

@ TRAIL

# Through the Lanes of Shehr-e- Khaas

3 KM

MAIN GATE KHANQAH-E-MOULA MOSQUE

**The old city of Srinagar, called Downtown, or locally the Shehr-e-Khaas is a labyrinth of alleys and bylanes along the Eastern and Western banks of the river Jhelum. A timeless urbanscape, the Shehr-e-Khaas, in its historic religious structures, heritage houses, bustling bazaars, and desolated ghats, embodies the many narratives of the changing tides of Kashmir's history.**

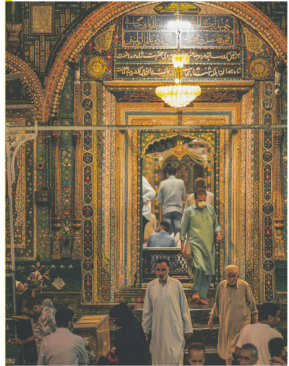
The walk takes us through the narrow, interconnected passageways of the old city; a historic, quintessential hub of Kashmir's political, economic, and cultural activity. We see the past and the present coming together, with remnants of more than 600 years of Kashmiri heritage co-existing with modern life.

## **1 Khanqah-e-Moula Mosque**

The Khanqah-e-Moula, also known as Shah-e-Hamdan mosque, as the shrine of Mir Sayyid Ali Hamadani, is one of the most revered spiritual and architectural landmarks in Srinagar. Located on the banks of the river Jhelum in the old city, this fourteenth-century *khanqah* (Sufi hospice) marks the site where the revered Persian Sufi saint is believed to have meditated and disseminated his teachings. Mir Sayyid Ali Hamadani, also known as Shah-e-Hamadan,

played a crucial role in the spread of Islam in Kashmir and introduced Persianate cultural, artistic, and craft traditions to the region.

Originally built in 1395 CE by Sultan Sikandar, the *khanqah* was reconstructed in the 18th century after a fire.



The wooden structure exemplifies Kashmiri vernacular architecture, with intricate papier-mâché, *khatamband* ceilings, and finely carved deodar wood panels. Every year, on the saint's *urs* (death anniversary), devotees gather in large numbers to pay their respects. The *khanqah* continues to serve as a center for spiritual learning, communal prayers, and Sufi traditions, making it the ideal spot to start the heritage trail.

## **2 Pathar Masjid**

Built in 1623 during the reign of Mughal Emperor Jahangir, Pathar



Masjid, locally known as Naev Masheed, stands as an architectural anomaly in Srinagar's predominantly wooden and brick-built religious landscape. Commissioned by Empress Nur Jahan, this mosque is constructed entirely of locally sourced limestone, earning it the name Pathar Masjid (Stone Mosque). Unlike traditional Kashmiri mosques, it lacks a pagoda-style roof and minarets, featuring instead grand arches and an austere symmetrical façade.

Its unconventional design and imperial patronage led to debates, with legends suggesting it was never used for prayer. Despite this, the mosque remains a significant example of Mughal influence in Kashmir. Located on the banks of the river Jhelum in Shehr-e-Khaas, it offers insight into the syncretic architectural history of the region. This beautiful mosque is recognized as a Monument of National Importance.

# 3

## Gade Kocha

In the heart of Shehr-e-Khaas, Gade Kocha or Gade Bazaar is a labyrinthine alleyway that mirrors the charm of a jigsaw puzzle, winding along the river Jhelum. Once a bustling fish market—its name derived from the word gade meaning fish in Kashmiri—this historic passageway has transformed into a vibrant marketplace, reflecting the evolving commercial fabric of Srinagar.



Today, the air in Gade Kocha carries the



rich aromas of spices, herbs, and dried goods, with shopkeepers proudly displaying Hand, Wopal Haak, turmeric rhizomes, and Abuj leaves. The alley is also home to shops selling exquisite fabrics, intricate handicrafts, and daily essentials, making it a fascinating stop for visitors seeking an authentic slice of Kashmiri heritage. Walking through these narrow lanes offers a sensory experience—a journey through Srinagar's living history, where echoes of the past blend seamlessly with the city's dynamic present.

#### **Zaina Kadal**

**4** Zaina Kadal, one of Srinagar's oldest and most historically significant bridges, was built by Sultan Zain-ul-Abidin (r. 1420–1470 CE) around 1425–1426 CE. Situated on the river Jhelum, it served as a crucial link between the two halves of the city, facilitating trade and movement. While some debate

whether it was the second bridge constructed over the Jhelum, its sturdy design has made it a vital crossing point for centuries.

The area around Zaina Kadal was a thriving commercial hub, once home to the renowned Gade Bazaar, where locals purchased meat, fish, cheese, and vegetables. The nearby Ranbir Gunj and Maharaj Ganj remain bustling wholesale markets for tea, spices, textiles, and essential goods. Although business activity has since shifted towards Lal Chowk, Zaina Kadal continues to be a historic landmark, reflecting the rich mercantile legacy of Shehr-e-Khaas.

#### **Copper Market**

**5** The Copper Market in Shehr-e-Khaas is a vibrant hub of Kashmir's centuries-old metalworking tradition. Introduced by artisans from Iran and Iraq over 700 years ago, copperware gained







prominence under the influence of Mir Sayyid Ali Hamdani, who brought skilled craftsmen from Central Asia to train local artisans. The craft flourished during the reign of Sultan Zain-ul-Abideen and later adapted to Mughal demands for weaponry. By the 19th century, as Mughal rule declined, Kashmiri metalworkers refocused on crafting ornamental vessels, often decorated with *meenakari* (enameling).

Today, the market is renowned for its finely engraved copper utensils, integral to Kashmiri households and ceremonial gatherings. Signature pieces include the *samovar* (tea urn), *trami* (large serving plate for feasts), and *taesh naer* (portable handwash vessel). A walk through this bustling marketplace offers an immersive experience of Srinagar's rich artisanal heritage, where age-old craftsmanship continues to thrive.

## 6 Mazar-e-Salateen

Overlooking the river

Jhelum, Mazar-e-Salateen is the final resting place of the mother of Sultan Zain-ul-Abidin, one of Kashmir's most celebrated rulers. Unlike the mosques and shrines that characterize Shehr-e-Khaas, this fifteenth-century royal tomb stands out with its distinctive five-domed brick structure, often compared to Byzantine architecture.

Serene and historically significant, the tomb offers panoramic views of the old city's skyline, especially from Zaina Kadal, Srinagar's oldest bridge, named after the Sultan himself. Zain-ul-Abidin's own tomb is nearby, reflecting his enduring legacy as a patron of art, culture, and religious harmony. Mazar-e-Salateen remains an integral part of Srinagar's medieval heritage, a site that silently narrates the city's royal past.



# 7

## Gurdwara Maharaj Ganj

This inconspicuous gem, nestled in a narrow alley, showcases a blend of historical importance and architectural subtlety. Gurdwara Maharaj Ganj is a marker of Kashmir's Sikh heritage. Dating back to the seventeenth-century, it was originally established as a Dharamshala, serving as a place for Sikh congregational gatherings before evolving into a formal Gurdwara. Recognized as the oldest Sikh shrine in Kashmir, it has silently witnessed the region's changing cultural and historical landscape.



The Gurdwara's architectural features subtly echo influences from the reign of Maharaja Ranjit Singh, particularly in its floral embellishments and decorative elements. Some of its motifs draw inspiration from historic Sikh shrines, including the Golden Temple, forming a rich artistic and spiritual connection. Despite its modest

appearance, Gurdwara Maharaj Ganj remains a vital center for the Sikh faith and heritage in Srinagar, offering visitors a glimpse into the syncretic traditions that have shaped the city's religious and cultural fabric.

# 8

## Jamia Masjid

Located at Nowhatta, Jamia Masjid is one of Srinagar's most significant architectural and spiritual landmarks. Built in 1400 CE by Sultan Sikandar, the mosque reflects Indo-Saracenic and traditional Kashmiri wooden architecture, featuring 378 intricately carved deodar pillars and a vast central courtyard.

The mosque was later expanded by Zain-ul-Abidin, allowing it to accommodate up to 33,333 worshippers. Despite being surrounded by bustling markets, Jamia Masjid remains an oasis of peace and reflection, drawing both devotees and visitors. Its striking wooden construction, inspired by



Persian and Central Asian influences, sets it apart from other mosques in the region.

### Please note:

- There is no entry fee.
- Photography is allowed (in the interior and exterior of buildings).
- It will be a leisure stroll in Shehr-e-Khaas with several stops to sit, talk, and discuss.

- Wear comfortable footwear, and carry a hat/umbrella along with a bottle of water.
- Please start early, as the weather becomes less enjoyable later in the day.
- Kindly respect the cultural and religious significance/sentiments of the spaces.

***Photos by Syed Muneeb Masoodi, Stuti Mishra, Abdul Rashid Lone, Wikimedia Commons and Imad-Clicks/Pexels.***

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