

Kashmir: Peaceful, Beautiful And Waiting To Welcome Tourists

By: Karen Dabrowska

Kashmir is peaceful, beautiful and waiting to welcome tourists. That's the message from Jonny Bealby of Wild Frontiers whose company specialises in trekking trips Primal forests, breathtaking mountains and pristine lakes, magical houseboats and wonderful scenery give visitors a variety of holiday choices.



Jama Masjid

For Muslim visitors there are Kashmir, Hazratbal Mosque spectacular mosques. The most stands like a glowing dream with important Muslim shrine of pristine grace reflected in the

waters of Dal Lake commanding a grand view of the lake and the mountains beyond. Hazratbal is remarkable for being the only domed mosque in Srinagar: the others have distinct pagoda like roofs. The importance of the shrine lies in the fact that it houses the Moi-e-Muqaddas (The Sacred Hair) of Prophet Mohammed. The shrine is known by many names including Hazratbal, Assar-e-Sharif, Madinat-Us-Sani and Dargah Sharief.

According to legend, the relic was first brought to India by Syed Abdullah, a descendant of the Prophet who left Medina and settled in Bijapur, near Hyderabad in 1635. When Syed Abdullah died, his son, Syed Hamid, inherited the relic. Following the Mughal conquest of the region, Syed Hamid was stripped of his family estates. Finding himself unable to care for the relic, he sold it to a wealthy Kashmiri businessman, Khwaja Nur-ud-Din



Amarnath cave

Chrar-e-Sharif



Dal Lake



Ishbari. However, when the Mughal Emperor Aurangzeb learned what had transpired, he had the relic seized and sent to the shrine of Khwaja Moinuddin Chishti at Ajmer. Khwaja Nur-ud-Din was imprisoned in Lahore for possessing the relic.

Later, realizing his mistake, Aurangzeb decided to restore the

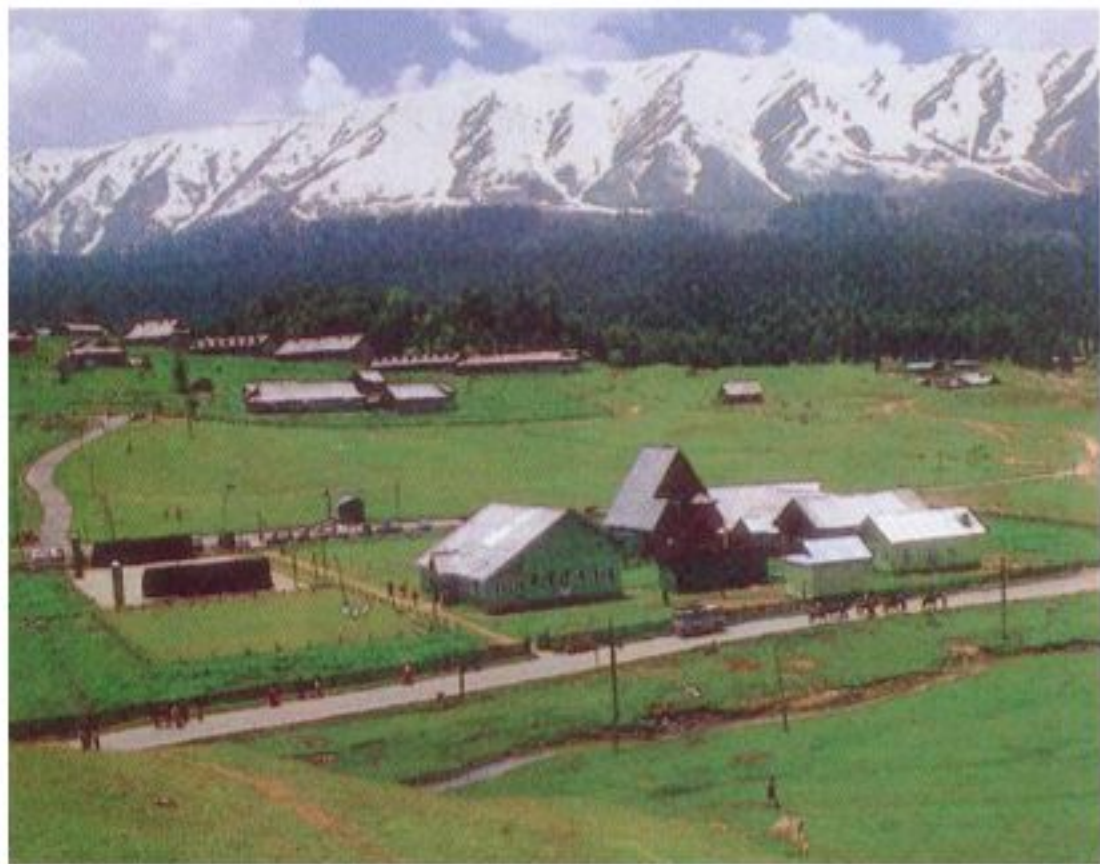
relic to Khwaja Nur-ud-Din and allow him to take it to Kashmir, but by that time Khwaja Nur-ud-Din had already died in prison. In 1700, the relic finally reached Kashmir, along with the body of Khwaja Nur-ud-Din. There, Inayat Begum, daughter of Khwaja Nur-ud-Din, became its custodian and established the shrine. Inayat Begum married into the prominent

Banday family in Kashmir, and since then, her descendants, known as Nishaandehs (givers of the sign), have been the keepers of the relic,

Jama Masjid in Srinagar is one of the oldest mosques in Kashmir, situated at Nowhatta, in the middle of the old city. It was built by Sultan Sikandar in 1400 AD. Later, the son of Sultan Sikandar, Zain-ul-Abidin got the mosque extended.

The attractions of the mosque include beautiful Indo-Saracenic architecture, a magnificent courtyard and 370 wooden pillars. Another feature of the mosque is the peace and tranquillity inside. It is just outside the old bazaar. Thousands of Muslims come to Friday prayers at this mosque.

Chrar-e-Sharief is a shrine revered by both Muslims and Hindus. It is dedicated to Sheikh Nooruddin, who was one of the great mystic-



Hemis festival



saints of Kashmir. An example of the composite culture of Kashmir, the Sheikh was born as Nund Reshi or Sahazanand in 1377. His ancestors migrated from Kishtwar to the Valley. His father, Salar Sanz, a pious man, was influenced by the spiritual teachings of the Sufi Saint, Yasman Reshi, who arranged his marriage to Sadra Maji. It is said that for three days, the infant Nund refused to be breast-fed until on the third day, a Yogini (a well-known female saint),

Lal Ded entered the house and fed the child her own milk. After that, she left the house prophesying that the infant would be her spiritual heir.

While personifying the Hindu-Muslim culture of the Valley, Nund, was later named Naruddin meaning (the light of faith). He fully believed in the immanence and transcendence of God, desired a society based on moral values and preached against indulgence.

Within two days of his death in 1438 at Charar, nine thousand people gathered at the shrine, including the King, Sultan Zainul Abdin. The saint preached against communal hatred and in one of his teachings, wrote: «We belong to the same parents. Then why this difference? Let Hindus and Muslims together worship God alone. We came to this world like partners. We should have shared our joys and sorrows together.»

After visiting the holy places, Wild Frontiers offers a variety of excursions. The most popular are: Wild walk in the Kashmiri Himalayas, the High Road to Kashmir - Leh to Srinagar and Kashmir in the garden of the Moghul Kings.

The wild walk is a four-day trek from Aru to Sonomus - a classic Himalayan trail, over high mountain passes. At the end there

Ladakh





Boats House



is three days relaxation in Srinagar's famous lakes - and of course its house boats.

The Leh to Srinagar trip begins with an epic flight over the Himalayas to Leh with ancient palaces, forts and monasteries. It includes the Tsechu festival, during which Lamas perform sacred masked dances to commemorate the birth of Padmasca, the founder of Tibetan Buddhism. There is also

a glimpse of rural life in the old Silk Road Kingdom of Ladakh and a visit to the remote Nubra Valley. The trip concludes with a journey along one of the most spectacular roads in the whole Himalaya, via Lamayuru and the Zaskar Valley, to Srinagar and its beautiful alpine mountains and lakes.

The Moghul kings tour focuses entirely on the fabled vale of Kashmir. The three-day water-trek from Dal Lake to Manasbal Lake

and beyond is on the beautiful watery trail, first plaid by the Moghul rulers in the seventeenth century, and then by the Brits two hundred years later.

Accommodation is in lovely mountain camps from where the Himalayan foothills can be experienced at their most glorious. There is a visit to the mountain village of Gulmarg and four nights on Srinagar's famous houseboats.

Hinterland Travel has organised a special trip to Amarnath cave where Lord Shiva spent time in meditation. The 46km trek is a traditional Hindu pilgrimate route which passes through magnificent scenery. En route are the famous temples of Anantnag, Deviangam, Bijbehara, Akingam, Lukbhavan, and Nagdandi Ashram along with the shrine of Baba Hyder Rishi situated at Anantnag.

Srinagar

