



Earthbound Expeditions

Kailash Yatra via Beijing and Lhasa

18 days, from US\$3,890 per person

Duration

18 days

Grade

Moderate to strenuous

Max altitude

5,630 m

Start and end

Beijing to Lhasa

On the trail

5 to 10 hours a day

Best season

May to Sep

Accommodation

Hotels and guesthouses

Meals

Full board, vegetarian

Group size

2 to 16

Getting there

Fly or train to Lhasa

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Kailash Yatra via Beijing and Lhasa Overview

Kailash reached through China: Beijing, the railway or a flight to Lhasa, the monasteries, and then the long road west to the mountain.

Tour overview

Most pilgrims reach Kailash from Kathmandu. This journey travels through Beijing and Lhasa instead, for two practical reasons. It uses an ordinary Chinese visa obtained at home rather than the group visa issued in Kathmandu, which ties five travellers to one document. It also gives you three nights at 3,656 m in a city with hospitals and hotels before the demanding part of the trip begins.

Three nights in Lhasa

The three nights in Lhasa are central to the trip. You visit the Potala, the Jokhang with pilgrims prostrating at its door, Drepung on the hillside and the debating courtyard at Sera. This is also where your body acclimatizes for the plateau, which is why the arrival day has no activities planned.

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 forbidden. Hindus know it as the abode of Shiva, Buddhists place Demchok on its summit, Jains hold that Rishabhadeva was liberated here, and Bon practitioners walk the circuit anticlockwise while everyone else walks clockwise.

The three-day kora

The kora is fifty three kilometres from Darchen and back. You walk north below the west face to Dirapuk, cross the Dolma La at 5,630 m on the long second day, and descend the Zhong Chu valley to the plain on the third. None of it is technical. The difficulty comes from the altitude, and two weeks of gradual approach is the best preparation.

Itinerary

Day	Route	Hours	Distance	Altitude
1	Fly to Beijing	–	–	44 m
2	Beijing, the Forbidden City	–	–	44 m
3	Beijing to Lhasa, air or rail	4 or 40	–	3,656 m
4	Lhasa, arrival and rest	–	–	3,656 m
5	Potala and Jokhang	2 to 3	–	3,656 m
6	Drepung and Sera	2	–	3,656 m
7	Lhasa to Shigatse	6 to 8	350 km	3,840 m
8	Shigatse to Saga	8 to 9	450 km	4,640 m
9	Saga to Lake Mansarovar	8 to 9	470 km	4,590 m
10	Mansarovar to Darchen	2	40 km	4,575 m
11	Yam Dwar to Dirapuk	5 to 6	12 km	4,900 m
12	Dirapuk to Zuthulpuk over the Dolma La	9 to 10	22 km	4,835 m

13	Zuthulpuk to Darchen, then Hor Qu	4 to 5	12 km	4,560 m
14	Spare day at the lake	-	-	4,560 m
15	Hor Qu to Saga	8 to 9	460 km	4,640 m
16	Saga to Shigatse	8 to 9	450 km	3,840 m
17	Shigatse to Lhasa	5 to 6	280 km	3,656 m
18	Fly out of Lhasa	-	-	3,656 m

Day 1

Fly to Beijing

You fly from Kathmandu or Delhi to Beijing, where we meet you and take you to your hotel. There are no activities planned today. If your flight lands late, the programme begins tomorrow and there is no early start.

Altitude: 44 m On foot: None, arrival day Night: Hotel, Beijing Meals: Dinner

Day 2

Beijing sightseeing

You visit the Forbidden City in the morning, then Tiananmen Square and the Temple of Heaven, at a pace that suits the group. It is an unusual start to a Himalayan pilgrimage, and most travellers value it afterwards. The evening briefing covers altitude, which becomes a factor from tomorrow.

Altitude: 44 m On foot: Easy walking, 3–4 hrs Night: Hotel, Beijing Meals: Breakfast, lunch, dinner

Day 3

Travel from Beijing to Lhasa by air or rail

You travel either by a four hour flight over the Kunlun mountains or by railway, which takes two nights and crosses the Tanggula Pass at 5,072 m in carriages with enriched oxygen. The train is neither faster nor cheaper, but it is a better introduction to the plateau, and most of our travellers who have done both would choose it again.

Altitude: 3,656 m On foot: None, flight day Night: Hotel, Lhasa, or the train Meals: Breakfast, lunch, dinner

Day 4

Rest and acclimatisation day in Lhasa

This is your first full day at 3,656 m, and the programme is kept light on purpose: a short walk in the Barkhor, tea and an early night. Oxygen saturation is measured morning and evening from today. Travellers who do a lot of sightseeing on this day are more likely to feel unwell at Shigatse.

Altitude: 3,656 m On foot: Optional 1–2 hrs Night: Hotel, Lhasa Meals: Breakfast, lunch, dinner

Day 5

Potala Palace and Jokhang Temple

You visit the Potala in the morning on a fixed timed ticket. The climb through it is the most strenuous exercise since you arrived. In the afternoon you visit the Jokhang, where pilgrims prostrate themselves at the door, and walk the Barkhor kora around it, clockwise with the other pilgrims.

Altitude: 3,656 m On foot: 2 to 3 hours Night: Hotel, Lhasa Meals: Breakfast, lunch, dinner

Day 6

Drepung and Sera monasteries

You visit Drepung in the morning, once the largest monastery in the world, and Sera in the afternoon for the monks' debates, which involve a great deal of clapping and are interesting to watch even in translation. This is the last evening in a city with restaurants for ten days.

Altitude: 3,656 m On foot: 2 hours Night: Hotel, Lhasa Meals: Breakfast, lunch, dinner

Day 7

Drive from Lhasa to Shigatse

The route follows the Yarlung Tsangpo west. The river becomes the Brahmaputra much further downstream. If the group chooses the longer road, it passes Yamdrok Lake and the Karo La glacier. Shigatse is Tibet's second city and the seat of the Panchen Lamas, and you can visit Tashilhunpo Monastery in the late afternoon.

Altitude: 3,840 m On foot: None, 6–8 hr drive Night: Hotel, Shigatse Meals: Breakfast, lunch, dinner

Day 8

Drive from Shigatse to Saga

Today you reach the high plateau: high, brown, vast and almost empty. The road crosses several passes above 5,000 m by vehicle, with a long, steady gain in altitude that you will notice by evening. Saga is a garrison and truck-stop town and serves as an overnight stop on this route.

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

Day 9

Drive from Saga to Lake Mansarovar

This is the longest drive of the journey, heading west past nomad camps and salt lakes. Late in the day Gurla Mandhata comes into view on the left, followed by the lake, which is very large and deep blue. We stay on the shore rather than continuing to Darchen.

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

Day 10

Lake Mansarovar and drive to Darchen

You see dawn over the lake, which is the reason for staying here. Anyone who wishes to bathe should be quick, as the water is only a few degrees above freezing. We drive along part of the shore, look across to Rakshastal, and reach Darchen in the afternoon to organise loads and rest before the kora.

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

Day 11

Trek from Darchen to Dirapuk

A short drive takes you to Yam Dwar, the gate, where the walking begins. You walk twelve kilometres north up the Lha Chu valley with little height gain, with the west face of Kailash above you for most of the afternoon. Dirapuk faces the north face directly, and the view at dusk is one of the highlights of the trip.

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

Day 12

Trek over the Dolma La to Zuthulpuk

This is the hardest day. You set off before first light and climb the moraine to Shiva Tsal, where pilgrims leave a personal item behind, then make the long ascent to the Dolma La at 5,630 m, which is covered in prayer flags. The descent is steep and loose, and the valley that follows is flat and long.

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

Day 13

Trek from Zuthulpuk to Darchen and drive to Lake Mansarovar

An easy morning walk down the gorge past Milarepa's cave until the valley opens onto the Barkha plain, where the vehicles are waiting. The kora is complete before lunch. We drive back east to the lake shore, where the lower altitude helps everyone sleep better.

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

Day 14

Spare day at Lake Mansarovar

This day is kept in reserve. If the pass was closed by snow, someone needed a slower day, or a vehicle broke down, this day allows for it. If it is not needed, you have a second morning at Mansarovar and a free afternoon, which is a useful rest at 4,560 m.

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

Day 15

Drive back east to Saga

You drive the same road in the opposite direction. Most of the group sleeps for much of the journey. After the past week at higher altitude, Saga feels comfortable in the evening.

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

Day 16

Drive from Saga to Shigatse

You continue east, slowly losing height, and pass the first villages with trees. After Ngari, Shigatse offers shops, hot water and a choice of restaurants for the evening.

Altitude: 3,840 m On foot: None, 8–9 hr drive Night: Hotel, Shigatse Meals: Breakfast, lunch, dinner

Day 17

Drive from Shigatse to Lhasa

This is the final drive, back along the Tsangpo to Lhasa, arriving in the afternoon. You have an hour in the Barkhor for any shopping, followed by a farewell dinner. Your permits are returned to the authorities tomorrow.

Altitude: 3,656 m On foot: None, 5–6 hr drive Night: Hotel, Lhasa Meals: Breakfast, lunch, dinner

Day 18

Departure from Lhasa

You fly home from Lhasa, either through Beijing or directly to Kathmandu, depending on your ticket. We take you to the airport and help you through the first checks, which are more thorough on departures from Tibet than most people expect.

Altitude: 3,656 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
- Two nights in Beijing with sightseeing and a guide
- Beijing to Lhasa by air, or by the Qinghai Tibet railway in a soft sleeper if you choose it

- All accommodation: four star in Beijing and Lhasa, three star in Shigatse and Saga, guesthouses at the lake and on the kora
- Full board from dinner on day one to breakfast on day eighteen, vegetarian from Lhasa onward
- Vehicles and drivers for the whole plateau crossing, with a support truck
- A licensed Tibetan guide throughout the region, and a national guide in Beijing
- Bottled oxygen and a portable pressure chamber from Lhasa onward
- A yak or porter allowance of 10 kg a person for the three kora days

Not included

- International flights into Beijing and home from Lhasa
- The Chinese tourist visa, which you obtain in your own country
- Travel insurance, which must cover trekking and evacuation to 6,000 m
- A horse and personal porter on the kora, roughly \$180 to \$260
- Lunches and dinners in Beijing beyond those listed
- Tips for the guides, drivers and kora crew
- Anything arising from a permit refusal, a closure or weather

Packing list

One duffel and one daypack

The truck carries one duffel of up to 20 kg for you across the plateau, and you carry a daypack on the three kora days. Pack the duffel so that what you need at Dirapuk is easy to reach without unpacking everything. Anything you need only in Beijing can be left at the Lhasa hotel free of charge, so you do not carry city clothes to 4,900 m.

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, no cotton
- Lighter clothes for Beijing, which is hot and humid in summer

For the kora

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

Sleeping

- Four season sleeping bag, comfort rated to about minus ten
- Silk or cotton liner
- Earplugs, for the shared kora rooms and the sleeper train
- Head torch and spare batteries

Sun and wind protection

- Category four sunglasses
- Factor fifty sun cream and a high factor lip balm, in generous quantities
- Brimmed sun hat, and a buff for the dust
- Moisturiser, because the plateau air is extremely dry

Health

- Your own medication in its original packaging, with the prescription
- Acetazolamide if your doctor agrees
- Rehydration salts, blister kit, paracetamol and ibuprofen
- Medication for an upset stomach, because the food changes three times on this trip

Documents

- Passport valid six months with two blank pages, carrying your Chinese visa
- Four passport photographs
- Insurance certificate showing cover to 6,000 m and evacuation
- Copies of everything, kept separately from the originals

Useful items

- Chinese plug adaptor
- Battery pack, kept warm inside a jacket on the kora
- Cash in small notes for tips, the horse and the guesthouses
- A refillable bottle, since we boil and filter water on the plateau

Optional extras

Railway instead of the flight

no change in price, 1 extra day

Two nights from Beijing over the Tanggula Pass in an oxygen-enriched soft sleeper. Book early in the season.

Xian and the Terracotta Army

from \$540, 2 days

A stop between Beijing and Lhasa, which also helps with acclimatisation.

Everest Base Camp, Tibet side

from \$560, 2 days

A detour from Shigatse to Rongbuk and the north face, added on the way west.

Fly out to Kathmandu instead of Beijing

from \$420

A simple option, and the natural choice if you want to add time in Nepal.

Single room where available

\$460

Available in Beijing, Lhasa, Shigatse, Saga and Darchen. Not available at the lake or on the kora.

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