

Exploring Religious Tourism Spots In Srinagar District Of Kashmir Valley – A Historical Study

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Abstract

Srinagar, the summer capital of Jammu and Kashmir, is often dubbed as the Venice of the East. Renowned through ancient times to the present, it has captivated travelers with its beauty. Serving as the backbone of Kashmir's economy, Srinagar attracts tourists from far and wide. While the district boasts numerous tourist spots, this document focuses solely on its religious sites, both renowned and lesser-known. The author's firsthand experiences shed light on Srinagar's significance as the nucleus of Kashmir's tourism industry.

Keywords: *Tourism, kashmir, srinagar, city, economy*

Introduction:

Srinagar, situated in the disputed Kashmir region and administered by India, serves as the largest city and summer capital of the union territory of Jammu and Kashmir. Nestled amidst the Shankaracharya and Hari Parbat mountains, it rests along the banks of the Jhelum River and the shores of Dal and Anchar Lakes in the picturesque Kashmir Valley. Renowned for its scenic waterfronts, lush gardens, and distinctive houseboats, the city is also celebrated for its dried fruits and indigenous handicrafts, such as the famed Kashmir shawl crafted from pashmina and cashmere wool, along with papier-mâché, wood carving, carpet weaving, and jewelry making. Notably, it stands as the second-largest urban area in the Himalayas, trailing only behind Kathmandu, the capital of Nepal.

Name:

The Sanskrit name shri-nagara appears in the Kalhana's Rajatarangini. Scholars have interpreted this name variously, with one interpretation being "The city of "Shri", the Hindu goddess of riches, meaning "City of Lakshmi," and another being Surya Nagar, which means "City of the Surya" (translation: "City of Sun"). Prior to its use for the current city, the name was used to a nearby older capital. From the 14th to the 19th centuries, the city was referred to as Kashmir or Shahr-i-Kashmir (literally, "City of Kashmir").

Research Objectives:

- 1.To highlight the famous Religious Tourist spots of Srinagar District whether explored or unexplored.
- 2.To highlight the importance of Srinagar as a famous tourist destination.
- 3.To mention the Geographical location and Climate of Srinagar District.

Research.Methodology:

The current study uses secondary sources and is descriptive and historical in character. The sources of secondary data included books, journals, periodicals, magazines, newspapers, newsletters, research articles, books, publish and unpublished records from the Directorate of Tourism (Jammu/Kashmir), J&K Tourism Development Corporation, Government of India, and Ministry of Tourism.

Result and Discussion

Srinagar, often compared to the "Venice of the East," boasts numerous scenic lakes, including Dal Lake and Nigeen Lake, renowned for their houseboats. Additionally, to the north, Wular Lake and Manasbal Lake grace the area, with Wular Lake ranking among Asia's largest freshwater lakes. The city is adorned with Mughal gardens like Chashma Shahi, Pari Mahal, Nishat Bagh, and Shalimar Bagh, alongside Naseem Bagh. The Jawaharlal Nehru Memorial Botanical Garden, established in 1969, adds to its allure. These gardens are part of the "Mughal Gardens of Jammu and Kashmir," listed as tentative UNESCO World Heritage sites. Notable historical landmarks include Sher Garhi Palace, housing state government administrative buildings, and Gulab Bhavan, now refurbished into the Lalit Grand Palace hotel. The Shankaracharya Temple, situated atop a hill in the city center, stands as another prominent attraction.

Geography of Srinagar: The city, known as Vyath in Kashmir, is situated on both banks of the Jhelum River. The river meanders through the valley and past the city before continuing on to the Wular Lake, where it deepens. The nine historic bridges that span the city and link its two areas are well-known. The city and its environs are home to numerous lakes and wetlands. Among them are the Hokersar, Khushal Sar, Gil Sar, Anchar, Dal, and Nigeen. A wetland called Hokersar is located close to Srinagar. During the winter, thousands of migrating birds from Siberia and other areas travel to Hokersar. Wetlands in Kashmir serve as temporary quarters for migratory birds from Siberia and Central Asia between September and October and again in the spring. Many birds that use these wetlands for staging, nesting, and wintering are dependent upon them. Hokersar, a world-class wetland of 13.75 km² (5.31 sq mi) featuring a lake and marshy terrain, is located 14 km (8.7 mi) north of Srinagar. Among the wetlands of Kashmir, which also include Hygam, Shalibug, and Mirgund, it is the most easily accessible and well-known. In recent years, Hokersar has witnessed an unprecedented influx of migratory birds. Hokersar is home to a variety of migratory ducks and geese, including the ferruginous pochard, red-crested pochard, brahminy duck, tufted duck, gadwall, garganey, greylag goose, mallard, common merganser, northern pintail, ruddy shelduck, northern shoveller, common teal, and Eurasian wigeon.

Climate of Srinagar

Because of its height, Srinagar experiences hot summers and moderate winters with slight continental influences. It is classified as having a temperate humid subtropical climate (Koppen climatic classification). The Himalayas encircle the valley on all sides. Winters are frigid; in January, the average daily maximum temperature is 6.7 °C (44.1 °F), and at night, it falls below freezing. During the winter, there is moderate to severe snowfall, and avalanches, landslides, and icy roads frequently cause blockages on the highway that links Srinagar to the rest of India. With an average July daytime temperature of 29.7 °C (85.5 °F), summers are mild to hot. Rainfall totals are about 721.8 millimeters (28.42 in) on average every year. Autumn is the driest season while spring is the wettest. 38.3 °C (100.9 °F) is the highest temperature that can be safely recorded, while -20.0 °C (-4.0 °F) is the lowest.

Monuments (Religious and non-religious sites in Srinagar)

Muslims (Mosques in Srinagar)

1. Hazratbal Masjid: In the seventeenth century, the Mughal Emperor Subedar Sadiq Khan established a garden here. It was referred to as Ishrat Mahal. Later in 1634, when he visited again, the emperor ordered that this place be converted into a house of prayer. During the reign of Aurangzeb, the Holy Relic was initially placed at Naqashbad Sahib when it arrived in Kashmir. It was later relocated to the Hazaratbal Mosque due to the small space at the original location. The Hazaratbal Mosque in Srinagar is renowned for housing a strand of Prophet Muhammad's hair, displayed to the public on special occasions. Friday prayers are particularly significant here, drawing worshippers from various locations. Built entirely of white marble, the mosque was constructed under Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah's supervision in 1968 and completed in 1979. Its strategically placed windows offer panoramic views of the surrounding area. Located on the western side of Dal Lake, the mosque provides a stunning backdrop of hills and the lake, facing the famous Nishat Bagh Garden.

2. Jamia Masjid Srinagar: The renowned Jamia Masjid in Srinagar was built around 1400 AD by Sultan Sikandar, overseen by Shah Hamdan's son, Mir Mohammad Hamadani. Later, Sultan Sikandar's son, Zain-ul-Abidin, extended the mosque and built a nearby school, managed by the Sultan's wife, Lachma Khatoon. Despite facing fires in 1479, 1503, and during Aurangzeb's rule, the mosque has been faithfully restored each time. It remains a symbol of pride for Jammu & Kashmir, showcasing Islamic art and attracting thousands of visitors seeking spiritual solace. Located in Nowhatta, it contributes to the city's allure and global renown.

3. Shah e Hamdan R.H Mosque: Shah-e-Hamdan is another name for Khanqah-e-molla. This is one of Srinagar's older mosques. Khanqah-e-molla is located precisely on the Jhelum River's banks in Srinagar's old city. Sultan Sikander built this mosque in 1395 as a memorial to the Sufi saint Mir Syed Ali Hamdan. This mosque is said to have preserved the "Secret of Allah," according to Muslim folklore. When it comes to exquisite timber building, Khanqah-e-molla is a model. It is important to highlight the wooden structures found inside this mosque. The center is where the prayer hall is located. While they are able to pray from the building's back walls, women are typically not permitted inside the prayer hall. These rear walls are even more exquisite and stunning.

4. Pathar Masjid: The Pathar Masjid, situated on the banks of the renowned Jhelum River in Srinagar, is recognized as one of the oldest mosques in the area. Found in the historic town of Nowhatta, it was constructed around 1623 under the supervision of the Mughal Empress, Nur Jahan. The mosque, primarily built of limestone, derives its name from this material. Adhering to Mughal architectural style, the mosque features intricate patterns and structures that have fascinated visitors for generations. Today, it remains a popular destination for tourists from around the globe, drawn to its historical significance and stunning design.

5. Makhdoom Sahib Shrine: People of various faiths visit the ancient shrine of Makhdoom Sahib, which is located on the southern slope of the Hari Parbat hill. Also referred to as Makhdoom Sahib, Mehboob-ul-Alam, and Sultan-Ul-Arifeen, it is the shrine of Sheikh Hamza Makhdoom. Situated on the southern slope of Koh e Maran Hill stands the shrine. It's among the holiest sanctuaries in Kashmir. This multi-pillared, double-story building has an impressive architectural design. Throughout the year, people of many religions pay visits to this shrine, not just Muslims. Hazrat Sultan, another name for Makhdoom Sahib, was a Sufi saint.

6. Roza Bal Shrine: According to first-century residents, the burial site of Yuza Asaf is located in a place now known as Roza Bal. Legend suggests that Yuza Asaf, believed by some to be Jesus Christ, survived crucifixion and traveled to Kashmir, where he was buried. There is controversy surrounding whether Yuza Asaf was a Muslim or Jesus Christ, with some claiming him to be Jesus Christ and disputing his original name. Roza Bal, situated near a Muslim burial ground, is a rectangular structure with a significant entrance gate and railings. It houses the tomb of a Muslim saint, with one of the rocks inside bearing markings of crucifixion. While originally maintained by the local community, Sunni Muslims now oversee the site.

7. Masjid Dastgeer sahib: The Sufi shrine known as Dastgeer Sahib is situated in Srinagar, the summer capital of Jammu and Kashmir, India, in the Khanyar neighborhood. Situated near Khanyar, Dastgeer Sahib is a 200-year-old shrine. It is connected to Abdul Qadir Gilani, who is thought to have kept his hair strand, a relic known as Mouia Pak in the area. An ancient Quran penned by Ali Ibn Abi Talib is also included. Khwaja Sanaullah Shawl built it in 1806 and extended it in 1877. It sits in the middle of the Khanyar's activity core and has a sizable market all around it. Thousands of people travel from all over Kashmir to the Urs.

8. Masjid of Akhund Malla: The mosque that Dara Shikoh constructed in 1649 for his spiritual guru is known in Kashmiri as Akhund Mullah Shah Masjid, Akhoun Mullah Masjid, or Dara Shikoh Masjid. The mosque is housed inside another mosque and is situated in Srinagar, Jammu and Kashmir, India. A courtyard encircling the main building divides the prime sanctuary from it completely. The mosque's podium is topped with a stone lotus.

9. Naqshband Shrine: The Mausoleum Hazrat Khawaja Naqshbandh Sahib, also called Ziyarat Naqshband Sahab, is a Sunni Muslim mausoleum located in Srinagar, Jammu and Kashmir, India. One of the customary mausoleums of the Hazrat Ishaans, who are descended from Mughal emperors and Bahauddin Naqshband. The Hazrat Ishaans have a Ziyarat at Begampura, Lahore, in addition to the Ziyarat Naqshband Sahab in Srinagar, Kashmir.

10. Imambara Hassanabad: The second-oldest Imambara in Kashmir, Hassanabad Imambara is well-known worldwide for its muharram customs. Situated in the southwest of Sri Nagar's Lal Chowk neighborhood, the building was constructed following in the footsteps of Imambara Zadibal, the most persecuted person in Kashmir. The Imambara's environs are a picture of interfaith understanding and social peace. World-famous Dargah Hazratbal, the Temple of Mata Sharka Devi, and Gurdawara Chatti Padshahi encircle Imambara on three sides. A businessman from Srinagar named Mirza Mohammad Ali established the early Imambara foundation.

11. Khanqah-e-Molla: Khanqah-e-Moula, also known as Shah-e-Hamadan Masjid and Khanqah, is a mosque located in the Old City of Srinagar, Jammu and Kashmir, India. Built in 1395 CE on the right bank of the Jhelum River between the Fateh Kadal and Zaina Kadal bridges, it was commissioned by Sultan Sikandar in honor of Mir Sayyid Ali Hamadani. This mosque is considered the first Khanqah in the Kashmir valley and is renowned for its papier-mâché decorations, representing exemplary wooden architecture in Kashmir. Initially constructed to commemorate Mir Sayyid Ali Hamadani, who played a significant role in the Islamization of Kashmir, the mosque underwent restoration and enlargement after a fire in 1480 CE under Sultan Hassan Shah's rule. Later, Abdul Barkat Khan reconstructed the Khanqah following another fire in 1731 CE.

Hindus (Temples in Srinagar)

1. Kheer Bhawani Temple: The goddess Bhawani is the subject of the temple Kheer Bhawani. The word "kheer" describes pudding, a milk-based sweet dessert. The name of the temple is a justification for the concept that pilgrims offer milk to this deity. The well-known Jammu & Kashmiri temple Kheer Bhawani is situated in Tula Mula village, 25 miles from the city proper. Kheer Bhawani is specifically situated on the eastern edge of the village. This lovely shrine is surrounded by tall Chinar trees and is in an open space.

2. Durga Nag Temple: At the base of the Shankaracharya temple in Srinagar is the Durga Nag temple. It was formerly a part of Kashmir's magnificent Gopadri or Gopa Agrahara in prehistoric and early medieval periods. In the past, the current Shankaracharya Hill in Srinagar was known as Gopadri. The Agama literature of Kashmir and Kalhana's Rajatarangini both make reference to this holy site, also known as the Sharada Math, which is among the oldest temples in the region. The renowned Shankaracharya is supposed to have penned the Saundarya-Lahari ("The Waves of Beauty") while lodging at this shrine in the eighth century. The Sharada Math was rebuilt and given a new name, Durga Nag mandir, by the Dogra kings in the 1800s. Every year, the temple is a significant destination on the holy Amarnath Yatra.

3. Shankaracharya Temple: This is recognized as one of Kashmir's ancient temples. Shankaracharya Temple is located on Shankaracharya Hill, about 1100 feet above sea level. According to legends, Raja Gopal Data built this temple in 371 BC. This temple is dedicated to Lord Shiva. The temple's stairs were built by Maharaja Gulab Singh, a Dogra ruler. Since then, the shrine has grown more open to the public. Shankaracharya Temple is an important temple because it has religious significance. This temple is also archaeologically significant because of its fascinating architecture, which continues to attract visitors today. This temple provides an excellent view of the entire area. Seeing the gorgeous city of Srinagar from this height is pure delight for tourists and devotees visiting this shrine.

4. Sharika Devi Temple: This is among the most sacred locations in Kashmir. Jagadamba Sharika Bhagwati's residence is the Sharika Devi Temple in Srinagar's Hari Parbat. Inside this temple is a deity with eighteen arms. Because of the temple that is located atop Hari Parbat, the entire hill is revered. The temple considers the days around Hora Ashtami and Har Navum to be auspicious. This temple is visited by people from all over the world.

5. Pandrethan Temple: This historic temple is four miles from Srinagar. It was indeed Emperor Ashoka who built this shrine. This temple's name is a combination of the words "adhistan," which means capital, and "purana," which means old. Given that Kashmir's capital formerly stood here. On the other hand, a stunning stone temple still stands in the heart of spring today. To go to this temple, pilgrims must lower themselves under the spring water. Lord Vishnu is the patron of this temple.

6. Bhuteshwara Temple: It is thought that this temple has been there since the 12th century. The stunning Bhuteshwara Temple in Srinagar is devoted to Lord Shiva. This temple was built by Jayasimha the King. The temple is one of the district's most attractive due to its rectangular construction.

7. Loduv Temple: This temple is four kilometers from Srinagar in the village of Loduv. The 8th century saw the construction of this temple. Visitors are drawn to the interior of the temple because it is built with incredibly small stones. The temple's interior is likewise constructed on a circle platform. This gives the temple a distinct and unusual appearance.

8. Ganesh Temple: This temple is dedicated to Lord Ganesh, as the name would imply. The Pathan rulers did not destroy the idol of Lord Ganesh kept in this temple. Two other identical-looking but enormous idols of Lord Ganesh may be found inside the temple. This is a Ganesh Temple that you can see when in Srinagar.

Christians: (Churches in Srinagar)

1. Roman Catholic Church: Holy Family Catholic Church is a Roman Catholic church situated in Srinagar, Jammu & Kashmir, India, on Maulana Azad Road. It was founded by Msgr. Winkley MHM in 1896. When the Curia remained in Srinagar, the parish functioned as a cathedral until the Curia relocated to Jammu on December 23, 1986. Holy Family Catholic Church and All Saints Protestant Church serve as the primary places of worship for the city's minority Christian population.

Arson and reconstruction

On June 7, 1967, protesters opposing the Arab-Israeli war set fire to the chapel. The belfry was destroyed in the incident. Holy Family Catholic Church underwent reconstruction, and in 2017 a new church bell donated by an Indian Christian family and manufactured in Moradabad, India, was installed. Clergy from Christian, Muslim, Hindu, and Sikh faiths came together "to jointly ring the new bell for the first time in the past 50 years" at an ecumenical service.

Sikhs (Gurudwaras in Srinagar)

1.Chatti Padshahi Gurudwara: The Gurdwara Chatti Patshahi, located near Kathi Darwaja, Rainwari, Srinagar, is a significant Sikh Gurudwara in the Kashmir region. This old Gurdwara is one of the Kashmir valley's tourist attractions in Srinagar. It is located right outside the Hari Parbat fort's southern gate. The sixth Guru of Sikhism traveled through Kashmir, giving sermons and staying at Gurdwara Chhevin Patshahi in Srinagar. Located near the Jhelum River and Dal Lake, the shrine is dedicated to Guru Hargobind. It stands outside the Kathi Gate of Hari Parbat Fort, on the site of Mai Bhaghbari's home. Guru Hargobind ordered the digging of a nearby well. A new Gurdwara building has been constructed, offering lodging and free meals. Every year, Jammu and Kashmir government declares a public holiday to commemorate Guru Hargobind's visit.

Conclusion:

The Srinagar region is hailed for its secular essence, where people of diverse religious backgrounds peacefully coexist, celebrating each other's holidays and embracing inclusivity. Residents express pride in the region's resilience and spirit, highlighting the joint observance of various faith holidays, such as Youm-ul-Quds, Jumuatul-Wida, and Baisakhi. This tradition of concurrent celebrations has deep historical roots, with past instances of Christians observing Good Friday alongside Kashmiri Pandits celebrating Ram Navami. Residents emphasize the beauty of Kashmir's diversity, rooted in a legacy of tolerance preached by spiritual leaders like Lal Ded and Sheikh Noor-uddin Wali. Despite challenges, Kashmiris remain steadfast in their commitment to secularism, viewing it as vital to preserving cultural harmony. In a world marked by religious tensions, Kashmir stands as a beacon of peaceful coexistence, where respect and acceptance of differing beliefs thrive.

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