers, rehydration salts, throat lozenges
- A broad-spectrum antibiotic if your doctor will prescribe one. You will be days away from a pharmacy
- Water purification as a backup to the bottled water in the vehicle
- Hand sanitiser and wet wipes. There is no shower for four consecutive nights

Documents

- Passport valid for six months, with at least two blank pages, plus three photocopies
- Six passport photographs, for the group visa and the permits
- Printed copies of your Tibet permit and group visa documents, carried separately from your passport
- Travel insurance certificate covering 6,000 m and repatriation
- Chinese yuan in cash. Cards are rarely accepted west of Shigatse

For the pilgrimage

- Prayer flags, if you intend to hang them at the Dolma La, as most pilgrims do
- A container, if you want to take water from Mansarovar home
- Anything you have been asked to carry or leave. Tell your guide at the start rather than at the pass
- A VPN installed before you leave. Many Western internet services are blocked in China

Altitude profile

Day	Place	Sleep at	Highest point
1	Kathmandu	1,300 m	-
2	Nagarkot	2,175 m	-
3	Kathmandu	1,300 m	-
4	Lhasa	3,656 m	-
5	Lhasa	3,656 m	-
6	Shigatse	3,900 m	-
7	Saga	4,350 m	-
8	Lake Mansarovar	4,590 m	-
9	Lake Mansarovar	4,590 m	-
10	Dirapuk	4,900 m	-
11	Zuthulphuk	4,790 m	5,630 m
12	Saga	4,350 m	-
13	Kathmandu	1,300 m	-

Travel, permits and visas

Two border crossings, a group visa, five separate permits and a lead time of fifteen to twenty working days. This section explains the arrangements.

Flight from Kathmandu to Lhasa

Himalaya Airlines and Sichuan Airlines fly the route on weekdays in about one hour and thirty-five minutes. The flight takes you from 1,400 m to 3,656 m in one morning, the fastest altitude gain on any of our trips, which is why day 5 in Lhasa is a rest day. Sit on the left on the outward flight for views of the Himalaya.

Four days of driving across the plateau

Lhasa to Shigatse, Shigatse to Saga, and Saga to Mansarovar each take six to nine hours on good tarmac roads between 3,900 m and 4,600 m. The road is much better than it was ten years ago, but the days are long, high and repetitive. You gain about a kilometre of altitude while seated, which is harder for your body than gaining it on foot.

Returning overland via Kerung

On day 13 you drive from Saga to the Kerung border at Rasuwagadhi and on to Kathmandu, which takes ten to twelve hours and descends more than 3,000 m. The descent is easy on the body and most people sleep. Border formalities are slow, and monsoon landslides on the Nepali side sometimes add several hours.

Permit processing time

The Tibet Travel Permit takes fifteen to twenty working days and the Ngari military permit a further ten to fifteen, applied for once the booking is paid. This lead time is set by the authorities. We need your passport scans six weeks before departure, and preferably eight.

No helicopter rescue in Tibet

This is the most important logistical difference between this trip and a trek in Nepal. If you become seriously ill on the kora, you are taken by vehicle to Darchen and then on a very long drive, or you walk down with a guide and a horse. Insurance is still essential, to cover hospital treatment and repatriation rather than a helicopter flight.

Accommodation

Where	Nights	Type	Room	Bathroom
Kathmandu	3	Three-star hotel	Twin or double	Private, hot water
Nagarkot	1	Hill resort	Twin or double	Private, hot water
Lhasa	2	Four-star hotel	Twin or double	Private, hot water
Shigatse	1	Three-star hotel	Twin	Private, hot water
Saga	2	Simple hotel, with unreliable plumbing	Twin	Private, hot water when available
Lake Mansarovar	2	Guesthouse on the lakeshore	Shared rooms, basic	Shared, no shower
Dirapuk	1	Guesthouse under the north face	Shared rooms, basic	Shared, no shower, no heating
Zuthulphuk	1	Guesthouse	Shared rooms, basic	Shared, no shower

Heating
In the Lhasa and Shigatse hotels. None on the kora or at Mansarovar. Dirapuk, at 4,900 m, is unheated and is the coldest night of the trip.

Hot shower
In Lhasa, Shigatse and sometimes Saga. None at Mansarovar or on the kora, which is four consecutive nights.

Charging
In the hotels. On the kora, from the support vehicle at Darchen, and not available at Dirapuk or Zuthulphuk. Bring two power banks.

Wifi
In Lhasa and Shigatse. Do not expect any from Saga onwards. Many Western internet services are blocked in China, so install a VPN before you arrive.

Phone signal
China Mobile covers most of the route, including Darchen. Roaming with your home SIM card is expensive; your guide can arrange a local SIM card in Lhasa.

Water
Bottled and boiled water is carried in the support vehicle and included. Do not drink water from Mansarovar. Bathing in the lake is a religious act, not a wash.

Oxygen
Bottled oxygen and a portable pressure chamber travel in the support vehicle for the whole of the Ngari section. This is standard equipment on this route.

Bedding
Provided in the hotels. On the kora you have a mattress and a blanket in a shared room, and you need your own sleeping bag rated to -15°C as well.

Meals

Meal	Time	What it is like
Breakfast	6:30–7:30	Tibetan bread, eggs, porridge, tsampa, butter tea or ordinary tea
Lunch	12:00–13:00	On driving days, often a packed lunch in the vehicle: bread, boiled egg, fruit and biscuits
Dinner	19:00–20:00	Dal bhat, thukpa, fried rice, vegetable curry, noodle soup
Tea	constantly	Black tea, sweet milk tea or salted butter tea. Drink more than you feel you need

Diet	How we manage it
Vegetarian	Standard. This is a pilgrimage and all meals are vegetarian by custom, which suits most travellers on it.
Vegan	Manageable with notice. Butter tea and dairy are very common, so tell us when you book.
Gluten free	Rice, dal, potatoes and eggs are safe. Tsampa is made from barley and the bread from wheat. Cross-contamination in a Ngari guesthouse kitchen cannot be ruled out.
Jain	We cater for it, and we need to know at booking. Root vegetables make up much of the food available on the plateau, so this needs advance planning.
Meat	Not served on this trip. Travellers of several religions join every departure, and the kora is a sacred route.

A typical day

Time	What happens
6:00	Tea, and hot water in a flask if you want it
6:45	Breakfast, and the guide measures everyone's oxygen saturation before setting off

7:30	On the trail, or in the vehicle. On kora days you start early because the weather often changes after noon
12:00	Lunch. On the kora it is carried; on driving days it is a packed lunch in the Land Cruiser
13:00	Two to five hours more, depending on the day
16:00	Arrival. Tea, choose a bed in a shared room, and rest
17:30	Oxygen saturation and pulse measured again and recorded
19:00	Dinner, and the guide explains the plan for the next day
20:30	Bed. At Dirapuk it is cold and most people sleep poorly, which is normal

Difficulty and preparation

Difficulty 4 of 5

Three demanding days of walking, after eight days of gaining altitude by vehicle.

- Only three days are spent walking: 14 km, 18 km and 8 km on consecutive days.
- Day 11 crosses the Dolma La at 5,630 m, which is higher than any point on our treks.
- The other eleven days are flights, long drives and two acclimatisation days, and gaining altitude by vehicle is what makes the trip demanding.
- You sleep four consecutive nights above 4,500 m in unheated rooms without showers, at Mansarovar, Dirapuk and Zuthulphuk.
- No technical sections. Horses and yaks are available for the kora and most pilgrims use them, but everyone walks over the Dolma La itself.

Getting ready

10 weeks before: See your doctor
Do this first, particularly if you are over sixty or have any heart, lung or blood pressure condition. This trip keeps you at 4,600 m for four nights and takes you to 5,630 m for about an hour, with no helicopter rescue available. This is the most important part of your preparation and should happen before you pay a deposit.

8 weeks before: Build cardiovascular fitness
Three sessions a week of 40 minutes at a conversational pace. Walking, cycling or swimming are all suitable. Fitness does not protect you from altitude sickness, but it makes the three kora days much easier.

6 weeks before: Walk on hills
Once a week, walk for an hour with 300 m of ascent, in the boots you will wear. Day 11 climbs 730 m to the Dolma La and then descends 840 m on rough ground above 5,000 m.

4 weeks before: Walk on consecutive days
Twice before you leave, take a long walk followed by a medium walk the next morning. The kora is three consecutive days, and on the third day your legs will be tired.

2 weeks before: Rest and reduce training
Halve your training. Arriving well rested is more important on this trip than on any of our treks, because acclimatisation is harder when you are exhausted and the altitude is gained by jeep.

1 week before: Do not travel with an infection
A chest infection or heavy cold that would be minor at home is a serious problem at 5,630 m and increases your risk of altitude illness. Tell us, and we will move you to a later departure rather than have you travel unwell.

Altitude and safety

This trip has the most demanding altitude profile we offer, for an unusual reason. On a trek you walk to every height at which you sleep, which gives your body time to adjust. Here you fly from 1,400 m to 3,656 m in a morning and then drive to 3,900 m, 4,350 m and 4,590 m over three days, gaining more than three kilometres of height almost entirely by vehicle. You then sleep four nights above 4,500 m and cross a 5,630 m pass on foot. Acute mountain sickness is much more common on this trip than on our treks, and the two rest days, at Lhasa on day 5 and Mansarovar on day 9, are the main protection.

What to watch for

- A headache that does not improve with water and paracetamol
- Nausea, or no appetite when you should be hungry
- Dizziness, or feeling drunk without having had alcohol
- Breathlessness at rest, not only when climbing
- Poor sleep at Saga or Mansarovar, or waking short of breath
- A dry cough that gets worse over a day
- Loss of coordination, which means you must descend immediately

How to prevent it

- Use the Lhasa day as a rest day. The Potala Palace involves several hundred steps at 3,656 m, which is enough exertion for that day.
- Use the Mansarovar day in the same way. It allows your body to adjust before the kora and is not a sightseeing day.
- Drink four litres of water a day. The air on the plateau is drier than on any of our other trips, and dehydration can feel like altitude sickness.
- No alcohol from Lhasa onwards, and no sleeping tablets at any altitude on this trip.
- Discuss Diamox with your doctor, especially for this itinerary, because the height is gained by vehicle rather than on foot.
- If you are offered a horse on the kora and are unsure, take it. Many pilgrims ride.

What we do

1. Daily health checks
From day 4 onwards, your guide uses a pulse oximeter to measure your oxygen saturation and pulse each morning before setting off and each evening on arrival. The readings are recorded so that any change over the driving days is clearly visible.

2. Oxygen and pressure chamber
Bottled oxygen and a portable hyperbaric chamber travel in the support truck for the whole Ngari section. A chamber simulates a descent of about 2,000 m and gives time for treatment where an actual descent takes hours. This is standard equipment on this route.

3. Mild symptoms
You rest for a day at Mansarovar or Darchen, with oxygen if needed. Many mild cases improve, and the traveller completes the kora a day behind the group, with a guide.

4. Serious symptoms
You do not start the kora. You stay at Darchen at 4,600 m with a guide, or descend by vehicle to Saga at 4,350 m. The kora is three days on foot, and the only way out is to continue or turn back, so starting it while unwell is dangerous.

5. No helicopter rescue
Helicopter rescue is not available to tourists in Tibet as it is in Nepal. A serious case is taken by vehicle to Darchen and then eight or nine hours to Saga, or much further to a hospital. For this reason our safety procedures on this trip are more cautious than on any of our treks, and we turn people back earlier.

6. Nearest hospital
The nearest hospitals are at Ali, about 300 km from Darchen, or back in Shigatse. Neither is close. On this trip, medical care in practice consists of your guide, the oxygen, the pressure chamber and early decisions to stop.

Weather by month

The season lasts four months and the route is closed for eight. The closures have two causes: snow on the Dolma La at one end of the year, and an administrative closure in March at the other.

Month	Daytime at Darchen	Night-time at Darchen	Dawn on the Dolma La	Conditions	Note
January	-3°C	-20°C	-28°C	We do not run it	The kora guesthouses are closed and the Dolma La is under snow. No trips run.
February	-1°C	-18°C	-26°C	We do not run it	Similar to January.
March	3°C	-14°C	-22°C	We do not run it	Tibet usually closes to foreign visitors for the month. Even when it does not, the pass is blocked by snow.
April	8°C	-9°C	-18°C	Hard	The region reopens but Kailash is usually not accessible. There is snow on the Dolma La and the guesthouses are only beginning to open.
May	13°C	-4°C	-13°C	Good	The season opens, usually around mid-month once the pass is clear. Cold, clear and quiet.
June	17°C	0°C	-9°C	Best	Warm, stable and the busiest month, especially around Saga Dawa. Book well ahead.
July	19°C	3°C	-6°C	Best	The warmest month. The monsoon reaches the Himalaya, while the plateau beyond remains mostly dry.

August	18°C	3°C	-6°C	Best	Similar to July, with slightly more cloud. Excellent, although landslides can affect the Nepal side of the drive.
September	14°C	-2°C	-11°C	Best	Clear, cold and less crowded. Our recommended month for this trip.
October	8°C	-9°C	-19°C	Hard	Early October can be excellent. The pass closes at some point during the month and the guesthouses close after it.
November	2°C	-15°C	-24°C	We do not run it	Closed. It is cold enough that the kora would require mountaineering skills.
December	-2°C	-18°C	-27°C	We do not run it	Closed.

Averages for the Ngari prefecture. The season closes for two unrelated reasons at opposite ends of the year: snow on the Dolma La, and an administrative closure of the region in March.

Guides and porters

Your guide and tour leader

A licensed Tibetan guide accompanies you for the whole time you are in the region. This is a legal requirement: foreign passport holders are not permitted to travel independently anywhere in Tibet. On our departures, a Nepali tour leader also travels from Kathmandu and stays with the group throughout, which is important when a group of twenty includes people of several religions, languages and ages.

Vehicles

A Land Cruiser or coach carries the group, and a support truck carries the luggage, food, bottled water, bottled oxygen and a portable pressure chamber. On the kora, the truck meets you at Darchen and at the end; between those points you carry what you need. The oxygen and pressure chamber are the main reason for the support truck and are essential on this route.

Horses, yaks and handlers

Horses and yaks for the three kora days are arranged at Darchen, are not included in the price, and cost about $180 to $260 with a handler. Many pilgrims use them. Nobody rides over the Dolma La itself; the handler takes the horse around and meets you on the other side.

Tipping

Tipping is customary but not compulsory. Allow about $120 to $180 per traveller for the guide, the driver and the truck crew together, handed over on the last evening. If you hire a horse on the kora, tip its handler separately at Darchen; about $20 is usual.

Responsible travel

Respecting the pilgrimage

Kailash is sacred to Hindus, Buddhists, Jains and followers of Bon, and you will be walking among pilgrims who have saved for many years to be there, and some who prostrate themselves along the whole 52 km. Walk clockwise unless you follow Bon. Do not climb on the mani walls or move the stones. Ask before photographing anyone, and do not photograph anyone who is prostrating.

Bathing at Lake Mansarovar

Pilgrims bathe in Lake Mansarovar as a religious act, not for swimming. Do not use soap or shampoo or wash anything in the lake. The water is around four degrees. If you bathe, do so in the way pilgrims do.

Waste

We carry out everything the group brings in, apart from food. Ngari has almost no waste management, and the kora route has been visibly affected over the last decade. Our support truck takes the group's rubbish back to Saga.

Supporting local communities

Less of your money stays in the local area than on our Nepal treks. The permits and area fees go to Chinese government bodies, the vehicles and hotels are largely run by Tibetans, and the Darchen guesthouses and horse handlers are local families. The guiding, leadership and organisation are provided by our team in Kathmandu.

Booking and payment

How to book

For Tibet, you book first and the permits are applied for afterwards. The Tibet Travel Permit is issued against a confirmed, paid itinerary with your hotels and guide named on it, so you commit to the trip before the permits are confirmed. For this reason our Tibet bookings require a longer lead time than our other trips.

Documents we need

Clear colour scans of your passport photo page at least six weeks before departure, and your occupation on the form. Journalists, photographers, diplomats and anyone with 'government' in their job title are often refused. If you give us accurate information early, we can usually find a solution; incorrect information discovered at the border cannot be resolved.

Minimum group size for the visa

The Kathmandu group visa is issued to a group on one list, and current practice requires at least five travellers. A couple can join one of our departures. Two people cannot book a private Tibet trip from Kathmandu, and we will tell you this before taking a deposit.

Refund if the permit is refused

Refusals happen occasionally, without a reason and without appeal. If this happens, we refund the Tibet portion in full.

Optional extras

Inner kora at Nandi

from $220, +1 day

The inner circuit at the south face, which by tradition is walked only by pilgrims who have completed thirteen outer koras. We arrange it for those who have, and we will ask you to confirm this.

Everest Base Camp on the Tibet side

from $560, +3 days

Rongbuk and the north face of Everest, added on the return journey through Shigatse. It is reached by road and shows a different side of Everest from Nepal.

Two extra nights in Lhasa

$290, +2 days

Visits to Drepung, Sera and the Norbulingka, and a more gradual start to the altitude. We particularly recommend this extension on this itinerary.

Saga Dawa at Kailash

+$200 on the price, in the itinerary

The festival marking the Buddha's birth, enlightenment and passing, held at Tarboche below Kailash, when the great flagpole is raised. It falls on the full moon of the fourth Tibetan month, usually in late May or June, and is extremely crowded.

Overland in both directions instead of flying in

saves $180, +2 days

Drive in via Kerung rather than flying to Lhasa. It takes two days longer and is much better for acclimatisation, but does not include Lhasa.

Single room where available

$240

For the hotel nights in Kathmandu, Lhasa, Shigatse and Saga. At Mansarovar, Dirapuk and Zuthulphuk only shared rooms are available.

Frequently asked questions

Answers to the 21 questions travellers ask us most often. If your question is not here, contact us and we will answer it.

Do I need to be religious to go?

No, and many travellers on each departure are not religious. We ask you to behave respectfully, because you will be walking among pilgrims who have saved for many years to be there, and some who prostrate themselves along the whole fifty-two kilometres. Walk clockwise, do not move the stones on the mani walls, and do not photograph anyone who is prostrating.

How fit do I need to be?

You need to be fit enough for three consecutive days of walking, the second of which takes seven to nine hours and crosses a 5,630 m pass. That is less walking than on any of our treks. The difficulty is the altitude and how quickly it is gained, and fitness gives little protection against altitude sickness.

Is there an age limit?

There is no formal age limit, but we ask anyone over sixty, and anyone with a heart, lung or blood pressure condition, to consult their own doctor before paying a deposit. This is important on this trip: there is no helicopter rescue in Tibet and the nearest hospital is hours away by road.

Can I ride rather than walk?

Yes, and many pilgrims do. Horses and yaks with handlers are arranged at Darchen for about $180 to $260, which is not included in the price. Nobody rides over the Dolma La itself; the handler takes the horse around and meets you on the other side.

Can two of us book this privately?

No. The China group visa issued in Kathmandu is given to a group, and current practice requires at least five names on the list. Two people cannot obtain one. You join a scheduled departure, which is why our groups on this trip are larger than on our treks.

What documents do I need?

Five documents, and we arrange all of them: a China group visa issued in Kathmandu, the Tibet Travel Permit, an Alien's Travel Permit for Ngari, a military area permit and a foreign affairs permit. The Alien's Travel Permit is still required here, although it was dropped for the Everest side of Tibet in June 2025.

How far ahead do I have to book?

Three months, and preferably four. The Tibet Travel Permit takes fifteen to twenty working days and the Ngari military permit a further ten to fifteen, and both are applied for once the booking is paid. This lead time is set by the government offices and cannot be shortened.

Should I get a Chinese visa before I travel?

No. The Kathmandu group visa cancels any Chinese visa already in your passport, so a visa obtained at home would be wasted and could cause complications.

What if the permit is refused?

Refusals happen occasionally, without a reason and without appeal, and we refund the Tibet portion in full. Occupation is the usual cause: journalists, photographers, diplomats and anyone with 'government' in their job title are often refused. If you tell us your occupation accurately and early, we can usually find a solution.

Why are there no departures in March?

Tibet usually closes to foreign visitors for the whole of March and sometimes into early April, around the anniversary of the 1959 uprising, and the closure is announced with little or no notice. We do not schedule departures during this period.

How dangerous is the altitude on this trip?

The risk is greater than on our treks, because of how the altitude is gained. You fly from 1,400 m to 3,656 m in a morning and then drive to 4,590 m over three days, gaining more than three kilometres of height almost entirely by vehicle. You then sleep four nights above 4,500 m and cross a 5,630 m pass. Acute mountain sickness is much more common on this trip than on a trek. The two rest days, at Lhasa and Mansarovar, are the main protection and are essential.

Is oxygen carried?

Yes. Bottled oxygen and a portable hyperbaric chamber travel in the support truck for the whole Ngari section. A chamber simulates a descent of about 2,000 m, which gives time for treatment in a place where an actual descent takes hours. This is standard equipment on this route, and you should check that any operator you consider carries it.

What happens in a serious emergency?

This is the most important difference between Tibet and Nepal. Helicopter rescue is not available to tourists here. A serious case is taken by vehicle to Darchen and then eight or nine hours to Saga, or much further to a hospital at Ali or Shigatse. For this reason our safety procedures on this trip are more cautious than on any other trip we offer, and we turn people back earlier.

Should I take Diamox?

Discuss it with your own doctor. On this itinerary in particular it is a reasonable preventive measure, because the altitude is gained by vehicle rather than on foot.

What is the accommodation like?

It varies widely. Four-star in Lhasa, three-star in Shigatse, simple with unreliable plumbing at Saga, and shared guesthouse rooms with no shower and no heating at Mansarovar, Dirapuk and Zuthulphuk. Dirapuk, at 4,900 m, is the coldest night and has no heating. Bring your own sleeping bag.

Is the food vegetarian?

Yes, throughout the trip. Travellers of several religions join every departure and the kora is a sacred route, so all meals are vegetarian. Vegan, gluten-free and Jain requirements can all be arranged with notice at booking.

Will my phone work?

China Mobile covers much of the route, including Darchen. However, many Western internet services are blocked in China, so install a VPN before you leave rather than trying to do it on hotel wifi in Lhasa.

Can I bathe in Lake Mansarovar?

Pilgrims bathe in the lake as a religious act, and the water is around four degrees. It is not acceptable to swim or wash in it: do not use soap or shampoo, and do not rinse anything in the lake. If you bathe, do so in the way pilgrims do.

When is the best time to go?

June to September, and September is our recommended month: clear, cold and less crowded. May is the start of the season and depends on the Dolma La being clear of snow. From November to April the route is closed, because the kora guesthouses are unstaffed and the pass is under snow.

What is special about 2026?

It is the Tibetan Fire Horse year, which runs from 17 February 2026 to 5 February 2027. A kora walked in a Horse year is believed to carry the merit of thirteen ordinary koras. This happens once every twelve years, and Kailash is much busier as a result. If the merit is important to you, this is the year to go; if you prefer a quieter visit, next year will be less crowded.

Should I travel for Saga Dawa?

If the festival is your main interest, yes. The raising of the great flagpole at Tarboche below Kailash, on the full moon of the fourth Tibetan month, is the most important day in the Kailash calendar. If you want a quiet kora, avoid it. It is extremely crowded and every bed in Darchen is taken.

Photos, videos and reviews of this trip: earthbound.rajansimkhada.com/kailash-mansarovar-tour