



Amarnath Yathra...  
experiencing The Divine!



It was on 30th June'2010, I started from Hyderabad to Delhi by flight on pilgrimage to Amarnath Yathra... which is a long cherished dream for me since young age. I booked my tour with Southern Travels, very famous for package tours in the country...more famous for south Indian Food for travelers!



There were about 70 people in 2 AC Buses. We started from Delhi at 5 PM and traveled to reach Katra passing through Ambala, Ludhiana, Jalandhar ( 650 kms.) which is in J&K State. It is about 14 hours journey and the devotees of Amarnathji drawn from various states in the country established make shift facilities for shelter, food and bathing free of cost to all the devotees proceeding to Amarnath.



These are called "Loungers". We were all amazed to see the devotion with which they were serving the devotees without any expectation of what so ever. We could see the young volunteers who though being paid by the organizers, feeling that this is the best way they can spend their time for the next 3 months.



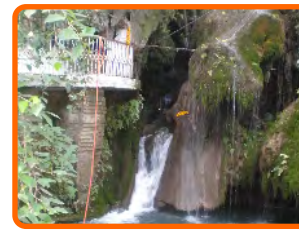
The size of the Kitchen was so huge and it which would run for 24x7. It is like what we see during marriage functions at our cities... delicious North Indian food is being served hot along with Sweets as well. The organizers established even Medical Camps for the benefit of pilgrims.



Elaborate security arrangements being made enroute through the roads leading to Amarnath on the back drop of security threats by terrorists. Kudos to the security personnel who were protecting the yathris day in and day out during chilled nights! We have seen many pilgrims thanking them and congratulating... taking snaps with them.



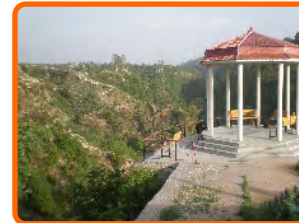
The pilgrimage looks to be very difficult one as the entire route leading to Amarnath is very dangerous as it goes through mountains, terrains, valleys, rivers all along... more under terrorist threats.



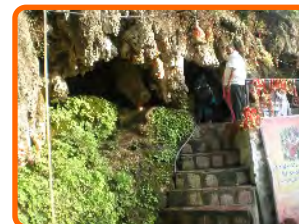
We reached Katra city for a day's rest which is base camp for going to Vaishno Devi. We thought of visiting the local temples taking advantage of time on hands. So we proceeded to visit Baba Temple (Siva) over there at a distance of 8 kms which is situated near a natural water falls.



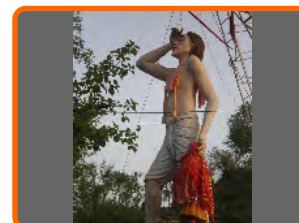
There we could see a natural cave and a formation of Siva ling inside the cave. The nature, water, ambience everything provided a great relief for the heart and soul.



The entire travel was so enjoyable in nature as the route was filled with lots of natural spots of beauty. We could not travel without having short breaks whenever we find some spots which attracted our eyes.



There after we visited NavaDurga Temple which is again a natural cave where in we could see the natural formations of Ganesh, Siva, Nava Durga's in dolomite formations. We all just wonderstruck to see such things inside the cave hundreds of years back drawing the people.



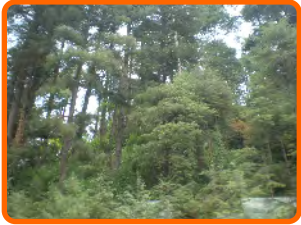
From there we visited Baba Jitto Mandir who was the pioneer of getting the land to the underprivileged. Jitto was great devotee of Matha Vaishno and being harassed by the local leaders ages back and sacrificed himself for the cause of formers over there. He dig a pit over there to water his fields and even today we can see that. His Samadhi to be seen over there. The formers drawn from across the region congregate there with their products once in a year.



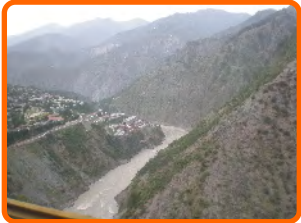
We stayed at Surya Hotel at Katra which is a decent hotel. Slept without getting disturbed due to the hectic schedules during the day.



Then again proceeded to Srinagar which is about 270kms from Katra City enjoying the nature and beauty of Kashmir Valleys... more over enjoying food / snacks served at bhandars.



Whenever we found eye catching beauty spots we were just clicking the camera...some of us are chatting...some were drowsing...some were just silently meditating. There were hundreds of vehicles all along the way proceeding to Srinagar.



We crossed Bhagilhar Dam which is infusing lives to the terrain form lands in the valley and also generating the electricity for the state.



The small stream of water flowing from mountain hills to be seen joining with many such waterfalls at various places and emerged as a big river in its magnanimous form and shape can be seen.



All along the route we find it very comfortable to have our food, snacks, refreshments etc., at specially erected Bhandars which were established by the devotees of Amarnathji. We find ladies cooking at the nights for the benefit of hundreds of devotees.



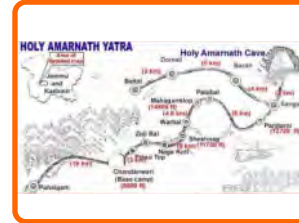
We have seen many devotes very enthusiastically greeting the Army personnel who are on duty during the nights as everyone were amazed with the spirit of their duty in protecting the country men all through the route.



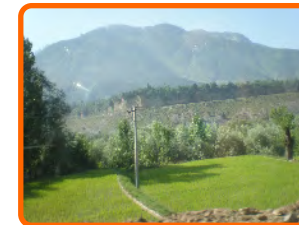
The beauty of the flowers over there at almost all the places cannot be explained in words as everyone who got cameras to capture the same were looks to be busy in clicking them.



We reached Zahgeer Hotel at Srinagar in the night which was all built by wood. Our 3rd day was concluded at Srinagar.



At around 10 AM we proceeded further to Baltal Camp which is situated at a distance of 120 kms from Srinagar. Though the distance is just 120 kms our journey was about 10 hours due to traffic congestions, security check up, terrain roads, breaks for food etc., ultimately we reached the base camp in the evening. We crossed India's longest tunnel road on our way.



I really find it very great to have silent sitting at the valley just enjoying the breeze over there in the Himalayan terrain. Just the thought of being there itself gave me so much pleasure as it is just few lakhs of the people out of 100cr population in the country can make this trip every year. I am one among those very few people! Such thoughts made me very devoted to the Lord Siva for the opportunity.





Border Security Forces had set up a base camp there at Baltal as this supposed to be very crucial and critical point for the country. It was near these hills only Kargil area situated. Over and above these reasons government took all the precautionary measures making the pilgrimage a success.



it was like Victory for me personally in life to reach such a sacred place and my heart was beating with high and positive vibrations.



There were occasions I have seen with my own eyes how the elderly couples were supporting each other in the pilgrimage. Not only elderly people... there were tiny tots too to be seen enjoying the trip.



Thousands of vehicles to be seen parked over there at the base camp...the seen was just cannot be explained and the magnanimity of Hindu fervor is at its heights.



We have seen many sadhus serving the devotees with their magic powers.



As many as 30 food courts being established all across the area of the base camp at Baltal. These Bhandars were being set up the instance of 3rd Sikh Guru Amar Singh hundreds of years back for serving the devotees of Lord Amarnath. Since then devotees from all the states of North India were very devotionally serving the yathris.



The decoration with which the bhandars are established can be seen and enjoyed by us. it was a feast for eyes. you name the dish...you will get over there in the Bhandars. Sweets, chat, snaks, rice, roties... what not you would get everything free of cost in the name of god over there. It is like living in heaven.



We had a big Pan Shop there in one of the bhandars!



If you have a problem with money...there you are served by Mobile ATM by J&K Bank. Thousands of make shift tarpaulin tents being erected at various places at base camp where ever there is a place for comfortable stay to yathris. The Government Health Dept., took enough care to even construct wonderful low cost toilets and bath rooms over there...everything made available free of cost for the yathris.



It was on 4th July at around 4 AM I started trekking the mountains leading to Amarnath Cave and I must tell you that it was a journey to heaven crossing the hell!! Why because the route was so difficult even to walk.



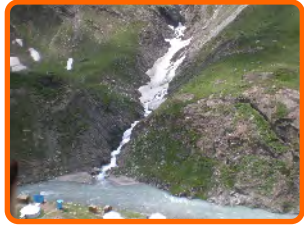
The distance to be covered to reach the abode of lord Siva is about 14kms. There was space for just 1 fellow to walk whereas the same space used for trekkers, horses, dollies and further more for coming and going people.



The entire experience is very divine as walking through such difficult way; one would certainly feel that he/she is walking to heaven. Even slightest carelessness would through one in to deep valleys/streams which will about 50-100 ft. similar would be plight of horse riders and pony travelers. The kabooliwalas who would be accompanying the yathris can be happily seen as Pramathaganas of lord Siva.



After trekking heights and downs...mountains... ice platforms continuously for about 9 hours I reached a place called Sangam. I was seeing the gushing waters all along the way...I understand that these waters are emerging from Lord Amarnath feet...very truly called as Amaraavathi river.



The sacred waters come like waters some places and some places they become frozen and be static like stone...witnessing this phenomena of Amaravathi... I was surprised.



From Sangam it is again trekking for about 3 hours up hills. Like this, I along with thousands of other devotees climbed about 7 hills chanting HIS name on lips and seeing god everywhere.



When I reached Amarnath cave...it was about 4PM in the evening. For my fortune, the moment I entered the holy place heavy down pour started from nowhere as if Lord Siva released Goddess Ganga from his Jathajooth... it happened for almost 2 hours...there by transforming the entire ambience in to Kailash... waters from mountain tops fallen like ganga... white fog prevailed all across the mountains...while clouds surrounded entire valley...top and bottom all over white snow...making the atmosphere like Silver City of Lord Siva.



I took bath over there near cave, started walking slowly to words cave...very carefully walking with the support of stick step by step... it became very difficult to reach the cave even after 2 hours time though the distance is less than half a kilometer. The magnificent gold colour cave stood before me like Kailash Paravth.



With heartfelt devotion, I could have the vision of Lord Amarnath Darshan which is being formed with drops of water from Ramkund continuously for about 3 months before the temple is formally opened. The magnanimity of Siva Linga is about 8 ft from the bottom. There were no words to explain how Lord manifested over there in the cave.



Epical story is that Siva in order to narrate Amara Katha at the request of Ma Parvathi chosen this place which is 14000 ft from the see level and ensuring that no living being hear the story. He left all his belongings on the way... his army, his bull, his snake, his sons... he opened his 3rd eye and smashed everything around the cave.



Shiva recounted to Parvati the secret of creation in the Amarnathji cave. Unknown to them, a pair of mating pigeons eavesdropped on this conversation and having learned the secret, are reborn again and again, and have made the cave their eternal abode. Many pilgrims report seeing the pigeons-pair when they trek the arduous route to pay obeisance before the ice-lingam (the phallic symbol of Shiva).



I was one of those fortunate to see the so called pigeons over there in the Amarnath cave.



From Amarnath I along with others in the bus, travelled back to Kathra again after 12 hours. This time the journey is to have Darshan of Ma Vaishno Devi at Trikuta Parvath. I started trekking at around 7 PM in the evening and walked up hills for about 12 hours and at last reached the abode of Matha... who manifested in the form of Pindis (natural formation of dolomite, ages back) and who is under penance in the present form waiting to marry Kalki.



While progressing, I could also visit other important places of Ma Vaishno Devi such as Adikumari, Charan Paduka, Bhirav Ghat etc., we proceeded to Srinagar. Then I realized why this land is called as paradise on earth... the beauty of Nature at its pinnacle and every spot is filled with colours, flowers, trees, gardens....



We all visited Dal Lake which is spread across 18 kms in Srinagar.



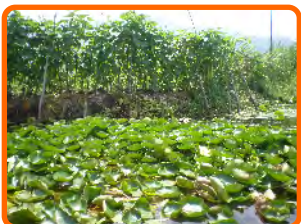
Local photographers came in boats and impressed the tourists about Kashmiri culture there by all of us started wearing Kashmiri costumes and posed for the photographs. There were vendors of all kinds like artificial jewelers, ice creams, fruits, photos, handicrafts etc., all of them approached us in self-driven boats...a floating market!!



We have seen for our amazement the floating gardens of water lilies all over the lake...that too in 4 colours. We understand that these flowers are not cut by the locals and these flowers would stay alive in the day time and close themselves in the night after sunset...it goes for 6 months or so!!



Then we reached the central point of the lake "Chaar Chinar" a place where four trees rest, which is being developed by Akbar during his regime as a resting place.



While proceeding to floating markets in the Dal Lake we have seen floating gardens where local villagers developed artificial beds and vegetables of all varieties are being grown.



We had a different experience to see all the shops on water in a floating state! We purchased some Kashmiri silks there.



The beauty of Kashmiri girls and their talent in sailing the boat is yet another memorable thing that we captured in our tour.



We have then seen the Boat Houses in their splendid beauty... many tourists stay there for a couple of days away from home enjoying the beauty of the nature.



From Dal Lake we visited Mogul Gardens...built by Jahangir for his queens to rest during the summer season. The ambience today looks to be different for the tourists. I sat calming the mind and soul under a tree near a waterfall.



There was tension prevailing since we started our journey in the valley. But during our visit to Gardens, we encountered a violent mob which pelted stones on our bus... driver got injuries.



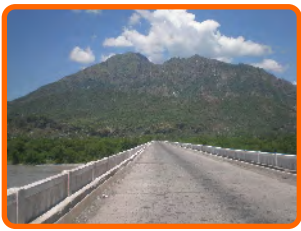
Fortunately none of us got struck, J&K Police escorted the buses to the Hotel.



Then we all went for shopping at a Govt Emporium and spent the rest of the time on that day closed doors and kept busy ourselves purchasing fabrics for kit and kin.



Forgot to tell you while we were in Katra after coming back from Vaishno Devi, few of us traveled again for about 100 kms and visited Siva Khori Temple. On our way we could see Cheenab river flowing in its full vigor.



The route was very different as the roads are just being laid by the govt.,



The Journey though was very tedious and sun was like burning ball, we still enjoyed our travel due to the joy we derived from seeing the natures beauty.



It took almost 4 hours to reach the destination as we travelled in valleys, forests, curved roads.



This was a hideout place for Lord Shiva. It was guarded by SheshNaag of which you can see the impression on the rocks of his huge snake head. The river in this area is called as Doodh Ganga as it turns white during day of Maha Shivratri.



There are two path in the same cave, One which leads to Swarga or heaven according to Mythological sayings and other one leads straight to Amarnaath. This is one of the temple where gods are present in 100% natural.



The cave was so big in its length... we were almost scrolling for an hour or so. This is again an unique experience of seeing the rare manifestations of god.



We proceeded to Amritsar in Punjab. This is the place where thousands of freedom fighters being killed by British General Dyer in the year 1919 at a place called Julian Wall Bagh.



We passed through the same narrow passage through which thousands of freedom fighters entered for the meeting.



The emotion which struck in the heart could not be explained as seeing is believing. The Sacrifice of our heroes of the nation being remembered there lighting Amar Jyothi which would be continuously all the 24 hours.



There was a huge commemoration pillar that is being built at the place in memory of our Matrys who sacrificed their lives in freedom struggle.



We further proceeded to visit Golden Temple Complex where the Sikhs most revered Guru Grandha Sahib is being kept and the said temple is the most sacred place of the sikh communities across the globe.



The temple is being built by Sikh Gurus (6,7 &8). We could see with what devotion it has been built in the center of the Amritsar. Amritsar is the lake where black crow became white when it touched the waters long back. It has the power of healing and curing. Sikhs collect the sacred waters and take to their homes for the consumption.



We also observed how Sikhs work in unity for the benefit of society. They have established Water Camps, House Keeping, Community Kitchen, Cheppal Stand all free for everyone in Golden Temple.



We further proceeded to Wagha Border which is about 40 kms from Amritsar which is very crucial point of the nation.



We could witness the Army Ceremony at around 6 PM on 9th July'2010.



India & Pakisthani Boarder Security Forces would bring down the Flags at both sides with great national fervor every day. There were thousands of Indian nationals (majority of them tourists from all across the country) to be seen dancing in ecstasy hailing Mother Bharath. Jai bolo Bharat Mata ki JAI.



We could see the Viswa Virat Hindu National Fervor all over the places surrounding army camp at Indian side where as there was thin presence of people on the other side of the territory.



We further proceeded to Delhi back and on our way we visited Kurukshetra, the place where Kouravaas and Pandavaas fought with each other during Mahaa Bharath War.



This is the place where Lord Krishna recited Bhagawath Geeta to Warriar Arjuna.



Offering our salutations and expressing our gratitude to the Lord Garuda Narayana we all proceeded back to New Delhi and reached Sothern Travels office at around 8 PM on 10th July bringing a closure to a 11 day long divine pilgrimage to Amarnath.

## Samastha Loka Sukhinobhavanthu



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