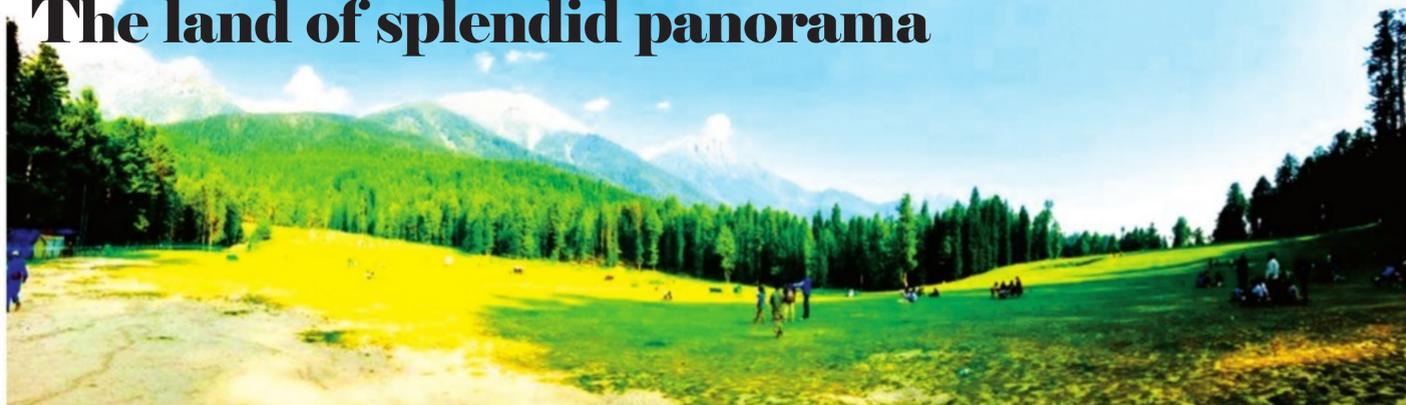


PACK YOUR BAGS

# Pahelgaon

## The land of splendid panorama



SOMEN SENGUPTA

**Snow capped peaks combined with lush landscapes truly make this scenic 'village' a jewel in the crown of Kashmir**

Leaving the majestic Dal Lake behind in Srinagar, my car took a turn towards Pampur on the way to a boundless land of beauty. At Srinagar itself, it was clearly settled with the taxi driver that he will not waste time as I needed to reach Pahelgaon early. I had a secret wish to stop at Pampur because Spain as a destination was looking far too difficult to visit in order to see saffron being grown, since it is found in only two places in the world. However, with no regret the plan was nipped as Pahelgaon was calling.

While I was gliding in the green and brown rocky surface of the Himalayas, nature was surprising us at every turn. The valley of Kashmir with its snow-capped peaks and green landscape was better than what I imagined. Being a sunny day, every colour was clear and the dewdrops were shining off the leaves and blades of grass, justifying the title of the region as "Queen of Kashmir."

In that sea of beauty, it occurred to me that Kashmir was once a country of demons according to Hindu mythology. The myth calls Kashmir Satisar meaning, "the lake of sati and kingdom of demons." Then Maharishi Kashyap arrived, killing the demons and freeing the suppressed subjects of the land. From the word Kashyapmari meaning, "killed in the hand of Kashyap," the word Kashmir originated.

My captivated mood was pleasantly broken when after crossing several hair-pin bends, our car stopped at Avantipur near the archaeological ruins of two Hindu temples. History quickly reminded me that before King Prabar Sen shifted it to Srinagar, this was the capital of ancient Kashmir. It may seem difficult to believe that Kashmir was once a land of Hindu people ruled by several Hindu dynasties for centuries from which music to archaeology originated and enriched the culture with distinctive merit and skill.

The relic of one such legacy is the temple of Avatiswamin dedicated to Vaikuntha Vishnu and the other is Avatiswar dedicated to Shiva. Both were built by Lalitaditya the great Hindu king of Kashmir during 855 to 883 AD.

Standing on the banks of the beautiful River Jhelum also known as Vitasta, are the temples that were named after Avantiverman, the founder of the Utkal dynasty. Legend has it, that these temples were built by the Pandavas of The Mahabharata. As I entered the temple compound of Avatiswamin, I quickly realised that the present ruin is not even a shadow of the original temple. However the ruins itself are a strong testimony of unimaginative engineering skill, executed several centuries ago.

The roofless blue and grey sandstone temple has a central courtyard and is surrounded by colonnaded pillars richly decorated with motifs and statues. The Buddhist influ-

ence is evident in the paved courtyard having an outer boundary, housing four smaller shrines at its four corners.

When I finally reached Pahelgaon in the afternoon, it was drizzling. My co-passengers explained that Pahelgaon means "the first village." So I opened my guide book to note that from Zoji La pass via Ladakh, this was once the first village on the way to the Amarnath caves. Even today, the pilgrimage to Amarnath begins from Pahelgaon.

I had no plans to visit Amarnath and this did not make my driver happy. He insisted that for a Hindu, this was a golden opportunity and that I must grab it. In a place like Pahelgaon, one does not need to grab anything because he is grabbed by the magical serenity, and I was no exception as well.

The blue sky which was overcast gradually brightened to give way to sunlight which reflected off the snow white peaks and the green valley. The tourist cottages of Kashmir Tourism surrounded by Pine and Oak trees, made me feel like I was in a quaint European country.

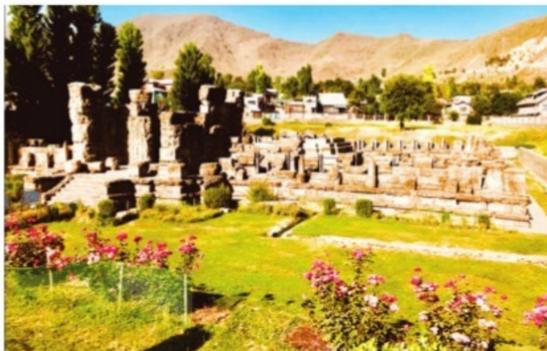
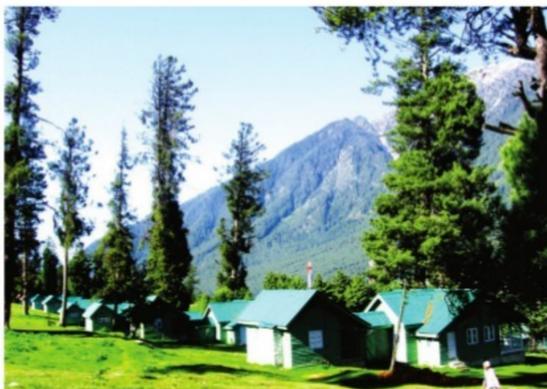
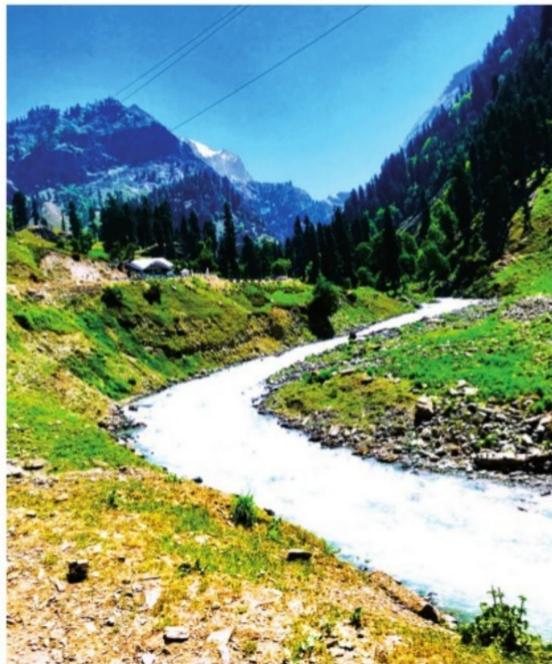
After lunch, I decided to take a walk along the green banks of the River Lidder which flowed like liquid glass. I was told not to be over-adventurous near any river, which is beautiful - until your life is in danger. I found a rock mass big enough to rest my

body, but not my soul. The cool winds from the Himalayas were blowing and the sound of the water became thrilling and mystic. It was finally so loud that at one point of time, even a whisper was not audible.

Soon, a magical evening unfolded on the banks of the River Lidder. A full moon reflected in the water, adding a kind of necromancy to the clandestine. It was cold and isolated and the valley of Pahelgaon was blooming with a pure and primitive aura.

The next morning, I arrived at the greenest part of Pahelgaon, known as the Betab Valley — named after a movie which was shot there in 1982 to 1983. This is also incorrectly called "poor man's Switzerland." I was in disagreement, as I did not find any deficiency of Pahelgaon as far as the landscape is concerned.

The scenic vista was unmatched as I looked at the splendid green pastures in the horizon where it finally met the boundary of dark, woodley pine and chinar. Mist and clouds covered the forest, and just above them, snow-capped peaks smiled regally. Walking on the green, soft grass carpet of the Betab valley, I cleared a doubt from my mind. Returning from Pahelgaon calmed my perplexing mind which always questioned why no one wants to part with Kashmir. I finally knew the answer is found in Pahelgaon.



OFF THE SHELF

For lively skin

Gulnare Skincare's Tonic Hydrating Mist Toner combines Neroli and Clarysage to help refresh, purify and cool tired skin. It is priced Rs 1,250 and is available at: [www.kalpane.in](http://www.kalpane.in). SoulTree-Fragrant Jasmine Toning Mist is prepared with handpicked jasmine from the Himalayas that detoxifies the skin by unclogging and tightening pores, a dash of Glycerin for supple and even skin tone and Aloe Vera that calms and soothes skin. Priced Rs 395 it is available at: [www.soul-tree.in](http://www.soul-tree.in). Purearth Wild Rose Himalayan Face Mist includes Himalayan wild Rosa Damascena flower valued for its healing properties. It is available for Rs 2,730 at: [www.beautysource.in](http://www.beautysource.in)



Comfortably stylish



Supreme Furniture brings unique yet functional designs for home interiors. Experience vast range of stylish and colourful designer plastic chairs and dining sets and add elegance and comfort to your lifestyle. The collection includes Cruz (coke red and black), Futura (green), Oak (amber gold), Web (red) and Amazon (globus brown). The durable and termite proof stackable chairs are also high on space saving quotient.

Drink pure

Moonbow from the house of Hindware has launched Evinos UV and Evinos Plus UV water purifiers. They are equipped with a single body stainless steel UV steriliser making it efficient and ensuring zero leakage of UV rays. It protects from unhealthy leaching of heavy metals like aluminium and lead in water. Priced at Rs 11,990 and Rs 12,990 respectively, Evinos UV and Evinos Plus UV are online water purifiers with a purification rate of two liters per minute. They have a three stage chemical free water purification system which retains natural minerals and the taste of water. The water purifiers come equipped with a consumer friendly touch screen interface with indicators for filter replacement, failure alert, purification, dispense ready and main faucet on/off.



Crispy and creamy



Tasty Treat presents a wide range of delicious biscuits and cookies. It features the all-time tea companion Marie biscuit, kids favourite cream biscuits, Chocolate Bourbon, fibre rich Oatmeal cookies and healthy Digestives which are also tasty combining the

fibre rich whole wheat biscuit with chocolate cream. It has 0 per cent added sugar and no trans fat. The cookies are available in choco chips, butter cashews, pista, butter and oatmeal. The crunchy cream biscuits are filled with strawberry, vanilla and chocolate cream. These are priced from Rs 5 to Rs159.



Light it up!

Zippo recently unveiled the exquisite and elegant Golden Scroll Lighter which comes with a 360° multi cut engraving allowing floral motifs and intricate banding to diagonally wrap the entire armor gold-plated lighter and a coordinating insert and luxury box completes the look.

Send your contributions in 900 words for the Travel Section to [travel.statesman@gmail.com](mailto:travel.statesman@gmail.com)

GET GORGEOUS



THRETY IRANI & NILUFER BABAYCON



**Q. I am in my mid sixties and I find it difficult to digest my food especially if I have eaten too much sugary food. This also happens when I eat a little heavy or fatty food. Why?**

*K Sinha, Kolkata*  
This is something which is very common

in older people as your digestive system becomes weaker with age. Your metabolism slows down and as a result your body burns less calories. That is why a number of middle aged women tend to get what is known as middle aged spread. Also as you age, there is a decrease in your physical activities and this aggravates it. Here are a few tips you can follow. Eat moderate portions and regularise your meal times. Also remember that chewing your food better thus preventing heart burn and belching which older people are prone to avoid high fat food and have plenty of fibre rich food and fluids. Fibre rich foods such as cereals, pulses, oat bran, and vegetables are easily digestible. These fluids help to dissolve the minerals and vitamins making it easier for the body tissues to absorb them.



**Q. I am a fitness person but after an illness I feel too weak and have no energy to re-start my exercise routine. Please help me to get back to my old routine again.**

*Sayani, Kolkata*

The first thing you need to do is to regain your strength by eating well. By this I mean having healthy home cooked food. Have a well balanced diet with complex carbohydrates, proteins and essential fats. To get back to your exercise routine, do it slowly because you must keep in mind that your body has been weakened. Start with walking slowly and only increase the pace as you get stronger. When you feel better you can start with a weight training session twice or thrice a week and then gradually increase this as well.

**Q. I am in my mid fifties and keen to start having fish oil in my diet - but how do I do it? Please inform me soon.**

*Shalini, Bangalore*  
Have plenty of fish in your diet because



the oil is found in the muscle and fat tissue. Apart from fish there are other foods that contain Omega 3, fatty acids such as walnuts, pumpkin seeds and green leafy vegetables. Although these foods contain fatty acids they do not have the same benefits as those found in fish.

send your questions to [beauty.statesman@gmail.com](mailto:beauty.statesman@gmail.com)