

Dates: Package offered from **6th July to 19th August 2009**

Trek: Pahalgam To Amarnath Cave Via Mahagunas Pass

Altitude: 4,175m (13,700ft).

Alternative Trek: Sonamarg To Amarnath

During the yatra, stages of the walk are carefully controlled by the Indian government authorities. The first stage of the trek is to Chandanwadi, the second to Sheshnag and the third over the Mahagunas Pass to Panchtarni. Many pilgrims visit the cave from Panchtarni and return to Sheshnag the same day, walking back to Pahalgam on the fifth day.

Day 01: Arrive at Srinagar and Transfer to Pahalgam

Arrive in Srinagar Airport. Transfer to Pahalgam by vehicle. Overnight stay at hotel in Pahalgam. Pahalgam to Chandanwadi (Average walking time 4 hours). The trail leaves Pahalgam on a bitumen road, past the Shankar temple and along the east Lidder valley. The trail is easy to follow and is suitable for jeeps as far as Chandanwadi (2,900m). The campsite is in a pleasant glade just before the main line of tea stalls.

Day 02: Chandanwadi to Sheshnag (Average walking time 5 to 6 hours)

From Chandanwadi the trail winds steeply for 500m to the summit of ridge known as Pissu Top (3,390m). From here, there are commanding views back down the valley to the mountains beyond Pahalgam. During the main pilgrimage, the tea stall owners do a thriving business, which keeps the pilgrims going on the long incline to the next main resting area at Wawajana (3,550m). From here it is two to three km further to Sheshnag Peak (3,720m). The glacial lake at the foot of the Sheshnag mountain is set in remarkable surroundings, its waters reflecting the snow capped peaks of Vishnu, Shiva and Brahma.

Day 03: Sheshnag To Panchtarni (Average walking time 6 hours)

The trail gradually ascends from Sheshnag with magnificent views of the mountains immediately above. The ascent towards the Mahagunas Pass winds up to a grassy plateau, and from there on to the pass it is a further hour's climb. The sign at the top of the pass states the height as 4,270m. It is not a dramatic pass, but it is still no mean achievement for the pilgrims.

The descent to Panchtarni (3,450m) is quite long and tiring, but there are frequent flowered meadows to rest in and admire. The campsite can be seen from afar; and behind, on a further ridge, the bare, treeless mountainscape resembles the terrain on the far side of the Himalayas. There are more spacious campsites upstream from the main camping area.

Day 04: Panchtarni To Amarnath Cave & Return (Average walking time 5 hours return)

The actual time to the cave will depend on whether one's trek coincides with the main pilgrimage. During the pilgrimage an early start is essential, since many of the pilgrims move more slowly than on the rest of the yatra, as if in awe of their surroundings.

The climb to the Singh Pass (3,850m) is gradual before the trail enters the Amarnath valley. It descends to a permanently blackened snow bridge, which fords the Amarvati stream before ascending the true right back to the base of the mountain. From here the final ascent is up a series of concrete steps to the entrance to the Amarnath Cave (4,050m). The J&K police manning the entrance to the cave only permit a limited number of pilgrims inside at any one time.

Day 05: Panchtarni To Chandanwadi (Average walking time 8 hours)

Many pilgrims return from Panchtarni to Chandanwadi in one day. After completing their pilgrimage to the cave most are happy to trek as far as they can the following Day.

Day 06: Chandanwadi To Pahalgam (Average walking time 4 hours)

On the final Day most pilgrims arrive back in the Pahalgam bazaar with enough time to complete the drive to Srinagar or Jammu the same day.