



Earthbound Expeditions

Overland Kailash Yatra, by Road Both Ways

16 days, from US\$2,767 per person

Duration

16 days

Grade

Moderate to 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 20

Getting there

Land Cruiser

Contact us

Phone

+977 9851017772

WhatsApp

+9779851017772

Email

earthboundnpl@gmail.com

Website

enepaltrekking.com

Office

G.P.O. Box 5801, Thamel, Kathmandu, Nepal

Overland Kailash Yatra, by Road Both Ways Overview

The traditional pilgrim route to Kailash and Mansarovar, by road in both directions, gaining height gradually to make the plateau easier on your body.

Tour overview

Before there were flights to Lhasa, everyone who reached Kailash from the south walked or drove the Kerung road, and most Nepali and Indian pilgrims still use it. The main advantage remains the same: you climb from 1,400 m to 4,640 m over six days rather than ninety minutes, and arrive at the mountain with your body better adjusted to the altitude.

Mount Kailash and its four faiths

Kailash is a 6,638 m peak of dark rock in the far west of Tibet. It has never been climbed, because climbing it is not permitted. Hindus regard it as the abode of Shiva. Buddhists place Demchok on its summit. Jains believe that Rishabhadeva attained liberation here. Followers of Bon walk around it in the opposite direction. The path around the mountain is shared by all four faiths.

The three-day kora

The kora is fifty-three kilometres, starting and ending at Darchen. The first day runs north up the Lha Chu valley below the west face to Dirapuk, twelve gentle kilometres. The second crosses the Dolma La at 5,630 m and is long, cold and demanding. The third descends the Zhong Chu valley to the plain, twelve kilometres, and finishes by lunchtime.

Why the altitude makes it demanding

None of the journey is technical, and no section is steep for long. The difficulty is that even the easiest day is higher than the summit of Mont Blanc. Everything takes longer, sleep is poor, appetite decreases and small problems can become serious. The trip is planned around the altitude rather than the distances.

Itinerary

Day	Route	Hours	Distance	Altitude
1	Arrive Kathmandu	–	–	1,400 m
2	Kathmandu, temples and paperwork	–	–	1,400 m
3	Kathmandu to Timure	7 to 8	150 km	1,900 m
4	Rasuwagadhi border to Kerung	3 to 4	35 km	2,800 m
5	Kerung, acclimatisation	2 to 3	6 km	2,800 m
6	Kerung to Saga	5 to 6	230 km	4,640 m
7	Saga to Lake Mansarovar	8 to 9	470 km	4,590 m
8	Mansarovar to Darchen	2	40 km	4,575 m
9	Yam Dwar to Dirapuk	5 to 6	12 km	4,900 m
10	Dirapuk to Zuthulpuk over the Dolma La	9 to 10	22 km	4,835 m
11	Zuthulpuk to Darchen, then Hor Qu	4 to 5	12 km	4,560 m

12	Spare day at the lake	–	–	4,560 m
13	Hor Qu to Saga	8 to 9	460 km	4,640 m
14	Saga to Kerung	5 to 6	230 km	2,800 m
15	Kerung to Kathmandu	8 to 9	185 km	1,400 m
16	Fly home	–	–	1,400 m

Day 1

Arrive in Kathmandu

We meet you at the airport and take you to your hotel. The afternoon is free to rest after your flight. In the evening we explain the route, the permits and the altitude, and check your equipment, because what is suitable for the Khumbu is not always enough on the plateau.

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

Day 2

Kathmandu sightseeing and group visa

A morning visit to Pashupatinath and Boudhanath, where many pilgrims begin their journey. Your passport is at the Chinese Embassy for the group visa, so this day in Kathmandu is essential. We hire any equipment you are missing in Thamel and repack your belongings into one duffel bag and one daypack.

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

Day 3

Drive to Timure

Drive north out of the Kathmandu Valley and up the Trishuli valley, on a road that changes from tarmac to gravel and is often damaged by the monsoon. It is a long day in the vehicle for the distance covered. Timure lies in the gorge below Rasuwagadhi, and you spend the first night here at a relatively low altitude.

Altitude: 1,900 m On foot: None, 7–8 hr drive Night: Guesthouse, Timure Meals: Breakfast, lunch, dinner

Day 4

Cross the border at Rasuwagadhi and drive to Kerung

Complete Nepali exit formalities at the bridge, then Chinese immigration, which is thorough and slow. Bags are opened. Books about Tibet and images of the Dalai Lama are confiscated, so do not bring them. After the border post, the road climbs steeply through pine forest to Kerung, gaining nearly a kilometre in an hour.

Altitude: 2,800 m On foot: None, 3–4 hr drive Night: Hotel, Kerung Meals: Breakfast, lunch, dinner

Day 5

Acclimatisation day in Kerung

An important day for acclimatisation. We walk for an hour or two up the side valley behind the town and return to sleep lower down. From here onwards, your guide measures everyone's oxygen saturation morning and evening and records it, so that any decline is noticed early.

Altitude: 2,800 m On foot: 2 to 3 hours Night: Hotel, Kerung Meals: Breakfast, lunch, dinner

Day 6

Drive from Kerung to Saga

The road climbs above the tree line and over the Kongtang La, and from here the landscape is high, brown and vast. Saga is a garrison and lorry town rather than a destination, and it is where most people first feel the altitude. Drink more than you feel you need and eat more than you want to.

Altitude: 4,640 m On foot: None, 5–6 hr drive Night: Hotel, Saga Meals: Breakfast, lunch, dinner

Day 7

Drive from Saga to Lake Mansarovar

The longest drive of the trip, heading west along the Brahmaputra and then away from it, past nomad camps and salt lakes in open country. Late in the day, Gurla Mandhata comes into view on the left, followed by Lake Mansarovar.

Altitude: 4,590 m On foot: None, 8–9 hr drive Night: Guesthouse, Mansarovar Meals: Breakfast, lunch, dinner

Day 8

Lake Mansarovar and drive to Darchen

Sunrise on the lakeshore, which is the reason we stay here overnight. Those who wish to bathe do so briefly, because the water is only a few degrees above freezing. We drive along part of the lakeshore, see Lake Rakshastal, and reach Darchen in the afternoon to organise the loads for the kora.

Altitude: 4,575 m On foot: None, 2 hr drive Night: Hotel, Darchen Meals: Breakfast, lunch, dinner

Day 9

Drive to Yam Dwar and trek to Dirapuk, first day of the kora

A short drive to Yam Dwar, the gate where the walking begins. The valley turns north, with the south face of Kailash above you for most of the afternoon. It is twelve kilometres on a good path with little ascent; the only difficulty is the altitude of around 4,500 metres.

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

Day 10

Trek over the Dolma La to Zuthulpuk

The most demanding day of the trip. We leave before first light and climb the moraine to Shiva Tsal, where pilgrims leave personal items, then make the long ascent to the Dolma La at 5,630 m, which is covered in prayer flags. The descent to the valley floor is steep and loose, and the final hours are flat and very long.

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

Day 11

Trek from Zuthulpuk to Darchen and drive to Lake Mansarovar

An easy final morning down the gorge, past Milarepa's cave, until the valley opens onto the Barkha plain where the vehicles wait. The circuit is complete by early afternoon. We drive east to the lakeshore, which is lower than Darchen, so everyone sleeps better.

Altitude: 4,560 m On foot: 4 to 5 hours, 12 km Night: Guesthouse, Hor Qu Meals: Breakfast, lunch, dinner

Day 12

Reserve day

This day is kept in reserve. It is used if the pass was closed by snow, if someone needed a slower day, or if a vehicle broke down on the plateau. If it is not needed, you have a second morning at Mansarovar and a restful afternoon.

Altitude: 4,560 m On foot: Optional 2–3 hrs Night: Guesthouse, Hor Qu Meals: Breakfast, lunch, dinner

Day 13

Drive back east to Saga

We drive back along the same road in the other direction. Most people sleep for much of the drive. After a week at higher altitude, Saga feels relatively low.

Altitude: 4,640 m On foot: None, 8–9 hr drive Night: Hotel, Saga Meals: Breakfast, lunch, dinner

Day 14

Drive from Saga to Kerung

We cross the Kongtang La again and descend into the forest. Kerung, at 2,800 m, has a milder climate after a week on the plateau, and most people's appetite returns here.

Altitude: 2,800 m On foot: None, 5–6 hr drive Night: Hotel, Kerung Meals: Breakfast, lunch, dinner

Day 15

Drive from Kerung to Kathmandu

Complete the Chinese exit formalities at the border, which can take some time, then cross the bridge at Rasuwagadhi to Nepali immigration. The road down the Trishuli valley is rough, green and warm. We reach Kathmandu in the evening, where you can have dinner wherever you choose.

Altitude: 1,400 m On foot: None, 8–9 hr drive Night: Hotel, Kathmandu Meals: Breakfast, lunch, dinner

Day 16

Departure

After a late breakfast and a free morning, we take you to the airport in time for your flight. If you are staying longer, we can arrange a few days in Chitwan or Pokhara, where the warm lowlands are a welcome change after the plateau.

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

What's included

- All 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
- Three nights in Kathmandu and all accommodation in Tibet, twin share
- Full board from dinner on day one to breakfast on day sixteen, vegetarian throughout
- Land Cruisers with drivers and a support truck for the whole plateau crossing
- A licensed Tibetan guide for the whole time you are in the region, and a Nepali leader from Kathmandu
- Bottled oxygen and a portable pressure chamber, carried in the support vehicle
- A yak or porter allowance of 10 kg per person for the three kora days
- All transport from Kathmandu to the border and back

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 if required
- Lunches and dinners in Kathmandu other than those listed
- Tips for the guide, the drivers and the kora crew
- Any costs arising from a border closure, a permit refusal or weather, which are outside anyone's control

Packing list

One duffel and one daypack

The truck carries a duffel bag of up to 20 kg for you from Kathmandu and back. On the three kora days you carry a daypack and 10 kg goes by yak, so pack your duffel with the kora in mind: the things you need at Dirapuk should be easy to find without unpacking everything. Anything you do not need in Tibet can be left at your hotel in Kathmandu free of charge.

For the pass

- Windproof hooded shell, which is more important here than a heavier fleece
- Insulated jacket for the pre-dawn start
- Warm hat, a buff for the dust and wind, and liner gloves under thicker gloves
- Walking poles, which are very useful on the loose descent

Walking

- Worn-in boots with ankle support
- Three pairs of good walking socks
- A 30-litre daypack for the kora days
- Water bottles holding two litres, insulated if possible

Sleeping

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

Sun and wind

- Category 4 sunglasses
- Factor 50 sun cream and high-factor lip balm, in generous quantities
- Sun hat with a brim, and a scarf for the dust
- Moisturiser, because the plateau is extremely dry

Health

- Your own medication in its original packaging, with the prescription
- Acetazolamide if your doctor agrees
- Rehydration salts, blister plasters, paracetamol and ibuprofen
- Your usual motion sickness remedy, for the road through Nepal

Documents

- Passport valid for six months with two blank pages
- Four passport photographs
- Insurance certificate showing cover to 6,000 m and evacuation
- Photocopies of all documents, kept separately from the originals

Useful

- Battery pack, kept warm inside your jacket
- Chinese plug adaptor
- Cash in small notes for tips, the horse and the guesthouses
- A refillable bottle, as our crew boils and filters water

Optional extras

Inner kora at Nandi

from \$240, 1 day

By custom, only for pilgrims who have already completed thirteen koras. We arrange it for those who have.

Two nights in Lhasa on the way home

from \$420, 2 days

Fly from Ngari Gunsa to Lhasa and on to Kathmandu, instead of driving back.

Saga Dawa departure

+\$200 on the price

The full moon festival at Tarboche, and the busiest days of the year on the kora.

Chitwan on the way home

from \$390, 3 days

Jungle and a warm climate at 150 m, which is a welcome change after the plateau.

Single room where available

\$260

Available in Kathmandu, Kerung, Saga and Darchen. Not available on the kora.

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