

# Kailash Mansarovar Yatra to resume soon: Everything you need to know

The yatra has been suspended since 2020. Its imminent resumption is a part of a larger rapprochement between New Delhi and Beijing

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The Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) on Thursday announced that the Kailash Mansarovar Yatra, which has not taken place since 2020, will resume this year. This comes as a part of a larger rapprochement between India and China in recent months.

## A thaw in ties

While the yatra had initially been suspended due to the [Covid-19](#) pandemic, deteriorating relations between India and China meant that it did not resume even after the virus was no longer a concern. Ties between the two neighbours had nosedived following a number of border skirmishes in 2020, most notably on June 15 in the Galwan Valley in Ladakh, which caused casualties on both sides.

Since 2024, however, both countries have been looking to improve ties. They signed a pact last October to disengage at Demchok and Depsang, the two remaining friction points on the border. The very same month, Prime Minister [Narendra Modi](#) met China President Xi Jinping on the sidelines of the BRICS summit in Kazan.

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In January this year, following Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri's visit to Beijing, the two countries agreed in principle to resume the yatra. A formal announcement with details will be made soon, with New [Delhi](#) and Beijing likely wanting to get this sticking point out of the way before the next Special Representatives meet, set to be held in Delhi later this year.

## The Mansarovar yatra

Lake Mansarovar, known locally as Mapam Yumtso, is a high altitude freshwater lake near Mount Kailash in the Ngari Prefecture of the Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR).

Both the lake, which is at an elevation of 4,600 metres, and the adjacent 6,638-metre high mountain, which Hindus believe is the home to Lord Shiva, are sacred in Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, and the Tibetan Bon religion. Hundreds of pilgrims make the arduous journey to the region each year; they generally trek to Lake Mansarovar, and then circumambulate the nearby Mount Kailash.

Till the yatra was stopped in 2020, the MEA itself organised the pilgrimage for Indians between the months of June and September each year. The journey usually took between 23 and 25 days, and was open to anyone holding Indian passports, displaying medical and physical fitness (all *yatris* were thoroughly screened before the journey), and above the age of 18 and under the age of 70.

Registrations would open by April-May every year, after which a draw of lots would be held to fill the limited slots. The total cost of the yatra would be upwards of Rs 2 lakh.

The details of this year's yatra are yet to be announced by the MEA.

### **The two routes**

There are two primary routes to reach Lake Mansarovar from India.

**LIPULEKH PASS ROUTE:** Lipulekh pass lies at an altitude of 5,115 metres, on the border between Uttarakhand and TAR, near the trijunction with Nepal. It is an ancient passageway between the Indian subcontinent and the Tibetan Plateau, frequented by traders and pilgrims alike.

While the Lipulekh pass route is the most direct way to get to Mansarovar from India — as the crow flies, the lake is roughly 50 km from the border — the terrain makes the journey very challenging. Currently, this route entails roughly 200 km of hard trekking. Before 2020, it had been operational since 1981.

**NATHU LA PASS ROUTE:** Nathu La pass lies at an altitude of 4,310 metres on the border between Sikkim and TAR. It is one of two mountain passes in the region — the other being Jelep La — that have connected Sikkim and Tibet since ancient times.

The route to Mansarovar from Nathu La is much longer in terms of distance — close to 1,500 km. But it is fully motorable, meaning pilgrims can make it all the way to the lake without any trekking. (They would only need to trekk 35-40 km for the circumambulation of Mount Kailash). This route became operational in 2015.

On the Indian side, logistics were arranged by the Kumaon Mandal Vikas Nigam on the Lipulekh route, and the Sikkim Tourism Development Corporation on the Nathu La route. TAR authorities provided accommodation and logistics on the other side of the border. (The yatra's continued suspension was due to TAR authorities not making arrangements on their side of the border).

While one could provide the preference of route during the registration process on the MEA portal, routes were assigned by a computer. And once they were assigned, it was difficult to change routes.

**NEPAL ROUTE:** No private operators function on the two official routes. There is, however, a third route through Nepal in which private companies do operate. In theory, this route has

been accessible to Indians since 2023, when China reopened its border with Nepal. But visa and permit requirements, as well as high costs due to China-imposed fees, have meant that few have likely availed this option.

In recent years, some airlines have been operating chartered flights out of Nepalgunj, Nepal in which the faithful can get an aerial *darshan* of Mount Kailash. India too is developing a Mount Kailash viewing spot in Dharchula, near Lipulekh, which will provide a direct line of sight to the sacred peak.



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