



Jammu & Kashmir (including Ladakh)

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Best Buddhist Monasteries

- ➔ Yungdrung Gompa (p260)
- ➔ Thekchhok Gompa (p247)
- ➔ Thiksey Gompa (p247)
- ➔ Karsha Gompa (p264)
- ➔ Diskit Gompa (p252)

Best Mountain Scenery

- ➔ Pangong Tso (p255)
- ➔ Dal Lake (p267)
- ➔ Turtuk and the Shyok Valley (p253)
- ➔ Leh–Manali road (p248)

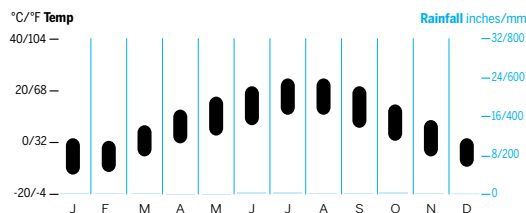
Why Go?

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 *wazwan* (feast) can have dozens of courses, notably mutton-based dishes such as *goshtaba* (pounded mutton balls in saffron-yoghurt curry), *tabak maaz* (fried lamb's ribs) and 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). Kashmiri *kahwa* is a luxurious golden tea flavoured with saffron, cinnamon and crushed almonds.

Ladakh's Tibetan favourites include salt-tea, *momos* (savoury dumplings wrapped ravioli-style in thin pasta) and *thukpa* (noodle soup) though a more genuinely Ladakhi dish is *skyu*, pieces of flat barley 'gnocchi' in a vegetable stew. Ladakh's barley-beer, *chhang*, is available at rural homestays but not for general sale.

DON'T MISS

Buddhist **Ladakh** (p228) 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.

- ➔ **Dosmoche** (☉Feb-early Mar; Leh, p230, Diskit, p252, Likir, p256) Buddhist New Year is celebrated with masked dances; effigies representing the evil spirits of the old year are burnt or cast into the desert.
- ➔ **Matho Nagrang** (☉Feb-Mar; Matho, p246) Monastery oracles perform blindfolded acrobatics and ritual mutilations.
- ➔ **Amarnath Yatra** (☉Jul-mid-Aug; Amarnath, p266) Hindu pilgrims' mountain trek to Amarnath.
- ➔ **Ladakh Festival** (☉1-15 Sep; www.reachladakh.com/festival_dates.htm; Leh, p235) Events include a carnivalesque opening parade, Buddhist dances, polo, music and archery.
- ➔ **Losar** (☉Dec; Ladakh & Zaskar) Tibetan New Year is celebrated two months earlier in Ladakh.

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:** 10.1 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. Even if troubles return to Srinagar, don't be deterred from visiting ever-calm Ladakh.

Resources

- ➔ **News** (www.greaterkashmir.com, www.dailyexcelsior.com, www.kashmirtimes.com, www.kashmirherald.com/main.php)
- ➔ **Traveller Forum** (www.indiamike.com/india/jammu-and-kashmir-f30)
- ➔ **Tourism** (www.jktourism.org)
- ➔ **Kashmir Conflicts** (http://blankonthemap.free.fr/1_accueil/map.php?code=1015)