



Manasa Sarovar is located in the Tibet Autonomous Region of China Approximately 800 kms from Lhasa.

Situated at 4556 meters/14947 feet - 88 kilometers in circumference and 90 m in depth - it is the highest freshwater body of the world. It freezes in winter (surface area- 320 sq kms) and thaws only in spring.

Manasarovar is the source of the Sutlej river which is the easternmost large tributary of the Indus. Nearby are the sources of the Brahmaputra, Indus and the Karnali an important tributary of the Ganges.

Lake Manasa Sarovar is a place of pilgrimage, attracting religious people from Nepal, Tibet and the neighboring countries. Bathing in the Manasa Sarovar and drinking its water is believed to cleanse all sins. Pilgrimage tours or Yatras are organized regularly, especially from India, the most famous of which is the *Kailash Manasa Sarovar Yatra* which takes place every year. Pilgrims come to take ceremonial baths in the cleansing waters of the lake.

Manasa Sarovar lake has long been viewed by the pilgrims as the source of four of the greatest rivers of Asia namely Brahmaputra, Karnali, Indus and Sutlej and has been an axial point which has been thronged by pilgrims for thousands of years. The region was initially closed to pilgrims from outside and no foreigners were allowed between 1949 and 1980. But after the 80s it has again become a part of the Indian pilgrim trail.

According to Hindu religion, the lake was first created in the mind of the Brahma the creator after which it manifested on Earth. Hence, it is called "Manas sarovara", which is a combination of the words *manas* (mind) and *sarovara* (lake). The lake, in Hindu religious belief, is also supposed to be the summer abode of the hamsa or goose. Considered to be sacred, the Hamsa is an important element in the symbology of the subcontinent, representing wisdom and beauty.

Buddhists too associate the lake to the legendary lake known as Anavatapa in Sanskrit where Queen Maya is believed to have conceived Gautama Buddha. The lake has a few monasteries on its shores. The most notable of which is the ancient Chiu Gompa, which has been built right onto a steep hill. It looks as if it has been carved right out of the rock.

Manasarovar is flanked on the west by Rakshas Tal and by Mount Kailash on the North.

Rakshas Tal

The Satluj originates at Rakshastal's northwestern tip. Despite its close proximity to Lake Manasarovar Lake Rakshastal does not share the lore of worship with its east neighbor. Named 'lake of the Rakshasa or demon', Lake Rakshastal is considered to be the residence of Ravana, the ten-headed demon king of Lanka in Hindu myth. In Buddhism, Lake Manasarovar, which is round like the Sun, and Lake Rakshastal, crescent shaped, are respectively regarded as 'brightness' and 'darkness'. Its salty water, a stark contrast to the fresh water of Lake Manasarovar, produces no Aquatic plants or fish and is considered poisonous by locals. In lake Rakshas Tal there are four islands: Topserma (Dose), the Dola, Lachato (Nadzhado) and Dosharba. Two biggest islands Topserma and the Dale are visited by local peoples only during the winter period on ice and used as winter pastures for yaks.

According to Hindu Mythology, this lake was created by King Ravana for the express purpose of garnering superpowers through acts of Bhakti and Meditation to Lord Shiva who was presiding on Mount Kailash. It was upon the banks of a special island in this lake that he would make daily offering with

one of his ten heads as a sacrifice to please Lord Shiva. Finally, on the tenth day, Lord Shiva was moved enough by his devotion and granted Ravana his wish to obtain superpowers. This lake is set as a contrast to the holy god-created Lake Manasarovar.

However, despite its notoriety, Lake Rakshastal bears no less beauty than other lakes in Tibet. Originally joined with Lake Manasarovar and later separated by geological movements, it is still connected with Lake Manasarovar by a natural channel Ganga Chhu. It covers a total area of 70 square kilometres (27 sq mi), at an altitude of 4,752 metres (15,591 ft).

Mount Kailash or **Mount Kailas**; ***Kangrinboqê*** or ***Gang***; is a peak in the Gangdise Mountains, which are part of the Himalaya in Tibet. It lies near the source of some of the longest Rivers in Asia: the Indus, Sutlej, Brahmaputra and the Karnali. It is considered a sacred place by Hindus, Buddhists, Jains and Bon.

In Sanskrit the word *Kailāśā* means "crystal

In Hinduism, it is considered to be the abode of Lord Shiva and a place of eternal bliss where the Lord resides in perpetual meditation with his consort Paravati.

Every year, thousands make a pilgrimage to Kailash, following a tradition going back thousands of years of several religions believe that circumambulating Mount Kailash on foot is a holy ritual that will bring good fortune. The peregrination is made in a clockwise direction by Hindus and Buddhists. Followers of the Jain and Bon religions circumambulate the mountain in a counterclockwise direction. The path around Mount Kailash is 52 km (32 mi) long.

Some pilgrims believe that the entire walk around Kailash should be made in a single day. This is not easy. A person in good shape walking fast would take perhaps 15 hours to complete the 52 km trek. Some of the devout do accomplish this feat, little daunted by the uneven terrain, Altitude sickness, and harsh conditions faced in the process. Indeed, other pilgrims venture a much more demanding regimen, performing body-length prostration over the entire length of the circumambulation: The pilgrim bends down, kneels, prostrates full-length, makes a mark with his fingers, rises to his knees, prays, and then crawls forward on hands and knees to the mark made by his/her fingers before

repeating the process. It requires at least four weeks of physical endurance to perform the circumambulation while following this regimen. The mountain is located in a particularly remote and inhospitable area of the Tibetan Himalayas. A few modern amenities, such as benches, resting places and refreshment kiosks, exist to aid the pilgrims in their devotions. According to all religions that revere the mountain, setting foot on its slopes is a dire sin. It is claimed that many people who ventured to defy the taboo have died in the process. There have been no recorded attempts to climb Mount Kailash; it is considered off limits to climbers in deference to Buddhist and Hindu beliefs.

Following the Chinese army entering Tibet in 1950, and political and border disturbances across the Chinese-Indian boundary, pilgrimage to the legendary abode of Lord Shiva was stopped from 1954 to 1978. Thereafter, a limited number of Indian pilgrims have been allowed to visit the place, under the supervision of the Chinese and Indian governments either by a lengthy and hazardous trek over the Himalayan terrain, travel by land from Kathmandu or from Lhasa where flights from Kathmandu are available to Tibet and thereafter travel over the great Tibetan plateau by car. The journey takes four night stops, finally arriving at Darchen at elevation of 4,600 m (15,100 ft), small outpost that swells with pilgrims at certain times of year. Despite its minimal infrastructure, modest guest houses are available for foreign pilgrims, whereas Tibetan pilgrims generally sleep in their own tents. A small regional medical center serving far-western Tibet and funded by the Swiss Ngari Korsum Foundation was built here in 1997.

Walking around the holy mountain—a part of its official park—has to be done on foot, pony or yak, taking some three days of trekking starting from a height of around 15,000 ft (4,600 m) past the Tarboche (flagpole) to cross the Drölma pass 18,200 ft (5,500 m), and encamping for two nights en route. First, near the meadow of Dirapuk gompa, some 2 to 3 km (1.2 to 1.9 mi) before the pass and second, after crossing the pass and going downhill as far as possible