

Jammu Yatra

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When I visited the Kashmir Valley in 1988, I was told to visit the Jammu region as well. The dream came true this October. The route was Jammu and around, Rajouri, Poonch, via Mughal road to Anantnag, to Kishtwar via Sinthan Top, Bhadarwah and finally Jammu.

This is one of the most scenic and exciting drives in India, perfect for bikers and car rally enthusiasts. We drove approximately 1800 km through good, stone or mud roads, snow and water streams, all in a 2005 model Tata Indica that unexpectedly served us very well.

Day wise travel

1. Day one local Jammu sight-seeing for half a day.
2. Day two Mansar Lake (8 am to 1.30pm) and Jammu sight-seeing.
3. Day three to Basholi and early morning Jammu sight-seeing.
4. Day four from Samba to Purmandal, drive via Katra to Reasi and another 30 kms to see the world's highest railway bridge being made.
5. Day five Akhnoor and Shiv-Khori cave, night at Nowshera.
6. Day six Rajouri, reached Poonch by 5 pm, night at Poonch.
7. Day seven Poonch sight-seeing and night at Budha Amarnath Mandir.
8. Day eight left Budha Amarnath Mandir at 10 am to Surankote, then Mughal Road – Shopian to reach Anantnag by about 4.30 pm. Night at Verinag about 30 kms away ahead.
9. Day nine left Verinag at about 8.30 am, via Sinthan Pass reached Kishtwar by 4 pm.
10. Day ten local Kishtwar reached Bhadarwah by 6 pm.
11. Day eleven left Bhadarwah by 1.30 pm for Jammu, via Patnitop and took diversion enroute for Sudh Mahadev Mandir to reach Jammu by about 10 pm.
12. Day twelve visited homes of West Pakistan Refugees to reach Airport by 12.30 pm.

Photo captions tell you more about each place and have travel tips.

Jammu (also known as City of Temples)

Shri Raghunathji Mandir (Shri Ram), Shri Ranbireshwar Mandir (Shivji), Panjvaktra Mahadev Mandir (must experience), Peer Kho Mandir (Gorknath cave) must see, Panjthirthe (5 temples close to each other), Dau Temple (Balaram), Gurudwara Sh Guru Nanak Devji has 3 feet marble images of Guru Nanak. All these are quite close to one another. Raghunathji Mandir is in the local market in old Jammu area – market worth a visit.

Panjvaktra Mahadev Mandir is one of the oldest temples where the lingam appears in self-manifest form (Aap Shambhu). According to local tradition Adi Shankracharya stayed here during his visit to Jammu. As per literary sources Guru Nanak too visited this place during the period of his second Udasi in 1514. When king of Jammu Raja Khokhar Dev visited Guru Nanakji and urged instructions/blessings, the Nanak Dev expounded a course of 'Raj Dharma'. The historic 'Ber' tree under which the discourse appears to have been delivered still stands and is highly worshipped. According to 'Shiva Rahasya' the Panjvaktra or the five faced Shivji is the

prime cause of the entire creation. Mahadeva is seen in five aspects: Rudra, Aghora, Vamdeva, Tat Purusha and Ishana. They also represent his five Mahabhutas or elements. In Jammu region, worship of Panchmukhi Mahadev seems to have been in vogue since hoary times. Panjvaktra Mahadeva is also called Sacchand Bhairav in Kashmir Shaivism. It is believed that the five faces of Mahadeva represent the five Chakras as well. It is also called Rupaiye Wala Mandir since the courtyard was decorated with silver coins which are embedded in the floor. The temple was also known as 'Samadhi Muth' due to presence of large number of Samadhis of Mahants who had served temple in the past. The oldest is attributed to Naga Baba of Dashnami Akhara who had sat on a 'Zinda Samadhi' here some one thousand years ago.

Also see Rani Kalhuri Dev Mandir, Sardaran Mandir, Shri Shivnabh Temple (inside Mandi complex) and ancient Shiv Temple Sunjwan.

Visit Bahu Fort, in it is Bawey Wali Mata shrine ie one of the most important Shakti shrines in the region, see lovely garden at entrance of fort and close by is Har-Ki-Temple complex nice.

Amar Mahal Palace, Mubarak Mandi Palace & Dogra Art Museum. Amar Mahal is at one end of city, loved it. It has a small and nice museum. Art Museum is part of Mandi palace complex.

To see pictures of Jammu City <http://www.esamskriti.com/photo-detail/Jammu-City.aspx>

Outside Jammu

Mansar and Surinsar Lake i.e. linked to the Mahabharata, visit Nag Devata Mandir there. Distance about 60 kms from Jammu. Keep 4-5 hours. Lovely Government Resort in Mansar Lake – perfect place to relax for a day after Vaishnudevi Yatra. Lovely walk way round the lake visit. Newly-weds consider it auspicious to do parikrama of Mansar Lake and seeks blessings of Sheshnag at temple i.e. on banks of Mansar lake.

To see pictures of Mansar Lake <http://www.esamskriti.com/photo-detail/Mansar-Lake.aspx>

Purumandal (40 kms away) it is known as Chotta Kashi. It is situated on the banks of the sacred mostly underground Devak River and is a complex of ancient temples associated with Saivites. Main temple dome is plated with gold donated by Maharaja Ranjit Singh.

Did not see

1. Vaishnudevi
2. Aghar Jitto is 6 kms from Katra, a cool and scenic spot. It derives its name from Baba Jitto, a revolutionary folk hero who is remembered for his campaign against the feudal system to improve the condition of fellow farmers.
3. 11kms from Katra on the Reasi road in Baba Dhansar, an enchanting spot with a spring of cool water Karua Jheel. Inside a small cave is a naturally formed Shivling perennially bathing in droplets of water falling upon it.
4. *Dera Baba Banda* is a gurudwara 25 kms from Katra on the banks of the river Chenab, sad I missed it. It is named after Baba Banda Bairagi who was Guru Govind Singh's

favourite Saint-soldier. The Gurudwara is famous for its rich wall paintings and 48 feet high 'Nishan Sahib' made of deodhar wood erected by the Baba himself.

5. 10 kms from Reasi is Sihard Baba becoming popular for its nearly 400 feet high cascading waterfall and ancient Pragan Nag Mandir.

Basholi

Basohli, approximately 160 km from Jammu, is well known for a style of painting characterised by vigorous use of primary colours and a peculiar facial formula that prevailed in the 17th and 19th centuries in the foothills of the western Himalayas.

It is from here that this style spread to Chamba and Kangra. We met with members of Vishwasthali, a social and cultural organisation that is striving to keep the tradition alive by teaching young children about the local culture. They cribbed about virtually no state government support and excess importance to Valley.

To see pictures of Basohli Paintings <http://www.esamskriti.com/photo-detail/Basholi-Paintings.aspx>

Reasi

From Purmandal we left around 1 pm, drove to Katra, then Reasi 30 kms ahead and another 30 odd kms to see the highest rail bridge in the world being constructed. At Reasi saw Zorawar Singh Fort (small fort not worth a visit). The drive from Katra onwards is very scenic, saw some dams enroute. Post Reasi the roads were being made, not as good as earlier. That evening it was adventure all the way. We left at about 5.15 pm to reach Jammu by about 9.30 pm.

To see pictures of Reasi and beyond <http://www.esamskriti.com/photo-detail/Zorawar-Singh-Fort-Reasi.aspx>

Akhnoor

It is about 30 kms from Jammu. See Fort, Pandava Cave, Gurudwara all on the banks of the river Chenab. It was at the Jip-Patha temple on the banks of the Chenab that Maharaja Gulab Singh was coronated by Maharaja Ranjit Singh in 1822. Excavations have revealed remains dating back to the Indus Valley Civilization inside the fort. Town is famously associated with fold dance of Soni & Mahiwal. Keep two hours max.

To see pictures of Akhnoor <http://www.esamskriti.com/photo-detail/Akhnoor.aspx>

Shiv Khori Cave

It is one of the most venerated cave-shrines of Shivji, is about 1 to 1.5 hours drive ahead of Akhnoor, very scenic. This holy cave is nearly 100 metres long ending into a huge hall and houses 4 feet high Svayambhu lingam which bathes in a milky limestone liquid dripping from a tiny stalactite jutting down from the ceiling. The cave is in the shape of Shivji ka damroo.

We started trek at 1 pm, is 3 kms and took one hour. We were back post darshan by 5.15 pm. If the line for entering cave is long it could take longer. Finding our way in the cave, walking through little space and low height was an experience of a life time. If you do not want to stand in queue or are in a hurry you can enter from back entrance and have near instant darshan.

Now day's devotees first come to Shiv Khori and then visit Vaishnudevi – it is only 78 kms from Katra.

To see pictures of Shiv khori cave <http://www.esamskriti.com/photo-detail/Shiv-Khori-Cave.aspx>

Rajouri

From Shiv Khori it was too late to reach Rajouri the same evening so we spent the night at Nowshera. There is only one hotel, very good and some Rs 400/ for a double room. We had lovely rajma chawl here as we did all along the yatra.

Enroute to Rajouri visit Chingus Fort to see tomb of Mughal King Jahangir. Jammu to Rajouri is 120 kms.

In Rajouri we walked around the market and went to Balidan Bhawan. In 1947, local women and men got to know of the impending attack by *Kabailis* (Pakistani tribesmen) and local Muslims. When death stared at them, the women, with the consent of their husbands, consumed poison. As poison began showing its effects, they got the men to shoot them. When bullets were exhausted, the women requested the men to slit their necks. About 20,000 people from Rajouri and nearby villages were martyred. The Bhawan was made in their memory; some pictures depicting those dark days are on display here.

What happened in 1947 <http://www.satp.org/satporgtp/publication/faultlines/volume1/Fault1-Bloeriatext.htm>.

There is a garden at some distance from Rajouri, not as good as the ones in the Valley, did not visit. There is a scenic hill station some distance away whose name I forget. Keep half a day. I liked Rajouri something nice about it.

To see picture of Rajouri including Balidan Bhawan <http://www.esamskriti.com/photo-detail/Rajouri.aspx>

Poonch

Poonch was a Hindu kingdom in 1947. It is known for Shri Dashnami Akhada, the Nangalia Sahib Gurudwara and Budha Amarnath Temple that attracts thousands of devotees every year.

There is something very likeable about Poonch. Fort is in the town itself. There is a Sheesh Mahal in ruins. Visit Chaken de Bagh or Trade Centre. If you are lucky you could see trucks which bring goods from POJK and Gilgit. Also see Air Force and Army Memorial.

Poonch has 7 lakes namely Sukhsar, Neelsar, Bhagsar, Katorasar, Kaldachnisar and Nandansar that are situated at about 12,000 feet. We were told that one has to trek to get there. Wish the State Govt promotes these scenic lakes. Good hotels @ Rs 600/ per night, get North Indian food.

We did not see Lohar Kote Fort which was once called the Gateway of Kashmir and Garden in Poonch because bridge was damaged due to heavy rains.

To see pics of Poonch <http://www.esamskriti.com/photo-detail/Poonch.aspx>

To see pics of People of Poonch <http://www.esamskriti.com/photo-detail/People-of-Poonch.aspx>

To see pics of Nangali Sahib Gurudwara <http://www.esamskriti.com/photo-detail/Nangali-Sahib-Gurudwara.aspx>

To see pics of Budha Amarnath Mandir <http://www.esamskriti.com/photo-detail/Budha-Amarnath-Temple.aspx>

Mughal Road

From Poonch drove back to Surankote, drive some 10 kms ahead from where the Mughal Road starts. It is an 84 kms drive to Shopian which took around 2-3 hours. Highest point on drive is Pir Pass at 12,000 feet. Road is not good, too much deforestation in most parts of the route. There is a Noor-e chamb waterfall enroute. We could not spot in though.

To see pictures of Mughal Road <http://www.esamskriti.com/photo-detail/Mughal-Road.aspx>

Anantnag

In Anantnag visited the Surya Mandir (Mattan). It was Kashmiri Pandits from Mattan who met the ninth Sikh Guru Teg Bahadur in 1675 to narrate their tale of woes.

Entrance to the Martand Temple was blocked by apple boxes. The sign board with a brief history of the place was rusted; what was left of the writing was illegible. The ruins gave an idea of how magnificent the temple was. There were little or no signs of restoration work.

To see pictures of Martand Surya Mandir <http://www.esamskriti.com/photo-detail/Martand-Sun-Temple.aspx>

Verinag

From Anantnag, we drove to Verinag. It was dark and we almost lost our way. Spent night at Hotel Alpine of J&K Tourism, nice rooms Rs 800/ for a double bed in off season.

Jhelum (Sanskrit name Vitasta) rises from a *kund* (pond) in Verinag. There is an ancient Shiv Temple there and a beautiful garden. I enjoyed early morning walk.

To see pictures of Verinag <http://www.esamskriti.com/photo-detail/Verinag.aspx>

Sinthan Top

We left Verinag at about 8.30 am for Kishtwar and drove through Sinthan Pass. It had just snowed so road was wet and had snow on it too. We never expected this so were super happy. Lovely deodhar trees all along. Till the road was in Valley area it was good, the moment we entered Jammu region the road got bad, at times very bad. Great drive any which way. Around 2 ish we stopped by at *Sinthan Maidan*. It is a picnic spot, lovely. Reached Kishtwar by 4 pm.

To see pictures of drive through Sinthan Pass <http://www.esamskriti.com/photo-detail/Sinthan-Pass.aspx>

Kishtwar

Kishtwar has a 1,000-year recorded history. Its first ruler Kahan Pal was from Bengal who settled here in the period 900-1000 AD.

I was suprised to see saffron grown there because I thought saffron was grown only in the Valley. The town is on a plateau. It is scenic. A policeman who stopped us laughed when we told him we were tourists. "What is there to see?" he asked.

Kishtwar is base for many important pilgrimages — Sarthal temple is the temple of Sharika Devi, the presiding deity of Kashmir and Machail Mata Mandir. Devotees will come, as in Vaishno Devi, when there is awareness and infrastructure.

To see pictures of Kishtwar <http://www.esamskriti.com/photo-detail/Kishtwar-City.aspx>. A good site on town is <http://www.mykishtwar.com/ktr1.html>

Bhadarwah

It is a very pretty and popular hill station. See the Vasuki Naagji Mandir. During August there is a Kailash Yatra. At *Ramgarh* stopped by a restaurant that serves only Rajma Chawal. The best we had on the yatra.

To see pictures of Bhadarwah <http://www.esamskriti.com/photo-detail/Bhaderwah.aspx>

Sudha Mahadev Mandir

It is a popular pilgrimage site to worship the trishul and mace believed to belong to Pandava Bheem. Close by is Mantalai i.e. associated with the marriage of Shivji and Parvatiji.

To see pictures of Sudha Mahadev Mandir <http://www.esamskriti.com/photo-detail/Sudh-Mahadev-Temple.aspx>

Udhampur

We missed seeing the KRIMCHI temple complex. These temples were in the 11-12th century. Missed seeing ancient temple of Jalandri Mata believed to be the abode of Pandavas for some time during their exile and ancient Raghunath Mandir.

Patnitop

We missed seeing Patnitop and Sanasar.

Patnitop consists of several meadows enveloped by thick forests of deodhar and kail trees. You get a super view of the Chenab basin and Pir Panjal range beyond that. There is a Nag Mandir close i.e. a must visit. It is wow when it snows said driver Bishan.

Sanasar, i.e. app 19 kms from Patnitop, is a sprawling meadow with a 9-hole golf course. It is ideal for para gliding while Natha Top on way to Sanasar affords scenic views of the surrounding peaks and valleys. A 10 kms trek from Sanasar is Sankhpal i.e. at an altitude of 10,000 feet.

Jammu Region very scenic, roads are invariably good, people friendly and beauty diverse. It needs to be aggressively promoted as a tourist destination. Route we took also makes a great drive more so for motor cycle enthusiasts.

App Distances

1. Jammu to Rajouri 120 kms and 110 kms further to Poonch.
2. Poonch to Anantnag 175kms.
3. Poonch to Kishtwar 318 kms.
4. Kishtwar to Jammu 240 kms.
5. Kishtwar to Doda 60 kms.
6. Jammu to Patnitop 110 kms.
7. Jammu to Basholi 140 kms.

Details of each place are taken from the brochure published by Jammu and Kashmir Tourism and those given by individual temples. Dhanyavad.

Taxi Services

We used Bishan Sharma. Very good driver, sensible and balanced at the same willing to take the road less travelled. Contacts: 91 9797350725 and 91 9419296745.

Another person I spoke to was Mahesh Sharma. Even though I did not take his taxi he was ever willing to give me travel tips. Really appreciate his positive and consumer centric approach. Contacts: 91 9419190597, 91 9797640597, 0191 2560685. Has bigger vehicles like Innova.

If you are doing a long journey pay a fixed per day rate for vehicle, driver and toll with diesel to your account depending on how much you drive.

Also read

1. Jammu: A Road less travelled <http://swarajyamag.com/politics/jammu-a-road-less-travelled/>
2. E book - Everything you wanted to know about the Jammu and Kashmir Problem <http://www.esamskriti.com/essay-chapters/Everything-you-wanted-to-know-about-the-Jammu-ad-Kashmir-Problem-1.aspx>
3. Pics of Drive from Leh to Manali <http://www.esamskriti.com/photo-detail/Leh-to-Manali-drive.aspx>

Jai Mata Di

Ishwar ke aashirwad our yatra was safal (successful).