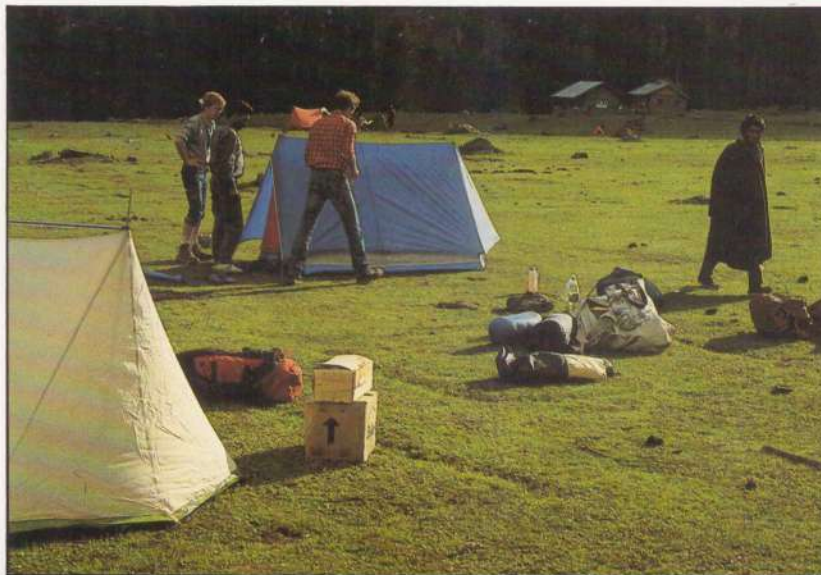


A D V E N T U R E



KASHMIR



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A D V E N T U R E

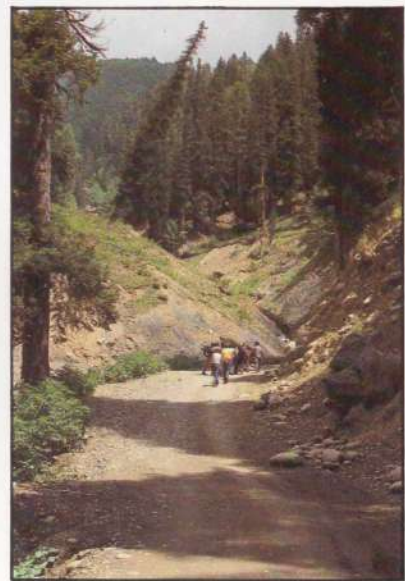
Kashmir's adventure image takes position

With its sparkling waterways, rolling valleys and snow bound mountains, Kashmir provides the perfect holiday for those who want to admire them from afar. To plunge into a whirl of sightseeing and shopping, or just relaxing in the midst of idyllic surroundings, there's nowhere more pleasant, more refreshing than Kashmir.

For those, however, who want to well and truly get away from it all Kashmir offers another facet of itself: the challenge of adventure sports — water-skiing, snow sports, river running, canoeing, mountaineering and trekking. And if you are daunted by the skills you think you need, take cheer — every adventure sport has graded levels of difficulty, and you need never feel out of your depth. It is important to keep in mind that most visitors to Kashmir arrive unprepared and untrained, but are caught up in the thrill of adventure after reaching. You will see, as you read on, that training facilities exist for every sport, and that you can form part of a group, and so need never experience doubt or uncertainty. There are centres all over Kashmir where you can hire equipment and benefit from the advice and experience of professionals.



Trekking is a popular sport in Kashmir — top: near Gadsar lake; above: trekkers relax on a hillside; right: setting off on a trail near Pahalgam





Trained instructors for water skiing

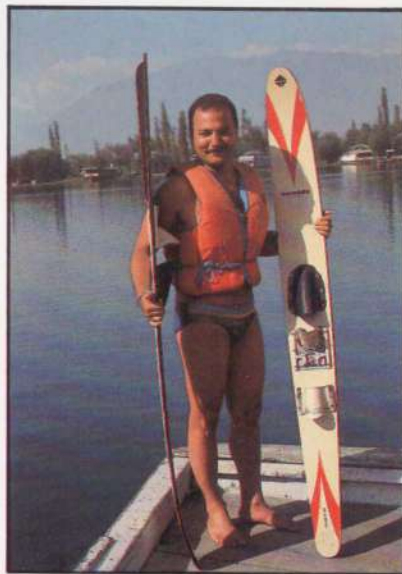
Do you know that on the Dal and Nagin lakes in Srinagar and the Manasbal lake, 32 km from Srinagar, you can go water-skiing?

The largest expanse of the Dal, the Boddal, has privately owned 'bathing boats' which hire out motor launches, water-skis and trained instructors if required. The fees, charged on the basis of every minute, include the hire of a motor launch and navigator, as well as hiring charges of water skis.

At the Nagin Lake are more bathing boats and a government run Institute of Water Sports. Both the Dal and the Nagin have trained instructors, the Nagin being more popular because of its cleaner waters.

Manasbal Lake, approachable from Srinagar by taxi or luxury tourist coach, is secluded from the rest of the world by the hills that surround it. Serene, with a mirror like sheen on its surface, Manasbal is the new centre for J&K Tourism's water sports. Not only can you hire the latest water skiing equipment, but specially trained instructors impart lessons to the uninitiated. Also, J&K Tourism's tourist bungalow and tourist huts make Manasbal an attractive resort for an overnight getaway.

Throughout the summer season in Kashmir — from May to the end of August — the water of the lakes is pleasant for water sports.



Watersports are the 'fun' aspect of Kashmir — water-skiing on the Nagin (top and right), and relaxing at Manasbal lake (above)

Asia's only heli-skiing resort

Come December, and the verdant green slopes of Gulmarg are blanketed with snow, forming some of the finest natural slopes for ski runs of all levels.

The gentlest slopes, having runs of upto 200 metres, are eminently suitable for beginners because of their gentle gradients; there are steeper runs of 500 metres for intermediate level skiers, and yet other stretches of over 2,000 metres, precipitously steep, for top level skiers.

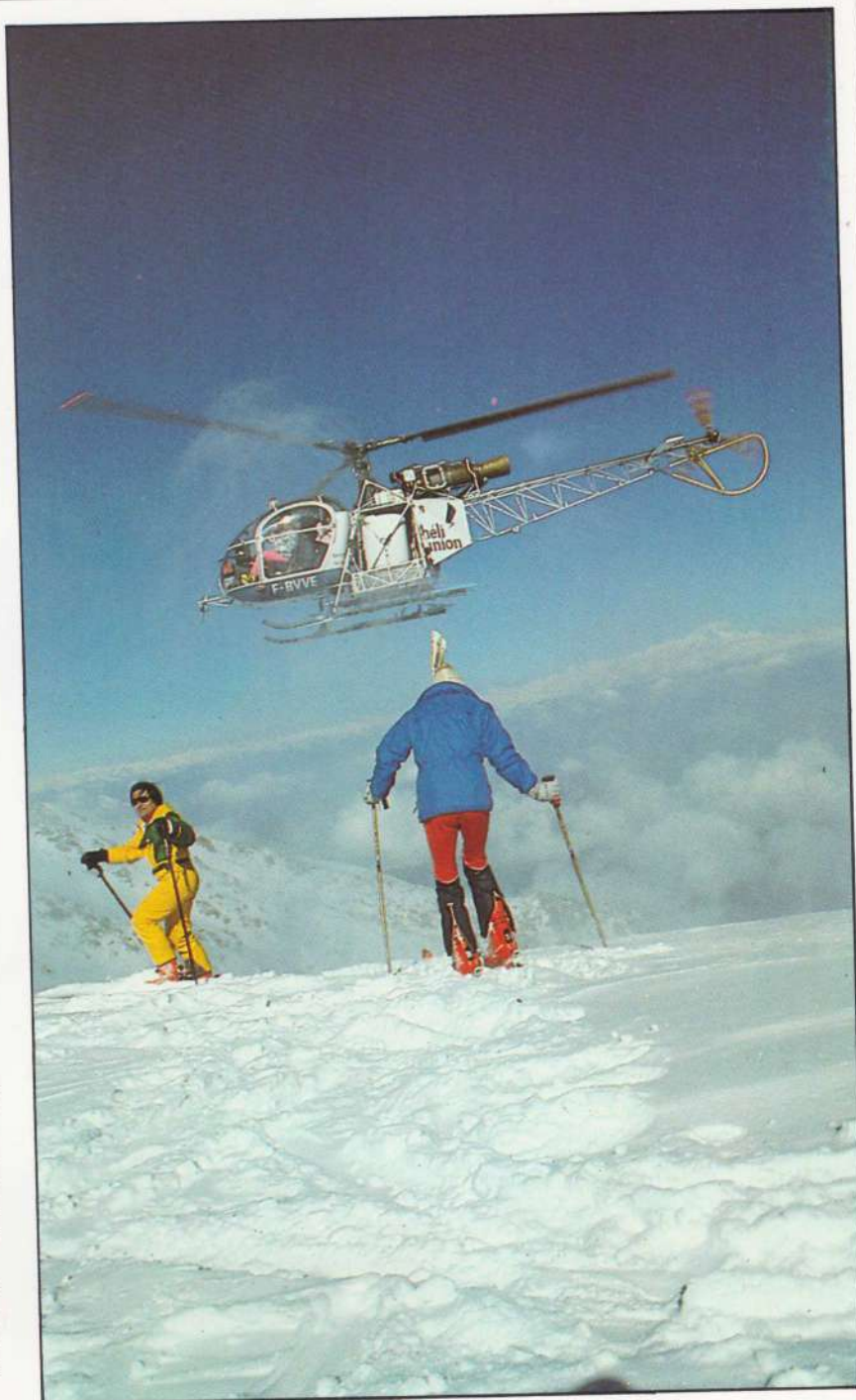
T-bars and chair lifts, on five runs for beginners and intermediates, are operated throughout the day. These runs are consequently the most popular. However Gulmarg is full of possible ski routes not connected by T-bar, and hence far quieter. For the advanced skier Gulmarg offers a wealth of possible runs, each varying greatly in degree of difficulty and length. You can set off before day-break on foot to Apherwat, 7 km away, trekking for 4 hours, and ski down in 20 minutes.

Gulmarg now offers heli-skiing, being the first destination in Asia to do so. A helicopter takes you upto the Apherwat peak from where you choose your own descent route. The helicopter is privately run, and those interested in booking up for the package offered can contact the Tourist Reception centre for details.

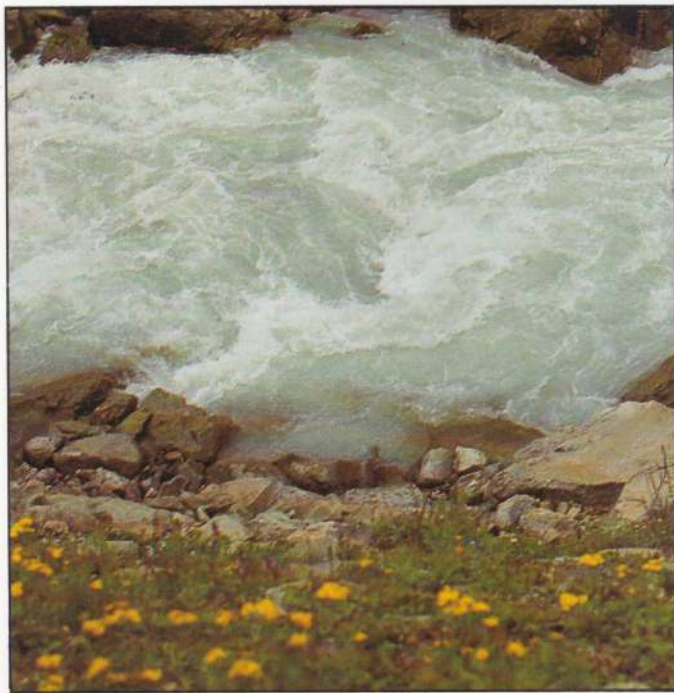
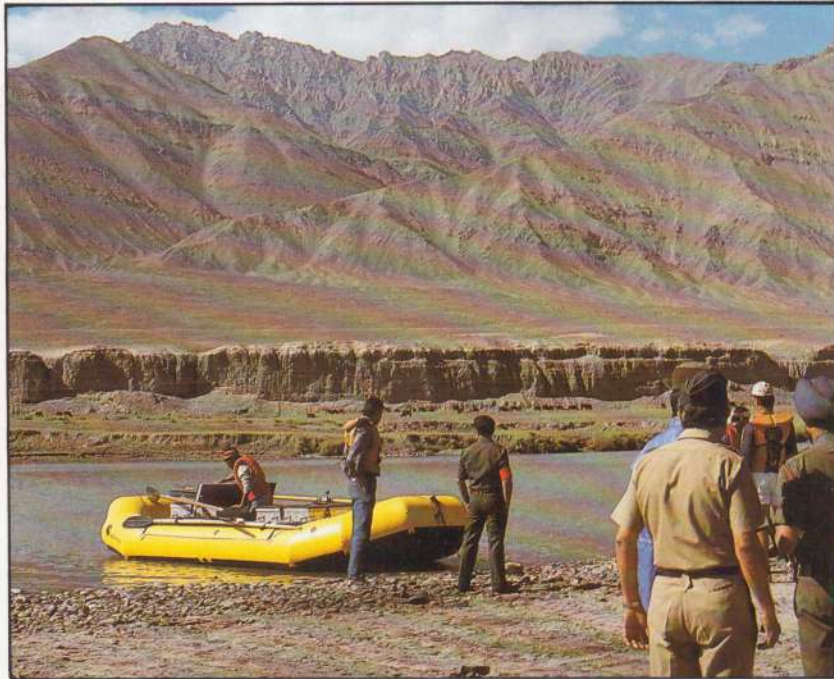
In Gulmarg is a government run ski shop from where equipment can be hired. The equipment consists of skis and sticks, gloves, goggles, jackets and boots. Instructors are available for beginners, besides which the Indian Institute of Skiing and Mountaineering organises 10 and 21 day courses.

Also in Gulmarg during winter are toboggans, sledges and snow cycles. Requiring little, if any, skills, they are a perfect way to enter the spirit of fun and excitement that snow generates.

The winter sports season in Gulmarg lasts for as long as the snow does — normally December through March. J&K Tourism has 22 winterised huts of one, two and three bedrooms each. Some privately owned hotels, mainly in the upper bracket, remain open during winter.



Heli skiing is being offered for the first time in Asia — in Kashmir



River running is available in both Ladakh (top) as well as in the frothy waters of the Lidder at Pahalgam

Gentle floats and white waters rapids — wet thrills!

Plunging down icy rivers in a raft must certainly rank as the most adventurous way of seeing Kashmir and Ladakh — it is definitely the most unusual. The Lidder in Kashmir and the Indus in Ladakh are the two rivers most commonly associated with white-water rafting. An adventurous sport, various sections of each river offer varying grades of difficulty. The Zaskar river in Ladakh offers professionals exciting runs through its valley. The Lidder near Pahalgam has stretches where its gentle gradients are particularly well-suited to the beginner.

In Srinagar are several privately owned travel agencies which specialise in river-running. They organise expeditions, make camping arrangements as well as hire equipment. The Tourist Reception Centre, Srinagar, can be contacted for information on gradients and currents.

For those whose pace is gentler, you can canoe from the Dal and Nagin Lakes in Srinagar, into the Jhelum and follow its meandering course through Ganderbal or Manasbal lakes. From there through to Wular Lake, India's largest fresh-water lake, is an adventure — set the pace yourself, camp where you want, and because villages and towns are never very far off, provisions are easily acquired. In days of yore, the aristocracy of Kashmir spent weeks aboard doonga boats that took them through waterways. Canoeing captures something of this whimsical way of life and being decidedly out of the ordinary, you will encounter few people on the way.

The water sports institute at Manasbal Lake hires out canoes, and rafts. They can assist you in chalking out possible routes.

A D V E N T U R E

The trekking experience — varied, memorable

All three provinces — Jammu, Kashmir and Ladakh — have remarkably varied terrain and provide excellent trekking areas. A trek can be rigorous enough to test the strongest endurance or as comfortable, even luxurious, as one's budget will allow.

Very generally, Ladakh with its high altitudes, and sparse population, is considered the state's most difficult trekking region. With the lowest altitude around 11,000 feet, in some areas just breathing can be a problem, and acclimatisation prior to the trek is essential. Trekking trails in many parts of Ladakh are difficult to follow and villages on any given route are few and far between. This necessitates the trekker being fully equipped and prepared for every eventuality.

Ladakh has been variously described as 'moonland' and 'frozen desert'. Certainly the terms are justified — greenery is rare, and even when encountered, has a certain austere quality about it. Ladakh is most assuredly unique — the Buddhist culture and lifestyles of its people have evolved over the centuries to be consonant with the harsh conditions of the land.

Trekking in Jammu and Kashmir is different from Ladakh. One need never be very far from human habitation — nomadic shepherds, Gujjars and Bakkerwals — graze their sheep on lonely hillsides and their huts built of logs of wood are a familiar sight to every trekker. Here too, it is possible to trek for a week or for a day. Some trekking routes are colourful with throngs of fellow trekkers; others are decidedly off the beaten track. And just as some treks in Ladakh have monasteries as their focus, a few treks in Kashmir have mountain lakes as their focus. One trek in particular covers half a dozen high altitude lakes, encircled by snow covered mountains. The Kishtwar and Bhadarwar regions of Jammu have excellent trekking routes.



The trail to adventure (above) and trekkers at a camp (left). In Kashmir adventure lovers share a communion with nature

The Tourist Reception Centre, Srinagar, has a trekking shop, open till 8 pm, which hires out camping equipment on daily or weekly rates. From here, as well as from the Information Counter, you can obtain information about possible treks and their duration. At Leh and Kargil in Ladakh, Jammu city, Pahalgam, Gulmarg, Sonamarg, Yusmarg and Aharbal, all bases for treks, J&K Tourism have tourist officers who can assist you in procuring porters and ponies, if required. In addition, there are a number of excursion agents and tour operators in Srinagar who specialise in organising treks. The trekking season extends from July through September.

A D V E N T U R E



Mountaineers have a vast playground in the Himalayas (top); skiers queue for the T-bar lift at Gulmarg (above); traversing a steep climb (right)



Book a peak . . . one at a time

Jammu, Kashmir and Ladakh have, between them, several mountain ranges — Pir Panjal, Himalaya, Zaskar, Ladakh, Karakoram. Each range offers the mountaineer peaks which are well-known and successfully scaled; unscaled and unnamed; and those which have been attempted unsuccessfully in the past. Nun and Kun in the Zaskar region are very popular peaks which have been ascended by several mountaineering expeditions. Rimo in the Karakoram range has yet to be successfully attempted. Mountains in the Zaskar region, by and large, offer the highest peaks in the state, Kishtwar in the Jammu region offers peaks that are possibly the lowest, but are technically difficult.

A list of peaks, their location and height, can be obtained from the Survey of India, Dehra Dun, Uttar Pradesh. These contain a list of all the mountains that fall within the country's security boundary, and are therefore not restricted for foreigners or Indians.

The Indian Mountaineering Foundation, Benito Juarez Road, New Delhi, will book the peak for you, upon payment of a fee, to ensure that it is open to only one expedition at a time. The Indian Mountaineering Foundation also assists in obtaining the Government of India's permission, essential in the case of foreign expeditions:

J&K Tourism's Adventure Tourism Division can furnish valuable suggestions and guidance, and will arrange an Indian liaison officer to accompany foreign expeditions — a necessary requirement. This department will also organise wireless transmitted weather forecasts by All India Radio, desirable in the case of difficult peaks, and helicopter sorties by the Indian Army in case of emergency.

The mountaineering season in Kashmir is from April to October.

ADVENTURE

