

There are quite a few hill resorts around Katra which you can visit before or after Darshan.

Hill Stations on Jammu Kashmir National Highway

There are number of very beautiful hill Stations on the hill highway that leads to Srinagar from Jammu. These are favoured destinations with both Indian and foreign tourists.

Kud

Distance from Jammu : 103 kms(on the Jammu Srinagar highway)

Time duration from Jammu : Approximately 3 hours

Altitude: 1,738 meters

Kud is a popular hill resort falling in Udhampur District. It is a very good picnic spot with a perfect climate during summers. Kud is also a popular stopover for lunch on the Jammu-Srinagar route. Two kilometers from Kud is Swamai Ki Bauli, the well-known mountain spring.

Trekking in Kud

Kud offers a host of trekking options. Excellent camping sites are provided in the nearby wilderness. Trekking options are available along Sundarani, Jangal Gali, JasarKote and Sanasar. Trekking equipment can be hired from the tourism department shop. Some private agencies also offer trekkings here.

Aghar Jitto

Distance from Katra: 6 kms

Location: At Reasi on the Katra- Reasi road

Aghar Jitto is named after Baba Jitto the legendary farmer who laid his life to fight oppression by

landlords. He was a great devotee of Ma Vaishno and a temple is built here dedicated to him. A three day Aghar Jitto festival is the prime attraction of this place. There's also spring water that flows in front of the shrine. It is believed that water of this spring is holy. If a pre-natal woman takes a dip here then no harm can be done to the baby. A path from here goes to Shri Mata Vaishno Devi shrine cave.

Dera Baba Banda

Distance from Katra : 30 km

Location : Tehsil- Reasi, district-Udhampur

Dera Baba Banda is not only a major pilgrimage centre for Sikhs but attracts people from other faiths also. It has a Gurudwara built by Baba Banda Bairaagi on the banks of river Chenab. He was Guru Gobind Singh`s favourite `Saint-soldier`. Pilgrims in great number especially from North India throng this place in the month of April to participate in the three-day annual mela.

This place is around 300-year-old. The historic gurdwara at Dera Baba Banda Bahadur has the samadhi of Banda Bahadur. Here the ashes of Banda Bahadur are also kept, along with an arrow given by Guru Gobind Singh to Banda. Other attractions include number of weapons and a huge sword used by Banda during wars.

Kol Kandholi

Distance from Jammu : 14 km

How to reach : Kol Kandholi at Nagarota village is on the Jammu Katra main road

Kol Kandholi falls on the itinerary of every devotee seeking a darshan of the Mata Vaishno Devi. Actually it is said to be the first darshan of the entire Yatra. There is an interesting tale behind the name Kol Kandholi. Kol in the local dialect means bowl and Kandholi means shaking. Legend and local beliefs say that Mata Vaishno Devi had supposedly stayed here for some time. She played like any other girl with the local children of the village. One day as the girls felt thirsty she gave them a bowl. As the girls shook the bowl water gushed out from a dry place. The girls then quenched their thirst. Interestingly the well that was believed to have been formed from the spring never runs dry. Mata also used to play on a swing with local girls. Devotees have put up a symbolic swing on a tree, which is the object of worship in reverence of the

mother.

Baba Dhansar

Distance from Katra: 15 kms

Distance from Reasi: 17 kms

Distance from Jammu: 65 kms.

Location: Baba Dhansar is located at Karua Jheel (Pond) near village Karua

Baba Dhansar is famous for Temple of Lord Shiva

Baba Dhansar is known for the temple of Lord Shiva that falls on the way to Salal Dam. The distance of the temple from the main road is around 1 km. The main attraction of Baba Dhansar is a naturally formed Shivling. Droplets of water can be seen falling on this Lingam all the year round. Baba Dhansar, it is believed saved the villagers of Karua from a demon with the help of Devadidev Mahadev. There is an annual mela organized here during the Shivaratri.

Another attraction here is a huge spring. Emerging from the rocks it leads to a number of small cascading waterfalls. Finally it flows into the Holy rivulet of Banganga to merge with the Chenab River.

Karua jheel near the temple of Baba Dhansar is considered sacred. Though bathing is not allowed. An annual Dangal (wrestling) competition is also organized here.

Shiv Khori

Distance from Katra : 85 Kms

Distance from Jammu : 105 kms

How to reach : The Shiv-Khori Shrine is very well connected to Katra / Jammu by road. People can reach here by taxi/car. Buses from Katra are also available.

Shiv Khori is also known as “Home of Gods” is famous for the cave shrine of Lord Shiva. It is

situated in the Reasi district of the J&K. The road from Jammu to Shiv Khori passes through some very scenic places consisting of lakes and waterfalls.

The cave is a natural wonder. Shaped like the “Damroo” of Mahadev it is wide at both ends while congested at the centre. The cave is 1kilometer in length. The width of the cave is different at different places. At some point it is so narrow that a person can even barely crawl there. At some other place there is width of more than 100 meters.

The prime attraction of the cave is a 4 feet high naturally formed Shiva Lingam. Natural milky limestone water drips from the ceiling on the head of Svayambhu Lingam like river Ganga. The cave also houses many natural impressions and image of gods. A major fair takes place at Shiv Khori on the occasion of Maha Shivratri. So you can plan your visit accordingly to witness the fair.

Sudh Mahadev Temple

The Sudh Mahadev Temple is said to be 2800 years old and with a strong mythological connection. The temple houses a natural black marble `lingam`. Devotees throng this place for a three day Mela during Sawan or rainy season. On this occasion they worship the Trident and mace believed to be that of Bheema the second Pandava brother. Devak stream flows nearby where people can take a bath before entering the temple. Mysteriously the Devak stream disappears a few kilometers downstream.

Distance from Jammu : 110 km

Distance from Katra : 75 km

Distance from Patnitop : 20 km

Location : Chenani Tehsil, District Udhampur

Altitude : 1225 msl

How to reach : Sudh Mahadev is connected with Jammu by a regular bus service. From Jammu go to Chenani on the Jammu Kashmir National Highway. Then from Chenani take the road towards east and travel for another 30 kilometers to reach the temple. You can also come to this place from Patnitop by hiring a Jeep.

Gauri Kund

Gauri Kund is at a very short distance from Sudh Mahadev. It is basically a spring. Legend has it that Goddess Parvati used to bath here daily before paying obeisance to Sudmahadev. This spring gets its name from Parvati.

Mantalai

Mantalai is a place that is few kilometers further from Sudh Mahadev, Mantalai is a picturesque place. It is surrounded by a dense cover of green deodar forests. Legend says it that the marriage of Lord Shiva with the Goddess Parvati took place here.

Jhajjar Kotli

Distance from Jammu: 35 kms

Location: On the Jammu –Srinagar national highway.

Jajjar Kotli is basically a picnic spot that attracts visitors during summer. There's a tourist complex, on the banks of Jujjar rivulet. Good facilities are provided here by JKTDC.

Nandini Wildlife Sanctuary

Nandini Wildlife Sanctuary is located just 28 kms from Jammu and is virtually a paradise for lovers of nature and wildlife.

Distance from Jammu: 28 kms

Best time to visit: March- May (Bird watching)
September- March (for other forms of wildlife)

How to Reach: Regular buses are available from Jammu

The Nandini Wildlife Sanctuary named after a nearby village got established in 1990. This wildlife sanctuary was attempted at preserving the thick forest cover of Jammu's adjoining

areas. So after you have finished the Darshan and taken Ma Vaishno's blessings heading for the Nandini Wildlife Sanctuary would be a very exciting idea and would not surely disappoint any nature lover.

What to see at Nandini Wildlife Sanctuary

The stunning environs, the diverse topography, the sylvan surroundings, create the right ambience for a large variety of wild animals. No doubt this wildlife park boasts of many endangered species of animals and birds to be rarely seen elsewhere.

* **Animals:** Some of the animals to be sighted in this sanctuary include the porcupine, common leopard, wild boar, rhesus monkey, bharal, goral, Indian fox, barking deer, grey langur, civet cats(two species),hare, mongoose, five-striped squirrel etc.

* **Birds:** If you are a bird lover there is a bagful of attractions for you too. A significant population of pheasants can be found here along with blue rock pigeon, bee-eaters, the Babblers, Indian mynah, great jungle fowl, chakor etc. A great attraction of the park is the Indian pea fowl and the Kalij pheasant. It is absolutely a treat to watch these winged creatures dotting the sky or perched in tree tops.