

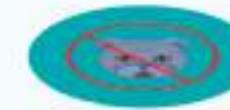
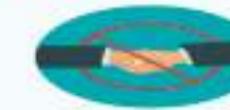
# STATE TIMES

# SUNDAY

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## Amarnath yatra — A spiritual journey full of adventure



Planning a pilgrimage to pay obeisance to Baba Barfaani this year? We give you the religious significance and Amarnath Yatra story, the Amar Katha. Amarnath Yatra is among the most revered pilgrimage circuits among Hindus. This annual event starts in July and goes on till mid-August every year. This holy Yatra lasts for around 45 days and is undertaken by thousands of people from all over the country.

Nestled in the lap of the mighty Himalayas in the Anantnag District of Kashmir, Amarnath Cave is one of the most celebrated Hindu shrines that hold spiritual significance among the devotees.

Situated at an altitude of 3,888 m above sea level, Amarnath Cave houses an ice stalagmite that symbolizes the mythical power of Lord Shiva. This ice Shiva Lingam is the prime attraction of the Amarnath Cave, which shrinks and grows with the phases of the moon. This prominent Hindu shrine is dedicated to Lord Shiva, which has many lore and legends related to pilgrimage and Amarnath Yatra.

Built back in the 15th century, the Amarnath shrine has its history preserved in ancient books. In "Rajatarangini", a discovery and establishment of Amarnath Dham are audibly stated.

According to the book, the cave was first discovered in the 15th century by a local shepherd. Since then, the cave has been available to Lord Shiva's devotees. If we further turn the pages on Rajatarangini, it is believed that when Lord Shiva left the Kailash parvat for his devoted meditation, He left His worldly goods at some places.

He left His bull; Nandi at Pahalgam, the moon of Lord Shiva's head was left at Chandanwari and He left the snakes from His nape at lake Sheshnag. The Lord Ganesha stayed at Mahagunas Parvat; also known as mahaganesh mountain.

Along with His belongings and His souvenirs, He also spread the five elements of nature; Earth, Water, Fire, Sky, and Air. As Lord Shiva sacrificed and renounced His hearty belongings, He performed the tandava dance. And then, He progressed to Amarnath ki gufa with Goddess Parvati Ji to enlighten Her with the secret of life, living, and eternity.

Shri Amarnath cave temple is one of the oldest shrines of Hinduism. With its mention in ancient books, it was first found in the 15th century and has been available for public darshan since then. The shrine is not open to the public for the whole year. To ensure safety and convenience, the holy cave is open for a 45-60 day interval in the July-August period only when the weather is in human tolerance and propounds no limitations for shiva's darshan.

Shri Amarnath yatra is considered as one pure shrine for God devotees. Situated amidst snow-covered white mountains, the Amarnath yatra route is not easy and needs pure dedication and devotion for Lord Shiva.

There are various routes available to reach the true dham for a glimpse of Lord Shiva's sanctuary and Amarnath darshan. For the convenience of devotees, there are air, train, and road routes available to reach the mountains of Amarnath Dham in 5-7 days. For difficult treks, pony riders, helicopters are also available at the desired height to the shrine.

**Train Route:** As of now, there are no direct trains available to Amarnath temple. The nearest railway station from sacred Dham is Jammu Railway station. The Dham is 178 km far from Jammu's railway station and one can take cabs and shared taxis to reach Batal or Pahalgam.

From Batal, one needs to trek for 1-2 days to cover the distance of 15 km to Amarnath temple and from Pahalgam, this distance is 36-48 km that can be covered in 3-5 days.

**Reach Amarnath by Road:** The road route to reach Shri Amarnath is not preferred and advised. As the Dham is located in between the snow-covered high mountains, the road network is not well managed and available. However, one can reach Srinagar first. From there, take the road to Batal or Pahalgam.

Batal is a shorter route but is a difficult trek of 2 days. One should avoid this route with family and old people. From Pahalgam, the Dham can be reached in 3-5 days.

**Air route to the holy shrine:** The air route to reach Amarnath cave is the most preferred and safest. The nearest airport is Srinagar airport. From there, one will be needed to take taxis or cabs to Pahalgam. The rest of the way to the temple can be covered by foot and horse rides. Helicopters are also available.

One can board a helicopter to the main temple from Pawan Hans, Global Vectra Helicorp, and from Himalaya heli services. This is considered and said to be safest and convenient for old age devotees of Lord Shiva.

Resting surrounded by chalky huge mountains, Amarnath Dham is a beauty filled with the sound name of Lord Shiva. Every year, millions of devotees march to the sacred place to experience God's power and his true presence. The dham's yatra is long

with roads cutting in mountains with snow all around. The trek is quite tiring and is often completed in days.

Families, friends, and companions often go forward to reach Shri Amarnath Dham. As the time of yatra can vary depending on the route chosen, the most chosen route among Shiva followers is the one from Pahalgam followed by a trek of 4-5 days to cover the distance of 42 km.

The other traditional routes such as one from Srinagar and Batal are also available. The trek can be covered by horses as well.

### What is the secret of Amarnath?

Lord Shiva is the destroyer of the world. The holy Amarnath ki gufa where he once meditated for years is situated at Jammu: 141 km from Srinagar. The cave is at a height of 3,888 m having Shiva Linga formed due to melting ice from the roof of the cave and two other ice deities of Goddess Parvati Ji and Lord Ganesha Ji.

The cave is surrounded by mountains and is a scenic shrine. The Shiva linga inside the cave is 40 m in height. The shivling Amarnath signifies the presence of Lord Shiva himself. According to the Hindu beliefs, the Shiva Linga of the Amarnath cave temple grows and shrinks according to the phases of the moon. The amalgamation of nature and religion chants the power of Lord Shiva carrying the moon on his head. Amarnath yatra is a holy pilgrimage. Pilgrims from around the world with true hearts and feelings, present their prayers to lord shiva and experience the ancient shrine built between white mountains. The families, friends, and companions often travel together to experience this Amarnath yatra distance of 36-48 km long and a difficult yatra to get themselves enlightened by God's true light.

Lord Shiva's devotees worship iced Shiva Linga for righteous living, prosperity, health, and purity of the sins. A pilgrimage to Amarnath yatra can bring light to the good sins of past and present births. Go for an Amarnath yatra in 2021 and experience the lord's one true presence.

### Legend behind Amarnath yatra

The legend goes like this. At one time Goddess Parvati was quite insistent that Lord Shiva tell her how it was that she died but was reborn again but he remained immortal. He replied that there was a story, the Amar Katha, that contained the secret of immortality but made a condition that he would tell it only in absolute secrecy where no one could listen in. For this purpose he took her to Amarnath Cave. On the way he left behind Nandi, his Bull at Pahalgam, the moon at Chandanwari, the snakes from his hair at Lake Sheshnag, his Son Ganesha at Mahagunas Parvat and the five elements making up the earth at Panjtarni. He then entered the Amarnath Cave along with Goddess Parvati and then created a fire to destroy all life in the immediate surroundings of the Cave and the mountain but only an egg, hidden in the folds of his deer skin, survived of which were born two pigeons, unknown to Shiva. He recounted the Amar Katha to Goddess Parvati and the pigeons overhead the story thus becoming immortal. Even today pilgrims report sighting pigeons at the holy Cave.

For aeons the Cave lay undiscovered until one day a saint appeared to a shepherd and gave him a bag of coins. On reaching home and opening the sack he found gold coins inside. When he went back to the spot where he had met the saint, instead he found the Cave and the Shiva Ling and announced his discovery to the villagers. This is one version of how the cave was discovered. Another version states that the great sage Kashyap Rishi came to this area and found it submerged under water. He used his powers to drain the water in the form of rivers and entered the cave to pray to Lord Shiva.

### Do's and Don'ts for Yatris

#### What to do?

1. Carry sufficient woolen clothes as the temperature may sometimes abruptly fall to below 5 degree Celsius.
2. Carry umbrella, wind cheater, raincoat and waterproof shoes as the weather in the Yatra area is unpredictable.
3. Keep your clothes and eatables in a suitable waterproof bag to avoid your belongings getting wet.
4. Keep in your pocket a note containing the name, address, mobile telephone number of any Yatri proceeding for Darshan on the same date as you are doing, for emergency purposes.
5. Carry your identity card, driving license and Yatra permit with you.

#### What not to do?

1. Don't stop at places which are marked by warning notices.
2. Don't use slippers because there are steep rises and falls on the route to the Holy Cave.
3. Don't attempt any shortcuts on the route as doing so would be dangerous.
4. Do not do anything during your entire forward/return journey which could cause pollution or disturb the environment of the Yatra area. Use of plastics is strictly banned in the Union Territory and is punishable under law.



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