

**My City
My Heritage**

**Sri
nagar**

📍 TRAIL

Srinagar's Craft Tour

📍 8.5 KMS

📍 KHANQAH-E-MOULA SHRINE

The traditional crafts of Kashmir have flourished for centuries, dating back to the fourteenth century or even earlier. These crafts, from intricate woodwork to fine papier-mâché, showcase the artistry passed down through generations.

Highlighting eight karkhanas led by master artisans, the tour aims to showcase artisans of *khatamband*, *sozni*, carpet weaving, *pashmina*, copperware, and other crafts. It brings visitors directly to these artisans in their home *karkhanas*, challenging the usual top-down approach to heritage interpretation. By trying the craft under their guidance, visitors can discover firsthand the meticulous processes behind each creation, from intricate wood carvings to delicate *sozni* embroidery.

Winding through Srinagar's historic Shehr-e-Khaas, the tour offers a unique experience of the city's centuries-old built heritage. The tour celebrates Kashmir's artistic legacy and empowers local craftsmen to narrate their tales and share their skills in authentic local spaces.

1 Copperware: Wanpoo Copper Shop

Kashmiri copperware is known for its intricate designs and functional elegance. Artisans create *samovars*, *tasht-naari*, *trami*, and decorative pieces, adorned with motifs like chinar leaves,

paisleys, and geometric patterns—echoing Kashmir's rich heritage. The craft dates to the eighth century under King Lalitaditya, evolving in the fourteenth century with Persian influences with repoussé and inlay work in



silver and gold. The process involves shaping copper sheets, engraving patterns, gilding, and polishing.

Wanpoo Copper Shop in Srinagar's old city is run by the renowned Mohammad Aslam. With over thirty-five years of experience, Aslam blends copper with wicker, wood, and papier-mâché to create innovative designs. He has earned a State Award and mentors students from institutions like NIFT Srinagar and the Craft Development Institute.

Located near the Khanqah-e-Maula shrine in Srinagar's historic KK Mohalla Shamswari, the shop offers a firsthand glimpse into the making of Kashmiri copperware. Visitors can also explore the area's architectural heritage along the Jhelum riverbank.

2 Maharaj Gunj Historic Market

The camping grounds of the royal soldiers of Calicut are an essential part of the city's royal heritage. Maharaj Gunj, in the heart of Srinagar, is a historic market established in the nineteenth century under Maharaja Ranbir Singh. Once a bustling trade hub along the Silk Road, it connected merchants from Amritsar, Lahore, Karachi, Rawalpindi, and Central Asia.

Known for its exquisite copperware, pashmina shawls, and intricate embroidery, it



also showcases tilla work in gold and silver threads, along with crewel and chain stitch embroidery on textiles. The market offers papier-mâché items, often used in weddings, as well as willow wicker products like *Kangris* (fire pots) and decorative baskets for dry fruits and nuts.

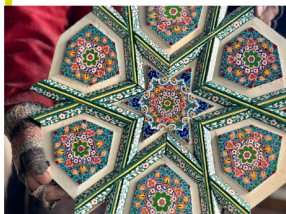
The market's architecture blends vernacular and colonial styles, with *taq* and *dhajji dewari* buildings—shops below and residences above. Maharaj Gunj offers a glimpse into Kashmir's evolving commerce and craftsmanship while the nearby, the fifteenth

century Budshah Tomb and the iconic Vakil House are illustrative of the region's architectural and cultural heritage.

3 Khatamband: Qadeem Khatamband Ceiling and Panelling Karkhana

Khatamband is a traditional Kashmiri craft of intricate wooden ceilings made from pine, walnut, or deodar wood, assembled without nails or glue. Introduced by artisans accompanying Mir Syed Ali Hamdani in the fourteenth century and popularized by Mirza Hyder Tughlat mid-sixteenth century, its geometric patterns offer both aesthetic appeal and insulation.

The *karkhana* Qadeem Khatamband Ceiling and



Panelling, in Haftayarbal, Safa Kadal, Srinagar, is run by master craftsmen Ali Mohammad Najar and his son Mohammad Iqbal Najar of the Geeru family, who have trained over three hundred artisans. Specializing in Persian *Khatamband* designs like Dawaz Dah Gird, Chaar Baksh,

Panch Baksh, and Moaj, their work is featured in shrines, houseboats, and mosques across Kashmir and internationally, including in Qatar.

Located in a traditional three-story Kashmiri home, the karkhana offers visitors insight into this historic craft, with nearby attractions such as the Malik Sahib shrine, Yarkand Sarai, historic mosques, and the Shri Ram temple.

4 Walnut Wood Carving: Maizbaan Art and Craft

The walnut wood carving of the region is a renowned craft that transforms durable walnut trees into intricate art. Artisans (*naqqash*) carve delicate motifs like chinar leaves, lotus flowers, and vine patterns. Introduced during Sultan Zain-ul-Abidin's fifteenth-century reign, the craft relies on high-quality walnut wood, seasoned for up to four years. Using handmade chisels and mallets, artisans meticulously carve designs, with some pieces taking years to complete.

Maizbaan Art and Craft, near Abu Seena School, Safa Kadal,



Srinagar, is a leading workshop run by Ghulam Nabi Dar, a master craftsman. Despite early rejections, he developed a unique style inspired by Kashmir's landscapes. His work includes decorative panels, furniture, and window surrounds, some valued between INR 8 to 10 lakhs.

Honoured with the Padma Shri in 2024, Dar has exhibited his work globally and welcomes visitors to his workshop a glimpse into this exquisite craft.

5 Kashmiri Carpets: SS Carpets

Kashmiri carpets are exquisite hand-knotted textiles made from silk, wool, or a blend of both. Known for intricate floral motifs, hunting scenes, and medallions, they blend Persian influences with



Kashmiri elements. Their vibrant jewel-like colours and high knot density—up to 900 knots per square inch. Sizes vary, with custom-made carpets available, including Asia's longest 72x40 square foot carpet with over three crore knots.

The craft dates to the fifteenth century when Sultan Zain-ul-

Abidin invited Persian artisans, merging their techniques with local artistry. Designs by *naqqash* are translated into *talim* (coded blueprints) before artisans meticulously hand-tie each knot. Natural dyes like indigo and madder root enhance longevity.

SS Carpets in Rethpora Muhalla, Srinagar, led by designer Shahnawaz Ahmad Sofi, integrates technology into traditional craft, using AI and blockchain for authenticity. His carpets, including one featuring the FIFA World Cup logo, were showcased at the Qatar World Cup 2022.



6 Pashmina: Me & K

Pashmina, Kashmir's luxurious fabric, has a history spanning over 3,000 years, cherished by royalty from King Caesar to Queen Marie Antoinette. The weaving tradition flourished under Sultan Zain-ul-Abidin's reign, who invited Central Asian weavers to Kashmir. Made from the fine undercoat of the Changthangi goat, *pashmina* is prized for its softness, warmth, and lightweight feel. The craft begins with hand-combing delicate fibres, which are spun and woven on

traditional looms. Each intricately designed piece requires immense skill and can be expensive.

A key centre of this craft is Me & K, a three-story *karkhana* established in 2008 by cousins Mujtaba Kadri and Rauf Shaw in Srinagar. The workshop focuses on preserving and advancing traditional *pashmina* craft. The artisans use both traditional wooden spinning wheels and innovative pedal-powered winders, which help increase productivity and improve wages for the artisans. Me & K also operates a Centre for Excellence in Pashmina Weaving. Visitors can explore the process and shop in its showroom.

7 Papier-mâché: Shah Handicrafts

Kashmiri papier-mâché, introduced by Persian mystic Mir Syed Ali Hamadani in the fourteenth century, is known as *kar-e-kalamdan*. This craft involves shaping decorative items like vases, trays, and boxes from paper pulp. Distinct from other paper crafts, it features intricate motifs such as *gul-e-ander-gul*



(flower inside a flower) and *hazara* (a thousand flowers), reflecting Persian and Central Asian influences.

The process begins with soaking waste paper for twenty days, mixing it with rice water to form pulp, which is then layered onto moulds. Once dry, the objects are polished, painted with natural dyes, and finished with gold or silver foil and varnish for durability.

Shah Handicrafts in Zadibal, Srinagar, founded by Syed Amjad Ali, has been preserving this art for over forty years. Artisans, from *sakhtasaz* (framework makers) to *naqqash* (painters), create exquisite pieces displayed in the showroom. Many designers here have earned National and State Awards, showcasing Kashmir's rich artistic heritage.

designs define *sozni*, often featuring up to 18 colours and stitch densities ranging from 5 to 500 stitches per centimetre.

The process begins with a *naqqash* (designer) sketching patterns, later transferred onto fabric using wooden blocks. Skilled artisans then embroider these patterns with fine silk threads. The Beigh family of Srinagar has been crafting shawls for over 250 years, tracing their legacy back to the artisans brought by Mir Syed Ali Hamadani. Each shawl takes 1.5 to 5 years to craft by a single artisan. The family's craft has earned them numerous awards, including the prestigious Shilp Guru Award and the Best of the Best award in the Art in Action festival in Oxford, London. Their work is displayed at their karkhana. Nearby, the Jalali heritage house offers a glimpse into Kashmiri architectural splendour.

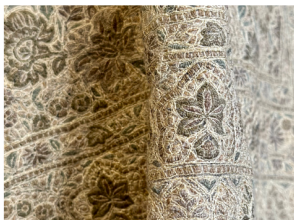
8

Kashmiri Sozni Atelier

Sozni embroidery is known for its intricate hand-stitching on fine *pashmina* and silk. Introduced during the Mughal era, it flourished in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, incorporating Persian techniques like shading and layered stitching. Delicate paisleys, florals, and geometric

Please note:

- Given the distance, availing a vehicle is recommended to explore the trail.
- There is no entry fee; artisans welcome visitors out of love for their craft. If offering a token of appreciation, use an envelope and express your intent beforehand.
- Photography is allowed for exteriors; interiors upon request.
- Wear comfortable footwear, and carry a hat/umbrella along with a bottle of water. Some karkhanas may have a series of two staircases to climb.
- Start early as the roads tend to get busy, and the weather becomes less enjoyable later in the day.



- Kindly respect the cultural and religious significance/sentiments of the spaces. Expect to remove your shoes before entering the karkhanas.
- As many of the karkhanas are located inside the homes, loose full body clothing is advised for all.
- Contact the master craftsmen/artisans/manager before planning your visit and for more details:
 - Wanpoo Copper Shop: Mohammad Aslam (+91-6005779191)
 - Qadeem Khatamband Ceiling & Panelling Karkhana: Mohammad Iqbal Najar (+91-9906716314, +91-9906503961, kadeemkhatamband786@gmail.com)
 - Maizbaan Art & Craft: +91-7006966309
 - SS Carpets: Shahnawaz Sofi (+91-9906528085)

Heritage Experience/ Walk Leader:

Taha Mughal
(Architect, Historic
Preservationist, and Writer)

Contact: +91 91494 92614
Email: taha.
mughal@fulbrightmail.org

- Me & K: +91-98100 50819
- Shah Handicrafts: Amjad Ali (+91-7006717026, +91-9419016398)
- Kashmiri Sozni Atelier: Beigh family (0194-2421831, +91-9906646394, +91-9797163315)

Photos by Taha Mughal and Syed Muneeb Masoodi.



1. Wanpoo Copper Shop
2. Maharaj Gunj Historic Market
3. Qadeem Khatamband Ceiling and Panelling Karkhana
4. Maizbaan Art and Craft
5. SS Carpets
6. Me & K
7. Shah Handicrafts
8. Kashmiri Sozni Atelier