



■ The 1,000-year-old Sun temple at Martand.

Temple of ruins

LOST GLORY

The Sun temple in Kashmir is in a dilapidated condition. But the wreck shows the engineering excellence achieved in ancient times



FACT SHEET

- Martand ruins are just 10 km from Anantanag town. It is en route to Pahelgam from Srinagar
- It takes 8 hrs from Jammu to reach Srinagar; Srinagar is well connected with all the major Indian cities
- It takes nearly three hours to see the ruins. Night stay is not required
- ASI guides are available at the tourist spot.

reader's corner

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Most return from Kashmir overwhelmed by the snow-capped mountain, lush green valleys, lakes and gardens. What's more, tourists also bring back the intricate work of the Kashmiri artisans on wood and shawl.

Few tourists who visit Kashmir stop to see the majestic ruins of the 1,000-year-old, west-facing Sun temple at Martand. On the way to Pahelgaon and just 10 km from the Anantanag town stands the ancient Martand temple that tells us about some of the forgotten pages of Kashmir's history.

The massive ruins of the temple, also known as Pandu Kuru, are an outstanding example of civil engineering and craftsmanship of the ancient times. Standing on a hilltop with debris all over the place, the temple gives an eerie feeling of the otherwise paradise on earth.

For several years, Kashmir was ruled by two Hindu dynasties Karkota and Gonandya. An ancient book, recorded by a contemporary author named Kalhana in his book Rajtarangini, tells us that Lalitaditya Muktapida, the warrior emperor of Karkota dynasty of Kashmir who ruled from 693 AD to 729 AD over area spreading from Kashmir to Bengal to Karnataka and many parts of central Asia, supposedly built this temple.

But scholars differ. The legendary British archaeologist Alexander Cunningham said that the Sun temple of Martand was built by King Aryaraja of Gonandya dynasty while King Ratnaditya and his queen Amriraprabha later added the two annexure on the north and south of the main platform.

However, the most famous king of Karkota dynasty, Lalitaditya Muktapida, who is believed to have constructed the colonnade, renovated the temple. In spite of the debate, quite a few scholars opine that Lalitaditya Muktapida constructed this temple. Scholars say the name Martand came from Mach Bhavan, meaning the fish mansion, probably named after fishermen.

The temple is built with blocks of blue limestone held together by iron bolts. Each block is nearly 7 ft in length. It is interesting that this temple is West-facing which is in sharp contrast to the Sun temple of Konark, whose garva griha is East-facing for welcoming the rays of dawn. At Martand, it appears it is not the dawn but the twilight that is invoked.

Dedicated to the Sun God, the grand structure was originally known as Martandeshwar Temple. However, since no stone or tablet is there to tell its history, it is difficult to ascertain the time and the founder of this marvellous piece of architecture.

Situated on the top of a plateau known as Martan Wadur, overlooking vast green field with the majestic snow-capped Himalayas in the background, the spot takes the breath away. The temple in early days was considered a 'Surya tirth' and a visit to this temple was

must on the way to Amarnath.

The central edifice of the temple stands 63 ft above the surface and since the temple is roofless, its actual height and pinnacle cannot be measured. Many believe the pyramid-shaped pinnacle was perhaps 73 ft from the ground and a group of pyramidal towers surrounded the temple.

The temple has 84 pillars, which is peculiar to a Sun temple. The number 84 is sacred for Hindus as signifies the seven days of a week, 12 months of a year and 24 hours of a day.

The design of this temple can be classified into three parts. The first part is the entrance through a flight of stairs, which is called aradhya mandapa or half temple, and the next chamber, which is little bigger, is known as antarala or middle temple. The last part where once the deity was placed is called the garva griha or sanctum sanctorum. The temple has a reservoir that is connected by channels from all the four sides. The outer sidewall runs 220 ft while the inner is limited to 142 yards.

Images of Ganga and Yamuna are etched in the first chamber along with various Hindu motifs. Divine figures of flying Gandarvas are also found here. Inside the garva griha we find the three-headed statue of Vishu with eight hands. As Islamist invaders have defaced the figures, it is difficult to recognise them. One can however guess that one head is that of Narhasima while the other one is of Varaha. Some Hindu rulers like Kalasa (1063-89) also robbed the temple's wealth.

After being in oblivion and in a dilapidated state for many years, the ruins were rediscovered by the British in 1869. The place was mentioned by British archaeologist John Burke as one of India's lost gems in the ASI report, with the heading of 'Illustration of Ancient Buildings in Kashmir'.

Editor of the report, Henry Hardy Cole, described it as "the most impressive and grandest ruins in Kashmir". Since then, the temple has been drawing foreign and Indian travellers.

■ The ruins are an outstanding example of civil engineering and craftsmanship.
PHOTOS: SOMEN SENGUPTA

IN NATURE'S LAP

New Zealand: A destination for those who like wilderness

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Given its striking landscapes and expansive untouched wilderness, travel agents are vigorously promoting New Zealand as a destination for eco-minded and sustainable-savvy tourists.

The Kauri Museum in the picturesque village of Matakoho, and Waipoua Forest in New Zealand's Northland region is home to ancient kauri trees that have astonishingly survived for thousands of years. Tane Mahuta, the tallest of the ancient trees, is revered by the local Maori tribe as 'Lord of the Forest', while another, Matua Ngahere, as 'Father of the Forest'. Both trees are estimated to be between 2,500 and 3,000 years old.

"We have always believed in demonstrating environmental excellence. We wish to leave the world a better place for our grandchildren," Kauri Museum CEO Betty Nelley said.

In the Southland region, both Tuatapere Hump Ridge Track (THRT) and Wairaurahiri Jet demonstrated a mix of business and sustainability.

THRT is located in Fiordland National Park, New Zealand's largest national park. A three-day 62-km track would take walkers on a journey of natural discovery across Fiordland's remote



■ The entrance to The Kauri Museum in Matakoho.
WIKIMEDIA COMMONS / PHOTO

wild and relatively untouched landscape. The Wairaurahiri Jet takes visitors deep into the heart of the Fiordland National Park. Visitors can enjoy a 90-km round trip across the Lake Hauroko and down the fast-flowing Wairaurahiri River.

"After seven years of predator-control measures, we are trying to restore the unique wildlife of New Zealand," owners Johan Groeters and Joyce Kolk said.

Based in Nelson at the western tip of South Island, Wine Art and Wilderness (WAW) offers wine and art tours with an eco-edge. WAW explores the lesser known Nelson and Marlborough wine regions. As WAW owner Noel Kennedy puts it, the key is using fresh and local produce, apart from waste-reduction and conservation efforts.

Visitors can go to two working wineries, take a ride on a water-taxi at Kaiteiteri beach and enjoy a trip to Abel Tasman National Park.

While city life in Auckland is committed to reducing landfill waste and supporting art and children's charity, Heritage Auckland is committed to reducing carbon footprint. The latter claims to be the first hotel in New Zealand to introduce a Raw Bar.

"We had observed an international trend towards more conscious cuisine in 2010. Therefore, we embraced sustainability benefits of plant-based meals and provide low fat and nutritious meals to our guests," said Heritage Auckland general manager Graeme Back.

Even backpacker accommodations like the Youth Hostel Associations at Wanaka and Wellington are devoted to ecological practice.

The West Coast region encompasses Te Wahipounamu, a world heritage site that includes the Franz Josef and Fox glaciers. The region also boasts five of New Zealand's 14 national parks.

There are no direct flights from India to New Zealand. Connecting flights on Malaysia Airlines, Singapore Airlines, Thai Airways, and Cathay Pacific are available.

STREET FOOD



Try this lip-smacking rice and oyster appetizer in Turkey

MUST HAVE IN IZMIR, TURKEY
Midye

In case you have planned a holiday to Turkey, try out midye in Izmir — the third most populous city of the country. Besides being a popular tourist destination in Turkey, the city has a lot to explore on the culinary side. Executive chef of Swissotel, Pranay Kumar Singh, had the opportunity to savour its lip-smacking street food while on a tour of the city two years ago.

"Midye is a must try in Izmir. Like puchka in Kolkata, midye is a popular street food in Turkey. Stuffed with rice filling and oyster, the dish is covered in a shell called mussel. Generally, lemon juice is sprinkled

on the dish before serving," says Singh who believes Turkish cuisine is similar to Indian cuisine to a large extent.

UNIQUE PRESENTATION

The dish, which is quite popular all over Turkey, is a common appetizer in many other parts of the world too. However, in Izmir, the seafood is popular both as a starter and as a part of the regular course of meal.

"Since the stuffing of midye is made with rice and oyster, both are cooked separately and then mixed together to fit inside the mussel shells," says Singh.



In his opinion, what makes the dish special is its typical presentation. "The filling is packed inside a mussel shell and is served with a slice of lemon," adds Singh.

HEALTH QUOTIENT

A plate of steaming hot midye, freshly prepared in front of the customer, is a common sight while taking a stroll on the streets of Izmir. Besides being sour in taste, midye has high protein content and is light on the stomach.

Although Izmir's cuisine a multi-cultural background, the larger part of it comes from the Mediterranean. Chef Singh says,

"Since seafood dominates Turkish cuisine, grilled and sautéed dishes are the prominent ones in the city. One can also find a variety of lamb dishes at Izmir. The lamb is generally cooked very slowly. Once marinated with salt and pepper, the meat is cooked on low flame and is also one of the vital ingredients in the local cuisine."

BITE-SIZED

Besides midye, mezze is one of the popular Turkish delights. Most of the eateries in Izmir serve mezze as a part of their menu.

"What makes mezze interesting is that this bite-sized dish is prepared using different vegetables and is generally accompanied with pita

bread," says Singh.

LOCAL ATTRACTIONS

One can visit ruins of the 10th century BC Ephesus in Izmir. Ephesus used to be an ancient Greek city. From ancient coins to rugged sculptures, the ruins give the visitor a feel of the bygone Greek era. Besides this, there is also the Virgin Of Mary House, which is believed to be the last residence of Virgin Mary

Megha Roy

TALK TO US

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