JEWEL OF THE SNOWS

Whether you’re a pilgrim or a traveller, journeying to the magical Mount Kailash and Lake Mansarovar is an experience of a lifetime.
FROM THE HOLY MOUNTAIN

Whether a pilgrim or a traveller, the journey to Kailash-Mansarovar won’t fail to move you

Text and photographs by Colleen Briganza

Mount Kailash, Tibet’s holy mountain, is a must-visit destination for pilgrims and trekkers alike. Known as the abode of the gods, it is a place of spiritual significance for Hindus, Buddhists, and Jains. The journey to Kailash-Mansarovar is a challenge, but the experience is unforgettable.

THE ULTIMATE JOURNEY

Most Hindus, Buddhists, and Jains aim to go on the Kailash-Mansarovar yatra at least once in a lifetime. It is also a journey anyone with the right mindset can undertake. But it isn’t easy.

The Kailash Rises

The Kailash Mountain rises majestically against the backdrop of the Tibetan plateau, where food and supplies are scarce. The weather is often unpredictable, and the terrain is rugged and inhospitable. It is unknown how many people have ever attempted such a journey.

MYTH AND FACT

Mount Kailash

Considered the spiritual centre of the universe, Mount Kailash rises 28,250 feet (8,616 meters) and is covered in snow from May to October. It is revered by Hindus, Buddhists, and Jains alike. The mountain is said to be a symbol of spiritual enlightenment and a place where deities reside. The Kailash Mansarovar Yatra, a pilgrimage to Kailash and Mansarovar, is a sacred journey for followers of the three religions.

Lake Mansarovar

At an altitude of about 14,000 feet, Lake Mansarovar is one of the highest freshwater lakes in the world. It is located in the Mansarovar Valley, a region known for its stunning natural beauty. The lake is believed to be a place where deities reside and is a popular pilgrimage site for Hindus.

The Reckoning

According to legend, Kailash Mansarovar was created by Shiva, who spent 1,000 years in meditation on the mountain. The lake is said to have been formed from the tears of Shiva, who cried out of remorse for the deaths of his deities. The lake is also said to have the power to purify sins and grant wishes.

The Road

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Hindustan Times Sunday Magazine, August 16, 2009

Would you like to go to Kailash Mansarovar? Ask the brahmin if needed. Life continuing.
breakfast rapidly. It is unusual for years to never return either. The trek, at least 10 Indians pilgrim died because of dehydration and high altitude sickness. The first stop was at Mount Kailash. We wonder then that in the morning trip more than another called us to highlight the delicious, welcoming to pull out of the yard.

PILGRIM'S PROGRESS
I was with a group of 150 meditations from the Isht Foundation who had arrived from all corners of the globe, Germany, the UK, India, Comoros, Mumbai and Guwahati. The pilgrims in my group were young in 16 and 17. It was one of our mathematicians and the only person who had not been initiated into Hindu yoga. After flying into Kathmandu, we drove to the Nepali border for the much-anticipated crossing into Chinese territory. We had been told to look for Chinese border guards in blue uniforms. They are not required to carry out this border crossing, but the tour operators offered the rest of our luggage across the border. We had bought some food and clothes, and then we were told to walk to the Chinese border.

The crossing into the Indian border of Zanskar. With this, we crossed the Friendship Bridge over the river in the company of. Nearly 500 Nepali people who had been waiting for us to board our laptops at the Indian border to cross into the border crossing, which certainly amazed us. The guide from the Indian border and another 270 meters to the waiting for the other side. On the way, we were very excited. Everyone was eager to reach their destination on their own.

We stayed overnight in Batal village, the Indian border of Zanskar. With the Indian border, we crossed the river, and then we stayed in a little house in the middle of the mountains. We were very excited to reach our destination on our own.

HIGHWAY THROUGH HEAVEN
The "highway" journey started when our Land Cruisers pulled out of the Indian border of Zanskar. We were very excited to reach our destination on our own. On the way, we were very excited to reach our destination on our own. The guide from the Indian border and another 270 meters to the waiting for the other side. On the way, we were very excited. Everyone was eager to reach their destination on their own.

ALPINA'S WORK
Our campsite was set up two days before the trek. We were very excited to reach our destination on our own. The guide from the Indian border and another 270 meters to the waiting for the other side. On the way, we were very excited. Everyone was eager to reach their destination on their own.

ALTITUDE STRIKES BACK
The military town of Sag stands unique on this windy, dusty, and concrete town where snacks and water are available. There were 50 and 30-year-olds from India. They looked in wonder at the mountains as they stood there.

THE MOUNTAIN PEOPLE
We were a group of 50 Pilgrims. It was on the cold and then walked two hours for the next day. Why were they coming? They were having breakfast! In Sag, I found out he was serious. We reached Sag at 9:00 AM. We were walking on the ice, and the whole area was covered with ice. Everyone was very excited to reach their destination on their own.

A JEWEL IN THE DESERT
It is difficult to describe the beauty of the massive lake. Manasarovar is a jewel in the middle of the desert. It is a shallow lake, blue-green that spans on the vast and empty with the changing landscape of the sky. There is a protective ring of mountains around it with the white-capped Mount Kailash beyond it and a magnificently cushion from the distance. Our cameras were also complimenting the beauty. We had to see the ridge to believe it. The ridge is located in the Manasarovar region, where the ridge is located in the Manasarovar region. It was a very exciting trip. We had to see the ridge to believe it. The ridge is located in the Manasarovar region, where the ridge is located in the Manasarovar region.
How to get there

The best time to go on this yatra is between June and September. From India, there are two options:

1. You can join a tour operator. This route takes you through Kathmandu or Lhasa and involves extensive travel by road. The entire trip can last 14-16 days. Be careful while choosing a tour operator as there are many fly-by-night operators who offer cheap deals with hidden costs. Such operators are also not equipped to handle medical emergencies. Costs can range from Rs 90,000 to Rs 170,000.

2. The Ministry of External Affairs organises a yatra between June and September every year. The route goes over the Himalayas up to the Lhasa-Tibet border and takes 26 days to complete. Advertisements for the yatra are usually out in January. Since the number of applications is higher than the number that can be accommodated, the MEA selects yatra through a computer-generated random selection process. Costs: Approx. Rs 60,000 (not including expenditure on camping equipment, food, porters and ponies). For details go to: http://meaindia.nic.in/Announcements.html

STEP BY STEP

- MOUNT KAILASH
  - Only the brave do the 92 km parikrama around Kailash

- MANSAROVER
  - Two nights here. Other stop at daily Durbar that is cheaper for the second night
  - At approx 14,000 ft., we spent four nights here in acclimatization
  - At approx 26,000 ft., we spent two nights here in acclimatization
  - At approx 13,000 ft., we spent two nights here in acclimatization

- PARTANG
  - A small village, probably famous only because pilgrims stop over for the night

- SAGA
  - At approx 13,000 ft., we spent two nights here in acclimatization

- KATHMANDU
  - Though Lhasa is also an option, most yatras start from Kathmandu, Nepal

- ZHAKO
  - At approx 13,000 ft., we spent two nights here in acclimatization

- Tsoe of Endurance
  - The 10 km trek to Drapuk from Gompa can be seen the northwest face of Mount Kailash. The trek can take 3-4 hours.

They were at a sunny beach or something.

We spent the rest of the day thawing our frozen feet and resting for the trek to the holy mountain.

TO THE HOLY MOUNTAIN

The next day after a hearty breakfast to fortify us, we drove to the starting point of our 10 km trek to Drapuk, the site of a 12th century monastery, from where one can gaze on the imposing northwest face of Mount Kailash. The trek started after an initiation by Sadguru on the banks of the river near the starting point.

The trek took us through a spectacular landscape. We walked through something that looked like a miniature Grand Canyon – a sheer rock cliff on either side buffeted and battered by the wind to an unusual smoothness. The walk was undulating and not as difficult as I expected and slowly took us up from approx. 14,000 ft. to 15,000 ft. Each group of four was given portable oxygen cans to use in case of extreme breathlessness but I was happy to see that, though I carried my own backpack (I didn’t use a porter) and though I got breathless at every ascent (that’s normal) and though I don’t do yoga, I didn’t need additional oxygen, hurray! My lungs were in good shape. We were also fortunate to have had good weather.

We rested for the night at a newly-constructed ashram in Drapuk (travellers in previous years stayed in tents) and we headed up a stream to Mount Kailash for a meditation session the next morning. This ascent was considerably steeper with climbers negotiating through boulders and even led by the side of the stream – the descent from Mount Kailash.

We stopped at a clearing for a meditation session guided by Swami Ullasa, the efficient leader of our group. This was the closest we would ever be to Mount Kailash. As the Ishas meditated quietly, calling out to Shiva, the eternal meditator, I closed my eyes. I was at 18,500 ft. I had reached a spot where most people back home would give up and a leg to be at. I was thankful for that opportunity. I was struck by the silence of people around me, humbled by the magnificence of the beauty before me and grateful to have made it so far from home without any mishap. I was cold and tired too. But resting my back against a huge boulder, I prayed.