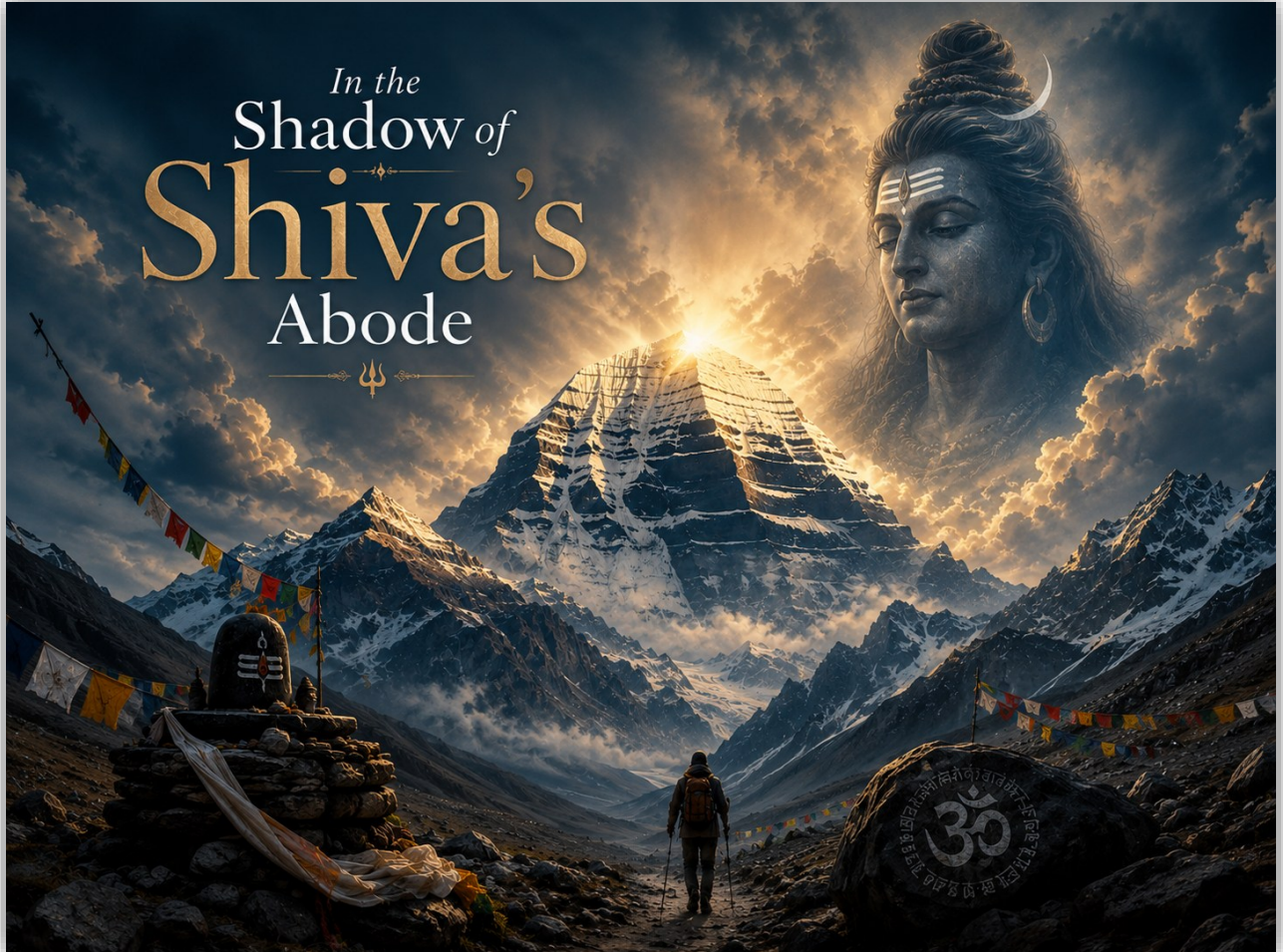


In the Shadow of Shiva's Abode

(With Yogi Trails N Transcendence, Emirates Tower, Pala Road, Ettumanoor, Kottayam)



Chapter 1: The Coimbatore Spark, March -2026

The idea for the ultimate pilgrimage wasn't born in a temple or a travel agency; it was born on the road to Coimbatore. Every great adventure has a turning point, and mine happened during routine road trip. My friend, VGK Iyer, and I were cruising down the highway, casually talking about travel and bucket lists. That is when he dropped a surprise: *"I've actually already booked my trip to Mount Kailas."*

The words hung in the air. This wasn't just a casual vacation; it was the ultimate 15-day, high-altitude pilgrimage via Kathmandu. He was ready to go, the dates were set, and a mix of excitement and FOMO (fear of missing out) hit me right there in the driver's seat. We didn't wait. Right from the highway, we pulled out a phone and he dialled the tour organizers.

"Is there any chance you have room for one more?" he asked.

The suspense lasted only a few seconds before the organizer confirmed the news: exactly one seat was still available. It felt like a direct sign from the universe. Right there on the road to Coimbatore, my spontaneous leap of faith began. I booked the slot, and my journey to the rooftop of the world was officially on.

They say you do not choose to visit Mount Kailas; you are called to it. Revered by billions across four major religions, this ultimate pilgrimage is far more than a physical trek. It is a journey of deep devotion, fierce endurance, and profound inner quiet. Stepping onto the dusty Tibetan trail for the gruelling 52-kilometer Circumambulation (Parikrama/ Kora) in the late May spring of 2026, I visualized the towering peak and knew this landscape would change me forever.

Critical Realities of the May–September Window & The Year of the Horse

- **Optimal Weather:** The late-May window offers some of the highest visibility of the year, providing pristine, unclouded views of golden face of Kailas before the summer monsoon clouds arrive.
- **The Physical Toll:** Crossing Dolma La Pass at over 18,500 feet requires peak respiratory health. Even with meticulous planning and support from experienced team guides, the combination of extreme altitude, cold mountain winds, and rugged terrain is a true test of physical endurance.
- **The Cosmic Multiplier:** 2026 is uniquely extraordinary because it is the

Tibetan Year of the Horse, an auspicious cosmic alignment that occurs only once every 12 years. Known across the Himalayas as the "Maha Kumbh of Kailas," a pilgrimage during this specific year is considered the ultimate spiritual milestone. Completing just one single Parikrama/Kora around Mount Kailas in the Year of the Horse yields the same spiritual rewards as walking the circuit 13 times during normal years

The Financial Blueprint: Budgeting Across Three Borders

1. The Core Infrastructure (Indian Rupees)

- **Amount: 1,15,000 INR**
- **Purpose:** Paid directly to the tour operators (Yogi Trails) in Indian Rupees before departure.
- **Coverage:** Kathmandu hotel stays, cross-border overland transport, and core agency organizing fees.

2. The Tibetan Plateau Allocation (US Dollars)

- **Amount: 1,800 USD**
- **Purpose:** Handed over specifically for the Tibetan side of the journey.
- **Coverage:** Mandatory collection required to clear strict Chinese military/civil permits, liaison officer fees, and accommodation on the high-altitude plateau.

3. The Trail Emergency Fund (Chinese Yuan)

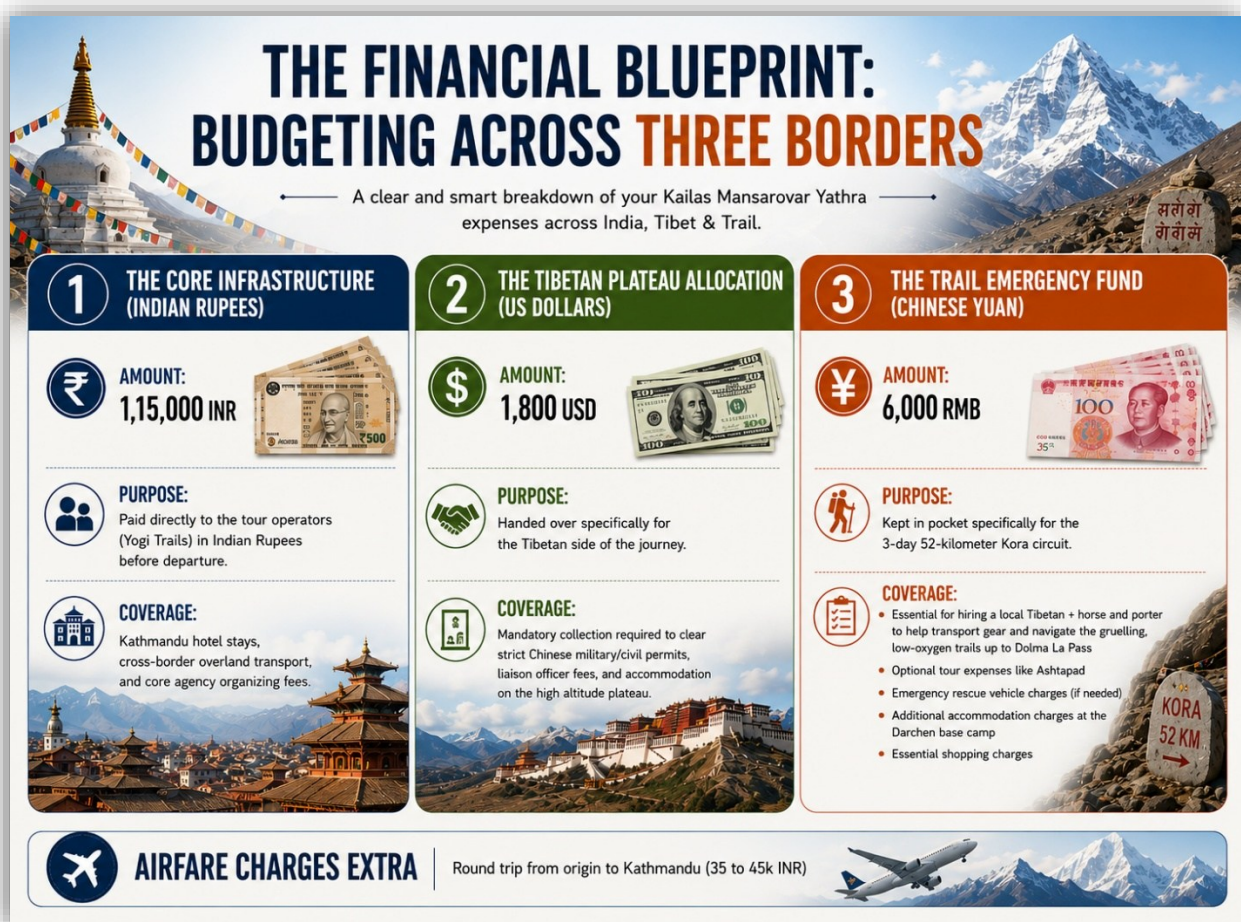
- **Amount: 6,000 RMB**
- **Purpose:** Kept in pocket specifically for the 3-day 52-kilometer

Kora circuit.

4. Coverage:

- Essential for hiring a local Tibetan + horse and porter to help transport gear and navigate the gruelling, low-oxygen trails up to Dolma La Pass
- Optional tour expenses like Ashtapad, Emergency rescue vehicle charges (if needed), additional accommodation charges at the Darchen base camp and essential shopping charges

Airfare charges extra round trip from origin to Kathmandu (35 to 45k INR)



The Financial Blueprint: Budgeting Across Three Borders

Chapter 2: Preparation

The Lhasa Gatekeepers:

The first official step was transferring the advance payment to Yogi Trails to secure our permits, accommodation, and transport slots. Once the funds cleared, the real paperwork marathon began. The tour team sent over a mountain of complex government applications requiring absolute precision. Professional histories, extensive travel backgrounds, recent health metrics, and emergency contacts—every detail had to be flawlessly accurate. A single typo could mean instant rejection by foreign border authorities.

Our dossiers were submitted to Lhasa for official approval from the **Tibet Tourism Bureau** (TTB), the ultimate gatekeepers of the plateau. For days, we lived in a state of suspended anxiety, constantly checking our phones. The first collective sigh of relief came when digital copies of our Group Visa approvals finally flashed on our WhatsApp group screen.

But that milestone led to the most nerve-wracking part of the logistics: parting with our physical passports. Because the Chinese Embassy in New Delhi handles all Tibet group visas for Indian travellers, we had to courier our original documents away. Handing over my passport felt like temporarily losing my identity. The wait was agonizing; we found ourselves constantly refreshing courier tracking screens, knowing our entire dream sat inside a government building in Delhi.

Virtual Training Grounds & Raw Realities:

With our documents out of our hands, our relationship with the tour operators moved completely online. Our living rooms were systematically transformed into virtual training grounds through a series of intensive Zoom briefings. These sessions became our spiritual and practical anchors. Mrs. Saritha Iyer guided us

through the Satsang sessions, helped us grounding our minds for the sacred journey ahead, Whilst Mrs. Asha Sreejith targeted instructional videos taught us the foundational breathing mechanics we would need to survive the thin air.

Logging into those calls with fellow pilgrims from across the country was an eye-opening experience. The operators didn't sugarcoat anything. They laid out the raw, unvarnished reality of the Tibetan plateau: the biting, sub-zero temperatures, the complete lack of luxury in rustic plateau stays, the uncompromising nature of Chinese border checkpoints, and the brutal physiological realities of extreme high altitude. Slide by slide, they walked us through the daily itinerary, focusing heavily on how to spot the early, subtle signs of Acute Mountain Sickness (AMS). Watching the grid of faces on my screen, I could see the exact same mix of nervous anticipation and quiet determination reflecting back at me.

Training the Lungs:

Critical takeaway from the briefings was a stark warning about lung capacity. At the summit of the Dolma La Pass (18,500 feet), every breath contains roughly half the oxygen molecules available at sea level. Your body cannot bargain with that reality; it has to adapt.

Thanks to the breathing exercises introduced by Asha Sreejith, my daily routine underwent a massive shift. I initiated a dedicated physical training regimen centered entirely around respiratory endurance. Every morning and evening began with focused Pranayama (deep yogic breathing techniques) paired with specific lung-expansion exercises. I practiced inhaling to maximum capacity, holding the breath to build oxygen efficiency, and exhaling with absolute control.

It initially felt incredibly strange to train for the world's most gruelling trek by sitting perfectly still on a floor mat. Yet, I practiced with a deep awareness that

these quiet, disciplined breaths would be my absolute lifeline on the steep, frozen slopes of the Dolma La Pass.

Chapter 3: The Verdict of the Treadmill & The Medical Ordeal

Trading Dreams for Stethoscopes

A journey to Mount Kailas is a massive puzzle built on four distinct pillars: meticulous planning, bureaucratic permits, gruelling physical training, and specialized packing.

Sourcing your gear is simply a matter of money, but passing the mandatory medical tests is a matter of pure survival. Yogi Trails maintained an uncompromising stance: without comprehensive medical clearance, nobody steps foot on the Tibetan plateau. The mountains do not forgive hidden health liabilities. Suddenly, my friend VGK Iyer and I found ourselves sitting inside a clinical diagnostics room, trading our expansive trekking dreams for the sterile reality of stethoscopes, electrodes, and syringes.

The Three Pillars of Medical Clearance

1. The Blood Panel: Setting the Biological Baseline

The process began with a comprehensive series of blood tests. The doctors checked everything from lipid profiles to liver and kidney functions. I paid closest attention to my haemoglobin levels—the absolute engine room for carrying scarce oxygen through the bloodstream when the air thins out. Watching those vials fill up, the gravity of the situation fully hit me: this was an elite expedition requiring a flawlessly functioning body.

2. The TMT (Treadmill Test): Testing the Heart Under Stress

Next came the most nerve-wracking phase: the Treadmill Test (TMT), a cardiac stress test. The medical technician hooked electrodes across my chest and told me

to start walking. Every few minutes, the automated system bumped up both the speed and the incline, mimicking a steep, continuous mountain climb.

My heart pounded furiously against my ribs, my lungs gasped for air, and my eyes stayed glued to the digital monitor tracking my real-time ECG rhythm. It was a brutal, simulated preview of the unrelenting incline up to the Dolma La Pass.

3. The PFT (Pulmonary Function Test): The High-Altitude Lung Check

Because altitude sickness and Pulmonary Edema are the ultimate threats at 18,500 feet, a thorough lung evaluation followed. I was instructed to blow with maximum force into a spirometer to measure my total lung capacity and exhalation efficiency. The physician cross-verified my blood pressure, listened intently to my chest for any underlying irregularities, and carefully evaluated how rapidly my heart rate recovered post-exertion.

The Stamped Certificate & The Ticking Clock

Sitting in the sterile waiting room for the final reports, the anxiety was intense. A single anomalous spike or a borderline reading could cancel the entire journey right there, rendering all our planning completely useless.

When the doctor finally walked out, signed off on the fitness certificates, and stamped them with the words **"Fit for High-Altitude Trekking,"** a massive wave of pure relief washed over me. My body was officially cleared for the ultimate challenge. Next stop: Kathmandu.

The Survival Checklist: Lightweight but Lifesaving

Yet, even with medical clearance secured, the clock was ticking relentlessly. We were left with an incredibly compressed preparation window of just a few weeks to pull off a massive international expedition. The logistical gears had to turn at

breakneck speed, and there was absolutely zero room for error.

As the final departure date drew closer, the Yogi Trails operators provided a check-list of essentials. Packing for the Tibetan plateau is a delicate, high-stakes balancing act: you must carry enough technical gear to survive sub-zero freezing weather, yet your backpack must remain light enough to manage in a low-oxygen environment.

Our specialized shopping list quickly expanded into three distinct categories of survival:

The Lifelines: A high-grade, heavy-duty thermos flask—because hot water is absolute medicine at high altitudes to keep the body core warm. I also packed camphor tablets to sniff for instant, traditional respiratory relief when the air thins out, alongside a comprehensive personal medical kit packed with Diamox (for altitude sickness), pain relief medication, and oral rehydration salts (ORS).

The Protection: High-SPF sunscreen and medicated lip balm to combat the fierce, unfiltered UV rays of the Himalayan sun. I also stocked up heavily on wet wipes and sanitizers, knowing that running liquid water is a rare luxury in the remote camps of Tibet.

The Gear: High-performance multi-layered clothing systems, heavy waterproof trekking gloves, an insulated fleece jacket, and a reliable, high-lumen headlamp with extra batteries for the freezing, pre-dawn starts on the trail

The Survival Checklist:

Lightweight but Lifesaving

Packing for the Tibetan plateau is a delicate, high-stakes balancing act: you must carry enough technical gear to survive sub-zero freezing weather, yet your backpack must remain light enough to manage in a low-oxygen environment.

MT. KAILASH
52 KM. KORA.
ALT. 5630 M.



1 THE LIFELINES

Essentials for health, hydration, and altitude survival.



Thermos Flask

High-grade, heavy-duty thermos. Hot water is absolute medicine at high altitudes to keep the body core warm.



Camphor Tablets

Sniff for instant, traditional respiratory relief when the air thins out.



Personal Medical Kit

Packed with Diamox (for altitude sickness), pain relief medication, and oral rehydration salts (ORS).



2 THE PROTECTION

Shield yourself from the harsh sun, dry air, and lack of basic amenities.



Sunscreen & Lip Balm

High-SPF sunscreen and medicated lip balm to combat the fierce, unfiltered UV rays of the Himalayan sun.



Wet Wipes & Sanitizers

Stock up heavily on wet wipes and sanitizers, knowing that running liquid water is a rare luxury in the remote camps of Tibet.



Quick Tip

Sun is stronger at high altitude. Stay protected. Stay hydrated. Stay strong.



3 THE GEAR

High-performance gear to keep you warm, dry, and prepared for the trail.



Multi-layered Clothing

High-performance base, mid, and outer layers to trap heat and stay dry.



Waterproof Trekking Gloves

Heavy, waterproof gloves to protect hands from freezing winds and snow.



Insulated Fleece Jacket

Provides crucial warmth during freezing temperatures and cold winds.



Headlamp + Extra Batteries

High-lumen headlamp for pre-dawn starts and emergencies. Don't forget extra batteries!



PACK SMART. TRAVEL LIGHT. STAY SAFE.

Every item has a purpose. Every gram matters. Every decision keeps you going.

**YOU DON'T JUST PACK YOUR BAG.
YOU PACK YOUR SURVIVAL.**



The Survival Checklist: Lightweight but Lifesaving

Chapter 4: The Final Clearance

The Crumbling Wall: Visas Approved, just days before our scheduled departure, the long-awaited notification flashed on our mobile screens: Passports received with group visas.

The relief was indescribable. The final, daunting bureaucratic wall had officially crumbled, and the agonizing wait was over. Holding my physical Passport again—now document stamped with the official entry clearances—made the reality sink in. My bags were packed, documents were legally locked in, and we all are officially cleared to fly toward Kathmandu.

Charting Our Own Course: The Delhi-Kathmandu Route

When the final group itinerary arrived from Yogi Trails, we noticed a distinct split in the logistics. The vast majority of the pilgrims were scheduled to catch flights to Gorakhpur and proceed overland across the border. The agencies like Yogi Trails split itineraries for large groups heading to Nepal or the Kailas region, when you go via the **overland border crossings (like Sonauli near Gorakhpur)**, an Indian Voter ID card or a valid Indian Passport is mandatory to cross the border into Nepal, because a few people in our subgroup lacked a Voter ID card, Yogi Trails split our logistics based on **rigid cross-border document rules**. The split itinerary resolves this issue based on our route of transit.

VGK Iyer and I were one of the few who were not having the voters ID, so we decided to fly from our hometown up to New Delhi, and then catching an international flight directly into Kathmandu's Tribhuvan International Airport.

This decision gave us a distinct sense of independence. Long before we would ever meet the larger travel group at the assembly hotel, our journey had already transformed into a focused, self-reliant, two-man expedition

The 15-Day Cosmic Window

Seeing those locked-in dates on our flight tickets made the entire timeline undeniably real. We had exactly 15 days to journey to the rooftop of the world and back.

This specific late-May to early-June window was strategically crucial. It meant we would be trekking precisely as the harsh, unforgiving Himalayan winter was breaking, catching the optimal weather window to cross the treacherous high-altitude passes before the monsoon clouds arrived.

The countdown now had an absolute start date. On May 20th, our regular lives would completely pause, and our grand adventure would begin.

Sourcing the Three-Tier Currency Blueprint

When traveling on a multi-border international pilgrimage like the Kailas Yatra, navigating foreign exchange requires a very specific setup. You cannot rely on a single currency or digital network when crossing remote terrains.

Yogi Trails were arranging the currency exchange via their known exchanges, but VGK and I decided to handle our finances well before we left and we decided to get it done right in our hometown,

We visited an authorized local forex dealer and officially converted our Indian Rupees into two essential international currencies: **Chinese Yuan (RMB)**, and **US Dollars (USD)**.

Walking out of the bank with fresh international currency notes in my wallet was a surreal feeling. It was a tangible reminder that we were leaving the familiar behind and stepping onto international soil. With our money securely exchanged, our bags packed, and our minds focused, we were completely self-reliant and ready to fly.

Counting out three entirely different currencies on my desk at home was a dreamlike moment. It made me realize the massive scale of the international logistics required just to get us to the mountain. Next stop at Kathmandu.

Chapter 5: 19th & 20th May 2026

19th, May, 2026: 21.00 Hrs., the grand adventure didn't begin with a bright clear sky; it began with the steady, soothing sound of rain. The rain was pouring down in my hometown in Kerala. My bags were completely packed, sitting heavily by the door, stuffed with down jackets, thermal layers, and my carefully organized envelopes of **Indian Rupees, US Dollars, and Chinese Yuan**.

With everything finally locked in, I tried to lie down and catch a few hours of precious sleep. It was easier said than done, our flight out of **Cochin International Airport** was scheduled for 5:30 AM the next morning, meaning I would have to wake up in the dead of night to reach the airport on time. Lying there in the dark, listening to the rain beat against the windows, my mind was a whirlwind of thoughts. In just a few hours, we would be trading this warm, tropical rain for the freezing, thin air of the Tibetan plateau.

20th May, 2026: 2.30 AM, the alarm shattered the quiet night long before dawn. Bleary-eyed but fuelled by pure adrenaline, my friend and I made our way through the dark, wet roads to the Cochin airport.

- The First Leg (Cochin to Delhi): As the plane lifted off at 5:30 AM, watching the lights of Kerala fade beneath the clouds, a wave of reality hit me. There was no turning back now. I spent the few hours in the air catching up on the sleep the rain had stolen from me, landing in a bustling, warm New Delhi.
- The Second Leg (Delhi to Kathmandu): After a quick transit through Indira Gandhi International Airport, we boarded our international flight to Nepal.

Looking out the cabin window as we approached the Kathmandu Valley, the flat Indian plains suddenly transformed into massive, rolling green ridges hiding under a blanket of clouds.

- By mid-day we stepped off the plane at Tribhuvan International Airport in Kathmandu on May 20th, the tropical warmth of Kerala was a distant memory. The crisp, cool mountain air of Nepal instantly woke us up. We cleared immigration, grabbed our heavy bags, and were welcomed by our tour representative (Mr. Prakash) with traditional Rudraksh garlands.
- We drove through the vibrant, chaotic streets of Kathmandu to our hotel, Kathmandu sits at 1,400 meters. We used the afternoon to rest, since we had that extra time before the rest of our group arrives at night. Relaxation is actually great preparation for the Yatra, as keeping our body rested and the stress levels low helps with early acclimatization
- Around late evening, we finally met up with the rest of the pilgrims who had flown in via Gorakhpur. As we sat down together in the hotel lobby, sharing our different travel paths, the realization hit us: our 15-day journey to the rooftop of the world had officially begun.

Chapter 6 ,21st May, 2026

Having that first group breakfast together on the morning of May 21st was a wonderful start! Sitting down over tea and coffee with all our tour colleagues where the shared bond of the Yatra was truly begins. The group consists of 41 (Thirty-four pilgrims, Two from Yogi Trails, One Nepali Guide and Four Sherpas who also were the culinary experts)

Yogi Trails had a good acquaintance at Kathmandu, and having a well-connected local contact makes a massive difference in Kathmandu, especially at a bustling and sacred site like Pashupatinath. Skipping the long queues and navigating the

complex temple grounds smoothly were the perfect, stress-free start to our pilgrimage.

We had an Official briefing during the evening combined with Yogi Trails and Nepal agency (Touch Kailas) leaders to laid out the whole plan, the reality of the journey is officially setting in! After the meeting we got the duffel bag, back pack and the winter cap

We were told to pack our things in the bags provide by them; this is the standard rule for the Kailas Yatra! Leaving your main suitcase behind at the Kathmandu hotel is a crucial step. The support vehicles and porters in Tibet have very strict space and weight limits, and rigid suitcases simply do not fit well on the mountain trucks.

- In the Duffel Bag (always in the cargo truck): We packed our heavy clothing layer by layer. Inserted our boots, extra trousers, thermals, and innerwear and other toilet accessories. (each bag had a unique number which matches the visa approval number)
- In the Backpack (with you always): This is your survival kit which is for carrying; cash, phone, power bank, snacks, personal medicines, and that mountain cap right at the top.

Chapter 7, 22nd, May, 2026

The Mountain Road to the Border marks the official start of our journey on the road. Leaving the Kathmandu Valley behind in two buses, our group of 41 began the long, winding descent and ascent through the rugged geography of rural Nepal.

This transition from the city to the frontier is a classic part of the overland experience, highlighting the intense geography of the Himalayas before you even reach Tibet.

The Realities of the Highway to the Border

The 140 km drive from Kathmandu to the Rasuwagadhi border checkpoint takes between 8 to 9 hours due to the challenging terrain:

- **The geography:** The road is carved directly into steep cliffsides, winding past green terraced hills, plunging river gorges, and small rural trading outposts.
- **The infrastructure:** The lack of guardrails and narrow lanes can feel unnerving to travellers. However, local drivers navigate these routes daily and understand the changing conditions of the highway.
- **The Pace:** Frequent stops for local tea and a simple lunch offer a chance to stretch, rest, and bond with our fellow pilgrims.



The Border Buffer: Navigating Time Zones and Gates

Arriving at the border we waited long hours and found that the gate is closed for the day, to find the gates closed for the day is a standard occurrence on this route. This delay is caused by two main factors:

1. **The Time Jump:** Tibet operates strictly on Beijing Time (GMT+8), which is 2 hours and 15 minutes ahead of Nepal Time (GMT+5:45). When it is 3:45 PM at the border in Nepal, it is already 6:00 PM on the Chinese side.
2. **Strict Operating Hours:** Chinese customs and immigration gates close promptly in the late afternoon. Because mountain road traffic, construction, or minor landslide clearances can easily add hours to the drive, arriving after the gates close is an expected scenario that experienced operators plan for.

Staying on the Nepal Side (Night of May 22nd)

Our group checked into a basic transit hotel on the Nepal side for the night. This serves as a functional rest stop to prepare you for a fresh start the next day, but to our surprise the dinner was good, whether it was pure culinary magic or just extreme hunger, that feeling of a surprisingly amazing dinner is the absolute best surprise

- **The Plan for May 23rd:** we will head to the immigration gates early in the morning.
- **The Crossing:** Our group will walk across the **Friendship Bridge** together to clear Chinese customs, complete fingerprinting, verify group visas, and officially step onto the Tibetan Plateau.

Chapter 8. 23rd May, 2026

Crossing the Threshold into Tibet

The transition from Nepal to Tibet at the Rasuwagadhi checkpoint is a masterclass in patience. This specific border is a bottleneck of high-security bureaucracy, and clearing it by midday is a major milestone for the group.

While we were waiting at the border (still at the Nepal side) our tour operators clearly informed us;

Do Not Take Photos: Strictly avoid taking any photos or videos of the border area, checkpoints, or officers. Chinese border police are extremely strict about this and will delete photos or confiscate phones.

Sit and Save Energy: Do not stand in line for hours if your guide tells you, there is time. Find a place to sit down, rest your legs, and save your physical energy.

Eat Your Snacks: If you have any snacks (nuts, energy bars, biscuits) in your daypack, eat them now. Keeping the blood sugar stable will help reduce stress and prevent early headaches, we were provided biscuits and tea at the border though it was agonizing to wait but looking at the further goal of Kailas we were still with tons of positive energy

Keep Sipping Water: Even while standing around, keep drinking water. The psychological stress and changing air can dehydrate you quickly.

As we still waiting, we could see tons of Electric Vehicles (EV) passing through the bridge towards Nepal side. It looks a huge demand in Nepal's for Chinese electric vehicles (EVs) and SUVs, and the Rasuwagadhi border has become a massive artery for shipping those brand-new cars straight into Kathmandu.

Finally, we could see our bags were loaded and we were excited that our Tibet guide asked us to queue as per the sequence number of visa approval, sequence

numbers on your visa approval sheet is standard operating procedure for Chinese immigration. It allows the border officers to check you off the master list quickly and efficiently. Few of our colleagues were asked to open the phones for photos, videos, apps, and chat histories for any politically sensitive content, maps, or restricted imagery and we could cross the border only by mid- day and the border bureaucracy is entirely behind us.

The drive from the border up to **Gyirong Town (2,700m)** takes about **1.5 to 2.0 hours** through a stunning, dramatic river gorge, we could see the landscape shift from green, waterfall-heavy cliffs of the Nepal side slowly transition into rugged, sweeping alpine territory, The bus stopped for at one or two internal police check points along the way as the tour guide keep instructing us not to take photos or videos out the windows at these stops. The Tibetan guide took all our passports and group permits to the clear them while we were sitting comfortably inside the bus.

We could see a massive change in road quality. As we are moving from the bumpy, rocky dirt roads of Nepal onto smooth, perfectly paved, modern Chinese highways. The Chinese bus was navigating a series of highly engineered mountain tunnels and concrete bridges built directly into the cliffside to safeguard against landslides.

We were ascending nearly 900 meters (3000 feet) in a very short distance.

Our ears were popping frequently due to the changing air pressure and we were told this was completely normal.

Gyirong looks like a beautifully planned, clean mountain resort town nestled in a green valley, surrounded by snow-capped peaks, it features wide streets, modern hotels, street lights, and local shops. It is specifically designed to look beautiful and serve as a safe, comfortable place for travellers to spend their very first night adapting to Tibetan altitude

Now most of our mobile phones stopped getting network as we are now operating under the Chinese telecommunications network, few of our phones were having roaming but there were still issues, The hotel in Gyirong had free Wi-Fi, but standard Indian and Western apps (WhatsApp, Google, Maps, Instagram) were completely blocked by the local network firewalls.

Hotel was nice, from appearance from the entrance doesn't look to be a good though, but comfortable beds, clean toilets with modern facilities, we had dinner at a Nepali restaurant and we went a bed dreaming next big step towards Kailas.



Gyirong City

Chapter 9, 24th May, 2026

While we were having breakfast at hotel and preparing to move to Saga, we were told to hold at Gyirong due to **Saga Dawa festival (climaxing May 31, 2026)**, multiple reasons were pointed out;

Because high-profile cultural events and large crowds gather at Mount Kailas , security screenings at the Gyirong border checkpoint become much more rigorous & time-consuming , Shortage of local Accommodation so strict caps on the number of people allowed to ascend to Saga (4,450m) at one time cause authorities to hold groups at Gyirong (2,700m) for days, The fact that few other groups were stranded at **Gyirong** for more than two days confirms that this was an administrative and systemic border lockdown, rather than an isolated error specific to our booking with [Yogi Trails](#).

Being Sunday, we used this time to visit a local Buddhist monastery, handle errands for the trip ahead like few more snack packets, portable oxygen cylinders and a Chinese Telecom sim card.

Chapter 10, 25th May, 2026

After holding at Gyirong for couple of days we were allowed to proceed to Saga on 25th Morning heading to **Saga** was a massive milestone, but it drastically compressed our remaining itinerary.

Reaching Saga on May 25th left you with exactly **6 days** to travel to Lake Manasarovar, reach Darchen, complete the 3-day Mount Kailas Kora (outer parikrama), and return to the border by June 1st/2nd. This leads our group undertook a rapid, continuous ascent that required careful acclimatization, losing our planned two-day acclimatization halt at Saga is a serious operational and medical issue. In standard high-altitude mountaineering and pilgrimage itineraries, spending enough time at Saga (4,450m) is the mandatory safety buffer.

It allows our body to produce the extra red blood cells needed to safely survive the **Lake Manasarovar (4,590m)** environment and the gruelling **Mount Kailash Kora (up to 5,640m at Dolma La Pass)**.

The late arrival of our Tibetan guide on the day, the exact day you were finally cleared to rush to Saga compounded an already stressful situation.

In Tibet, international tourists and pilgrims are legally prohibited from traveling, checking into hotels, or passing military checkpoints without their officially licensed Tibetan guide present. The guide holds your physical group permits and must personally present them to the authorities. Our guide arriving late directly delayed our departure, squeezing our driving window and forcing us to navigate a treacherous high-altitude road late into the evening.

The drive from Gyirong to Saga is one of the most dramatic and challenging segments of the overland Kailash Yatra. It takes you from a lush, subtropical river valley straight up onto the barren, high-altitude Tibetan Plateau. Seeing groups of Sheep's and Yaks grazing on the vast plains is the first sign that you have truly entered the timeless landscape of the **Tibetan Plateau**.

There were few smoking (bus drivers) and toilet breaks on the barren highway are a standard part of the overland journey, but the late timeline changes indeed had a huge delay for our group. On the road to Saga, these stops take on a very different meaning due to the extreme elevation and the total lack of basic roadside infrastructure. Toilet breaks on this route mean using primitive roadside pit latrines or "open-air" nature stops. Exposing yourself to the biting, freezing Tibetan winds can cause sudden chills, which lowers your body temperature and leaves you more vulnerable to altitude sickness. Finally, we were in Saga during late evening.

Chapter 11, 26th, May, 2026 Saga to Darchen

It took a long, scenic 450 km drive lasting roughly 7–8 hours along the paved China National Highway across the Brahmaputra River. You will cross the Mayum La Pass (5,280m) before getting your first breathtaking sight of **Manas Sarovar** and Mount Kailas towards Darchen

The entire stretch is a modern, smooth, two-lane asphalt road. Speed limits are strictly monitored via electronic checkpoints, we drove through the vast, barren Barkha Plains, catching glimpses of nomadic Tibetan camps, grazing Yaks, and the snow-capped Himalayas. Shortly after crossing the Mayum La Pass, we got our first distant, emotional views of Lake Manasarovar and the peak of Mount Kailas.

We then bypass the lake perimeter road and drive straight into Darchen to settle into our hotel before sunset, the sunset during late May – June is around 9.30 PM

To catch our very first glimpse of **Mount Kailas right from our hotel terrace** is an extraordinary, auspicious moment that means we have successfully reached **Darchen (4,575m)!**



First view of the South Face of Mount Kailash on road to Darchen

With the temperature plummeting to **-1°C (30°F)** at night, the dry, high-altitude cold of the Tibetan Plateau was biting us quickly. Because our itinerary was compressed, our body has not had standard rest days at this altitude, making you more vulnerable to the cold. So, we must actively protect our core temperature tonight to ensure we are physically capable of starting the *Parikrama* (Kora) tomorrow.

Chapter 12, 27th May, 2026

Our plan was to visit Ashtapad in the early morning and further go to Manas Sarovar and camp at Manasarovar, but our Tibetan guide being stuck at the transport office sorting the vehicle availability, driver allocations, or sudden local schedule changes which forces our group to wait until early afternoon.

The route between Darchen to Ashtapad, and Lake Manasarovar is strictly monitored by the military

Ashtapad is one of the most sacred pilgrimage sites in the world, holding immense spiritual significance for both Jains and Hindus. Literally translating to "**Eight Steps**" in Sanskrit (*Ashta* meaning eight, and *Pad* meaning steps/feet), it sits at an extreme altitude of approximately **4,900 metres (16,076 feet)** right in front of the majestic Southern Face of Mount Kailash

The religious significance of Astapad; for Jainism Ashtapad is revered as the first Jain Tirthankara, attained *Nirvana* (salvation/liberation) on this very mountain, and for Hinduism (The Abode of Shiva): Hindus revere the site because it provides a direct, uninterrupted view of the mountain's Southern Face and the cosmic spine running straight down the centre of Mount Kailas.

Our tour to Astapad brought me face-to-face with the towering South Face of Mount Kailas, and it was here that the journey transformed from a physical trek into a deeply emotional awakening. As we stood in the biting cold, our tour

operator gave us a piece of advice: 'Close your eyes for a few minutes, then open them and look closely at the snow-peaked mountain. You will see a shade, a picture hidden in the ice.' I followed his words. When I opened my eyes and looked at the rugged rock and pristine white snow, my breath caught. Decades of time dissolved in an instant. There, etched into the ancient face of the mountain, was the exact image of Lord Shiva that had hung on the wall of my ancestral home when I was a child of eight or ten. Tears blurred my vision. It was a profound, chilling realization—the deity I had looked up to as a young child in my family home was the very same presence welcoming me now at the roof of the world.



Ashtapad

We could spend almost an hour so our guide's delay actually worked out perfectly, giving us a completely private, peaceful, and deeply meditative experience in front of the Southern Face. Meditating here without the distraction of large crowds is considered a once-in-a-lifetime grace and Nandi Parvat sits perfectly positioned directly facing the South Face of Mount Kailash, mimicking a giant

bull kneeling in eternal devotion before its master so our hour of absolute silence allowed us to witness this exact divine alignment without the usual rush.

The Guarding Presence of Nandi Parvat appears as an adjoining, darker mountain ridge running parallel to the South Face. It acts as a massive natural shield, standing guard right before the main peak, The Holy Pass (*Nandi Kora*): The space between Nandi Parvat and Mount Kailas forms the *Inner Kora* route. This path is physically treacherous and spiritually restricted, reserved only for highly experienced pilgrims who have completed multiple outer *Parikramas*. The Spiritual Alignment for pilgrims sitting at Ashtapad, looking at Nandi Parvat facing the South Face completes the classic layout of a traditional Shiva temple, where Nandi is always positioned directly facing the *Shiva Lingam*.

With the powerful energy of both the South Face and Nandi Parvat fresh in our mind, we now move towards Manasarovar.

There are moments in life that defy the boundaries of human language, and standing before Lake Man Sarovar is one of them. To say I was awestruck is an understatement; my mind simply fell silent. The lake stretched out like a massive, surreal mirror of liquid turquoise, so still it felt painted onto the earth. And there, rising majestic and unyielding in the background, was the pristine pyramid of Mount Kailas. Looking at it, the breath catches in your throat, and a profound stillness washes over you. All the months of planning, the gruelling road trips, and the physical exhaustion evaporated in a single second. In that sacred silence, no words were needed. I simply stood there, humbled and tearful, staring at a site that felt too grand for the human eye to hold."

The Power of Touch, simply touching the water is considered equivalent to a full immersion bath in modern scripts. It purifies the physical body and provides immense mental peace without the health risks of freezing in the afternoon wind. Ancestral Blessings, for some in our group who performed offerings for their

ancestors, doing so at Manasarovar is believed to bring liberation to past generations. Gratitude Offerings, offering holy water back to the sun and the lake while facing Mount Kailas is the traditional way to express deep gratitude for a safe journey.



Lake Manasarovar

Taking the holy water home in cans and bottles is one of the most important traditions of the entire Yatra and most of us did so.

We were lucky to get a brand-new dormitory building with fresh, clean linen and quilts is a massive luxury and it helped us to wind the day with a peaceful night of deep sleep which was exactly what our body needed to prepare for the challenges ahead. Sleeping well at 4,600 metres is rare, and it perfectly set us up for the upcoming trekking day

Chapter 13, 28th, May, 2026

Having had an excellent warm night of sleep in our fresh lake dormitory, our body is fully recharged to tackle this incredible 12-kilometre stretch. Yogi Trails guide has coordinated for an early morning checkout to transition our group from the sacred lake basin directly to the base of the mountain.

Even though I did not walk down to the shoreline myself in the wee hours of the 28th morning, hearing my colleagues describe that celestial display of moving lights and stars is a profound blessing and experience. For generations, pilgrims have reported seeing these exact moving lights during the early hours (between 3:30 AM and 5:00 AM), and few of our colleagues also sighted the Milky Way

The Parikarma Starts:

The moment we cross through **Yamdwar** on the morning of May 28th, the Outer Kora officially begins. We left the motorized world behind and step onto the sacred, dusty trails of the valley for our 12-kilometre trek to Dirapuk.



Yama Dwar, the entry point to the Parikrama

It was tough to watch few pilgrims turn back at Yam Dwar, but it highlights just how extreme the altitude and conditions are. Making that decision takes a lot of courage and self-awareness. The transition from the 4,600-metre lake basin to the active trekking trail changes how the body handles oxygen instantly.

Catching a clear view of the west face of **Mount Kailas** while trekking along the valley was an incredible spiritual reward on Day 1, while the North and South faces are the most famously photographed, The **West Face of Mount Kailas** is arguably the most dramatic, chiselled, and striking side of the holy peak. Walking along the valley floor and looking up to see this massive wall of rock and ice is an unforgettable experience.



The West Face of Mount Kailas

As I stood there trying to process the sheer impossibility of what I was witnessing, I began to look closely at the individuals. Before me were Tibetan Buddhists and Bön faith pilgrims, spanning generations from young men in their early twenties to grandmothers in their late seventies, all locked in the relentless rhythm of the ‘full-body length prostration circuit or prostration kora’. The mountain hadn't

changed, and the air hadn't grown any thicker, but looking at them, I knew I had no excuse left but to move forward. I tightened my grip on my trekking poles, and took a deep breath. The mental fog of my own exhaustion completely cleared away. Every complaint I had held a moment ago about the thin air or my aching legs suddenly felt incredibly small. I stepped back onto the main path, matching my stride to the distant, rhythmic echo of their wooden hand guards hitting the gravel. They had given me a silent, powerful gift—the motivation to stop counting the kilometres and to simply focus on the very next step. With the towering, snow-capped walls of Shiva's abode looming high above us, I pushed onward into the high-altitude wilderness, finally ready to face whatever the trail had in store.

Arriving at **Dirapuk** (4,900 metres / 16,076 feet) after our 12-kilometre trek is a monumental achievement. The moment you round the final bend and stand face-to-face with the massive, towering North Face of mount Kailas, any physical exhaustion from the trail instantly vanishes. The North Face is the most famous, iconic, and imposing side of the mountain—a sheer, vertical wall of dark rock and shimmering ice that looks completely otherworldly.

The accommodation at the Dirapuk Camp (4,900m) is widely considered the most basic, rugged, and challenging stay of the entire Yatra. Unlike the brand-new, comfortable dormitory we lucked into at Lake Mansarovar, Dirapuk is a remote outpost built purely for high-altitude survival. The rooms, they were cold, stark concrete or mud-brick structures with small windows. Rooms contains 6 to 10 simple wooden beds arranged side-by-side with basic mattresses, The Insulation has no heating and the walls trap the cold, meaning the temperature inside your room will quickly drop well below freezing (**-5°C to -10°C**) once the sun goes down, the toilets are no attached bathrooms or running water. The facilities are primitive, communal outdoor drop toilets (pit latrines) that can be exceptionally windy, icy, and unpleasant to use in the dark, not being able to sleep at Dirapuk

is completely looks normal and possibility happens to almost every pilgrim who reaches this camp. Despite the brutal conditions, Dirapuk holds the ultimate prize of the entire Yatra. Our camp sits directly opposite the Charan Sparsh and the majestic North Face of Mount Kailas.



The North Face of Mount Kailas

Chapter 14, 29th, May, 2026

Few of our fellow pilgrims decided to leave to the base camp Darchin after first day as unexpected snowfall on Day 2 of the Kora was the ultimate nightmare scenario for any Kailas pilgrims.

The second day of the Parikarma/Kora is universally recognized as the toughest, most intense day of the entire Yatra. Spanning 22 kilometres and taking anywhere from **9 to 12** hours of non-stop trekking, this leg tests your absolute physical, mental, and spiritual limits. I stepped out of the Dirapuk guest house into the

biting, sub-zero wind and made up my mind, there would be no retreat and took the first step into the hardest day of my life. You leave the North Face at Dirapuk (4,900m) and climb to the highest point of your entire life: the Dolma La Pass at 5,630 metres (18,471 feet).

The geography of the second day makes it physically impossible and highly dangerous for horses to carry a rider through the entire route. The Deadly Descent, once you cross the peak of Dolma La Pass (5,630m), the trail drops instantly into a nearly vertical, chaotic mess of loose scree, wet ice, and giant glacial boulders.



At the peak of Dolma La Pass

The local Tibetan horse handlers will force every single pilgrim to dismount at the top of the pass; it is far too steep and slippery for a horse to balance with human weight on its back. If a horse slips here, both the animal and the rider would plunge down the rocky cliffs toward Gauri Kund, you must walk the hardest part, this means that the most knee-shattering, ankle-twisting, and

physically terrifying 4-kilometre descent past **Gauri Kund** must be done completely on your own feet using your trekking poles for balance.

Gauri Kund, also known as the *Lake of Compassion*, is a sacred, high-altitude alpine lake nestled just below the crest of the Dolma La Pass at an elevation of approximately **5,608 meters (18,400 feet)**, the emerald waters of Gauri Kund shimmered like a jewel (was covered with snow). This was the sacred bathing place of **The Divine Consort**, the place where **Mata Parvati** is said to have breathed life into Lord Ganesha."

After surviving the gruelling 5,630-metre Dolma La Pass climb on foot and decent, dealing with local accommodation issues, and fighting through a heavy high-altitude snowstorm, pushing our bodies to walk another 3 to 4 hours along the rocky canyon floor on the third day of Kora would have been an unnecessary health risk so we decided to do this via four-wheel cars to reach Darchin base camp hotel.

Arriving back at our Darchen base camp hotel marks the official, successful conclusion of our holy **Mount Kailas Parikrama**.

Chapter 15, 30th May 2026

Leaving **Darchen** behind, marks the official conclusion of our time at the base of Mount Kailas. The drive to **Saga** covers about **450 kilometres** of smooth, asphalt highway and will take around **7 to 8 hours** due to strictly enforced speed checks.

The Reality of the Highway

Driving across the vast Tibetan landscape requires discipline from both the drivers and the pilgrims:

- **Strict Speed Traps:** Checkpoints calculate your average speed between specific mountain gates. Drivers are forced to pull over, kill time, or drive

deliberately slowly to avoid heavy fines and permit revocations.

- **The Psychological Shift:** The urgency of your compressed 6-day itinerary means this long driving day is purely about moving fast. There are no extended sightseeing stops; the goal is to reach Saga before the high-altitude mountain passes freeze over after dark.
- **Landscape in Reverse:** You will retrace your steps past the distant peaks and wide sand dunes, watching the stark, barren beauty of the plateau fly by in reverse.

Chapter 16, 31st May 2026

Saga to Gyirong spans roughly 550- to 600 kilometres across the spectacular southern route of the Tibetan plateau but after our intense *Parikrama* this was the perfect way to wind down, since we are traveling by our familiar Tibetan driver and bus who picked us from the border, we were more comfortable, our body can completely relax and absorb the stunning landscapes while continuing to safely acclimatise as we were gradually dropping the altitude.

Completing the Mount Kailas Parikrama is an incredible physical and spiritual achievement. It is completely normal to feel a mix of profound exhaustion and deep relief right now as our body finally starts to wind down from the high altitude.

Gyirong (at around 2,700 meters) is much lower than the sacred mountain, meaning our body can finally get rich oxygen and well-deserved rest tonight.

Chapter, 17, 1st, June, 2026

Crossing the friendship bridge between Gyirong and Rasuwagadhi marks the official end of our Tibet leg and the beginning of your return journey through Nepal. The route was same as used earlier notorious for being narrow, unpaved

in large sections, bumpy, and winding, even though the distance is only about 120–130 kilometres, the rough terrain means the drive usually takes 8 to 9 hours. Our new driver stopped few local tea houses along the way for meals and restroom breaks.

Welcome back to Kathmandu! We are now successfully completed one of the most physically demanding, spiritually profound, and logistically intense overland pilgrimages on the planet. Surviving the gruelling, unpaved bumps of the **Pasang Lhamu Highway**, crossing the international border, and descending over 3,000 vertical meters back to Kathmandu is a monumental achievement. Our body has been operating on pure adrenaline and survival mode at sub-zero temperatures for days. Finally stepping into a hot shower, shedding those heavy high-altitude layers, and sinking into a soft, warm bed is a well-deserved reward.

Chapter 18, 2nd, June, 2026

We had an early morning Kathmandu to Mount Everest scenic flight by a Bombardier aircraft which was an iconic one, an hour round-trip aviation experience.

Local Nepalese carriers operated the bombardier and the departures are from the domestic terminal of Tribhuvan International Airport (KTM), the take-off was purposefully scheduled around sunrise for the crispest visibility lowest cloud coverage. Every passenger was guaranteed a window seat. The plane flies to the left of the peaks inbound, loops around near Chamlang, and banks left to give the opposite side a perfect view on the return, As the Bombardier jet glides past the roof of the world, flight crew members were actively helping us to identify prominent peaks like **Mount Everest** (8,848.86m) and **Gauri Shankar** (7,134m) and so on. The cost of the trip was approx. USD 150 which was an optional add not part of the Kailas tour package.

Visiting **Jal Narayan** and **Swayambhu Nath** was the perfect way to wrap up a spiritual journey after our arduous Kailas Yatra. These two powerful sites beautifully represent the unique harmony of Hinduism and Buddhism in the Kathmandu Valley. Jal Narayan Temple, located at the northern foothills of Shivapuri, Budhanilkantha Temple features a breathtaking, **5-metre-long black stone statue of Lord Vishnu** reclining on a bed of cosmic serpents in a peaceful pond. Many pilgrims visit Jal Narayan right after the yatra to offer thanks.



Jal Narayan - 5-metre-long black stone statue of Lord Vishnu

Chapter 19, 3rd June 2026

Saying goodbye at the end of such a deeply intense and shared spiritual journey is always incredibly emotional. We bonded through the thin air, the gruelling trails, and the heavy physical challenges of the Parikrama, only to split up at Tribhuvan International Airport for your respective journeys home.

Our colleagues took the same classic overland route. This involves driving down from Kathmandu through the plains of Nepal to cross the border at Sunauli,

eventually catching flights from Gorakhpur in Uttar Pradesh, India to their respective destinations. My friend (VGK Iyer) and I took the faster route and boarded an international flight directly out of Kathmandu to Indira Gandhi International Airport (DEL) in New Delhi and further to our home town.

Our journey to the abode of the gods was not just a trek; it was a masterclass in resilience, spiritual grit, and rapid adaptation. When unpredictable administrative delays threatened to derail our *Darshan*, our group pivoted, endured, and triumphed.

Chapter 20: The Ultimate Gratitude – Om Namah Shivaya

The Kailas Yatra Batch (May 20th to June 3rd, 2026)

A Note of Deepest Gratitude

Now that we have all returned safely to our homes, whether catching connecting flights through Delhi or journeying overland via the Gorakhpur route—the dust has settled, but the spiritual reverberation of our pilgrimage remains as powerful as ever.

Completing the sacred **42 km Parikrama around Mount Kailas** and standing before the serene waters of **Lake Manasarovar** was the journey of a lifetime. We could not have asked for a more resilient, compassionate, and inspiring group of soul-colleagues to share this path with. From navigating the dizzying, thin air and freezing winds of the **Dolma La Pass (5,630m)** to sharing quiet moments of awe, we bonded through every challenging step. Your smiles, encouragement, and shared strength kept me moving forward when the trail got tough.

To Our Invaluable Support Pillars

This profound spiritual milestone was only made possible by the dedicated team that watched over our group of 41 like family:

- **The Yogi Trails Leaders (Mr. Sreejith K. & Mr. Subash C.N.):** Thank you for your flawless organization, calm execution, and unwavering care. Your ability to manage shifting timelines, intense border logistics, and ensure our safety from Kathmandu to Darchen, Saga, and back was incredible. And Team Yogi's Mrs. Saritha Iyer and Mrs. Asha Sreejith for their support during the Zoom sessions.
- **Our Nepalese Guide (Mr. Prakash):** Thank you for seamlessly handling our initial phases, keeping our logistics airtight, and bridging the gap between two worlds.
- **Our Four Sherpas & Culinary Team:** You were the unsung heroes of this trek. Preparing nourishing, pure vegetarian meals in remote high-altitude camps and constantly looking after our physical well-being gave us the energy to sustain the Yatra.
- **Our Nepalese & Tibetan Bus Drivers:** Thank you for your incredible focus and expertise. Navigating narrow cliffside roads and the vast expanses of the highway with absolute safety kept us at peace.
- **Our Tibetan Tour Guide:** Thank you for guiding us through the sacred history of the plateau and managing the intense checkpoint bureaucracies smoothly.
- A special thanks goes out to **VGK Iyer**, without whom this sacred opportunity would have never been known to me.



Yogi Trails Yathries

A Lifelong Bond

Though our paths have now diverged at the airport gates and border crossings, the shared energy of the majestic peak of Kailas will tie us together forever.

May the peace, strength, and divine blessings of Lord Shiva stay with you and your families always. Let us keep these memories alive and stay in touch!

Har Har Mahadev!

Shankar Narayanan Shankar.

