



Kal Tal (Lake)

The Mystic “Death Lake” of Manaslu

Kal Tal, located in Tsum Numbri Rural Municipality, Ward No. 4 Prok is an enigmatic, raw, and deeply dramatic alpine gem hidden higher up in the Manaslu region. Known to locals as the "Death Lake" due to its dark appearance and striking folklore, this high-altitude tarn offers a stark, brooding contrast to the cheerful turquoise waters found elsewhere on the circuit. For those willing to step off the beaten track, it represents the ultimate untamed Himalayan wilderness.

Access

Kal Tal is located at a detour of regular Manaslu Circuit. It provides a pristine area less visited than the regular trekking route and also serve as additional acclimatization for the trekkers. Access to the location are:

Lake features

- **Altitude:** 3,685 meters above sea level.
- **Location:** South-West of Prok Village of Tsumnumbri - 4, Gorkha (within the Manaslu Conservation Area).
- **Lake Type:** Deep, obsidian-dark freshwater lake.
- **Primary Water Source:** It is a strictly rain and snowmelt-fed high alpine tarn. Its deep bed and sheer rock walls give the water a reflective, ink-black or deep olive hue.
- Heavily frozen for nearly a third of the year



- **Primary Starting Point:** Prok (Prookh) Village (approx. 2,500m).
- **The Grind:** This is not a casual walk. The trail from Prok to Kal Tal is a steep and relentless vertical climb of over 1,100 meters.
- **Duration:** 4 to 5 hours of demanding uphill trekking; 2 to 3 hours for the descent (6–8 hours round trip).
- **Trail Conditions:** The route transitions quickly from Prok's stone-walled agricultural terraces into dense, ancient forests. It is a primitive trail, heavily shaded, often damp, and slick with moss. As you break past the tree line, the track cuts across steep, open alpine meadows and rocky ridges that open up directly to the lake basin.
- **Alternative Serang Detour:** Some trekkers visit Kal Tal as part of a deeper cultural loop that includes the isolated, highly spiritual Serang Gompa hidden in the nearby cliffs.

Mythology & Local Name Origin

The name "Kal Tal" translates directly from Nepali as "The Lake of Death" (Kaal meaning time/death, and Taal meaning lake). To the local indigenous communities, the lake is wrapped in ancient, dark omens and spiritual taboos:

- **The Forbidden Waters:** For generations, local herders believed that looking too closely into the dark reflection of the lake during specific lunar cycles would cause a person's soul to be pulled into the deep.
- **The Silent Shore:** Unlike other sacred lakes where prayer flags flutter loudly, local traditions dictate approaching Kal Tal with an air of absolute quiet. Raising one's voice, shouting, or throwing stones into the lake is strictly believed to anger the resident water deities (Nagas), bringing sudden, violent storms or avalanches down from the surrounding peaks.
- **A Symbol of Impermanence:** In Buddhist philosophy practiced in the valley, the mirror-black, perfectly still surface is often used by passing lamas as a metaphor for the mind—deep, deceptive, and a reflection of earthly illusions.

Conservation Significance

Kal Tal holds deep ecological and conservation values as follow:

Habitat: Surrounding the lake, dwarf junipers, aromatic alpine herbs, and delicate high-altitude wildflowers adapted to the cold, thin air.

Mammals: The dense tree cover is a known habitat for the endangered Himalayan musk deer, red panda, and the Himalayan black bear. On the higher cliffs overlooking the lake, herds of Himalayan tahr can occasionally be spotted.

Avian Life: The quiet forests are teeming with spectacular birdlife, most notably Nepal's national bird, the colorful Himalayan Monal (Danphe), alongside the Blood Pheasant and Koklass Pheasant.

Seasonal Information

Spring (March – May): The absolute best time for biodiversity. The steep climb is made vastly easier by the cool temperatures and the spectacular sight of blooming rhododendron forests below the lake.

Autumn (September – November): Offers the sharpest, clearest views of Sringi Himal and Ganesh Himal. The lake is perfectly still, behaving like a flawless black mirror.

Winter & Monsoon: Highly discouraged. The steep trail from Prok becomes dangerously slick, muddy, and plagued by leeches during the monsoon. In winter, heavy snow completely blanks out the primitive trail markings, making navigation across the steep upper ridges highly perilous.

Quick Tips for Visitors

- **What to Pack:** There are absolutely no teahouses or shops at the lake itself. Bring a windcheater, drinking water, polarized sunglasses (to block intense glacial glare), and energy snacks.
- **Acclimatization Advantage:** Do not skip this hike! Spending a couple of hours walking up to 3,691 m and resting by the shore is the absolute best way to prepare your body before tackling the grueling Larkya La (Pass 5,106 m) later in the trek.