

BARAMULLA BECKONS: A HEAVEN FOR TRAVELERS IN JAMMU AND KASHMIR

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Abstract

Tourism plays a pivotal role in fostering economic growth by generating revenue, creating employment, and contributing to GDP in many nations. Known for its unparalleled natural beauty, Kashmir is famously referred to as "Heaven on Earth." Within this region, Baramulla district is distinguished by its rich array of attractions, including gurdwaras, temples, monasteries, and shrines. A key highlight is Gulmarg, located at an elevation of 2,730 meters, which serves as a major tourist draw. Originally called Gauri Marg, the name was changed in the 16th century to Gulmarg, meaning "Valley of Flowers." Other notable sites in Baramulla include the Gulmarg Biosphere Reserve, Khilanmarg, Acchabal, Gondola Lift, Tangmarg, Khilanmarg Golf Course, and Parihaspora. The tourism industry in this district holds substantial potential, providing significant economic opportunities for the local population. This analysis focuses on the district's major tourist attractions, historical sites, and geographical landmarks, highlighting their contribution to regional tourism development.

Keywords: *Tourism, paradise, origin, explore, spots*

INTRODUCTION

Baramulla, one of the 22 districts of Jammu and Kashmir, spans approximately 4,190 square kilometers and is divided into 8 tehsils and 16 blocks. It shares its western border with Pakistan-occupied Kashmir, while Kupwara lies to its north, and Poonch and Budgam to its south. The district also borders Srinagar and Ladakh to the east. Founded in 2306 BCE by Raja Bhimsina, Baramulla has a rich history, including a visit by the Mughal emperor Akbar in 1508 CE. Known in Kashmiri as Varmul, Baramulla serves as the district's administrative center and is situated along the Jhelum River, downstream from Srinagar, the summer capital of Jammu and Kashmir. Historically, it was a key entry point to Kashmir, functioning as a hub for distributing goods along the Jhelum Valley cart route. The town's name, derived from the Sanskrit terms *Varaha* (wild boar) and *Mula* (root or origin), reflects its ancient heritage. However, the 1947 Pakistani tribal invasion devastated Baramulla, which was once a prominent urban and trading center. Today, it remains a key commercial and educational hub in northern Kashmir. Along with his disciples and associates, the well-known Muslim saint Syed Janbaz Wali selected Baramulla as the centre of his mission in 1421 AD. After entering the Valley through Pakhil in 1586 AD, Emperor Akbar spent a few days at Baramulla, turning the city into a magnificent spectacle while he was there, according to "Tarikh-e-Hassan." When Jahangir visited Kashmir in 1620 AD, he also spent some time in Baramulla. As a result, Baramulla developed into a community where Muslims, Buddhists, Sikhs, and Hindus lived in harmony and created a rich and varied composite culture. When it came to the northern part of the princely state of Jammu and Kashmir, it was the oldest and most important town.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1. To provide an introduction to tourism in Baramulla.
2. To Provide an outline of the historical background and geographical location of the Baramulla District.
3. To identify the tourist spots in the Baramulla district.

METHODOLOGY

This study is descriptive in nature and relies on secondary data sources. These secondary sources include a variety of materials such as journals, periodicals, magazines, newspapers, newsletters, research articles, books, online resources, and both public and unpublished documents from the Ministry of Tourism, Government of India, and J&K Tourism.

ORIGIN OF BARAMULLA

The word "baramulla" is derived from the Sanskrit Varahamula, which means "boar's molar." In Hindu mythology, the Kashmir Valley was known as Satisaras, or Parvati's Lake in Sanskrit. Until Lord Vishnu changed into a pig and hit Varahamula, Jalodbhava—which means "originated from water"—ruled the lake. Lake water was released as a result. Varahamulaksetra or Varahaksetra was the name given to Baramulla in antiquity. It was a suburb of Hushkapura (Ushkur). Vishnu's boar manifestation, the Adi Varaha, was revered. Thus, numerous temples and monasteries were built under the reigns of Lalitaditya Muktapida, (Queen) Sugandha, and Ksemagupta.

Languages

Kashmiri and Urdu are used most, followed by English, Pahari, Hindko, Gujari, and Punjabi.

Transport, Road from Srinagar

Srinagar, Jammu and Kashmir's capital, is 55 kilometres from Baramulla. NH-1 connects Uri to Srinagar and Leh via the Line of Control. NH-1 was previously known as NH-1A before the National Highway Authority of India renumbered all national highways in 2010. Srinagar's NH-1 joins NH-44. Both Srinagar and Jammu have cabs and buses. The route from Srinagar to Baramulla is the most motorable and well-maintained in the valley. Rice plantations and meadows encircle it. It connects Sangrama, Wagoora, Hygam, Pattan, and Zainakot. NH701 and NH701A connect Baramulla with Kupwara and Gulmarg, respectively.

From Uri and Muzaffarabad

The Jhelum River flows alongside the 123-kilometer (76-mile) Muzaffarabad-Baramulla road. Pakistan refers to it as "Srinagar Road." From Domel Bridge in Muzaffarabad to the LOC Chaktothi-Uri Border Crossing. NH-1 goes through Uri, 45 kilometres (28 miles) west of Baramulla, and crosses the Line of Control. The road from Uri to Baramulla is scenic, traversing through wooded mountainsides and cliffs until the final 40 kilometres (25 miles). The road reopened for controlled bus travel in 2005, but was closed again in 2019.

From Kupwara via Watergam

NH-701 connects Baramulla and Kupwara via Watergam and Handwara. The distance between Baramulla and Handwara is 29 km, and Watergam is 15 km. The distance between Kupwara and Baramulla is 47 km.

Airport

Sheikh-ul-Alam International Airport in Srinagar, which is around 60 kilometres southeast, is the nearest airport. On the other hand, the state's winter capital's airport is Jammu Airport.

Train

On the 119-kilometer (74-mile) Banihal-Srinagar-Baramulla railway line, the Banihal railway tunnel opened in October 2009 and connects Srinagar, Qazigund, and Banihal across the Pir Panjal mountains to Baramulla, the final station. The Jammu–Baramulla line will be connected by Indian Railways. The closest long-distance train station is Katra, which is located 276 km (171 mi) south.

TOURIST PLACES IN DISTRICT BARAMULLA

WULAR LAKE

Wular Lake, Asia's second biggest freshwater lake, is located on the foothills of Haramuk Mountain. It's 200 square kilometres long and 10 kilometres wide. Sangrama's Baramula Road lake is situated between Sopore and Bandipore. The River Jhelum gives water to Wular Lake. "Zaina Lank" is the lake's central island. Zainul-Abidin created this island. Wular Lake may be a vestige of the old Satisar Lake. Sunsets are popular at this lake.

GULMARG

Gulmarg, meaning "flower meadow," is a picturesque destination located 60 kilometers from Srinagar, reachable via a 1.5-hour drive. Nestled in the Himalayas, it attracts millions of visitors annually. One of its most iconic attractions is the Gulmarg Gondola, the world's highest cable car. The Gondola operates in two stages: the first ascends to Kongdori Station at 8,530 feet, while the second reaches an elevation of 12,293 feet. Visitors can explore Strawberry Valley, Leopards Valley, and Kongdori on horseback, with the frozen Al-Patar Lake being a key highlight. During winter, Gulmarg transforms into a haven for skiing enthusiasts, offering pristine snow-covered slopes that challenge even the most skilled skiers. The season also features "White Christmas" celebrations, New Year festivities, and breathtaking scenery. Historically, Gulmarg, previously known as Gaurimarg after Lord Shiva's consort, was renamed by Yousuf Shah Chak to signify its association with roses. Prominent figures, including Mughal emperor Jahangir and Central Asian explorer Sir Marc Aurel Stein (1862–1943), have frequented the area, the latter living in a tent during his expeditions. Additionally, British colonials favored Gulmarg as a summer retreat, further cementing its historical and cultural significance.

PARIHASPORA

Old Parihaspora is located in Baramula, 26 kilometres from Srinagar. This was the capital of Shanker Varman, Kashmir. It was discovered by the ruler of Kashmir in the eighth century, Lalataditya Muktapid. The primary draw of the Parihaspora Pattan and Pattan Bazaar is its ancient archaeological buildings. There is also a Buddhist monastery and stupa in the town. Excavations in 1914 turned up a Chaitya, Raj Bhawan, and Vishnu temples. Ancient stone construction can be seen in this dig.

ZIYARAT BABA RESHI

Thirteen km from Gulmarg, in Baramula, next to Alpathar Lake, is a well-known shrine dedicated to Baba Payam-Din's Ziarat of Baba Reshi. A well-known Muslim saint and courtier of Zain-ul-Abidin in Kashmir was Baba Payam-Din. After praying and meditating at this shrine, Baba Payam-Din passed away around 1480. The grave of Baba Payam-Din, covered in a hand-embroidered cloth, is the focal point of this shrine. Worshippers are said to receive blessings from the temple. After being blessed, devotees come back to this shrine to give thanks to the saint.

RANI TEMPLE

In the winter, the Shiva-Parvati Rani shrine is covered in snow. This temple served as the filming location for Jay Jay Shiv Shankar, the most well-known Rajesh Khanna song. There are mountains blanketed in snow everywhere. You can see this temple over Gulmarg.

NINGLE NALLAH

Ningle Nallah is 10 kilometres from Gulmarg. Mountains are seldom without wild streams. The Ningle Nallah mountain stream in Gulmarg is popular among travellers. Green meadows with wildflowers surround the creek. The gushing of this stream has a therapeutic effect on the soul.

ALPATHER LAKE

Alpather Lake is a tiny lake next to Gondola Phase 2 on Apharwat Peak in Gulmarg. Because it completely freezes in the winter, the locals refer to it as the frozen lake. Our solo excursion to Alpather Lake is detailed in the post below. At 4,390 meters, the lake is the primary tourist destination of Gulmarg. It is surrounded by rugged mountains and meadows covered with wildflowers. The journey to the lake is an experience in and of itself.

DRUNG WATERFALL

The Drung Waterfall in Tangmarg, Gulmarg, Baramulla, is a well-known tourist destination. This cascading waterfall in the majestic highlands is frozen by the exceptionally cold winter temperatures. This frozen waterfall is a must-see for locals.

SHRUNZ FALL

Shrunz Falls is 22 km from the Srinagar-Baramulla highway, between the Tapper Kreeri and Putkhah crossroads in Chandoosa, Baramulla.

ST. MARY CHURCH, GULMARG, BARAMULLA

The century-old St. Mary's Church is located next to Gulmarg's Golf Course. Amazing Victorian architecture. Its brownstone walls make it look like a rustic chapel. It shines in the winter, especially in the snow. One of the most tranquil sights in Gulmarg is the church. It has adorned wooden walls and a green tiled ceiling. Inside are frescoes from the Bible. From a distance, stained glass intensifies its brightness. The church is only reachable on foot because it is situated on a beautiful green field that is encircled by golf courses on three sides and a mountain on the fourth. The British-style chapel was finished in 1902. In 2003, the church underwent renovations that improved its exterior. Following repairs in 2003, Christmas mass was celebrated after 14 years. It is no longer used for Mass.

KHILANMARG

Khilanmarg, a small valley in Jammu and Kashmir, India, is six kilometres (3.7 miles) from Gulmarg. Spring flowers bloom along Gulmarg's winter ski routes, which overlook the Kashmir Valley and neighbouring peaks. The elevation difference between Gulmarg and Khilanmarg is 600 meters (2,000 feet). From Nanga Parbat to Nun and Kun, the Himalayas are visible.

ZALOORA-ZAINGEER-BARAMULLA

Zaloora Zaingeer, a village in the Baramulla district of Jammu and Kashmir, holds historical significance due to its unique cultural and strategic relevance in the region. Nestled within the Zaingeer area, Zaloora has been a part of Kashmir's rich historical and socio-political tapestry. The village is known for its traditional Kashmiri architecture and serene natural beauty, reflecting the region's heritage. Historically, Zaloora was part of the ancient trade routes that connected Kashmir to surrounding regions,

facilitating commerce and cultural exchanges. The village has witnessed various historical events, including the influence of Mughal, Afghan, and Dogra rule in the Kashmir Valley. Its strategic location in the fertile Zaingeer area made it an essential part of the agrarian economy, contributing significantly to the local livelihoods. Zaloora Zaingeer also has a legacy tied to its religious and spiritual heritage. The village is home to several shrines and historical structures that attract local visitors and highlight the spiritual traditions of the region.

Oral histories and folklore associated with Zaloora further enrich its historical narrative, emphasizing its role in preserving Kashmir's cultural identity. The author of this paper 'Shabir Ahmad Lone' belongs to this famous historical village. He has highlighted a detailed account about Zaloora village in his project during his Masters degree in History at University of Kashmir, 2017. Zaloora, located in Zaingeer Tehsil, Baramulla District, Jammu & Kashmir, is governed by the Zaloora Gram Panchayat under the Zaingeer Community Development Block. Situated 14 kilometers from Sopore, it has emerged as a budding tourist destination. Key attractions include Hilltop Zaloora, Hawa Kayar, Phall Dhaffer, Mujhadroo, and Khukar Nallah, which gained popularity among local visitors in 2019. The village is also home to the revered Haji Lola Reshi Baba shrine and is noted for its natural beauty, sports, fruit business, education, and cultural harmony. Historically, Kashmiri Pandits and Muslims celebrated festivals together in the village. During summer, Mujhadroo is a favorite spot for its apricots and waterfall. Zaloora is also believed to have been the site of a Buddhist university during Emperor Ashoka's reign. In summary, Zaloora Zaingeer stands as a testament to the historical, economic, and cultural evolution of Baramulla district, embodying the heritage and resilience of the Kashmiri people. Zaloora is heart of Rafiabad constituency. Its historical relevance continues to influence its identity as a vital part of the region's legacy.

HAZRAT BABA SHUKUR UD DIN RA, KASHMIR TORCH BEARER

A true spiritual wonder is the shrine to Hazrat Baba Shakoor ud din RA at the Spiritual Sharikot Hill Top in Watlab Sopore. This well-known saint was born under Sultan Qutub Din's reign, according to information supplied by the mosque's administration. From his earliest childhood, Hazrat Baba Shakoor ud din wali RA was renowned for his impeccable morals, genuineness, and deep devotion to Allah and the Prophet, peace be upon him. He devoted his days to reciting the Quran and praying fervently. As he grew older, he also worked in agriculture to make ends meet.

FRUIT MANDI SOPORE

Sopore, located 50 kilometers north of Srinagar in Baramulla district, is home to Asia's second-largest fruit mandi, spread over 372 kanals. However, the mandi has faced significant disruptions, particularly following the abrogation of Jammu and Kashmir's special status on August 5. Historically, militancy has periodically forced its closure. Currently, the mandi is largely inactive, with minimal trading activity, a stark contrast to its usual bustling operations. Jaspreet Singh, a truck driver from Amritsar, highlighted that low apple prices and adverse conditions in the Valley have hindered the shipment of produce, affecting truckers financially. Similarly, Jammu-based trucker Puran Chand shared concerns over the prolonged waiting times and lack of business. Kashmir, which produces 75% of India's apples, relies heavily on horticulture as an economic backbone, supporting 12 lakh families. However, the sector has suffered significantly this year due to reduced trading and transport issues. A militant attack on fruit growers in Dangerpora, Sopore, on September 6 further discouraged activity, with truckers avoiding the region. The Valley typically produces 24 lakh metric tonnes (approximately 14 crore boxes) of apples annually. However, Fayaz Ahmed Malik (Kakaji), president of the Sopore fruit mandi, noted that only about two crore boxes had been sold—a worrying decline. The downturn in the market began in October 2018, exacerbated by frequent national highway closures. Early apple varieties, usually marketed between July and August, also failed to fetch favorable prices. The situation worsened with the communication blackout and restrictions imposed in August, leaving growers unaware of market conditions outside the Valley. Bank loans have further added to the burden on fruit producers, intensifying the crisis.

ECO-PARK

The Eco Park, located on an island in the Jhelum River along the Baramulla-Uri Road, is accessible by exquisite wooden bridges. The J&K Tourism Development Corporation designed this scenic tourism attraction, which combines contemporary architecture with the region's natural beauty. With a backdrop of breathtaking mountains, the serene flow of the Jhelum River, brilliant green gardens, and meticulously crafted wooden cottages, it is one of Baramulla's most popular attractions, especially during the summer season. Future plans include the inclusion of cable cars and the extension of the Eco Park's facilities.

GULNAR PARK

Gulnar Park, located in Baramulla, Jammu & Kashmir, is a serene recreational space along the banks of the Jhelum River. Known for its lush greenery and tranquil environment, the park serves as a popular spot for locals and tourists to relax and enjoy nature. Its scenic setting, complemented by well-maintained lawns, walking paths, and seating areas, makes it ideal for family outings and picnics. Gulnar Park also holds cultural significance, hosting occasional events and gatherings that reflect the region's vibrant traditions. Its accessibility and peaceful ambiance make it a cherished attraction in Baramulla.

TEHSILS OF DISTRICT BARAMULLA

1. Boniyar 2. Dangerpora 3. Khoie Panzipora 4. Kwarhama 5. Watergam 6. Baramulla 7. Kreeri 8. Kunzer 9. Pattan 10. Sopore 11. Tangmarg 12. Uri 13. Wagoora 14. Dangiawacha 15. Rohama 16. Zaingeer

CONCLUSION

Baramulla's economy depends largely on tourism and the fruit trade. Tourism has the potential to bring people together and drive job creation and economic growth by opening new investment opportunities and generating revenue. However, while tourism boosts the economy, it may not directly alleviate poverty. To address this, the state government, local investors, and other stakeholders must actively engage in tourism development. Local workers can contribute by supporting businesses related to transport, food, and services, helping to reduce poverty. Baramulla's development faces challenges due to its diverse terrain and connectivity issues, with a low rail-to-road ratio. Many roads require expansion from two lanes to four, and alternative routes are needed in some areas. Improved aviation connectivity and the addition of new airports are also crucial for the sparsely populated and geographically fragmented region. Tourism infrastructure in Baramulla should focus on better roads, enhanced transport options like airlines and rail services, upgraded hotels, and improved access to tourist destinations. Restoring historical monuments and developing sacred sites for pilgrims are also essential. With its stunning landscapes and ecosystems, Baramulla has immense potential for tourism and could play a key role in regional development. As a unique destination, the tourism sector in Baramulla offers diverse employment opportunities, including hotel management, guiding, and travel services. Its natural beauty and rich ecosystems continue to captivate visitors, highlighting the area's importance in the tourism industry.

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