

A trip of three from four

July 4-9, 2024

Package cost: INR 16600 pp

Extra cost: around INR 5000 pp

This has been our first family trip after apu has gone to USA and a trip that I had to plan from scratch. It felt daunting at first, since planning a trip for your friends and planning a trip for your parents are quite different in nature. I was afraid of making any mistake, didn't want my parents to feel that they entrusted this responsibility to a kid. However, I think I impressed them a little bit with how I knew the right cost in every bargaining spot beforehand and about what to do or not to do (a huge thanks to my friends and juniors who visited Kashmir recently). I didn't take into account some things though, so if you are planning a trip to Kashmir with your parents, keep these in your mind:

1. They want TIPS from you everywhere. I never had to face this with my friends, and my friends did not even tell me this about Kashmir. Later I realized that they demand it more seeing elderly people like my father. Like if you rent a car for an hour of around 4500 INR, you need to give 100-200 INR extra as a tip to the driver or if you rent a horse of INR 1200, they will demand another 100. And for some reason, they looked like they weren't satisfied with the 100.
2. If your parents aren't too adventurous, and aged (65 and 53) like mine, do not make them ride horses. Ammu enjoyed in spite of being fearful but I could see my father being afraid all the time considering the risks of falling down.
3. If you are financially sound, take good hotels. Whenever I went with friends, we tried to take good hotels within budget. But I realized for my parents, comfort is very important, and at this age, they enjoy a bit luxury. So even you take a package, talk with the tour manager and change the hotel after seeing reviews and pics from booking.com and google maps. Normally in packages, they try to give you low-cost hotels.
4. If possible, don't go to Kashmir on July during the time of Amarnath Yatra. Around a lac people all around India visit at that time and it causes extra traffic. Also, some tourist places like Betaab Valley and Chandeshwari were closed due to it.

We went on a package of five nights four days with "Rest on Wheels Kashmir" where the cost pp was INR 16600. The package mainly includes a car for transport, hotels, breakfast and dinner. One thing to keep in mind that the car does not mean 24*7 service. They will take you to your travel destinations and then return you to the hotel. In most cases, if you cover your destinations within 5-6 pm, they will leave. If you want to roam around the city at night, you need to do it by yourself, by taking autos. If you want to have the car till night, talk with your package managers beforehand, they might charge you some extra. In Kashmir, evening takes place around 8 pm, so try to be outside as late as possible. There's not much to do after you come back to your hotel.

July 4 – Dhaka to Srinagar:

We took a flight of Bangladesh Bimans from Dhaka to Delhi at around 12 pm (started on 12:30) which reached in Delhi around 2:45 pm Indian Time. We took another domestic flight in Spicejet from Delhi to Srinagar (5:30 pm – 7:30 pm). Please keep a gap of at least 3 hours in Delhi between both of these flights, specially if the terminals are 1 & 3. To go to terminal 1 from 3, you need to take a cab ride of around 25 minutes. In Delhi airport, we had to complete our immigration, take luggage, then do the check-in for the domestic flight. Fortunately, in our case, terminal 1 was closed for a month so both flights were in terminal 3 and we didn't face any timing issue. Also, they do not provide food in Spicejet, so better to carry some dry foods with you.

Reaching Srinagar, we were taken by our driver to our Hotel - Moghal Mahal where we had dinner and spent the night. I'd recommend Moghal Mahal 10/10, they have very good stuff and the hotel rooms were also nice.

July 5 – Gulmarg (Cable car + Moghal Gardens in Srinagar)

We started for Gulmarg at around 8 pm and reached around 9:30. Booked the cable car 1st phase ticket beforehand (INR 810 pp). Should have booked the second phase too, got unnecessarily worried about the cold with my parents which wouldn't have been a problem. You need to buy the tickets online around a month before. Afterwards, went to the Drung valley of Tang Marg and made a few stops in the route. Gulmarg is very beautiful, wildflowers everywhere and it looks straight out of some wallpaper. Many spend a night there though we didn't. One suggestion, Gulmarg is not too big, so if you want to roam around and can walk, I would suggest walking rather than taking a horse ride. In Kashmir, pony rides are unnecessarily expensive and the place where most scams take place. I heard there is a golf club and children's park there though we didn't visit any more places.

We returned to Srinagar in noon and had our lunch in Kareema restaurant to taste the authentic Kashmiri Wazwaan. It was very good and am grateful for the restaurant suggestion by our package manager Asif vai. It costs around INR 700 and it is enough for two people like us. Afterwards, we took an hour rest in hotel and went to visit the Moghal gardens – Both Shalimar and Nishat gardens. Parimahal was on the same route but we realized our driver was a bit pissed since he thought that we would be done after Gulmarg that day, so we didn't visit Parimahal. Afterwards, we went to Lal Chawk to do some shopping and finally returned to our hotel at 9 pm. Our driver got very pissed that we kept him till 9 pm that day and rightfully so. In later days, we always released him around afternoon.

July 6 – Sonamarg (Zero Point)

This day, we started around 6:30 pm for Sonamarg to avoid the traffic for Amarnath yatra. Also, there is a rule that you cannot return after 3:30 pm from Sonamarg considering the safety for yatries, so we had to wrap up by noon there. You can visit two places in Sonamarg, Zero point and Thajiwas Glacier. I wanted to minimize pony rides as much as possible so decided with zero point instead of Thajiwas. In order to go to Zero point, you have to rent a separate car in Sonamarg and I heard the

cost will be around INR 3500 – 4000. However, they will try to scam you saying that they will make you visit four points or will take you to the Ladakh starting point etc etc and charge you more. Do not listen to any of it, say you want to go straight to the zero point. My mother was convinced with their talk and made a demand of visiting the Ladakh starting point so they charged us around INR 4.5k. Later we realized that the Ladakh starting point was just beside the zero point and you can literally walk down there if you wish . Also, the driver demanded tips from my father at the end of around INR 100. BTW, the roads are full of zigzag and narrow to zero point and that scared my parents too (Also the ice in zero point looked really mucky). We later had lunch at Lolabi restaurant in Sonamarg where the cost per person was around INR 200. On our way back, we also made a stop in a park to take some pictures. On our way to return, there was a lot of traffic due to the yatries commuting and we reached our hotel around 6 pm. Then we went to lal chawk to do the rest of the shopping while I had a nice walk with my Kashmiri friend Wasi.

July 7 – Pahalgam (Baisaran Valley – Mini Switzerland)

Sorry for the unfinished travel blog, here is my google [sheet](#), you can find useful information there.