

Kailash Pilgrimage 2012

Including Saga Dawa in Lhasa



Tibet is a unique place, visually stunning and spiritually deep. A pilgrimage to Mount Kailash is the ultimate spiritual experience not just to Buddhist, Hindus, Jains and Bonpos but all children of Mother Earth. The kora (or devotional circumambulation) of Mount Kailash forms the main part of this journey however we will also explore many of the major religious and cultural sites of Central and Western Tibet spending five days in Lhasa and visiting monasteries and sacred sites on the way to Kailash. The kora of Kailash and travelling on the Tibetan plateau for the first time is both a liberating and taxing experience emotionally, physically and spiritually. To cater for varied needs and fitness levels, we also have tents, yaks, excellent guides and cooks and provide high standard four wheel drive vehicles and the best drivers to transport the group. And for the kora itself we take a gentle five-day kora allowing for a smoother experience and more time for devotional practice and appreciation of the mountain.

1 June- 22 June 2012

\$AUS4450 (excluding flights to Chengdu, China)

Maximum group size 12

ITINERARY

DAY 1, 1 June, Arrive Chengdu, China

Group meeting and orientation before we venture into Tibet.

DAY 2, 2 June, Tour of Leshan Buddha and orientation

After a leisurely breakfast we take a trip to the seated Leshan giant Buddha, carved out of a cliff face that lies at the confluence of the Minjiang, Dadu and Qingyi rivers. In the afternoon there will be an orientation for our journey ahead to the Tibetan plateau and Mount Kailash.

DAY 3, 3 June, Fly to Lhasa

Today we arrive in the holy city of Lhasa on the roof of the world at 3600 – 3800 metres above sea level. From my experience the body adjusts amazingly to altitude change as long as it is given sufficient opportunity through complete rest. Despite the desire to rush out and see the sights of Lhasa we will spend most of the day resting sipping hot drinks, taking room service and best of all sleeping, in order to allow the ultimate wisdom of our bodies to adjust to the climate so we are rested and ready to take part in Saga Dawa tomorrow.



DAY 4, 4 June, Jokhang SAGA DAWA (Full Moon)

Today we visit the holiest of shrines in Tibet, the Jokhang, the main temple of Lhasa and Tibet, receiving the blessings of Jowo Rinpoche, the oldest and most revered statue or Buddha image in the Land of Snows. Afterwards we can take a stroll around the Barkhor. Please note as part of the acclimatization process, we will take a leisurely pace allowing for a deeper connection with the places we visit and for our bodies to adjust to life on the Tibetan Plateau. It is recommended that you pay close attention to your body's messages during the acclimatization process and if required, spend an afternoon or morning in bed for optimum adjustment prior to the Kailash Pilgrimage. In the afternoon we will visit Sera, the second of the three major Monasteries of Lhasa, where we will witness the spectacle of the monks' energetic debating.



DAY 5, 5 June, Potala Palace and Drepung Monastery

In the morning we climb the steps up to the Potala Palace, which acted as a castle, monastery, seat of government, cathedral and parliament all rolled into one. We will spend the morning exploring the home and seat of power of the Dalai Lama's, soaking up the blessings that seep from the walls and the many relics held within. An afternoon drive will take us to the outskirts of Lhasa and Drepung Monastery, nestled on the side of a mountain with excellent views of Lhasa. Once one of Tibet's largest monasteries with about 20,000 monks, Drepung now is home to around 200 who struggle with the upkeep of the old stone buildings. If our timing is right we may have the opportunity to sit with the monks in the great hall for the daily chanting.

DAY 6, 6 June, Shigatse via Yamdrok Lake and Gyantse

Roads West of Lhasa to Kaiash, have improved dramatically in recent years and our journey will be much smoother than in past years. Our first day of driving (in luxury 4WD vehicles) will take us to Shigatse via Yamdrok Lake and Gyantse with its incredible 1000 roomed tantric stupa.



DAY 7, 7 June, Tashilunpo Monastery and drive to Lhatse

At Shigatse we visit Tashilunpo Monastery, the seat of the Panchen Lama, traditionally the most important Gelupa Monastery in Tibet outside of Lhasa best known for the large gilded Maitreya statue. From Shigatse we will continue West via Sakya Monastery the traditional seat of His Holiness Sakya Trizen. The drive takes us beautiful high altitude scenery, taking the day very restfully, keeping warm and well hydrated as we inch our way closer to Kailash. We will be staying in simple Tibetan tea houses from here on which will be a wonderful experience and opportunity for us to connect with local Tibetans.

DAY 8, 8 June, Lhatse to Saga

A full day of driving through sweeping mountain vistas, stopping to sit among yak and nomads.

DAY 9, 9 June, Sagsa to Paryang

More beautiful high altitude desert scenery.

DAY 10, 10 June, Paryang to Darchen (foot of Mount Kailash)

This is an exciting day's journey. Before we actually view Kailash we pass Lake Manasarovar, for many the most sacred lake in Tibet. In terms of sacred sites it is the feminine counterpart to Mount Kailash and in terms of geology, the water that runs off Mount Kailash enters into the basin of this lake and then forms the three great rivers of Asia. Although the summit of Kailash is approximately 7000m, and we are driving along the plateau at about 4300m, Mount Kailash remains out of view until we come to a place just past Manasarovar where weather and gods permitting we will view the mountain in all its glory. We can place khatas and prostrate to receive the mountain's blessing and honour this most sacred of sites. Then we will journey a short way to Darchen at the foot of Mount Kailash.

DAY 11, 11 June, Darchen and start of Kora

Before we commence our kora we will visit Gyendrak Monastery a short drive away. The kora we are completing is the 53 km outer kora. Once you have completed 12 outer koras, you qualify to enter the inner kora. Gyendrak Monastery is situated right at the foot of Kailash, and close to the inner kora. We are doing a slower than usual kora with a full day at the North Face allowing the opportunity for rest, exploration and devotional practice. We also take two days rather than one to reach the north face, allowing plenty of time to visit sites of interest along the way and perform ceremonial rites at each place. A kora of Kailash is considered by Tibetans a spiritual rite of passage where you die to the old self and are reborn to the new self having cleared a lifetime's worth of karma. One thing is for certain that whether it is the power of place that is determined by geomancy, and the enormous crystal that is Kailash or whether it is the spiritual beings who gather there, a kora of Kailash has a profound effect for cleansing and clearing the mind. It is like a diamond cutting through the layers of beliefs and misconceptions. We will sleep half way to the North Face.



DAY 12, 12 June, Kailash kora *(see itinerary below for people not walking the kora)

Communing with this beautiful place we will continue with our kora with the opportunity to visit caves and gompas along the path heading to the North Face. Many famous Buddhist masters have visited and meditated in these caves, it is even said that Shakyamuni Buddha flew there taking many of his disciples with him.

DAY 13, 13 June, Kailash kora, exploring the North Face

Today is a rest day at the North Face. Throughout the kora we walk through a valley and inside the inner ring of the valley is Mount Kailash. For most of the time Kailash is shielded by snow but at the North Face there is a small break in the valley and you can clamber over rocks and actually touch the crystal face of the mountain. There is also a small monastery there where many masters have stayed and received enlightenment. This is one of the most powerful places for you to gather and transmit merit. So we will have time for people to perform their spiritual practices and soak up the power of this place and also rest up for what will be for most people one of the most arduous emotional, spiritual and physical exertions of their life, in going through the pass tomorrow. Whilst a degree of physical fitness is required, from my experience the ease and grace for people performing and completing the kora depends to a large extent on their peace of mind and heart.

DAY 14, 14 June, Kailash kora

You can't really say this is a big day because the whole kora and pilgrimage is incredible, but this is the apex of the journey, the pass is about 5400metres though having said that we'd have spent most of the past ten days at around 4000 and above so our lungs will be well accustomed to the rarefied air. We cross a mountain stream that at this time of the year will probably no longer be frozen so we're hopping from rock to rock with the assistance of our guides and sherpas and then we go up into some of the most amazing scenery in the world with rock faces carved like a natural temple. We rest at the high pass Droma-La, before descending through the point of rebirth. It's a steep descent and the release of mental and emotional baggage is palpable. Some people feel euphoria.

This is the more shaded side of the mountain and we walk along a river for several kilometres where we reach our campsite possibly as dark is descending to be welcomed by our guides and porters with a hot drink and probably the best night's sleep of your life. Today is full moon and we will harness the power of the full moon and celebrate our journey.

DAY 15, 15 June, Kailash kora

Today is the shortest walk of the kora, but it's still several hours and we pass a very significant place where Milarepa, the most famous Tibetan yogi, meditated for many years around Kailash and purified his karma gaining enlightenment here. At this place he had a spiritual battle with a Bon practitioner in which he was victorious which allowed Buddhism to gain complete ascendancy in Tibet over the previously dominant Bon tradition which was an animistic religion. There is a small monastery where this event took place. A few kilometers walk after this is Darchen and the completion of the kora. From Darchen we will head by jeep to the hot springs of Chiu Gompa on the shores of Lake Manasarovar where there will be the opportunity to bathe in the springs. We will spend two nights on the shores of this lake, an incredibly soothing, nurturing and healing place to be after the exertion of our kora.



DAY 16, 16 June, Lake Manasarovar

Rest day on the shores of this peaceful and powerful lake, soaking up the nurturing energy of the lake. We will drive a kora of the lake, a 105km circuit, visiting Gosul, Seralung and Chiu Gompas.

DAY 17, 17 June, Lake Manasarovar to Saga

We re-trace our path back to Lhasa with perhaps a physical tiredness but a real lightness of being.

DAY 18, 18 June, Saga to Shigatse

DAY 19, 19 June, Shigatse to Lhasa

Tonight we will share a celebration meal and our experiences before our final night in Tibet.

DAY 20, 20 June, Fly to Chengdu

One of the most scenic flights in the world from the 3rd pole of the planet over incredible mountains to the lowland of Chengdu.

DAY 21, 21 June, Fly back home

***ITINERARY FOR PEOPLE NOT WALKING AT KAILASH**

The kora of Mount Kailash is a tough walk and requires a certain level of fitness. Over the past few years a four wheel drive track has opened from Darchen to the North Face which allows those unable to walk to share in the majesty and power of Mount Kailash. For those not walking the kora the itinerary will differ from the above for the following days:

11 June --- In the morning visit Gompas, with main group afternoon free time around Darchen staying the night at Mentsalkhang (Tibetan Medical Centre and University)

12 June --- Drive by 4wd jeep through spectacular scenery to the North Face (providing permission granted) and meet the group.

13 June --- Rest day at the North Face with the group

14 June --- Drive back to Mentsalkhang, visit Gompas and enjoy Mount Kailash under the magical full moon

15 June --- Rest in morning ... drive to Manasarovar with the group

NOTES

The tour is ex Chengdu, based on twin share, excluding some meals, guide and porter tips and temple offerings.

The nature of the journey requires flexibility and the itinerary may be subject to change prior to commencing or whilst on the road.

All tour members are required to have a medical check up on enrolling for the tour and provide Transformational Tours with a doctors letter to confirm they are fit to travel and trek at altitude.

Itinerary subject to change, in the case that travel to TAR not possible an alternate pilgrimage will be offered.