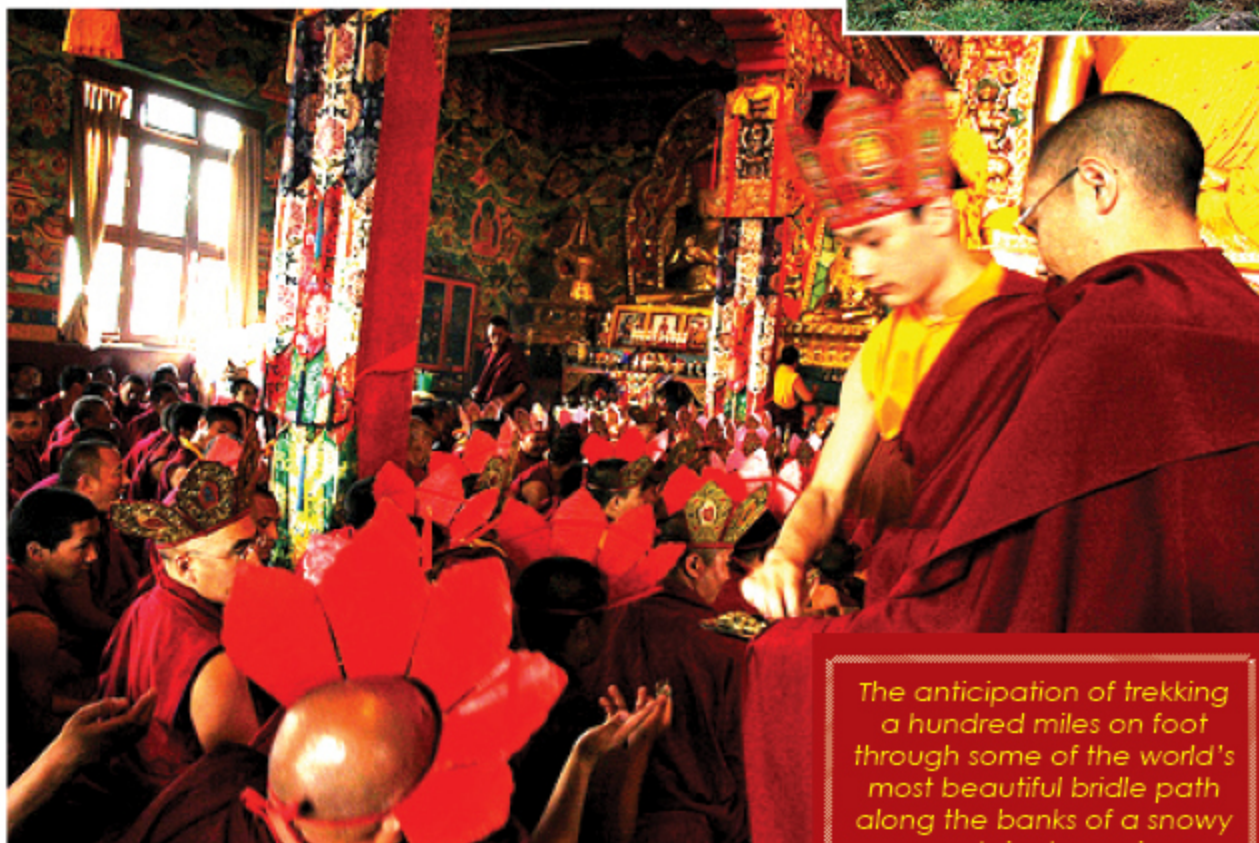


LESSONS FROM BON PA TRIBALS IN TIBET



Also having trekked in countries as diverse as Indonesia and Laos, I knew that trekking is the best way to gain knowledge about local customs, traditions, food habits and weather conditions. The locals are also the best guides to overcoming hidden dangers, avoiding treacherous paths and suggesting places to halt for the night. Also, it is much easier to befriend fellow travellers trekking to the same destination. As a believer of constant learning, I wanted to learn something new during every step of my 100 mile trek to Mount Kailash from Darchula in India. The other bonus of a painstaking trek is to be able to photograph local flora and fauna at

close quarters and having the liberty to wait for perfect lighting conditions for picture-postcard photographs all throughout one's trek.

One of the advantages of trekking to Kailash is the opportunity to meet village elders and gain small nuggets of ancient wisdom. This traditional wisdom has been passed down generations through folk-tales, anecdotes and songs. Hence, one cannot find such jewels in books. One has to be there and learn it for oneself. Many secrets of the universe are waiting to be discovered! During one of my overnight stays at Nabhidang on the tri-junction, where India, Nepal and Tibet meet, I was fortunate enough to be hosted by a 90-year-old Kumaoni grandmother,

The anticipation of trekking a hundred miles on foot through some of the world's most beautiful bridge paths along the banks of a snowy mountain stream is as exciting as the trek itself! Why does one choose to trek to Holy Mount Kailash in Tibet? Being a vegan, I not only consume only plant-based foods (just vegetables, fruits, nuts, seeds and grains) but also avoid travelling on animals. As there are only two options to reach Kailash Mansarovar from Kumaon, a horse-ride or a trek, I chose the later.



BY MURLI
MENON

ceo@tips4ceos.com



who after coming to know of my proposed trek to Kailash Mansarovar, revealed to me some amazing truths. Her grandfather had trekked to Kailash several times and brought back "atma-lingas." I learnt from her that if a devotee reaches the base of Mount Kailash and chants three malas each of the "gayatri mantra" at dawn, noon and dusk, small parts of Mount Kailash break away from the mountain and roll down towards the chanter. These are known as "atma-lingas" and these "atma-lingas" are charged with divine energy. The objective of the ancient people during their trek to Mansarovar was to collect and bring these auspicious atma-lingas to their respective villages and homes.

In Tibet, I met a Bon-Pa family who were circumambulating Mount Kailash along with me and who collected pebbles and cobble-stones from the banks of Mansarovar. The Bon-Pas are Tibet's original inhabitants who

are nature-worshippers and consider these pebbles auspicious. At the "Dolma-La" shrine at Dolma-La pass in Tibet, which is located at 22,000 feet and is the highest point one crosses during the Kailash parikrama, I met an ascetic who told me to take a dip in Mansarovar lake at mid-night and collect the water of the holy lake between 3 a.m. and 4 a.m. and drink it and carry it back home. According to him, this was what was taught to him by his ancestors.

The Bon-Pa tribals worship fire, water and earth (the primordial elements) and lead an eco-friendly existence, enduring unending hardships in one of the world's harshest terrains.

Needless to say, I chanted nine malas of the "gayatri mantra" at Mount Kailash at dawn, noon and dusk and yes, small rocks from Mount Kailash rolled down this majestic mountain, which I collected and



carried with me all along the tough return trek to India. Also, I did take a dip under the clear starlit skies, on the magical full moon-night at Mansarovar. I collected the holy pebbles from the banks of the lake between 3 a.m. and 4 a.m. and a litre of pure water. I was careful enough to drink water directly from the river all along my return trek and jealously guarded the atma-lingas, pebbles and holy water till I was back home at Ahmedabad.

I also collected rudraksh from the trees I encountered along the return trek through Nepal and India. Thus one can learn a lot of new things along the way through stories, anecdotes and real life experiences during one's travels.