

Sightseeing in Gulmarg

The Meadow Of Flowers

A huge cup shaped meadow, lush and green with slopes where the silence is broken only by the tinkle of cowbells, Gulmarg looks like a fantasy set in a film and not surprisingly have been the venue of several films. A beautiful hill resort of Kashmir, Gulmarg dates back to the 16th century. Apart from its scenic beauty, Gulmarg is known for housing the highest golf course in the world.

The valley of Gulmarg, a large meadow about 3-sq-kms in area, stands at 2,730 metres, 56-km south west of Srinagar. The name means 'Meadow Of Flowers' and in the spring it's just that, a rolling meadow dotted with countless colourful Bluebells, Daisies, Forget Me Not's and Buttercups. The valley itself is about 3-km long and up to a km wide.

Avantiswami Temple: There are two adjoining temples in Avantipur and the larger of the two is the famed Avantiswami temple. The other Shiva temple was renovated and is used for daily prayers but the older and larger Avantiswami Temple is completely in ruins. It has been dated to be built in the 9th century by the ruler, King Awantivarman. He built both the temples and the elegant ruined Avantiswami temple was dedicated to Lord Vishnu. With a touch of Greek architectural styles, the temple was built of sandstone and thus could not withstand the ravages of time. Some idols are showcased in the SPS Museum in Srinagar.

Cable Car to Kongdoor: The most fascinating aspect of Gulmarg is the amazing Cable Car to Kongdoor. It is also popularly known as the Gondola Lift and is an amazing experience especially as you go over pine forests. The lift starts at 2690 mts and reaches Kongdoor at an altitude of 3090 mt. The adventurous Gondola Lift is managed by Jammu and Kashmir State Cable Car Corporations.

Golf Course: The well laid out Golf Course in Gulmarg was laid out in 1911 as a British summer resort. The majestic Gulmarg Golf ground is the highest golf course in the country. With an 18 holes course and 72 par golf course facilities, the most unique feature is that it has open temporary memberships so you can get a membership for even a day! It is completely managed by the Jammu and Kashmir Tourism Development Corporation.

Gondola Lift: The crowning glory of Gulmarg is the Gondola Lift, one of the star attractions of this beautiful ski resort, nestling in the Himalayas. For a totally uplifting experience of the most unusual kind, check out the Gondola Lift!

Gulmarg is the only ski resort in Asia that offers you heli-skiing facilities. Your guide will tell you that it is the highest lift-served ski resort in the world, equipped with T-bar lift and three modern ski lifts along the Gondola chair lift. If you have skiing in mind, then the best time to head here is by mid December when the slopes are adequately covered with snow to kick off the skiing season that continues up to March.

Once you have got accustomed to the biting cold and are able to appreciate the glorious snowscape around you, you will learn that the Gondola lift comprises two sections. Designed by Poma of France, the first section is 2,350 m long and rises 450m vertically from the ski resort to slopes at a height of 3300 m up the side of Apharwat Mountain.

The second section extends over 4,000 m to just below the peak of Apharwat. At this dizzying altitude, the Aphrawat peak offers you an absolutely breathtaking view of the snow capped mountains and snow-covered slopes dotted with a good cover of mighty pine and fir trees.

From the top station, it's a half an hour walk up to the peak. You can glide from there in either direction for a couple of kilometres before descending the mountain's multiple ridges, faces and bowls.

If you want to learn skiing, this is the place to come to. Gulmarg is considered to be the cheapest venue in the world to learn skiing. The Poma slopes offer excellent facilities for both learners and pros with short ski courses regularly conducted for beginners and advanced skiers.

So let go of your inhibitions. Make a snowman, have a snowball fight or flail your arms wildly as you try to master the art of skiing. You might have a few sore spots on your person by the end of the day but it promises to be a once in a lifetime experience. So, go for it.

Khilanmarg: The highland meadow of Khilanmarg is a short 4 km from Gulmarg. You can trek there, take a pony ride or reach there in a dandi. Once you get here, you will once again be bowled over by the majestic splendour of the Himalayas. A panoramic view of the mighty mountain range with its snow capped peaks and the tranquil waters of the Wular Lake are a breathtaking one.

All through the summer and well into autumn, Gulmarg offers great golfing facilities for golfers with an 18-hole green golf course, said to be the world's highest, set among the beauty of the mountains. In winter, the stunning Gulmarg turns into a skiing resort with Khilanmarg becoming an important skiing centre.

If you have skiing in mind, head for these hills around mid-December when the slopes have a good snow cover. The season goes on till the end of March and offers tourists a fabulous range

of winter sports in the form of Skiing, Trekking and Heli-skiing. If you want to make your trip here truly unique, go for Heli-skiing. You are flown by helicopter to a chosen peak from where you can choose your descent route.

The meadows are carpeted by a floral splendour in spring and blanketed white by several feet of snow in winter; Khilanmarg thus offers the tourist a different landscape depending on the season! It's a 600-metre ascent from Gulmarg to Khilanmarg. In early spring when the snow begins to melt, the path turns slushy and can be quite a daunting experience. However, once you reach your destination, you will be amply rewarded with an unparalleled view of the great Himalayas from Nanga Parbat to the twin peaks of Nun and Kun to the southeast.

Maharani Temple: The beautiful Maharani temple was constructed in 1915 by the Queen Mohini Bai Sisodia, wife of the erstwhile ruler of Kashmir. The splendid temple is better known as Mohinieshwar Shivalalaya and also houses an idol of Goddess Parvati. This Shiva temple is located in serene and verdant surroundings and was also the royal temple of the Dogra rulers. It is situated on a Gulmarg hillock amidst verdant woods.

St. Marrys Church : A relic of the British era, St Mary's Church is known to be constructed over 150 years ago and reflects the beautiful architecture of the period. A unique feature of the region, the Church stands out amidst old temples and mosques. The verdant pine trees surround the Church, while there are numerous guest houses and an old luxury hotel for you to stay that gives you a beautiful view of the valley.

Take a Hike!

All around are snow-capped mountains, and on a clear day one can see all the way to Nanga Parbat in one direction and Srinagar is another. It's a popular day trip from Srinagar to Gulmarg, although many people extend their stay or use it as a base for trekking. The road from Srinagar rises gently towards the lower slopes of the range, passing through rice and maize fields.

From Tangmarg, at the foot of the range, there are two paths to Gulmarg - a steep footpath or a winding sealed road. There is also a pony track from Gulmarg that leads upwards to Khilanmarg, Kongdori and seven springs.

PRIME ATTRACTIONS

Khilanmarg

This smaller valley is about a 6-km walk from the Gulmarg bus stop and car park. The meadow, carpeted with flowers in the spring, is the site for Gulmarg's winter ski runs and offers a fine view of the surrounding peaks and over the Kashmir Valley. It's a 600-metre ascent from Gulmarg to Khilanmarg and during the early spring, as the snow melts, it can be a very muddy hour's climb up the hill. The effort is rewarded, if it's clear, with a sweeping view of the great Himalayas from Nanga Parbat to the twin 7,100-metre peaks of Nun and Kun to the southeast.

Alpather Lake:

Beyond Khilanmarg, 13-km from Gulmarg at the foot of the twin 4, 511 metre Apharwat peaks, this lake is frozen until mid-June and even later in the year one can see lumps of ice floating in its cold waters. The walk from Gulmarg follows a well-graded Pony track over the 3, 810 metre Apharwat ridge, separating it from Khilanmarg, and then up the valley to the lake at 3,843 metres. The more adventurous trekkers can climb straight up the boulder-strewn slope of the ridge and descend the other side to the path. For horse riding aficionados, Alpathar Lake makes an exciting day's excursion, starting early morning and returning late evening.

The Ningli Nallah:

Flowing from the melting snow and ice on Apharwat and the Alpathar Lake, this pretty mountain stream is 8-km from Gulmarg. The stream continues down into the valley below and joins the Jhelum River near Sopur. This long, grassy valley is a popular picnic spot and the walking path carries on, crossing the Ningli (also spelt as Ningle) Nallah by a bridge and continues on to the Khilanmarg, another grassy meadow and a good spot for camping. In early summer one will probably share the campsites with Gujars moving their herds up to the high meadows.

Ferozpore Nallah

Reached from the Tangmarg road, or from the Outer Circular Walk, this mountain stream meets the Bahan River at a popular picnic spot known as 'waters meet'. The stream is reputed to be particularly good for trout fishing; it's about five km down the valley from Gulmarg but quite close to Tangmarg. The river can be reached by walking 3-km down the path from the gap near Tangmarg and then heading south through the forest, down a slope towards the stream. Near here there is a bridge which leads to the small waters meet picnic spot on the right bank. Looking south from Tangmarg the river can be traced up to its source close to the rugged peak known as Ferozpore or Shinmahinyu. On the right bank the stream branches, the left path leading to Tosa Maidan, while the right bends away towards the Gogaldara road at a second bridge, about 32-km upstream, and then leads away to the Ferozpore pass, Poonch and Kantar Nag.

One can continue on from here to Tosa Maidan, a three day, 50-km walk to one of Kashmir's most beautiful Marg's, crossing the Basmai Gali pass at about 4,000 metres. The track here is very close to the ceasefire line with Pakistan and on the right one will pass the Jamainwali Gali, the pass at 4,000 metres is one of the easiest and safest routes into the Punjab.

Shrine Of Baba Reshi / Ziarat Of Baba Reshi :

This Muslim shrine is on the slopes below Gulmarg and can be reached from either Gulmarg or Tangmarg. The Ziarat, or tomb, is of a well-known Muslim saint who died here in 1480. Before renouncing worldly ways he was a courtier of the Kashmir King Zain-ul-Abidin. Every year thousands of devotees visit this shrine regardless of the faith they believe in.

Skiing:

In winter, Gulmarg acquires a new persona - that of the country's premier skiing resorts. Skiing, to many who watch it on TV, seems like a very elitist sport, requiring a high level of training and expensive equipment. They are surprised, when they visit Gulmarg for a day's expedition to "see the snow", that others with the same level of physical fitness and training are skiing down

slopes. Gulmarg is the ultimate beginner's skiing resort. One doesn't require a heavy woolen wardrobe - slacks or a Salwar Kameez will do fine. In Gulmarg one will also be able to drift to one of the many Ski shops and hire skis, sticks and goggles. Just find yourself a ski instructor and set off down a slope.

Neither does one need to exert oneself climbing up slopes. The gentlest slope of 200m is linked with a ski lift, which helps one to go up. When one graduates to intermediate level - which will happen after the first few days of practice, there are other slopes, longer and steeper, which are connected by chair lift. The longest ski run in Gulmarg is provided by the Gondola cable car, which allows a ski run of 2,213m.

GULMARG WALKS

Outer Circular Walk:

A circular road, 11-km in length, runs right round Gulmarg through pleasant pine forests with excellent views over the Kashmir valley. Nanga Parbat is clearly visible 137-km to the north, Haramukh 60-km to the east while to the south one can see the Ferozpora and Sunset Peaks and the Apharwat Ridge. Nanga Parbat, the 'lord of the mountains', is the fourth highest peak on earth at 8,500 metres.