



Jammu & Kashmir (including Ladakh)

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Best Buddhist Monasteries

- » Lamayuru (p268)
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- » Chemrey (p273)
- » Thiksey (p272)
- » Karsha (p242)

Best Mountain Scenery

- » Pangong Tso (p276)
- » Dal Lake, Srinagar (p235)
- » Shyok Valley (p270)
- » Manali-Leh road (p274)

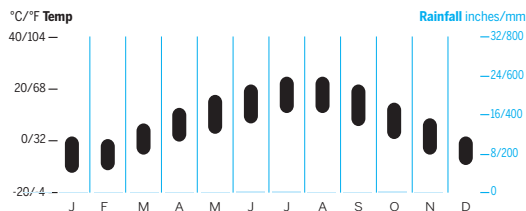
Why Go?

Welcome to three incredibly different worlds in one state. For most foreigners, J&K's greatest attractions are the Himalayan lands of Ladakh and Zaskar, with their disarmingly friendly Tibetan Buddhist people, timeless monasteries, arid canyons and soaring snow-topped mountains. But neither area is easily accessible, especially outside midsummer.

Hordes of domestic visitors make pilgrimages to temples around Hindu Jammu and love Muslim Kashmir for its cool summer air and alpine scenery. Srinagar's romantic houseboat accommodation is another drawcard. However, political volatility remains a concern. Disputes over Kashmir caused three 20th-century wars and intercommunal strife still breaks out sporadically. Always check the security situation before travelling to Jammu or Srinagar but, even if things look dodgy there, you can expect Ladakh to be as meditatively calm as ever.

When to Go

Leh



Jun & Sep

Ideal for Srinagar and Sonamarg; roads to Ladakh can be blocked.

Jul-Aug

Perfect for Ladakh; Pahalgam overflows with pilgrims; rain drenches Jammu.

Winter

Skiing at Gulmarg. Ladakh, only accessible by air, has festivals but no tourists.

Food

A full traditional Kashmiri *wazawan* (feast) can have dozens of courses, notably mutton-based dishes like *goshtaba* (pale mutton balls in saffron-yoghurt curry), *tabak maaz* (fried lamb's ribs) and mildly spicy rogan josh (rich, vividly red-coloured mutton curry). Kashmiri chefs also serve deliciously aromatic cheese-based curries and seasonal *nadir* (lotus stems) typically served in *yakhni* (a curd-based sauce made mildly minty with fennel).

Ladakh's Tibetan favourites include salt-tea, *momos* (dumplings) and *thukpa* (noodle soup) though a more genuinely Ladakhi dish is *skiu*, a stew incorporating flakes of homemade barley 'pasta'. Ladakh's barley-beer, *chhang*, is available at rural homestays but not for general sale.

DON'T MISS

Buddhist **Ladakh** is India at its most beguilingly human and scenically stunning, a rugged high-altitude desert softened with Tibetan temples, irrigated paddies and mesmerising mountain lakes. Come in summer when the rest of sweltering India is drenched in monsoons. But allow ample contingency time for acclimatisation, cancelled planes and roads that can suffer lengthy closures caused by landslides.

Top State Festivals

Hindu festivals are celebrated in Jammu, Muslim ones in the Kashmir Valley and Buddhist temple festivals abound in Ladakh and Zaskar. The latter, held around local monasteries, typically feature masked dances and village fairs that are colourful but lengthy, slow-moving affairs. Those held in winter, eg at Spituk (January), Stok (March) and Thiksey (November), see few foreigners but summer ones, like those at Lamayuru (June), Hemis (July) and Takthog (July), can feel overloaded with camera-toting tourists. Exact dates vary with the lunar calendar.

- » Losar (Dec) Ladakhi New Year, celebrated in Buddhist homes and gompas with feasts, rituals and dances.
- » Dosmoche (Feb-early Mar, widespread) Buddhist New Year. Masked dances; effigies representing the evil spirits of the old year are burnt or cast into the desert.
- » Matho Nagrang (Feb-Mar, Matho, p262) Monastery oracles perform blindfolded acrobatics and ritual mutilations.
- » Ladakh Festival (1-15 Sep, Leh, p244) Unrepentantly touristy but entertaining cycle of events including a carnivalesque opening parade, Buddhist dances, polo, music and archery.

MAIN POINTS OF ENTRY

Srinagar, Jammu and Leh have commercial airports. Jammu has the only major railhead. By road, Ladakh is only accessible in summer over tortuous mountain roads from Srinagar and Manali.

Fast Facts

- » Population: 12.5 million
- » Area: 222,236 sq km
- » Capitals: Srinagar (summer), Jammu (winter), Leh (Ladakh)
- » Main languages: Kashmiri, Urdu, Ladakhi, Balti
- » Sleeping prices: \$ below ₹1000, \$\$ ₹1000 to ₹5000, \$\$\$ above ₹5000

Top Tip

Check the security situation before heading to the Kashmir Valley but don't let troubles in Srinagar deter you from visiting ever-calm Ladakh.

Resources

- » **News** www.greaterkashmir.com, www.dailyexcelsior.com, www.kashmirtimes.com, www.kashmirherald.com
- » **Traveller Forum** www.indiamike.com/india/jammu-and-kashmir-f30
- » **Tourism** www.jktourism.org, www.ladakhtourism.in
- » **Rare maps** <http://blankonthemap.free.fr>
- » **Ladakh Homestays** www.himalayan-homestays.com