

ASIAN TRAVELLER

Experience The Real Asia...

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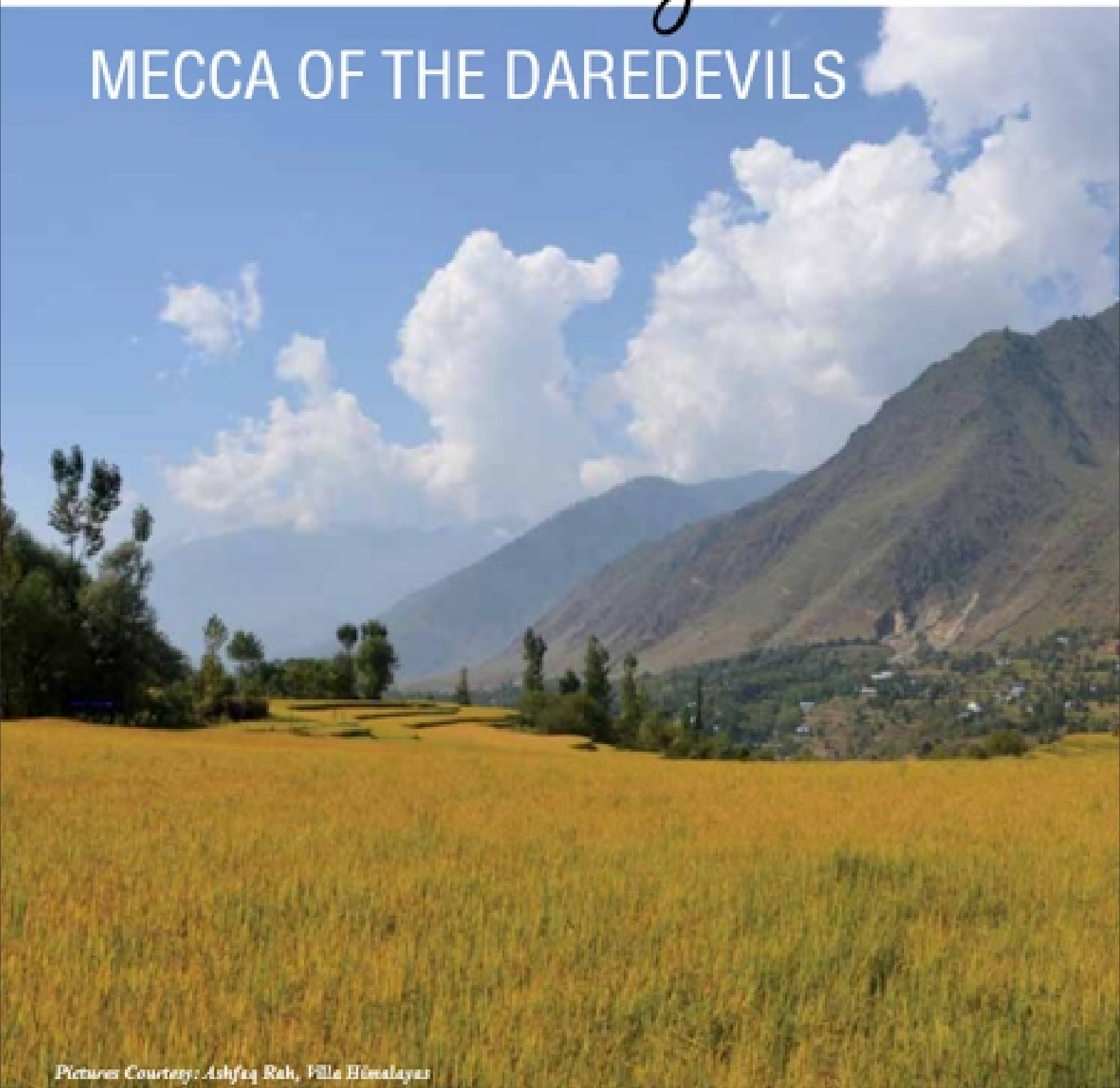
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Discover
China

Sonamarg

MECCA OF THE DAREDEVILS



Pictures Courtesy: Ashfaq Rah, Villa Himalayas



Every year adventure seekers from all over the world religiously flock to Sonamarg to get their share of thrill amidst the snow clad Himalayan peaks, undulated mountainous landscapes, widespread grasslands, sparkling streams, boisterous waterfalls and village-dotted slopes. An alpine valley on the banks of Nallah Sindh – the largest tributary of Jehlum in Kashmir – Sonamarg, is in fact the Mecca of trekkers and hikers

‘Paradise on Earth’ as the Mughals christened Kashmir, is truly a multi-faceted heaven that changes its hues every season. Extravagant and naturally gorgeous. It is here the erstwhile Mughal emperors holidayed during the harsh midyear summers of the hot Indian plains. And a picturesque little spot on this dazzling paradise is a serene little hill-station, Sonamarg, at 2740 meters above sea level, surrounded by awe-inspiring glaciers and majestic yet tranquil lakes. It derives its names from the enthralling golden-hued flowers spread all around, the sight of which is a pleasure to watch from the mountains that surrounds it.

Located at 87 km from Srinagar in Ganderbal district of Jammu and Kashmir, the place is particularly renowned around the world for trekking and hiking trails. These widely celebrated golden meadows form an ideal base for a major trek, passing through a large number of high terrain lakes, such as Vishansar, Kishansar, Gadsar, Satsar and

Gangabal.

Sonamarg also gives rise to ‘The Three Sisters’, the three mighty Himalayan glaciers of Kashmir Valley - Thajiwas Glacier, Kolhoi Glacier and Machoi Glacier. These are home to some imposing peaks, such as Sirbal Peak, Kolhoi Peak, Amarnath Peak and Machoi Peak. Lying within the vicinity of Sonamarg, these peaks offer all forms of challenges for the discerning dare-devils - from mild to most hard. An enjoyable climate with mild summers and cold winters is what makes Sonamarg an ideal location for trekkers to explore the land’s natural beauty and challenging treks.

Sonamarg also holds historical significance as a gateway on ancient ‘Silk Road’ to China and other Gulf countries. Geographically, this striking snow-covered, yet golden flower-laden meadow forms the Kashmiri gateway to Ladakh. Lying within the close proximity to the great Himalayan Zoji La pass, through which the Srinagar-Leh Road, also known as National Highway 1D (NH 1D), passes. In the present day

circumstances, NH 1D, also plays strategically important role for the Indian Army that controls this part of Kashmir.

In addition to trekking and hiking, the place also offers options for several other equally pleasurable activities – sightseeing (ideal for honeymooners), trout fishing, fly fishing (an art practiced particularly in high terrain swift-flowing rivers), horse riding, cycling, pony rides, sledge rides, ice skating and pilgrim trips (the famed Amarnath Yatra starts from Sonamarg).

This enchanting scenic place is amazing with many mind-blowing attractions.

- Nilagrad (colony of the Baltics) – this pretty little hamlet is a picturesque location where the swift-flowing stream of Nilagrad splashes into Sindh River.
- Vishansar Lake – The crystal clear water of the lake with ice flakes offers an appealing view from nearby Nichnai Pass. Located at an amazing altitude of 4,084 m above sea level, this high altitude lake is popular among the trekkers.
- Krishnasar Lake –

Another high altitude lake popular for fishing, especially for trout fishing. The lake is located at 3,801 m above sea level.

- Thajiwaz Glacier – the trekking route to this magnificent glacier is dotted with several amazing green water & frozen lakes. Located just 3 km from Sonamarg, the spot is popular for sledge rides on the snow in mid-summer. Pony rides can also be availed to this place.
- Zoji La pass – Situated at about 20 km east of Sonamarg, Zoji La pass is gateway to the Ladakh plateau. At 3,528 m above sea level, the pass connects Kashmir Valley in South to Ladakh in North.

Apart from all the excitement provided by the adventure sports and activities, the winters in Sonamarg are an especially good visual treat for all. The charm of watching the bare, snow-covered landscapes from the warmth of a fireplace is pure bliss! It simply cannot be described in words. It can only be experienced. Period. ■

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▶ WHERE TO STAY

The Villa Himalaya is one of the Sonamarg resorts known for its excellent services and amenities. With 15 deluxe rooms and a multi-cuisine all-day-dining restaurant, the resort offers some superb perspective trips over exquisite natural landscapes.

▶ HOW TO GET THERE

Trains are available up to Jammu from where Sonamarg is accessible by road owing to its proximity to NH 1D.

The Silk Road, or Silk Route, extending 6,437 kms, originated from the lucrative trade of Chinese silk carried out during the Han dynasty (206 BC – 220 AD). The Central Asian sections of the trade routes expanded enormously during this period, under Zhang Qian, the Chinese imperial envoy. This network of trade and cultural transmission routes also promoted cultural interaction by linking traders, merchants, pilgrims, monks, soldiers, nomads, and urban dwellers from China and India to the Mediterranean Sea. China also took great measures to protect their trade route and products, and to ensure this extended the Great Wall of China.

