



COMMUNITY ACTION TREKS LTD

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Tel: 01111111111

Email: info@catreks.com Web: www.catreks.com



MOUNT KAILASH THE SACRED PEAK and the Saga Dawa Festival

Grade: Demanding



Note: This trip is graded demanding because of the consistently high altitude throughout.

Land-only duration: 22 days Kathmandu - Kathmandu

Trekking days: 3 days

Maximum altitude: 5636m

Minimum numbers: Requires just 4 participants to guarantee these departures at the advertised price.

Dates and prices: Please refer to note regarding dates on page 2. Our latest dates and prices list is available at www.catreks.com or from the CAT office.



Kailash (Marian Dreyfuss)



Hindus and Buddhists, the pyramid-shaped mountain and nearby Lake Manasarovar are believed to be the abode of Gods and are held in the highest esteem. The four major rivers of the Indian subcontinent all draw from the area, adding to the sanctity of the place. The clockwise walk around Kailash is a goal for Buddhists, whose saint Milarepa is reputed to have beaten a rival from the Bon religion to the summit, and in doing so, proved the superiority of Buddhism. The legends are many, but today no one is allowed to climb the mountain, so sacred is it held. The 53km circuit of Kailash takes three days with the crossing of the Drolma La Pass, though some pilgrims attempt it in a day. For many trekkers, encounters with pilgrims, as well as the incredible views of the mountain and its glaciers, make for an awe-inspiring experience.

On this holiday, we fly to Kathmandu and have a day to explore before continuing by air to Lhasa in Tibet. After two days of acclimatisation and sightseeing, including visits to the Jokhang Temple and Potala Palace, we set off on the overland journey across Tibet by Landcruiser. Stunning views of the great plateau and Himalaya ranged to the south are broken by a visit to the cultural enclave of Shigatse, traditionally the seat of the Panchen Lama, where we visit the Tashilhunpo monastery. At Gyantse the fort and splendid 14th century Kumbum chorten are further attractions along our route. Arriving at Manasarovar, we visit the sacred lake before setting off on the three day trek around Mt Kailash. After the trek we travel overland through the heart of the Himalaya, to descend to Nepal and the Kathmandu Valley, for the return flight to the UK. During the holiday we use a mix of accommodation with a few nights in hotels, but mostly we camp or stay in simple guesthouses.

As a culmination to your trip to Tibet's sacred mountain, we have lengthened this itinerary to take time to visit the Saga Dawa festival which takes place at Mount Kailash. The festival attracts pilgrims of many faiths, and you can expect a very special atmosphere here.

Dates for 2011:

In 2011 flights will operate from Kathmandu to Lhasa on Saturdays, Sundays, Tuesdays and Thursdays.

The flag-raising ceremony is due to take place on 15 June 2011.

Therefore this trek fits into the following timescale:

Day 1	Arrive Kathmandu	Thursday 2 June 2011
Day 3	Fly Kathmandu-Lhasa	Saturday 4 June 2011
Day 14	Flag raising ceremony	Wednesday 15 June 2011
Day 22	Depart Nepal	Thursday 23 June 2011

Whilst we expect that the trek will run as per the itinerary, participants should accept that there is a possibility of changes being necessary subject to local conditions.

In future years, the order of events may change to fit in with the date of the flag raising and the days of the week that flights operate between Kathmandu and Lhasa.

OUTLINE ITINERARY

Walking and journey times are approximate

Meals included are shown as **B**-Breakfast, **L**-Lunch, **D**-Dinner

Day 1 Arrive Kathmandu

Transfer to hotel and rest of the day free to explore. Our staff in Kathmandu will need your passport to apply for your Tibetan visa.

Day 2 Free in Kathmandu

A day at leisure to explore the fascinating city of temples and markets, or take an optional sightseeing tour to the Kathmandu Valley and city of Bhaktapur (this can be booked and paid for locally through our Nepal office). While you are exploring Kathmandu, our staff will obtain your Tibetan visa for you. **(B)**

Day 3 Fly Kathmandu to Lhasa

Transfer to Kathmandu airport for the morning flight to Gonggar Airport. The airport is about 50 miles from the city of Lhasa, a journey of around one hour and a half which gives a taste of the stark landscapes of Tibet. On arrival we check into the guesthouse, a short walk from the fabled Jokhang Temple. **(B)**

Day 4 Lhasa

We visit the Jokhang Temple, the most sacred in the land. First built by King Songsten Gampo in the 7th century, it retains spectacular works of traditional arts. From morning to night an astounding display of chanting and prostrating pilgrims revolves around Barkhor Bazaar, Lhasa's inner pilgrim circuit, which runs around the Jokhang and is lined with markets, shops and street vendors. Afternoon at leisure to rest and help acclimatise. **(B)**

Day 5 Potala Palace

Potala is the very hallmark of Lhasa, an extraordinary architectural achievement that sits atop a hill, overlooking the city. Potala is in itself almost a city. Its one thousand or more rooms contain ten thousand shrines and hundreds of thousands of statues. Built of mud, stone and timber, its walls are several metres thick to support up to 13 storeys. Surprisingly, no nails were used in the woodwork and all the building materials were brought in by donkey or carried, because the wheel had not yet reached 17th century Tibet. In the afternoon we take a ride in a traditional Tibetan coracle, a yak-hide boat on the Kichu River. **(B)**

Day 6 Drive Lhasa to Gyantse 6 / 8 hours drive

We set off on our overland journey by Land Cruiser, crossing the 4600m Kamba La Pass to stunning turquoise Yamdrok Lake. Following the lake shore we climb again to cross Karo La, site of the 1904 confrontation between the British invading force and the Tibetan army. Overnight in Gyantse. **(B)**

Day 7 Explore Gyantse, drive 2 hours to Shigatse

We spend the morning exploring the town, which is one of the most traditional in Tibet and was formerly a great centre for wool production. We visit the remains of the impressive fort, which are remarkably well preserved in spite of the British assault on it in 1904. Gyantse's other great attraction is its outsized chorten, the Kumbum, the pagoda of 100,000 images. We then continue by road for about 2 hours, to reach Shigatse, stopping en route at the Mongolian monastery of Shalu. Overnight in Shigatse. **(B)**

Day 8 Explore Shigatse, drive 3 hours to Lhatse

The morning is spent exploring Shigatse, the traditional seat of the Panchen Lama who is second in command to the Dalai Lama. Though the town is essentially Chinese in flavour, not so the stunning Tashilhunpo Monastery, which was once home to 4,000 monks. Dating from the 15th century, this vast complex of temples, halls courtyards and narrow alleys is itself almost a town. We then have a 3 hour drive to Lhatse, where we stay overnight. **(B)**

Day 9 Drive Lhatse to Saga 8 / 10 hours drive

We now embark on the long drive out west, starting with a river crossing by ferry. The dirt road, which is a fairly smooth ride, winds through sparsely inhabited hilly country. The skylines are huge and the views broad, stretching as far as the distant snow-capped Himalaya. Depending on our progress today, we may camp or overnight in a guesthouse. **(BD)**

Day 10 Drive Saga to Paryang 8 / 10 hours drive

The road deteriorates over today's long journey but we may be lucky and see some interesting wildlife. Wild Tibetan donkeys (kang), antelope or foxes can be spotted, along with eagles and vultures soaring overhead. We may also encounter nomadic encampments along the way, with flocks of sheep and herds of cattle. We will either camp or stay in a guesthouse. **(BLD)**

Day 11 Drive Paryang to Darchen 10 / 12 hours drive

The longest and roughest day on the road, but with some adventurous river crossings to make it more interesting. Towards evening we will be rewarded by our first glimpses of Kailash. Approaching the mountain we will pass many heaps of stones and prayer flags, left by previous pilgrims to the holy mountain. We end the day at Darchen, the jumping off point for treks around Mt Kailash, where we camp or stay in a guesthouse. **(BLD)**

Day 12 Lake Manasarovar and Darchen

Lying 30km to the south of Mt Kailash is Lake Manasarovar, the most revered of Tibet's lakes and a pilgrimage site for Hindus and Buddhists. Hindus, in particular, partake in a ritual bathe in the lake's turquoise waters to cleanse themselves of sin, while both Hindus, Buddhists and a few tourists embark on the 53km circuit around its shore. While our crew prepares for the trek around Kailash, we spend the day at Manasarovar, whose name translates as 'Lake conceived from the mind of God.' We visit Chiu Gompa, a monastery atop a conical outcrop of red rock, with stunning views of both Manasarovar and neighbouring Lake Rakash Tal, as well as the Himalayan range to the south. **(BLD)**

Day 13 Saga Dawa Festival

We will be at the festival in time to see the preparations before the big day tomorrow. Expect market stalls and handicrafts for sale, and an exciting pre-festival atmosphere. **(BLD)**

Day 14 Saga Dawa Festival

Today is the big day of the raising of the Saga Dawa flagpole with its new prayer flags. The local people believe that their prosperity is dependant upon the straightness of the flagpole once it has been raised. **(BLD)**

**Day 15 Trekking around Kailash
6 / 8 hours walking**

The 53km circuit of Kailash is one of the most sought-after pilgrimages in Asia. The 6714m high peak has achieved almost mythical status as the jewel-studded Meru, home of the gods in the great Hindu epics. Whatever your beliefs, the mountain does have special significance in that its four faces match the points of the compass. It also lies at the heart of the drainage system of four of the Indian subcontinent's great rivers, the Karnali, the Indus, the Sulej and the Brahmaputra. Buddhist and Hindu pilgrims walk around the mountain in a clockwise direction, while adherents of Bon the ancient Tibetan faith which pre-dates Buddhism, do a counter-clockwise circuit. For maximum benefit, the trip should be completed in one very long day, but we will be taking the more leisurely option of a three day circuit, which allows time to enjoy the incredible views along the way, and take in the special feeling of the place.

We set off with a train of yaks in tow, to carry the luggage and equipment. The first day's trek takes us from Darchen (4520m) along the south face of the mountain, marked by an impressive indentation and steep gully that scars the snow-capped summit. The trail is initially fairly level until we meet the valley that runs down Kailash's western side. Following the river we climb steadily, enjoying constantly changing views of Kailash as we approach the first camp at the monastery of Drira Phuk (4860m), with views of the mountain's precipitous north face. **(BLD)**

Day 16 Trekking at Kailash 8 / 9 hours walking

Even though the pilgrims may rush past effortlessly, it is very important to take today's climb over the 5636m high Drolma La Pass slowly. This is definitely our most challenging day and a real test of perseverance. A distraction along the way are the many sites of religious significance, including the footprint of Buddhist saint Milarepa, culminating in a prolific volume of prayer flags fluttering in the wind on the summit of the pass. Crossing over the pass, a steep descent leads past a small frozen lake and over various rockfalls to the valley. Following the river downstream, we reach the monastery at Zutulpuk (4760m), where saintly Milarepa competed with his rival of the Bon faith, to build a cave shelter, leaving his hand and head print in the roof. Guesthouse or camp. **(BLD)**

Day 17 Trekking at Kailash 3 / 4 hours walking

The last day of the trek is easier and fairly level for the walk back to Darchen to complete the Kailash circuit. We camp at the Saga Dawa festival site. **(BLD)**

Day 18 Drive to Paryang

We backtrack our journey to Paryang, but remember that a journey is never the same in reverse. **(BLD)**

Day 19 Paryang to Saga

Another day of travelling back as far as Saga. **(BLD)**

Day 20 Saga to Zhangmu via Paikutso Lake

Now covering new ground, we cut south to join the main road to the Nepalese border. The road is likely to be very rough, but the views stunning by way of compensation. Leaving Saga we cross the river by ferry, heading through hill country where we may come across numerous nomadic encampments as we approach the jewel-like Lake Paikutso. There may be breathtaking views of Shishapangma before we join the main Lhasa to Kathmandu 'highway'. Over the 5124m Lalung La and 5200m Yakrushong La we get further dramatic views, our last as from here we descend abruptly to Nyalam.

Most obvious is the change in vegetation as we move from cold desert to sub-tropical rainforest on the approach to the border. **(BLD)**

Day 21 Drive to Kathmandu

Leaving Tibet, we embark on the last stage of our epic journey for the hopefully relatively smooth ride to Kathmandu. Overnight in a comfortable hotel. **(B)**

Day 22 Depart Nepal

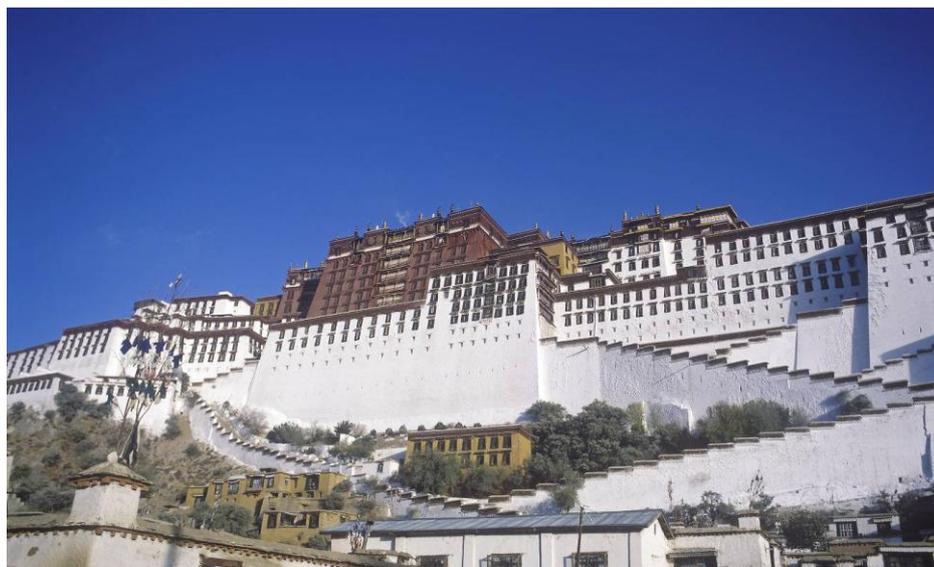
Today is free in Kathmandu until it is time for your transfer to Kathmandu Airport for your international flight. Extra nights in Kathmandu, or extensions in Nepal can be arranged for you. Please refer to our Himalayan Extensions itinerary for details. **(B)**

• Land-only prices:

The cost of international flights are less predictable than they used to be. Airlines now request full payment upfront. As a result, we will quote you a land-only cost, and quote separately for the cheapest flights we can find at the time of your booking. We will, however, require full payment for the flights prior to booking them. If you prefer to search for alternative flights yourself, we can sell you the trek at the land-only price.

• Important note – minimum numbers:

Before booking flights, please note that this trip requires a minimum of 4 trekkers before we can guarantee the departure at the advertised price. Please note that should you decide to book your own flights, it is essential that you check with the Community Action Treks office to ensure that the departure is guaranteed before committing financially to any flights or travel arrangements.

**The Price Includes:**

- 3 nights hotel accommodation in Kathmandu in rooms with shower/wc and inclusive of breakfast
- Flight and departure taxes between Kathmandu and Lhasa
- Airport transfers in Kathmandu and Lhasa
- Participation in escorted tour, as per outline itinerary, inclusive of transportation, a mix of guesthouse and tented accommodation, all meals in Tibet, trek with camping equipment and yaks/porters, entrance fees
- Services of an English speaking guide
- Oxygen cylinders are part of our emergency equipment in Tibet
- Accommodation on a Bed & Breakfast basis on the journey to / from Kailash.
- All meals whilst on camp from dinner on day 9 to dinner on day 20 inclusive. Meals included are shown in the itinerary above.

Not Included:

- Multiple entry visa for Nepal – see “Preparing for your trek” for latest visa prices
- Tibetan Visa – our agent in Kathmandu will need to take your passport to the embassy to obtain the Tibetan visa for you during days 1 and 2 of the trip. Please see the dates and prices list for current visa prices.
- Lunches and dinners that are shown included in the itinerary above
- Travel insurance
- Charges for photography in monasteries etc
- Tips
- Items of a personal nature such as drinks, laundry, telephone calls and souvenirs.

Options:

- Single rooms can be booked if requested in Kathmandu and Lhasa – see the dates and prices list for details of this single supplement. Single accommodation en-route to Kailash is subject to local availability, and is payable locally. It is not included in this single supplement price.
- Extra nights are available in Kathmandu in our group hotel, and in Pokhara in our choice of accommodation.
- Extension packages can also be organized in Nepal, Tibet or Bhutan. Please refer to our Himalayan extensions dossier for more details. Extensions should be arranged to booking international flights.