

ANCIENT WISDOM SERIES:

KAILASH CALLING

*Spiritual Journey
to Himalayan
Mountain
- Mount Kailash*

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Dedication:

Dedicated to my parents.

Mount Kailash



The mystical Kailash shining under sunlight

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Foreword

It all started in Feb 2016. When I said I intend to make my Kailash trip, advice poured all over! 'You're old', 'You're diabetic!', 'It's costly travel', 'You need cardiologist approval', etc.

As Sathguru says, there is a fighting spirit in everyone! To defy the naysayers we need to raise one's achievement bar very high. Something within me challenged myself into Kailash trip. This book is not about travel logistics or dos/don't about the trip but to give different type of motivation to make such trip

You don't just buy the tickets and pack your bags to make a trip to Kailash. During my childhood, I have seen people prostrating (seeking their blessings by touching their feet) before the people who have made the trip to Kailash. It was a very difficult travel during those time and many people never returned back alive. But these days, there is a best-in-class highway connecting from Lhasa to Kailash.

As per Hindu beliefs, you are to be destined to make this holy trip. For me, it was my third attempt to make the travel arrangements. For first two attempts, either my work schedule did not match up or my health certificate did not meet Tour operator's requirements. Yes, you need multiple levels of health certifications including cardio health checks. You will need Diamox (acetazolamide) medication to cover the altitude related sickness (like headache, tiredness, nausea, dizziness and shortness of breath), since you are reaching quickly the high altitudes above 10000 feet.

There are many tour operators and religious group that conduct these tours. Research in Google and make your own conclusions on the cost and amenities. I took the travel through Isha Foundation, an organization is led by Sathguru Jaggi Vasudev (www.sacredwalks.org). The organization is based in Coimbatore, India but have reach-out groups all over the world.

This is purely a spiritual journey so that you not only travel far into Tibet but also deep into yourself seeking the truth about you. There are no gift shops in Kailash. People do gather the Himalayan water from the streams to take back home with some religious significance. It is advised not to take water from the Manasarovar lake and again there are mystic myths around it. Make this trip with an open mind and for the experience of travel into completely natural surroundings. The entire travel is blessed with noisy flowing rivers, solemn lakes, snow capped mountains, and barren lands miles ahead. Don't fall into sleep during the bus journey to avoid these scenic routes. Also it's advised not get into sleep so that you're aware of getting into higher altitude and body is able to recognize it.

You're not trekking all the days and weeks like any other mountaineering. And there is no heavy snow or ice on the trekking path unlike Mount Everest. No snow storm or snow-slides to worry! Still practice regular exercises and check your medical data often. Most of the impact from the lack of full-scale oxygen in the air at those high elevations.

If you can really be with Kailash even for a few moments,
life will never again be the same for you.

It is a phenomenon beyond all human imagination.

- Sathguru

Motivation



There are people who will watch endless YouTube videos respectfully sitting in a couch and ensuring there was no footwear worn (out of respect to watching religious show!). But few of them stop watching the videos and start planning the trip. It's not about what others say about the Kailash but how and what you feel about it after that experience. If you set your intention out, the world out there helps you to get that into fruition. Quoting Sathguru again, he will ensure that the piece of Kailash will always remain with you after the journey.

I started visualizing 'Kailash' mountain in my meditation and soon realized all the road blocks are removed sooner. There lies the power of intentions. There is a saying that if you throw your intention out there, natural forces join to help you achieve that intentions. I followed that concept! Suddenly there was no problem with travel costs, my doctor gladly signed up the fitness certificate with some simple tests and said I am fit to start anytime! I started the iPhone health app to monitor my 3 mile walks five times a week. I should have done some trekking locally instead of side-walk jogging. As the dates came closer, the ISHA's newsletters kept me updated on the local trivia and travel preparations.

I told my colleagues that I am going on a vacation. If they showed interest by asking where, then I give the details. People ask me all the time, why risk this type of trekking and could just relax at a beach or go to Vegas on a break! I don't want a stay-cation (vacation where you stay in your local area) and expect the same old comfort in home like computers, iPhones, desk-work and eat some junk food. Then

get stressed about missing work or worrying how to get back to work as early as possible. In Kailash journey, you tell the family the risks you're taking and that you're not available by email or phone for nearly two weeks.

Kailash and Manasarover lake offer vast and endless potential of knowledge. It's left to the individual to feel the divine presence and absorb the serene environment into one's mind. I have seen some people in my travel group (of 60 members from various parts of the world) getting very quiet, some of them just getting sick every hour, some of them elated in their day! This is mostly a spiritual journey with less importance to religious tasks. This is the the best time to meditate in the natural surroundings and I promise you will not be disturbed by cell phone rings or text messages.

There are three areas worth mentioning from this trip: Tibet for its vibrant beauty, magical Manasarovar Lake and the blissful Mount Kailash. Short articles on these places are detailed in this book. Some tour groups skip the Lhasa City to save time, but it has one of the historic Potala Palace, where all the Dalai Lamas lived and prayed. Walking through the Palace and observing the historic articles of books/collection in Sanskrit and other languages will set the tone for the more spiritual journey down the road.

Kailash and its Religious Connections



The mystical, enchanting Himalayan Mountains are a treat to the senses for everyone. Venerated as the abode of the Enlightened, the Himalayas have been a destination of great significance for spiritual seekers across the world.

The Himalayas have always been the source of immense peace, tranquility and enlightenment for countless sages, yogis and spiritual gurus including Adi Sankaracharya, Guru Gobind Singh, Vivekananda and many others. There are written travelogue by woman saints from southern India who traveled to Mount Kailash many decades back. Every year, devotees undertake the holy trek, in spite of all the challenges they face due to extreme geographical and weather conditions. Such is the beauty and allure of this sacred space.

You must have known the fact that beautiful Mount Kailash in Tibet has never been climbed by any mountaineer. It is heard in stories that a mystic Tibetan Seer and poet named Milarepa is the only human being who has been able to climb the peak of Mount Kailash. It was over about some 900 years ago, and since then we have just heard the stories of how nobody has been able to reaching the summit of this unclimbable peak.

Do you ever wonder what makes this peak so difficult to be climbed? Is it the physical infeasibility, difficulty because of altitude, or some other mystic and inexplicable reason which are beyond human control and understanding? Here are some facts about the most mysterious mountain, and a small attempt to

understand what the mystery behind this unclimbed peak could possibly be which allows no one to complete the summit of Mount Kailash.

Mount Everest is 8848 meters (29029 ft) in height and its summit has been scaled by over 4,000 people, while Mount Kailash is 6638 meters (21778 ft) and its summit is unclimbed.

Jainism, Hinduism, Buddhism, and Bon are the four major religions that believe Mount Kailash to be a sacred place. At the height of 14,950 feet on the foothills of Mount Kailash, are Lake Manasarovar and Lake Rakshastal. Lake Mansarovar is known to be the highest fresh water body in the world, while Lake Rakshastal has salt-water in it. Rakshastal is believed to be the lake of Raavana, or the demon, where he performed his penance to please Lord Shiva. The shape of Mansarovar is that of the Sun and Rakshastal has the shape of the crescent Moon. Both the lakes are located close to each other divided by a thin isthmus and while Rakshastal is constantly stormy, lake Mansarovar remains calm throughout all weather conditions.

It is said that Mount Kailash is the heavenly abode of Gods and that's the reason why no mortal has ever been able to climb it.

According to ancient Tibetan legends and writings, "No mortal ever be allowed to walk atop Mount Kailash, where, among the clouds, is the abode of the gods. He who dares to start the top of Mount holy and see the faces of the gods will be put to death!" Colonel Wilson, one of the many mountaineers who tried to climb the summit of Mount Kailash explained, "Just when I discovered an easy walk to the summit of the mountain, heavy snow began to fall, making the ascent impossible." Sergei Cistiakov, a Russian climber gives an explanation to not being able to finish the summit which will stun you – "When we approached the foot of the mountain, my heart was pounding. I was in front of the sacred mountain, Mount which says it cannot be beat. I felt extremely emaciated and suddenly I became captivated by the thought that I do not belong on this mountain, it must necessarily come back! As soon as we started the descent, I felt liberated."

Those who visit the area around the mountain have seen their nails and hair grow to a length in 12 hours, which in normal conditions would happen in 2 weeks! The mountain has an air that causes rapid aging. Some Russian scientists have studied the mountain to a great extent and have put forward an idea that Mount Kailash could be a man-made pyramid, and might be the ultimate paranormal phenomenon that connects all the other such monuments in the world where similar things have been observed. It is believed to be the center of this world-wide system.

Mt. Kailash is believed to be the Axis Mundi, literally the 'Axis' of the world that provides a connection between the earth and heaven, between the physical world and the spiritual worlds, the celestial center of the world where heaven meets earth.

Legend says that the Mt. Kailash is the earthly manifestation of Mount Meru/Sumeru which is the spiritual center of the universe according to Buddhist, Jains, and Hindu cosmology.

Every year thousands of Buddhist, Jain, Hindu and Bönpo pilgrims circumambulate the foot of Mount Kailash, which is 52 km long.

Even with so many studies and many theories, it is believed that no one has ever understood the real reason why Mount Kailash cannot be climbed, why thousands attempted and failed despite of it being a mountain with a height of 6638 meters, which mountaineers should be able to do. But some things are fine if they remain the mysteries that they are, no matter how much intimidating they seem, or how long their history has been.

Tibetans have aptly named this mighty rock as 'The Precious Jewel of The Snow'. Mount Kailash is regarded as the spiritual center of the universe, revered by Hindus, Buddhists, Jains and Bonpos alike.

Hindus — for them, it is the home of the supreme God, Lord Shiva; Shiva is said to reside on top of this wondrous peak in an eternal state of meditation, creating the sustaining force that holds the universe together.

Bonpos — the ancient religion of Bon refers to the mountain as 'Water's Flower'.

Buddhists — see it as the 'Navel of the Universe'

Jains — revere it because it is where their first leader attained enlightenment.

(source: Isha Blogs in www.sacredwalks.org)

What is Mount Kailash?

Mount Kailash is a peak in the Kailash Range, which forms part of the Transhimalaya in Tibet Autonomous Region, China.

A great mass of black rock soaring to over 22,000 feet, Mt. Kailash has the unique distinction of being the world's most venerated holy place as well as least traveled one. The supremely sacred site of four religions and billions of people, Kailash is seen by no more than a few thousand pilgrims each year. This curious fact is explained by the mountain's remote location in far western Tibet. No planes, trains or buses journey anywhere near the region and even with rugged over-land vehicles the journey still requires weeks of difficult, often dangerous travel. The weather, always cold, can be unexpectedly treacherous and pilgrims must carry all the supplies they will need for the entire journey.

How long have people been coming to this sacred mountain? The answers are lost in antiquity, before the dawn of Hinduism, Jainism or Buddhism. The cosmologies and origin myths of each of these religions speak of Kailash as the mythical Mt. Meru, the Axis Mundi, the center and birth place of the entire world. The mountain was already legendary before the great Hindu epics, the Ramayana and the Mahabharata, were written. Indeed, Kailash is so deeply embedded in the myths of ancient Asia that it was perhaps a sacred place of another era, another civilization, now long gone and forgotten (source: sacredsites.com).

Further reading sources:

- [Allen, Charles](#)(1982)A Mountain in Tibet: The Search for Mount Kailas and the Sources of the Great Rivers of Asia. (London, André Deutsch).
- Allen, Charles. (1999).The Search for[Shangri-La](#): A Journey into Tibetan History. Little, Brown and Company. Reprint: Abacus, London. 2000.[ISBN 0-349-11142-1](#).

Tibet — Lhasa City

Lhasa is the capital city of Tibet and the second most populous city on the Tibetan Plateau.

At 3656 meters, this is where tourists stop for acclimatization. The east side of the city is completely traditional whereas the west side is busy with shopping malls and high-rise residential condos.

The name Lhasa translates to 'place of the Gods' which seems most suitable seeing as it is one of the highest cities in the world and known for its culturally significant Tibetan Buddhist sites such as Jokhang Temple and Potala Palace.



Tibet elders with the ringing bells. They rotate anti-clockwise while walking on the streets or going around the temple complex. The apron women wear signifies their marital status.

Jokhang Temple is the holiest site in Tibetan Buddhism, attracting crowds of prostrating Tibetan pilgrims and curious foreign tourists every day. It is where all ceremonies of initiation for the Dalai Lama and Panchen Lamas are hosted. It is also where the annual Great Prayer Festival is held. The temple has been regularly expanded over the years; however, the core of the temple is still original from the 7th century.

It's interesting to watch Tibet's men and women doing parikrama around the temples with their symbolic hand bells. There are devotees who prostrate flat along the pathways of the temple area, similar to people rolling their bodies in Hindu temples in South India. Our guide showed how Tibet women wear their apron which is also an indicator to say whether they are married or not.



A ardent devotee prostrating along the entire perimeter of the temple complex. He gets up and then slides into prostrating position

Scenic pictures in Tibet



Fresh water lake picture

It's most important to note that there are no fancy resorts on the sides, no flashing bill boards and not even any houses or camp sites.



Majestic Brahmaputra river flows all along the roads into Kailash travel

During the entire journey the river crosses your highway in multiple cities. You can hear the water flowing at high speed and also make some erosions along the way. There are lot of construction on building new bridges on the existing roads.



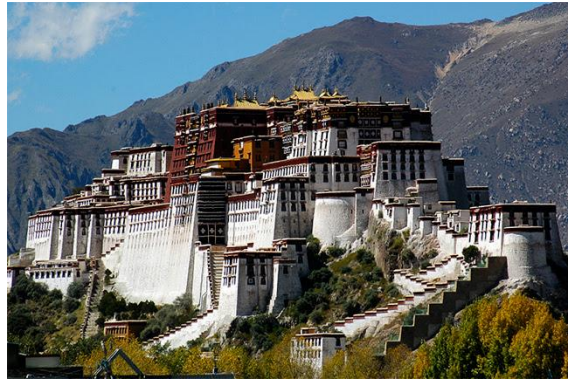
Snow capped mountains on our rest stops.



Singing bowls(also known asTibetan Singing Bowls,rin gongs,Himalayan bowlsorsuzu gongs) are a type ofbells, specifically classified as a standing bell. Rather than hanging inverted or attached to a handle, singing bowls sit with the bottom surface resting, and the rim vibrates to produce sound characterized by a fundamental frequency and usually two audible harmonic overtones (second and third harmonic).

Singing bowls are used worldwide for meditation, music, relaxation, and personal well-being. Singing bowls were historically made throughout Asia, especially Nepal, China and Japan. They are closely related to decorative bells made along the Silk Road from the Near East to Western Asia. Today they are made in Nepal, India, Japan, China and Korea.

Tibet — Potala Palace



The first major stop is Lhasa city in Tibet. If you have non-Indian passport you are allowed to visit this place. This is not just a palace! This is the revered place of Dalai Lamas from many centuries. Tourists flock this place with butter lamps and flowers. The entire building consists of red colored section for administrative offices and white colored section for spiritual practices.

The steps in the palace are very narrow with lot of artifacts in every place. Surely this is not a picnic spot but to revisit the journey of the past monks and their life styles.

Early legends tell of a sacred cave on this rocky hill considered to be the dwelling place of the Bodhisattva (Avilokiteshvara).

Built in 637, the Potala Palace stood until the seventeenth century, when it was incorporated into the foundations of the greater buildings we see today. Fortunately, all the chapels and their artifacts remain very well preserved at this time.



The Potala Palace was first and foremost the residence of the Dalai Lama and his large staff. In addition, it was the seat of Tibetan government, where all ceremonies of state were held; it housed a school for religious training of monks and administrators; and it was one of Tibet's major pilgrimage destinations because of the tombs of past Dalai Lamas.

The Potala palace's most venerated statue, the Arya Lokeshvara, known as "The Supreme God of Asia" is housed inside one of the two most famous chapels, the Phapka Lhakhang.

Potala place is a unique archeological and spiritual destination. On a normal day, thousands of tourists from all over the world pay their visit to this palace. Unesco has detailed description of the historic site and an except is given below to highlight the value of this destination.

“Enclosed within massive walls, gates and turrets built of rammed earth and stone the White and Red Palaces and ancillary buildings of the Potala Palace rise from Red Mountain in the centre of Lhasa Valley at an altitude of 3,700 metres. As the winter palace of the Dalai Lama from the 7th century CE the complex symbolizes Tibetan Buddhism and its central role in the traditional administration of Tibet. The White Palace contains the main ceremonial hall with the throne of the Dalai Lama, and his private rooms and audience hall are on the uppermost level. The palace contains 698 murals, almost 10,000 painted scrolls, numerous sculptures, carpets, canopies, curtains, porcelain, jade, and fine objects of gold and silver, as well as a large collection of sutras and important historical documents. To the west and higher up the mountain the Red Palace contains the gilded burial stupas of past Dalai Lamas. Further west is the private monastery of the Dalai Lama, the Namgyel Dratshang.

The Jokhang Temple Monastery was founded by the regime also in the 7th century, in order to promote the Buddhist religion. Covering 2.5ha in the centre of the old town of Lhasa, it comprises an entrance porch, courtyard and Buddhist hall surrounded by accommodation for monks and storehouses on all four sides. The buildings are constructed of wood and stone and are outstanding examples of the Tibetan Buddhist style, with influences from China, India, and Nepal. They house over 3,000 images of Buddha and other deities and historical figures along with many other treasures and manuscripts. Mural paintings depicting religious and historical scenes cover the walls.

Norbulingka, the Dalai Lama's former summer palace constructed in the 18th century, is located on the bank of the Lhasa River about 2km west of the Potala Palace in a lush green environment. It comprises a large garden with four palace complexes and a monastery as well as other halls, and pavilions all integrated into the garden layout to create an exceptional work of art covering 36ha. The property is closely linked with religious and political issues, having been a place for contemplation and for signing political agreements.

The Historic Ensemble of the Potala Palace, Jokhang Temple and Norbulingka embody the administrative, religious and symbolic functions of the Tibetan theocratic government through their location, layout and architecture. The beauty and originality of the architecture of these three sites, their rich ornamentation and harmonious integration in a striking landscape, contribute to their Outstanding Universal Value.”

- source: unesco.org. (<http://whc.unesco.org/en/list/707>)

You will need about four hours to tour the palace. The tour operators will know the crowd size for that day early in the morning (assume they need to purchase the tickets previous day). They will take you to one of the entrances or join the queue at some point. There are check points to verify your passport and palace entry tickets. The steps are narrow and made up of flat-bed rocks. You can use your shoes up to the palace entrance. Then you need to walk bare foot within the prayer complex and alleys that have Dalai Lama's artifacts. Some people pray where the current Dalai Lama lived and practiced his spiritual lifestyle. The entire Tibet is under Chinese control and there are army or police presence to avoid any liberation upsurge.

Tibet Cuisine

The Kailash Journey is a spiritual one. So sattvic vegetarian food is served along the travel days. Due to high altitude travel, it is preferred to avoid oily, spicy foods and relish fruits. To compensate the lack of oxygen in the air, the body will need more water and the Doctor in the tour will keep telling to complete the day's quota of water. Bottled water is provided in these tours.

So what is Sattvic diet?

Sattvic diet is a diet based on foods in Ayurveda and Yoga literature that contains sattva quality (guna). In this system of dietary classification, foods that harm the mind or body are considered *Tamasic*, while those that are neither positive or negative are considered *Rajasic*.

Sattvic diet is meant to include food and eating habit that is "pure, essential, natural, vital, energy-containing, clean, conscious, true, honest, wise".

Sattvic diet is a regimen that places emphasis on seasonal foods, fruits, dairy products, nuts, seeds, oils, ripe vegetables, legumes, whole grains, and non-meat based proteins.

Tibetan Cuisine

Tibetan cuisine includes the culinary traditions and practices of Tibet and its peoples, many of whom reside in India and Nepal. It reflects the Tibetan landscape of mountains and plateaus and includes influences from neighbors (including other countries India and Nepal). It is known for its use of noodles, goat, yak, mutton, dumplings, cheese (often from yak or goat milk), butter (also from animals adapted to the Tibetan climate) and soups.

Grain, traditionally mostly barley, is the staple food of Tibetans. Meat and dairy products are an indispensable addition. Rice is only cultivated in the lower regions situated in the south of Tibet and is imported mainly. Vegetables and fruits were eaten rarely in Central Tibet until quite recently, because their cultivation was very difficult. Nowadays it is possible to grow these crops due to the construction of greenhouses. Following the different vegetative conditions, the Tibetan cuisine has a big variety.

Tibetan crops must be able to grow at the high altitudes, although a few areas in Tibet are low enough to grow such crops as rice, oranges, bananas, and lemon. The most important crop in Tibet is barley. Flour milled from roasted barley,

called *tsampa*, is the staple food of Tibet, as well as *Sha Phaley* (meat and cabbage in bread). *Balep* is Tibetan bread eaten for breakfast and lunch. There are various other types of *balep* bread and fried pies. *Thukpa* is a dinner staple consisting of vegetables, meat, and noodles of various shapes in broth. Tibetan cuisine is traditionally served with bamboo chopsticks, in contrast to other Himalayan cuisines, which are eaten by hand. Small soup bowls are also used by Tibetans, and the rich are known to have used bowls of gold and silver.

Meat dishes are likely to be yak, goat, or mutton, often dried or cooked in a spicy stew with potatoes. Mustard seeds are cultivated in Tibet and therefore feature heavily in its cuisine. Yak yoghurt, butter, and cheese are frequently eaten, and well-prepared yoghurt is considered something of a prestige item. As well as consumed in Tibet, varieties of Tibetan dishes are consumed in Ladakh, Sikkim, Arunachal Pradesh and by the Tibetan diaspora in India, and various regions of northern Nepal, such as Mustang and others.

In larger Tibetan towns and cities many restaurants now serve Sichuan-style Han Chinese food. Western imports and fusion dishes, such as fried yak and chips, are also popular. Nevertheless, many small restaurants serving traditional Tibetan dishes persist in both cities and the countryside.

(source: wikipedia)



The major attraction along the travel during Tibet is the colorful flags on make-shift temples or along the monasteries.

The Tibetan word for prayer flag is Dar Cho. "Dar"- to increase life, fortune, health and wealth. "Cho"- all sentient beings.

It is said the mantras and powerful symbols displayed on prayer flags produce a spiritual vibration that is activated and carried by the wind across the countryside. They are simple devices that, coupled with the natural energy of the wind, quietly harmonize the environment.

The silent prayers are blessings spoken on the breath of nature. Just as a drop of water can permeate the ocean, prayers dissolved in the wind extend to fill all of space. According to Eastern medicine, health and harmony are produced through the balance of the 5 elements.

Generally there are 5 flags in 5 colors and each color corresponds to a primary element - earth, water, fire, air and space - the fundamental building blocks of both our physical bodies and of our environment.

Manasarover Lake



Lake Manasarover

Manasarovar is a mystical phenomenon, which is deeply connected to the human system. Roughly 20 km away from Kailash, and with a circumference of approx 90km (56 miles), it is situated at a height of 15,015 ft.

Manasarovar is believed to house the Kalpavriksha, the wish-fulfilling Divine Tree, and is considered to be the source of all Creation.

Lake Mansarovar lies at 4,600 meters (15015 feet) and is the world's highest fresh water lake, supporting countless species of fishes, birds and plants.

Lake Rakshastal, at a height of 4,292 meters, lies a short distance east of Mansarovar. In stark contrast, this is a salt water lake that supports few forms of life.

Through its fresh and calm water, Lake Mansarovar invokes a feeling of peace, while bareness and strong winds found at Lake Rakshastal create a feeling of harshness and turmoil. The former is situated towards east and latter to the west. In Tibetan art, the rising sun from east therefore results in pictorial representation of Mansarovar as Sun and that of Rakshastal as Moon. Interestingly, the aerial views of the two lakes are also in stark contrast. Mansarovar, with it's circular form, does indeed look like the Sun, while the semi-circular form of Rakshastal evokes the crescent moon." (see picture next page)

This calm and uninhabited lake can mislead you in many ways. Many people feel the cosmic energy and if you are lucky you can see the early morning Skyfall lights. This place prepares you to Kailash. People in the group now talking less and want to feel the nature. Again, there are many deeply personal feelings and varying emotions arise from this place. During the process, I felt immense heat on my left palm and the holy ash-water got dried very quickly. There were no burn marks at all on the palm.

There is no running water or electricity in the camp, but you stop complaining soon. You realize you were not checking emails or Facebook updates often but still the day went smooth and happy!

Manasarovar is known to the Tibetans as "The Unconquerable Lake" or "the invincible lake".

Since, this lake is considered as a Creation of Lord Brahma in his mind, the lake was named 'Manasarovar' - Manas meaning 'mind' and Sarovar meaning 'lake'.

Manasarovar has been a place of pilgrimage for thousands of years and is the source of four of the mightiest rivers in Asia.

East is the "Horse's Mouth" source of Yarlung Tsampo (Brahmaputra).

West is the "Elephant's Mouth" source of River Sutlej which eventually flows into the Arabian Sea.

South is the "Peacock's Mouth" source of River Tsangpo (or Karnali) which becomes River Ganges.

North is the "Lion's Mouth" source of River Senge Tsangpo



The highest source of fresh water in the world, this blue and emerald green lake is attributed with healing properties. According to Hindu mythology, Lake Manasarovar is a personification of purity, and any person who drinks this holy water will go to the abode of Lord Shiva after death.

Manasarovar is where Queen Maya is believed to have conceived Buddha, and it is said that the Devas descend to bathe in the lake between 3am and 5am, the time of the day known as Brahma Muhurta.

The Hindi poet Kalidasa once wrote that the waters of Lake Manasarovar are "like pearls" and that to drink them erases the "sins of a hundred lifetimes".

You can take a holy dip in the lake and pleasantly it is not that cold. If you step inside you will feel the cray ground with lots of lake-weeds. Just ensure you are not taking bath alone since the legs can be trapped easily into the clay soil. The colors on lake surface varies based on the day and we see emerald green with light blue color alternating among different levels. It's is more than a natural wonder and just watching the lake make you feel better.

Here comes some mystic stories..

There are enthralling stories associated with this lake – some Saints believe that 500 souls reside on this mountain and only when any one soul wishes for Moksha (liberation) is another soul allowed to reside in this hallowed area.

There is another equally fascinating account that the holiest of souls gather on this mountain on 3 occasions each year – Guru Purnima, Buddha Purnima and Kartik Purnima (religious calendar days).

Short of any vegetation and embedded deep under layers of snow, its grandeur and gravitas is felt by all who visit its slopes.

People who halt a night at Lake Mansarovar have seen two lamp like lights following each other in the dark sky. These are white lights which are like dots but clearly visible to human eye and are also always in movement. Sometimes the firmament over the Lake is also illuminated by mysterious lights – people believe these lights belong to self-realized sages living at Kailash.

Early in the morning, during Brahma muhurat (like 4am local time), people living in tents have heard the splashing of the water of the Mansarovar. They have also heard the sounds of ornaments. There are stories that the Sapta Rishis or seven sages mentioned in Indian mythology come and bathe every morning at the Mansarovar Lake. You can search Youtube and watch some of the documentaries showing the showering lights in Lake Mansarovar.

Lake overview from higher elevation:



Picture courtesy: Hinduism. Hinduism - The Religion Facebook page

Lakes Mansarovar and Rakshatal are regarded as 'brightness and darkness' respectively. And, unlike the former one, Rakshatal has salty water and no presence of aquatic life- plants or fish.

MOUNT KAILASH



Kailash sits amongst a picturesque landscape in the mountains of the Nagri region of western Tibet. There is a small area inhabited by a few nomadic tribes, but the rest is mostly virgin landscape with no vegetation.

The mountain is described in the ancient texts as a fantastic "Pillar of Light", with its roots in the lowest hell and its peak touching the heavens.

The 13 km trekking from south end to west is a personal challenge to many but the reward is waiting for you! Many use porters to help their backpacks and ponies if you can't climb long distance. The waterfalls and scenic beauty along the trek are beautiful if you're able to grasp the little oxygen in the air. You blame yourself for the junk and unhealthy food intake, when you see Sherpas walking or running on the mountains fast!

Once you reach the Kailash base, you can take rest and complete the medical checks. You can climb little more to get the better view of the Mount Kailash. You will feel the inner peace in those places background filled with the hustling of water springs

The journey to Kailash has different perspective to different people. Some feel inner peace and new reality to life. Some feel the presence of divine power. Many feel being with the nature has many lessons for us.

Some groups do religious rituals near the camp by doing pooja with mantras. This is mostly like thanksgiving prayer for the opportunity given to human being to reach this altitude in good health and in sane (not insane) condition.

The camaraderie felt during the journey shows human nature is to help each other. People took care of other people, emptied their bag of snacks or medicines if required. I am sure there were inconveniences that make them angry but they not find any words express anger with selfless service shown by volunteers and tour handling Sherpas.

Personally, to be with nature and in the presence of mystic mountain is a blessing for this life time. Most of the time, the group members were in silence and that enabled to be in meditative mode. There are no Internet access and so no need to keep checking emails or Whatsapp status updates.

Travel notes:

There are different ways to reach Mount Kailash. I took the Kathmandu/Lhasa cities way from my travel group, sacredwalks.org. This is a two week journey starting from Kathmandu (Nepal) and returning back to Kathmandu. The typical schedule for the journey:

Day 1: Arrival at Kathmandu/Nepal. You can stay overnight at a decent hotel to get rest from the jet lag.

Day 2: Short two hour+ flight from Kathmandu to Lhasa in Tibet. The flight timing get changed often due to Chinese military drills in that region.

Day 3: Stay in Lhasa for acclimatization. You can also visit Potala place and other tourist spots in the city. It will be interesting to see the visible difference of old and new city.

Day 4: Drive to Shigatse. A long 10 hour bus journey with intermittent rest room stops and lunch stop. Here the rest room mean some road side spots! You can stay overnight at a hotel. Do not start to expect world class accommodations.

Day 5: Drive to Saga. This is another small city in Tibet. If the weather is good you can walk around the hotel areas. You will see and feel the altitude (not attitude) difference.

Day 6: Drive to Manasarovar lake. Long bus journey again, but the scenic beauty of the terrain make you feel relaxed and calm you down. You will stay overnight on the banks of the lake. Do not expect all-day electricity, running water/shower, Internet connection, etc. You are now in wilderness. Do not walk outside the camp alone or in the evenings.

Day 7: Stay at Manasarovar lake. Get ready to wake up around 4 am to see the light showers on the lake. See the article on the book on the lake.

Day 8: Trek to Kailash. You will do a short bus drive to a city on the base of the Kailash. From there the tour operators will arrange pony and/or Sherpa luggage handlers to carry the bag uphill. Get the oxygen canister to support your needs. A walking stick is also recommended to scale the elevation slowly. You can get the stick on the shops in that town. You will stay overnight after the trekking in the Kailash area.

Day 9: Stay at Kailash. Trek closer to the mountain.

Day 10: Trek back to the base and drive back to Manasarovar

Day 11: Drive back to Saga. Stay at the hotel overnight

Day 12: Drive back to Sigatse. Stay at the hotel overnight

Day 13: Drive to Lhasa. Stay at the hotel overnight

Day 14: Fly back to Kathmandu. Stay overnight at Kathmandu

Day 15: Departure from Kathmandu to your own home town.

High level region map



Travel guidelines:

You will leave your large suitcases in the base starting point, like Kathmandu. Tour Operators give large duffel bag so that these can be transported in vans all along the trip. You will not access to this bag during travel time, but will be given back on the overnight stays. Since the weather is mix of very warm daytime with rains and very cold in the nighttime, be prepared for health issues. Keep your medicines in your carry-on bag. In the duffel bag, keep clothes in plastic covers to avoid moisture or rains making them completely wet. You may have some opportunity to wash your clothes at certain overnight stays but don't count on it. Keep a minimum of 5 sets of inner wear clothes so that you're fresh every day. Again, do not expect to take showers once you're in Lake Manasarover or Kailash area (which is about five days).

Many of group members underestimated the weather impact on their bodies. Extremely fit people can get sick quickly due to changing weather pattern. You need a heavy jacket that can withstand rains and cold weather. Water resistant is the key word here. You don't want to get wet and get into related health issues. You need to cover your ears and nose with woolen piece of cloth to avoid moisture getting into lungs. Water resistant pant is also recommended. Take some bed sheet covers since you will be re-using the warm blankets in camps and you want to stay away from dust/dirt from them. Also you need to cover neck and chest from any surprise cold winds. Last but not the least, you need a water proof trekking shoes and don't expect your sneakers to help there! You will be constantly reminded to take your 'diamox' medications twice a day.

You will be converting some Chinese yuan currency at Kathmandu since you can't use credit card en-route. The tour operator will get Chinese group visa since you can't travel into China on religious trip on your own. Please ensure the passport pictures are recent and carry some extra passport size pictures. You can't check-in luggage in flights with lithium batteries but you can carry it on your handbags.

Frequently asked questions from first time traveler to Kailash:

When I decided to make this trip I had hundred of questions and could not get many answers to my satisfaction! Even when I met someone who just went there in another group could not answer my questions and/or not sure to communicate the details. So here are some of the popular questions

What's the age limit for this travel?

There is no age limit but you have to be healthy and able to produce the medical certificates required. In my group of 60 there were people from 21 to 75 years old.

What is the cost?

This depend on the tour organization and the sector they handle the travel. You can ask upfront all the cost involved (normally it's start/end from a common destination. The travel to that common point is your responsibility) and do comparison analysis. Talk to people who went before from the same organization. Some organization may cut corners to save cost but will result in bad arrangements

Can I just join the starting point on time?

Please plan to arrive a day early and even incur the additional hotel expenses. I have seen people having delayed flights and missing main luggage on the destination points. Most of the tour will NOT stop for your delays since there are so much travel coordination happening all the time.

Am I going around the entire part of Kailash?

No, you're trekking from South point to East, or assume like one sector of the circle. And you get down from the same path you went up. There are not enough resources to make the entire round trip on the Kailash mountain. And you are NOT climbing any rocks, but trekking in the uneven terrain. There is no snow on the ground during the peak travel season July/Aug/Sep time period.

What if I get sick?

Normally there are doctors in the group to guide you and they will bring key medications. If you get sick in key staying points, you may be asked to stay back there till the group completes the trip. They will pick you on their return. In emergency cases the organization hire vehicles to transport back to the starting destination.

What to shop?

Again, this is not a shopping trip. You can get Kailash water back home so keep some small plastic bottles or reuse the water bottles. You should not take water from Manasarovar lake. You will see Tibet merchants selling artifacts on outside the hotels. You can always buy clothes or things in Kathmandu (if that's your starting/ending destination)

So no shower? Really?

Yes, during the stay at Manasarover lake and in Kailash, there are no restrooms to take showers. You can wipe your body with warm water in your room shared by many people. There are make-shift pit toilets with short tents to handle your morning routines.

Can I bring my laptop?

There is no need to carry that around in your bag. There are wi-fi services in hotels you stop for overnight stays. You can use your phone to access Internet using wi-fi or make INTERNET based calls. There is no INTERNET in Lake Manasarovar and Kailash areas. Tour organization carry satellite based phones for emergencies.

Can I take pictures?

Sure, this is a natural terrain. Pictures are not allowed inside the Potala palace to keep the serenity of the place.

Picture yourself here!



There is nothing more motivating than visualize yourself in this location. My picture may not look pretty but I have to follow all the travel guidelines (water resistant boots, rain-proof pant/jacket, gloves, ears covered and sunglasses) but this helped to complete the journey without any worries.

Some of the group pictures from my tour team:

The bonding starts after a day and people open up to talking and sharing their thoughts. It's especially interesting to know their motivation to make this journey. From second day, people open up their carry-ons to share the snacks or fruits without worrying to keep it aside for themselves later. That's the power of the spiritual trips where you comprehend you're in God's hands and no need to worry about the next second in life!



About the Author:

Mathur (Matt) Ravikumar holds a bachelor of engineering degree and have done post-diploma work in management/accounting. He has worked in manufacturing and information technology field for more than three decades.

He had written business white papers, newspaper articles and published content in professional magazine 'Performance Advantage' by APICS (Association for Operations Management- with 30000 industry professionals).

He was a speech-writer to a company CEO and still love to hear great speeches. The acquired and published material content are available at his website. He frequently blogs at blogger website and also in Linked-in.

He is a regular meditator and trekked to Himalayas (Mount Kailash) towards a spiritual journey in 2016. He lives near San Francisco/California and can be reached by email, matravikumar@gmail.com

He does political cartooning on weekends and his works are available under these resources:

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