

Saga Dawa Festival Tour to Mt. Kailash with Roger & special guest Tom Riddle



This is my favorite time of the year to visit the sacred mountain and this tour has been designed for people who, like me, like nature and pure outdoor experiences. In the early summer season, the natural setting will be almost untouched and most of the people walking around the mountain will be Tibetan pilgrims. The weather will be good with blue skies and reasonably moderate warm temperatures. **Saga Dawa** is the Tibetan Buddhist lent and celebrates, with merit-making ceremonies, the day of the Buddha's birth, enlightenment, and death which occurs on the full moon of the fourth lunar month which in 2021 falls in May. Traditionally it is believed that during this month one circumambulation of the mountain generates 100 thousand times more merit than at other times of the year, a belief that naturally brings more pilgrims than usual to the sacred mountain at this time of year. Fortunately for us, by slipping in and out at just the right times, we will be able to enjoy the festival while still having the mountain more or less to ourselves.

Holy Mount Kailash, the most sacred mountain in the Tibetan Buddhist world, is considered by many to be the centre of the universe and the crown of our planet.

Uncannily symmetrical, this remote and remarkable peak is located in the far west of Tibet, 1200 km from Lhasa. Mt. Kailash (6714m) is not only geographically one of the most important mountains in Asia, it is also the source of four major rivers, the Indus, Sutlej, Karnali, and Tsang Po which nourish Asia with their mountain waters. In Sanskrit, Kailash means 'luminous crystal'. Hindus believe Mt. Kailash to be the abode of Lord Shiva and his wife Parvati. For Hindus, to make the pilgrimage to Kailash and have the darshan (divine view) of Shiva's abode is to attain release from the clutches of ignorance and delusion. Tibetan Buddhists call the mountain Kang Rinpoche, the 'Jewel of Snow', and regard it as the body mandala of Korlo Demchog and his consort, Dorje Phagmo (Chakrasambhava and

Vajravarahi). To both the Tibetan and Indian people, a pilgrimage to this sacred and magical landscape is the most precious pilgrimage they can make and is a journey they hope to experience at least once in a lifetime.



Overview

Participants can fly to Lhasa Tibet, from Chengdu, China. To do this they obtain a Chinese visa before leaving their home country and then spend one night in Chengdu (Fastest way!). However, people may find it easier to fly to Lhasa from Kathmandu and let Roger, in four

days, do all the visa work for Tibet for them. This visa, a “group-visa” costs (USA 198\$/Europe 114\$.)

Either way, we will all meet in Lhasa, Tibet, to begin our gradual acclimatization to the altitude, the culture, and to each other.

In Lhasa, we will rest and acclimatize and walk to carefully selected sites that will support both our inner and outer journeys. From Lhasa, we will travel slowly in a comfortable bus through central Tibet with many stops at the sights along the way as we pass through some of the most breathtaking scenery on earth before arriving in Darchen, the village at the base of Mt Kailash. We will spend the next five nights in the Mt Kailash area. Before the kora (circumambulation), in the same area, we will visit Lake Manasarovar, where there are hot springs and the ancient Chiu Monastery. The next day we will begin the core of this journey: an unhurried four-day walk around (kora) Mt. Kailash. Our return overland journey to Kathmandu will include a visit to the cave where the great Tibetan saint Milarepa reached his enlightenment.

Throughout everything, we will have time to enjoy the silence, the nature, the panoramic views that are unequaled anywhere on earth as well as, of course, each other.

“Where Mount Kailash is considered the father-mountain, the active principle of skillful means, Lake Manasarovar is the mother-lake, the principle of transcendent reality.”

J. Snelling – The Sacred Mountain

Expedition of Inner Purification



All trips to Mt. Kailash have an *expedition nature* about them and this particular expedition, more than any other tour, holds a deep sense of Nature. Our journey, through vast open spaces, is likely to catalyse a variety of deep personal inner reflections and experiences. Not all of it will be easy. Long drives and simple accommodation will require a lot of patience, tolerance, and a continual letting go of expectations. The rewards, however, will make it all worthwhile. We will see some of the most untouched and beautiful landscape on earth as well as visit some of the most auspicious locations on the planet. With open hearts, we are also likely to meet many genuinely kind and considerate people.

This special tour has been organized in such a way that the effort of making all arrangements for transport, accommodation, and administrative arrangements have been taken care of for you which gives you more personal time to simply relax into the moment and enjoy the journey. You can expect to see all the most important sights along the way, while you are taken care of by professionals: your tour leader “Roger”, the Tibetan guide, our driver. For this trip only we have a special guest—fellow traveller Tom Riddle.

Fellow traveler: We will be joined by an old friend, whom I met at a Buddhist meditation retreat in India more than 15 years ago, Tom Riddle. This will be Tom’s fourth trip with me to the sacred mountain. After his third trip, he made a YouTube movie, [Mt Kailash and the Walk around the Sacred Mountain](#) that has become quite popular. Tom will be joining us as a fellow traveler and invited guest. He has no responsibility on the trip other than what moral support and encouragement he cares to give us. If you have questions about the trip, please direct them to me rather than to Tom.

Tour Leader:

I was born in Switzerland in 1960, but since 1995 I've been based in Boudhanath, which is just outside of Kathmandu in Nepal. During this time, I have owned and operated Snow Jewel, which leads expeditions to remote locations in Nepal and Tibet. In 1995 I started working as a volunteer for a British non-profit charity, ROKPA Nepal (<https://www.rokpa.org/en/what-we-do/nepal.html>).



ROKPA runs many projects around Kathmandu including a restaurant and guesthouse. I have practiced extensively in both the Tibetan and Theravada Buddhist traditions, completing annual meditation retreats in Thailand at Wat Ram Poeng and in India at Bodh Gaya and Sarnath with Christopher Titmuss. In Nepal, I spent two years in study at Ka-Nying Shedrup Ling, the official seat of the very venerable Chokyi Nyima Rinpoche, and I have studied

at Pullahari Monastery under the guidance of Khenpo Tsultrim Gyatso Rinpoche.

I made my first trip or kora around Mt. Kailash in 1996 and since then I have made over 100 “koras” around the sacred mountain and 14 around Lake Manasarovar.

Corona: We assume that the necessary vaccinations will be a prerequisite for entry into Tibet in the Corona era. Please have a vaccination certificate with you or the Corona vaccination app on your mobile phone. We will inform you about the further developments that arise in the course of the year for the entry conditions and stay.

Group Size: Minimum 7, maximum 16 people.

Duration: 18 days (+ 5-6 days in KTM and 1 day in Lhasa if one is coming from Kathmandu). This itinerary has been prepared so that those who wish to can begin their journey from Chengdu, China while others can begin in Kathmandu, Tibet.

Price: 21'900 CNY /US\$ 3400 / Euro 2800, additionally, the final cost will include the flight into Lhasa. Coming from Kathmandu that flight is 250-350 Euro; the flight into Tibet from Chengdu is about 360 Euro, which includes airport transfers and a one-night stay in a hotel in Chengdu.

Included:

Transfer and Flights from KTM (Kathmandu) or CTU (Chengdu) to Lhasa one-way.

In Tibet, the transfer from the airport to our hotel, and transportation costs (all in a private bus) from that point onward. All entrance fees to monasteries, all permits and road tolls in Tibet; western guide, local guide, driver; and all accommodation: hotel in Lhasa x 4, Samye x 2, Gyantse x 1, Sakya x1, and Saga x 2; plus, all other accommodation which includes the simple pilgrim guest houses during the four-day walk around Mt Kailash.

Excluded: Visa fee for Tibet; visa for Nepal. In Nepal; hotel, transfers, and other costs. In Tibet expenses not covered include: food and drink; porter, horse and horse driver for personal ride; cost for visa should you split from the group visa in case of an emergency; cost for public shower or bath in hot springs; personal expenses; insurances and tips.

Of course we cannot determine or foresee your spending behaviour, however, most people find that they need 100-150 CNY ca. 15-20 Euro/ day to cover food and drink. A porter on the kora, for those who need one, will cost extra 330 CNY / day (2019).

Note: Accommodation/activity Add-ons in Nepal: We will be pleased to organize airport pick up/transfer or hotel in Kathmandu if needed. If you would like us to book a room in a guest house of a monastery, the cost for a single is \$20 and a double is \$28. Airport transfers are \$10 per person. For Nepal programs, we can send you a variety of offers like the city tour.



Dates:

Participants entering Tibet from Chengdu

May 28: Arrive in Chengdu, airport pick up & transfer to hotel, where participants will be given their TTB (Tibetan Tourist Bureau) permit for Tibet and the ticket onward to Lhasa, this will be handled by my partner agency whom I have worked together with for 25 years.

May 29: Transfer to airport, fly to Lhasa, group briefing in the hotel in Lhasa

Participants entering Tibet from Kathmandu

May 25: Arrive in KTM to hand over the passport and visa form from 09 -17:00.

May 26-28: Visa process / unscheduled free time.

May 29: Transfer to airport, fly to Lhasa, group briefing in the hotel in Lhasa

All Participants

June 17th Earliest date to book flights to return home from Kathmandu.

Itinerary – Detailed

Day 1: Early morning transfer to the airport, for the flight to Lhasa. In Lhasa, our Tibetan guide will pick us up from Gonggar Airport and take us to the Hotel, located in the middle of the Tibetan old part of the city, just five minutes' walk from the Potala and the Jokhang Temple. Briefing for the trip.

Days 2-4: Lhasa – Sightseeing. We will explore Lhasa on foot and visit the heart of Tibet – the Jokhang Temple and the Potala Palace, the former home of the Dalai Lamas which is now a museum. We will also visit other less famous, but no less important, places like Lingkoher/ Barkhor and other temples.

Day 5: From Lhasa we will drive 2-3 hours towards Samye and visit Dorjee Drak Monastery on the way. Overnight in a simple pilgrim's hotel with a shower.



Day 6: Samye to Chimpu Caves and the first kora walk. Samye Monastery, the first Buddhist monastery built in Tibet, was constructed in the 770s by King Trisong Deutsen with the help of Guru Rinpoche in a mandala style that represents the Indian Cosmology. Above Samye Monastery, situated in a lush valley, are the Chimphu Caves. The caves have come to represent the enlightened speech of Guru Rinpoche for it was here that Guru Rinpoche gave the first Vajrayana teachings to his consort and closest students (altogether 25 disciples). The walk, up to the caves from the Samye Monastery, will be our first “kora” and will take about four leisurely hours. Overnight in hotel, double with shower.

Day 7: Samye to Gyantse. We will drive via Kambala Pass (4794m) along Yamdrok Tso (Scorpion Lake, 4488m) and Karo La pass (5045m) where we will see the Karola Glacier. Later in the day we will reach Gyantse. Overnight: hotel, double room with shower (280km, 7-8h).

Day 8: Gyantse to Sakya. At 9 AM we will visit the Gyantse Kumbum & monastery which holds very precious 14th-century clay statues posing with yoga mudras (postures). After we will drive through Shigatse to Sakya. Overnight: double room with shower. (241km, 6h).

Day 9: Sakya to Saga. In the morning we will visit the Sakya Monastery and then travel on to Saga passing through magnificent hilly landscape. (8h drive 460 Km). Overnight in simple pilgrims' guesthouse (public bath).

Day 10: Saga – Darchen (4'560m). 9-10h drive (540km). We will cross several high passes and enter the high desert of Western Tibet – with beautiful landscape from Paryang to Darchen. After crossing the Mayumla pass (5216m), we will drive along the shores of Gung Gyu Lake, before getting our first glimpse of holy Mount Kailash. We will stay in a guest house (public bath) at the foot of Mount Kailash.

Day 11: Day 1 of the Kailash kora. This is a medium trek (20km, 6-8h), slightly uphill. From the south, we reach Tarpoche, the so-called centre of the universe. Then, we pass Chuku monastery (those who have lots of energy can go for a short visit) and see the west face of Kailash. Our pilgrims' guest house, no shower, is just below the Dirapuk Monastery at 4900m with awesome views of Mt. Kailash's north face.

Day 12: Day 2 of the kora. Rest day at Mt. Kailash's north face for acclimatization. Those who would like to can visit the Dirapuk monastery (famous yogi Gyalwa Gotsangpa meditated there in a cave for a long time), make an excursion to the north face (2h), stroll into a side valley (1-2h) or simply enjoy Mt Kailash's power while relaxing in the guest house.

Day 13: Day 3 of the kora. This is the core of the kora and it is a somewhat difficult trek (19km, 8-10h), where we need the energy reserves built up from the day before. For the first 2-5h, we slowly, and patiently, ascend towards the Tara-Pass/Drölma-La (5630m), where Tibetans traditionally rest, share food, and offer prayer flags to the mountain. After a break, we steeply descend to the valley (1-2h) where there is a tea house. From there it is another two or three-hour walk to the simple guest house of the Zutulpuk Monastery (4790m).

Day 14: Day 4 of the kora. This day begins with a fairly easy (11km, 3-4h) half-days' slightly downhill walk back to Darchen where we will have lunch in a restaurant. After lunch, we will drive 30 km to Lake Manasarovar and overnight in a simple guest house with no bath. Public shower available in Darchen.

Day 15: Rest day to stroll around to look for stones around the lake and digest the mountain kora.



Day 16: This day is for mediation or excursion one can either relax and just enjoy the lake or for those whom feel to explore. They can drive to the Gosul gumpa and then walk back in 4 hours to the guest house.

Day 17: Early morning we drive back to Mt. Kailash / Tarpoche where the Saga Dawa festival is taking place. This usually last around 2-3 hours from 9 to 12 am! After that we let the crowds move to the kora and we will start our drive back to Saga to avoid the crowds. 8-9h 540km sleep in Hotel - long day. **This way we will have both a quiet kora and we participate in the festival.**



Figure 1: The Saga Dawa festival takes place at this spot about an hour's walk form Darchen. We will pass this spot early in our kora and visit again on Day 16.

Day 18: Saga to Kyirong/ Rasuwa 4h 160km. We drive over a high mountain pass (Zhongma) and descend the high desert and enter the green and lush vegetation. In Lower Kyirong/Rasuwa we leave the Tibetan crew, and cross the border, and change to new vehicles and continue the trip to Kalikasthan around 40km 3h. Overnight in small G.H.



Figure 2: Boudnanath Stupa, Kathmandu

General Information

Please Note

- We will not be responsible for extra costs incurred by landslides, road blockages, and other weather-related or political problems.
- You are responsible for your own health and health insurance. The itinerary has been designed to allow sufficient time for acclimatization.
- Accommodation will occasionally be in shared rooms (small dormitories). We assume your preparedness to share rooms with others, regardless of gender.
- We reserve the right to increase the tour price should the Euro in relation to the Chinese Yuan (RMB) depreciate significantly.

Visa and Passport Information

Chinese visa: Entry from mainland China, best from Chengdu; please tell me if you intend to come this way and I will send you details.

Visa Nepal: Entry from Nepal, Nepalese visa is best applied upon arrival in Kathmandu. You will need a passport photo. Upon arrival, you get a 30 day or 90-day multiple-entry visa valid from the date of entry. The visa costs US\$ 40 or US\$ 100, respectively.

Tibet Group Visa for those traveling from Nepal: One can only travel in Tibet with the so-called “Group visa.” Any other valid Chinese visa will be deleted by the Chinese Embassy staff in Kathmandu. We will obtain your Tibetan visa for you in Kathmandu. For this, we need one passport photo and a completed visa application form. Please download, print, and fill out the visa application form before you leave home, from here: <http://snowjewel.com/visalinks.html>. The visa costs US\$ 114 *in cash* which you need to give us when you deliver the above form and your passport to us on May 5. (US citizens must pay US\$ 198.)

Passport Validity: Minimum 6 months from date of entry.



May all beings be happy!