



Earthbound Expeditions

Kailash Express, by Air and Helicopter

11 days, from US\$3,290 per person

Duration

11 days

Grade

Strenuous

Max altitude

5,630 m

Start and end

Kathmandu

On the trail

5 to 10 hours a day

Best season

May to Sep

Accommodation

Guesthouses

Meals

Full board, vegetarian

Group size

5 to 12

Getting there

Flights and helicopter

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Kailash Express, by Air and Helicopter Overview

The shortest route to Kailash, by air to Simikot and by helicopter to the border, for pilgrims who cannot take three weeks away.

Tour overview

Most journeys to Kailash take almost a week to reach the mountain. This one reaches Taklakot, a short drive from Lake Mansarovar, on the fourth day, by flying to the far north-west of Nepal and crossing the border by helicopter. It is designed for pilgrims who cannot take three weeks away.

Rapid altitude gain

The disadvantage is the speed of the ascent. Nepalgunj is at 150 m on the plains and Taklakot at 3,900 m, and this itinerary allows one day between them. For this reason, the fifth day is a rest day, oxygen and a pressure chamber travel with the group, and we advise some travellers to choose the overland trip instead.

Mount Kailash and its four faiths

Kailash rises to 6,638 m in the far west of Tibet and has never been climbed, because climbing it is not permitted. Hindus regard it as the abode of Shiva, Buddhists as the home of Demchok, and Jains as the place where Rishabhadeva attained liberation. Bon followers walk around it anticlockwise, while all others walk clockwise.

The three-day kora

The kora is fifty-three kilometres, starting and ending at Darchen. It goes north to Dirapuk below the west face, over the Dolma La at 5,630 m on the long second day, and down the Zhong Chu valley to the plain on the third day. It is a walk, not a climb, but the altitude makes it demanding.

Itinerary

Day	Route	Hours	Distance	Altitude
1	Arrive Kathmandu	–	–	1,400 m
2	Kathmandu, visa and temples	–	–	1,400 m
3	Fly Kathmandu to Nepalgunj	1	–	150 m
4	Nepalgunj, Simikot, Hilsa, Taklakot	6 to 8	–	3,900 m
5	Taklakot, acclimatisation	2	4 km	3,900 m
6	Taklakot to Lake Mansarovar	3 to 4	100 km	4,590 m
7	Mansarovar, Darchen, Yam Dwar to Dirapuk	5 to 6	12 km	4,900 m
8	Dirapuk to Zuthulpuk over the Dolma La	9 to 10	22 km	4,835 m
9	Zuthulpuk to Darchen, drive to Taklakot	4 to 5	12 km	3,900 m
10	Taklakot to Hilsa, Simikot, Nepalgunj	6 to 8	–	150 m
11	Fly Nepalgunj to Kathmandu	1	–	1,400 m

Day 1

Arrive in Kathmandu

We meet you at the airport and take you to your hotel. In the evening we give a full briefing, because this route gains height faster than any other and you need to understand how this is managed before you start. We check your equipment and hire anything that is missing.

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

Day 2

Kathmandu and the group visa

Your passport goes to the Chinese Embassy with those of the rest of the group. Meanwhile, we visit Pashupatinath, where many pilgrims begin their journey, and repack your belongings into one duffel bag and one daypack. The baggage limit on the Simikot flight is strict and low, which is why we do this today rather than at the airport.

Altitude: 1,400 m On foot: Easy walking, 1–2 hrs Night: Hotel, Kathmandu Meals: Breakfast, lunch, dinner

Day 3

Fly to Nepalgunj

A one-hour flight south-west to the Terai, where the climate is very different: Nepalgunj is hot, flat and 150 m above sea level. We stay here because the Simikot flights leave from Nepalgunj at first light. Have an early night, with your bags packed for an early start.

Altitude: 150 m On foot: None, flight day Night: Hotel, Nepalgunj Meals: Breakfast, lunch, dinner

Day 4

Fly from Nepalgunj to Simikot, helicopter to Hilsa and cross into Tibet

Fly by Twin Otter to Simikot at 2,910 m, landing on a 549 m runway, which is why flights operate only in clear morning conditions. Then a twenty-minute helicopter flight over the Humla gorges to Hilsa at 3,640 m, the bridge across the Karnali, Chinese formalities at Zherwa, and a short drive to Taklakot. It is a very long day.

Altitude: 3,900 m On foot: None, flight day Night: Hotel, Taklakot Meals: Breakfast, lunch, dinner

Day 5

Acclimatisation day in Taklakot

This is the most important day of the itinerary. You have climbed from 150 m to 3,900 m within twenty-four hours. We take a gentle walk up the hill above the town, return, drink plenty of water, and measure everyone's oxygen saturation twice. Nobody goes higher until the readings allow it.

Altitude: 3,900 m On foot: 2 hours Night: Hotel, Taklakot Meals: Breakfast, lunch, dinner

Day 6

Drive from Taklakot to Lake Mansarovar

Drive north over the Gurla La, with views of Gurla Mandhata, to Lake Mansarovar, the main destination of the trip. The afternoon is spent on the shore. Those who wish to bathe do so briefly, because the water is only a few degrees above freezing at 4,590 m.

Altitude: 4,590 m On foot: None, 3–4 hr drive Night: Guesthouse, Mansarovar Meals: Breakfast, lunch, dinner

Day 7

Drive from Mansarovar to Darchen and Yam Dwar, trek to Dirapuk

Sunrise at the lake, then a short drive to Darchen and on to Yam Dwar, the gate where the kora begins. We walk twelve kilometres north up the Lha Chu valley below the west face, with little height gain, and arrive at Dirapuk in the late afternoon, facing Kailash.

Altitude: 4,900 m On foot: 5 to 6 hours, 12 km Night: Guesthouse, Dirapuk Meals: Breakfast, lunch, dinner

Day 8

Trek over the Dolma La to Zuthulpuk

The hardest day of the journey. We leave before dawn, climb the moraine past Shiva Tsal, and make a long, slow ascent to the Dolma La at 5,630 m, which is covered in prayer flags. The descent to the valley is steep and loose, and the trail then flattens and continues for several hours. The day takes nine to ten hours in total.

Altitude: 4,835 m On foot: 9 to 10 hours, 22 km Night: Guesthouse, Zuthulpuk Meals: Breakfast, lunch, dinner

Day 9

Trek from Zuthulpuk to Darchen and drive to Taklakot

An easy final stage down the Zhong Chu valley, past Milarepa's cave, to the plain where the vehicles wait. The circuit is complete before lunch. We drive south to Taklakot, and the descent of eight hundred metres helps your recovery after three days at high altitude.

Altitude: 3,900 m On foot: 4 to 5 hours, 12 km Night: Hotel, Taklakot Meals: Breakfast, lunch, dinner

Day 10

Taklakot to Hilsa, fly to Simikot and Nepalgunj

Complete the Chinese exit formalities, cross the bridge back into Nepal at Hilsa, and take the helicopter to Simikot when the weather allows. Then take the fixed-wing flight to Nepalgunj. The schedule includes its only spare time here, because the Simikot flight is the least reliable in the country.

Altitude: 150 m On foot: None, flight day Night: Hotel, Nepalgunj Meals: Breakfast, lunch, dinner

Day 11

Fly to Kathmandu and departure

Take the morning flight back to Kathmandu. The afternoon is free. If your international flight is the same evening, we book a day room for you. If weather delayed you at Simikot for an extra day, this day covers the delay, and we will already have contacted your airline.

Altitude: 1,400 m On foot: None, departure day Night: No overnight Meals: Breakfast

What's included

- All Tibetan permits: Tibet Travel Permit, Alien's Travel Permit, military and foreign affairs permits, and the Kailash area fees
- The Chinese group visa, arranged in Kathmandu, with the embassy fee charged at cost
- Flights from Kathmandu to Nepalgunj and Simikot, and back
- The helicopter between Simikot and Hilsa in both directions
- All accommodation: hotels in Kathmandu, Nepalgunj and Taklakot, and guesthouses at Mansarovar and on the kora
- Full board from dinner on day one to breakfast on day eleven, vegetarian throughout
- Vehicles with drivers throughout Tibet
- A licensed Tibetan guide in the region and a Nepali leader from Kathmandu
- Bottled oxygen and a portable pressure chamber, with the group at all times
- A yak or porter allowance of 10 kg per person for the three kora days

Not included

- International flights to and from Kathmandu
- Nepal visa on arrival
- Travel insurance, which must cover trekking and evacuation to 6,000 m
- A horse and personal porter on the kora, about \$180 to \$260
- Accommodation and meals after day eleven if the Simikot flight is delayed by more than the one spare day in the itinerary
- Tips for the guide, the drivers and the kora crew
- Any costs arising from a border closure, a permit refusal or weather

Packing list

Baggage limit of 15 kg

The Simikot aircraft and the helicopter have a strict baggage limit of about 15 kg, plus a small daypack. This limit is the main constraint on this trip. Pack for eleven days within it, keep a change of clothes and your medication in your daypack in case your duffel bag travels on a later flight, and leave everything else at your Kathmandu hotel, free of charge.

Clothing

- Windproof hooded shell, which is more important on the plateau than extra insulation
- Insulated jacket for the pre-dawn start on the pass
- Three base layers, merino or synthetic, not cotton
- One fleece and one light insulated mid layer

For the kora

- Worn-in boots with ankle support
- Walking poles, which are very useful on the loose descent from the Dolma La
- A thirty-litre daypack for the three walking days
- Liner gloves under warmer gloves

Two unheated nights

- Four-season sleeping bag, comfort-rated to about minus ten
- Silk or cotton liner
- Earplugs, because the kora rooms are shared
- Headtorch and spare batteries

Sun and wind

- Category 4 sunglasses
- Factor 50 sun cream and high-factor lip balm, in generous quantities
- Brimmed sun hat and a buff for the dust
- Moisturiser, as the plateau air is very dry

Health

- Your own medication in its original packaging, with the prescription
- Acetazolamide if your doctor agrees, tried at home first
- Rehydration salts, blister kit, paracetamol and ibuprofen
- Effective throat lozenges, because the dry air affects your voice

Papers

- Passport valid for six months with two blank pages
- Four passport photographs
- Insurance certificate showing cover to 6,000 m, evacuation and travel delay
- Copies of all documents, carried separately

Useful

- A change of clothes in your daypack, in case your duffel bag travels on a later helicopter
- A battery pack, kept warm inside your jacket
- A Chinese plug adaptor
- Small notes for tips, the horse and the guesthouses

Optional extras

Two extra nights in Kathmandu

from \$180, 2 days

Recommended on this trip as a buffer against delays at the end.

A night at Simikot on the way in

from \$150, 1 day

Sleeping at 2,910 m before Taklakot reduces the effect of the rapid altitude gain. We recommend it.

Priority helicopter seat

from \$260

A seat on the first helicopter from Simikot when the group is split across two flights.

Chitwan afterwards

from \$390, 3 days

Jungle and a warm climate, and it also makes your return date more flexible.

Single room where available

\$220

In Kathmandu, Nepalgunj and Taklakot only. Not available at the lake or on the kora.

Photos, videos and reviews of this trip: enepaltrekking.com/kailash-express