

Places of Interest in Kashmir-II

Pahalgam Valley

- The Valley of Shepherds" Situated at the confluence of the streams flowing from Sheshnag Lake and the Lidder river, Pahalgam (2,130 m) was once a humble shepherd's village with breathtaking views. Now it is Kashmir's premier resort, cool even during the height of summer when the maximum temperature does not exceed 25 deg C. A number of hotels and lodges cater to all preferences and budgets, from luxurious hotels to unpretentious trekkers' lodges, including J&K TDC huts.
- Around Pahalgam are many places of interest, and because the resort is set between fairly steep hills, it is worth hiring a pony rather than walking. Pony fares are posted at prominent locations. The most beautiful of these is the huge, undulating meadow of Baisaran, surrounded by thickly wooded forests of pine. Hajan, on the way to Chandanwari, is an idyllic spot for a picnic. Filmgoers will recognize it instantly as it has been the location of several movie scenes. Pahalgam has within it no fewer than eight tiny villages, one of which is Mamal. There is a Shiva temple here, generally considered to be Kashmir's oldest existing temple, dating to the 7th century. Betab Valley of Pahalgam is known for film "Betaab" which was film picturised there.





SONAMARG - The Meadow of Gold

- Sonamarg is situated at a distance of 84 kms from Srinagar, on the Srinagar-Ladakh Road. The route passes through the picturesque town of Ganderbal (21 kms), Kangan (40 kms) and Gund of the Sindh Valley, before reaching the resort. Spectacular views of the Harmukh range dominate the horizon.
- The drive to Sonamarg is through the Sindh Valley which presents yet another spectacular facet of countryside in Kashmir. Situated at an altitude of 2730 m, Sonamarg) has, as its backdrop, snowy mountains against a cerulean sky. The Sindh River that meanders through the valley abounds with trout. Ponies can be hired for the trip up to Thajiwas glacier, which is a major local attraction during the summer months.
- Sonamarg is the base of a major trek that passes along several mountain lakes –Vishansar, Kishansar, Gadsar, Satsar and Gangabal. Sonamarg is also the take off station for the drive to Ladakh across the Zojila, a major pass in the GreatHimalayanRange, through which the Srinagar-Leh Road passes. Sonamarg is also a base for undertaking the yatra to the holy Amarnath cave,
- Accommodation in Sonamarg is available in J&K TDC's Huts and Tourist Bungalows. In addition, there are some private hotels.



Daksum

- Past Mughals Gardens of Achabal with their tinkling fountains, through the breathtaking splendour of the springs at Kokernag, lies Daksum. Tucked away in a densely forested gorge, Daksum would be completely silent but for the Bringhi river which gushes through it. Daksum is a walker's paradise. Up the hills which are swathed in coniferous trees, past gurgling brooks, the simple, haunting notes of a flute will waft down to you from where an unseen shepherd tends his flock. For in the hills surrounding Daksum, suddenly you will find yourself in grassy meadows where sheep are taken to pasture.
- Daksum is a reviving experience - the bracing mountain air, the solitude, the densely clad hills, and beyond them, snow covered mountains all contribute to Daksum's mystique, making it the perfect retreat.

Kokernag

- Situated the lower of Bringhi valley, Kokernag (2,020 m, 70 kms from Srinagar), is set amidst sprawling gardens fragrant with the bloom of thousands of flowers. The Kokernag spring bubbles at seven places at the foot of the forested mountain. The water of the spring is famous for its medicinal and digestive properties.



Yusmarg

- A two hour drive from Srinagar (47 kms) will take you to acres upon acres of grassy meadow ringed by forests of pine, and towering beyond them, awesome and majestic snow clad mountains. This is Yusmarg - close enough to Srinagar for a picnic, idyllic enough to make you want to stay for a few days. Here are walks of every sort - a leisurely amble along flower-strewn meadows or away to where a mighty river froths and crashes its way over rocks, its mild white foam earning it the name of Dudh Ganga. Further down, a captivating lake, Nilnag, is cradled by hills. Nearby are several peaks - Trata Kutti and Sang Safed to name a couple of them. About 13 kms from Yusmarg, a short detour away from the Srinagar road, is Charari- Sharief, the Shrine of Kashmir's patron saint Sheikh Noor-ud-din or Nund Reshi.



View of rural Kashmir on way to Yusmarg

Aharbal

- Gradually, the distant rumble becomes a roar as one approach the waterfall of Aharbal, which crashes down a narrow gorge. Aharbal is more than just a waterfall. There are several places to picnic in the surrounding areas, as well as delightful walks of varying lengths all over the hillsides. An interesting treks to the high altitude lake of Kounsernag at 13,500 ft above sea level-takes off from Aharbal.



The Aharbal falls

Watlab

- Gradually , the panoply of the 'real Kashmir' miles away from well-traversed areas will unfold before you, and you will reach Watlab. Here, high on a hilltop is the shrine of a Muslim mystic, Baba Shukurdin. From here, the Wular stretches away as far as the eye can see, edged by picturesque villages, and terraced breeze-rippled fields of paddy in a riotous burst of colour.
- At Watlab is a Forest Rest House amidst sprwaling apple orchards, permission to stay in which has to be sought from the Forest Department Office at Sopore district headquarters.

Verinag

- Located 80 kms from Srinagar at an altitude of 1,876 m, the spring of Verinag is believed to be the chief source of the river Jhelum. Construction of the octagonal base of the spring and the arcade around it was undertaken by the Mughal Emperor Jahangir and completed during the reign of Shah Jahan. Down the stream to the east lie the remains of a Mughal pavilion and baths. Verinag can be approached through the link road, which turns off, from the national highway at Lower Munda.



Lolab Valley

- A three hour drive through the famed apple orchards of Sopore, through Kupwara district will bring you to this enchantingly lovely valley, visited by so few. But it is this very quality that makes Lolab so special - virtually flat lands planted with fields of paddy, verdant in summer, pure gold in autumn are offset to perfection for the gently rolling hills that encircle the valley, clad in the deepest green that is the colour of pines.
- Trees of walnut and apple whose colours reflect the changing of the seasons form nature's bounty here. And in the tiny hamlets that sprinkle the valley , you will see a life that is distinctly and uniquely Kashmiri. Timbered houses with sloping thatched roofs; the brilliant vermilion of chillies drying from windows; women carrying samvovars of tea into the fields where every member of the family is engaged. In short Kashmiri village life as it has been led for centuries.

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