



## Amarnath Yatra

### Amarnath Cave:

One of the holy Trinity, Shiva is a living God. The most sacred and the most ancient book of India, the Rigveda evokes his presence in its hymns. Vedic myths, rituals and even astronomy testify to his existence from the dawn of time. But Shiva, the Destroyer, and mendicant, is undefinable. He is a great yogi. Legend has it that Shiva recounted to Parvati the secret of creation in a Cave in Amarnath. Unkown to them a pair of mating doves eavesdropped on this conversation and having learned the secret, are reborn again and again, and have made the cave their eternal abode. Many pilgrims report seeing the pair of doves when they trek the arduous route to pay obeisance before the ice-lingam.

According to an ancient tale, there was once a Muslim Shepherd named Buta Malik who was given a sack of coal by a sadhu. Upon reaching home he discovered that the sack, in fact, contained Gold. Overjoyed and overcome, Buta Malik rushed back to look for sadhu and thank him. But on the spot of their meeting discovered a cave, and eventually this became a place of pilgrimage for all believers. To date, a percentage of the donations made by pilgrims are given to the descendents of Malik, and the remaining to the trust which manages the shrine.

Yet another legend has it that when Kashyap Rishi drained the Kashmir valley of water the cave and lingam were discovered by Bregeish Rishi who was traveling through the Himalayas. When people heard of the lingam at Amarnath it began to be worshipped as Shiva's abode and a center of pilgrimage

### How to Reach Amarnath?

From Pahalgam: Situated in a narrow gorge at the farther end of Lidder valley, Amarnath stands at 3888 mtrs and 46 Kms from Pahalgam and 141 Kms from Srinagar. Though the original pilgrimage route is that the Yatra should be undertaken from Srinagar, the more common practice is to begin the journey from Chandanwari and cover the distance to Amarnath and back in 5 days. Pahalgam is 96 Kms from Srinagar. The trek from Chandanwari to the Cave is on an ancient route. Pilgrims camp at Pahalgam or Chandanwari on the first night out.

The first day's trek of 12 Kms from Chandanwari is through spectacular primeval country side and the main center of attraction is Sheshnag a mountain which derives its name from seven peaks resembling the head of a mythical snake. A cascading stream accompanies you with wild scenery untouched by modern civilization. The second night camp at Wavjan overlooks the deep blue waters of Sheshnag Lake and glaciers beyond it. The tales of love and revenge associated with Sheshnag are recounted by campfires to the stillness of pine scented Himalayan night.

The second day's 12 km trek steadily gains height winding across Mahagunas Pass at 4600 mtrs and then descending to the meadow land of Panchtarni the last camp enroute to the Amarnath Cave.

From Panchtarni to Amarnath the distance is 6 Kms and an early morning start is recommended for there is long queue awaiting entry at the cave. The same day devotees after darshans can return to Panchtarni in time for lunch and continue upto Sheshnag for night halt. For those who journey with faith it is a rewarding experience.

From Baltal: The second approach to Amarnath is from Sonamarg via Baltal alt. 3000 mtrs. . Sonamarg is situated on Srinagar-Leh road north east from Srinagar. About 15 kms ahead lies Baltal which is charming little valley lying in the foothills of Zojila Pass. The holy cave is just a days journey from here. At domail 2 kms from Baltal free langar (community Kitchen) facility is available. The trek from here is very steep and therefore needs great caution and care. Some teastalls are available at Brarimarg and Sangam top. Several snow bridges on the fast flowing streams are to be crossed and during rains the road becomes slippery. At sangam top the road meets Pahalgam route. At Baltal Ponies/Dandies/Pack ponies /porters are available on Govt. approved rates

**Air:** The nearest Airport is away in Badgam Distt. This Airport is connected with major cities of India.

**Rail:** The nearest Rail Head is at Jammu which is 300 Kms away and from there National Highway NH1A connects the Kashmir valley with country.

**Road:** Every sort of transport to suit every budget from Buses to Taxis ply on the NH1A Highway. It takes around 10 to 12 hours to cross this mountaineous road which crosses some beautiful spots and the famous Jawahar Tunnel linking Kashmir Valley with country.