

Pahalgam : pahalgam is probably the most popular hill resort in the Kashmir valley. Since it is rather lower than Gulmarg the nighttime temperatures do not drop so low and it has the further advantage of the beautiful Lidder River running right through the town.

Pahalgam is situated at the junction of the Aru and Sheshnag Rivers and surrounded by soaring, fir-covered mountains with bare, snow-capped peaks rising behind them. The Aru flows down from the Kolahoi glacier beyond Lidderwat while the Sheshnag from glaciers along the great Himalayan.

At the confluence of the streams flowing from the river Lidder and Sheshnag Lake, Pahalgam was once a humble shepherd's village with breathtaking views. Now it Kashmir's premier resort, cool even during the height of summer. A number of hotels and lodges cater to all preferences and budgets, from luxurious to unpretentious trekkers' lodges, including JKTDC's delightfully romantic, fully furnished huts, partially concealed by giant pine trees.

Pahalgam Walks

There are many short walks available from Pahalgam and in addition it is an excellent base for longer treks such as those to the Kolahoi glacier or to the Amarnath cave. Pahalgam can also be used as a starting point for treks out of the region. Pahalgam is particularly famed for its many shepherds and they're a common sight, driving their flocks of sheep along the paths all around the town.

PRIME ATTRACTIONS

Around Pahalgam are many places of interest, and because the resort is set between fairly hills, it is worth hiring a pony rather than walking. Pony fares are posted at prominent locations.

Mamaleshwara

Mamaleshwara is only a km or so downstream from Pahalgam, and on the opposite side of the Lidder, is this small Shiva temple with its square, stone tank. It is thought to date from the reign of king Jayasima in the 12th century, even earlier.

Baisaran

This meadow, about 5-km from Pahalgam and 150m higher, provides excellent views over the town and the Lidder valley. Pine forests and the snowclad mountains surround the grassy glen. One can hire ponies for this trek from near the centre of town.

Tulian Lake

If one continues 11-km beyond Baisaran one reaches the Tulian Lake at 3,353m, 1,200m higher up. It is covered in ice for much of the year and surrounded by peaks, which rise more than 300m above its shores. It also can be reached by pony trek.

Aru

The little village of Aru is actually the first stage from Pahalgam on the trek to Lidderwat and the

Kolahoi glacier. It makes an interesting day walk from Pahalgam, following the Lidder river for Pahalgam, following the Lidder river for 11-km upstream. The main track, which also can be taken by car, is on the left bank of the river. There is also a less used, and more difficult path, on the right bank. At Aru one will often find the Gujars, living in their log huts with their flocks of sheep and goats, en route to the higher sheep and goats, en route to the higher pastures for the summer.

Hajan

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.

Chandanwari & Passage To The Amarnath Yatra

Situated 16-km from Pahalgam, Chandanwari is the starting point of the Amarnath Yatra, which takes place every year in the month of Sawan (Rain). The destination is the Amarnath Cave, believed to be the abode of Lord Shiva. Although the road from Pahalgam to Chandanwari is on fairly flat terrain, and can be undertaken by car, from Chandanwari onwards the track becomes much steeper, being accessible on foot or by pony.

Located 11-km from Chandanwari is the mountain lake of Sheshnag, after which 13-km away is the last stop, Panchtarni. The Amarnath cave is 6-km away from there. During the month of 'Sawan', an ice stalagmite forms a natural Shivling (also spelt as Shivlinga), which waxes and wanes with the phases of the moon.

The state government makes extensive arrangements every year for the successful completion of the pilgrimage, registering each one of the over one lakh pilgrims, pony owners and Dandi Walas, providing camps en route, and ensuring safe, comfortable and speedy progress of the Yatris.

Even if one's visit to Pahalgam is not during the period of the Yatra, one can still take a pony ride up to Sheshnag Lake, returning late evening.

Fishing

Pahalgam is one of Kashmir's popular trout fishing beats. Kashmir is famous for its trout although they tend to be rather small. Additionally, fishing licences are hard to get and rather expensive. A compulsion is to keep an am guide and one is also permitted to catch six fishes, which is the daily limit.

EXCURSIONS

On The Road To Pahalgam

The road to Pahalgam starts out towards Jammu but later branches off to the east at Anantnag. There are a number of points of interest along this route including several Mughal gardens - indeed if one take a bus tour to Pahalgam one'll be thoroughly saturated with Mughal gardens by the time one arrives.

Pampore

Only 16-km out of Srinagar on the main highway south, Pampore is the Centre of Kashmir's saffron industry. Highly prized for its flavouring and colouring properties and rather expensive, saffron is gathered from flowers, which are harvested in October.

Avantipur

This popular stop on Pahalgam excursions is noted for its two ruined Hindu temples. The temples were both constructed by King Avantivarman, after whom this ancient centre was named, between 855 and 883 AD. The larger of the two is dedicated to Vishnu and known as the Avantiswami temple. A huge wall encloses the central shrine with four smaller shrines around the centre. The other temple dedicated to Lord Shiva and known as the Avantishvara, is about a km before the Vishnu temple, but also close to the main road. It is situated in a courtyard, enclosed by a massive stonewall with a gateway on the western side. The nearby village of Bijbihara has a huge Chinar tree, claimed to be the largest in Kashmir.

Sangam

A little further down the road, Sangam is interesting for its strong local industry of cricket bat manufacturing! One'll see thousands of cricket bats displayed by the roadside and thousands more roughly cut lengths of wood being seasoned.

Anantnag

At this point the road fords, one route turning northeast to Pahalgam and two others southeast to Achabal and Kokarnag or to Verinag. The Jammu road leaves this route just before Anantnag at Khanabal.

Anantnag has a number of sulphur springs, esteemed for their curative properties. The largest spring is believed to be the home of Ananta, the serpent on which Lord Vishnu reclines and from which the town takes its name - 'Abode of Ananta'. Ananta means 'endless' and the water issues from the base of a small hillock and rushes into another spring in the middle of which is a natural mineral deposit column which the locals revere as a lingam. On the 14th day of a full moon fortnight in September/October, there is a festival where the people fast and pour rice and milk into the spring to feed the goldfish.

At one time Anantnag was known as Islamabad but this name is no longer used, due to the confusion it would cause with the not too far distant capital of Pakistan also named Islamabad.

Achabal

The Mughal gardens in this small town were begun by Nur Jahan and completed by Jahanara, daughter of Shah Jahan, in 1640. It's one of the most carefully designed of the Kashmir gardens and was said to be a favourite retreat of Nur Jahan. Water from a copious spring flows from the garden in three stone lined canals, over three terraces and three cascades, with several fountains in the main canal. There are three pavilions on the upper terrace, shaded by Chinar Trees. There's a tourist bungalow, tourist huts and a camping ground at Achabal.

Kokarnag

One may be suffering garden overload by the time one gets here, but Kokarnag has yet another one, noted for its roses. Like Achabal there is a tourist bungalow, tourist huts and a camping

ground for accommodation.

Daksum

Somewhat above Kokarnag, along the bring river valley, there's the small hill resort of Daksum at 2,438m. It's on the trekking route to Kishtwar and has a Rest house, Tourist Bungalow and plenty of camping spots. From Daksum the trail rises fairly steeply to the Sinthan Pass at 3,748m. The pass is open from April to September for trekkers.

Mattan & Martand

Only a few km beyond Anantnag, on the Pahalgam road, Mattan is an important Hindu pilgrimage point due to its fish filled springs. A complicated legend relates that the springs were created when Lord Shiva broke open an egg, which had been thrown there, the egg being the reincarnated form of a forgetful boy, who had been cursed by a wandering sage and that's only half the story!

On a plateau above Mattan and 3-km to the south, stands the huge ruined temple of Martand. Built by Lalitaditya Mukhtapida it is the most impressive ancient ruin in Kashmir and beautifully sited. The ruins are 67m by 43m and consist of a portico with a small-detached shrine on both side and a quadrangular courtyard. The courtyard was surrounded by 84 columns - the multiple of the number of days in the week by the number of signs in the zodiac.

From here to Pahalgam the road follows the course of the Lidder River, past some good trout fishing stretches.

Verinag

Close to the foot of the Pir Panjal range, the spring at Verinag is said to be the source of the Jhelum river, which flows north through Srinagar, Jehangir built an octagonal stone basin at the spring in 1612 and in 1620 his son, Shah Jahan, laid out a garden around it. The spring is said to be over 15m deep and is reputed never to dry up or overflow. There is also a tourist bungalow at Verinag.