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Amarnath Yatra 2026: Sacred Pilgrimage, History and Facts

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Amarnath Yatra 2026: Sacred Pilgrimage, History and Facts

The Amarnath Yatra is a yearly Hindu pilgrimage to a cave shrine of Shiva in Kashmir.

The 2026 yatra was scheduled for 57 days, from 3 July to 28 August.

This lesson covers the shrine, the legend, the two routes and the 2026 facts.

The idea in brief

- **Shrine:** A natural ice lingam of Shiva in a Himalayan cave in Kashmir.
- **Height:** About 3,880 metres above sea level.
- **2026 dates:** 3 July to 28 August, a 57-day yatra.
- **Routes:** Pahalgam in Anantnag, and Baltal in Ganderbal.
- **First batch:** 4,822 pilgrims left Jammu on 2 July 2026.

The Shrine

Where is the Amarnath cave?

The Amarnath cave is in the Himalayas of Kashmir.

It lies in the Anantnag district of Jammu and Kashmir.

The cave stands at about 3,880 metres above sea level. Some sources give 3,888 metres.

The nearest town on the main route is Pahalgam.

Why do pilgrims visit it?

Pilgrims come to see a naturally formed ice lingam of Lord Shiva.

The lingam is an ice stalagmite that grows inside the cave.

It reaches its fullest shape in the summer months.

So the yatra is held when the ice lingam has formed.

Who runs the pilgrimage?

The Shri Amarnathji Shrine Board, called SASB, runs the yatra.

The Lieutenant Governor of Jammu and Kashmir chairs the board.

In 2026 this was Manoj Sinha.

The police, security forces and health teams help the board.

> **Quick check 1.** The Amarnath cave is in Jammu city. *(True or False?)* See answer ↓

The Legend

Who first found the cave, according to legend?

Legend says Sage Bhrigu was the first to find Amarnath.

Long ago, the Kashmir Valley was believed to be under water.

Sage Kashyapa drained it through rivers and streams.

Bhrigu then had the first darshan of Shiva at Amarnath.

What did Shiva leave along the way?

Regional legend says Shiva gave up his worldly things on the route.

He left his bull Nandi at Pahalgam and his crescent moon at Chandanwari.

He left his serpent Vasuki at Lake Sheshnag and his son Ganesha at Mahagunas Parvat.

He left the five elements at Panjtarni.

What happened inside the cave?

After his tandava dance, Shiva entered the cave with Parvati.

There they appeared as the ice lingam.

That is why the ice form is held sacred.

> **Quick check 2.** Legend says Shiva left his bull Nandi at Pahalgam. *(True or False?)* See answer ↓

The Two Routes

Which two routes lead to the cave?

Pilgrims use two routes.

The traditional route starts at Pahalgam in Anantnag district.

The shorter route starts at Baltal in Ganderbal district.

Both meet near a point called Sangam, close to the cave.

Sources: indiatvnews.com

What is the Pahalgam route like?

The Pahalgam route is the long one. Guides give its length as 43 to 48 kilometres.

Pilgrims halt for the night at Sheshnag Lake and Panchtarni.

The whole walk takes three to five days one way.

The road is open for vehicles only up to Chandanwari.

What is the Baltal route like?

The Baltal route is only about 14 kilometres long.

But it is very steep and hard to climb.

The walk takes one to two days for a return trip.

The route runs along the Amarnath valley and the Amaravati river.

> **Quick check 3.** The Baltal route is longer than the Pahalgam route. *(True or False?)* See answer ↓

The 2026 Yatra

What were the dates in 2026?

The 57-day yatra formally began on 3 July 2026.

It was scheduled to end on 28 August 2026.

That day was Shravan Purnima, also Raksha Bandhan.

The Pratham Puja at the cave was held earlier, on Jyeshtha Purnima, 29 June.

Sources: kashmirlife.net

Who flagged off the first batch?

Lieutenant Governor Manoj Sinha flagged off the first batch on 2 July 2026.

The convoy left the Bhagwati Nagar base camp in Jammu.

Sinha first did a special puja at the camp.

The base camp is under high security.

Sources: deccanchronicle.com

How big was the first batch?

The first batch had 4,822 pilgrims.

Of these, 2,510 took the Pahalgam route and 2,312 took the Baltal route.

The group had 3,707 men, 816 women and 16 children.

It also had 246 sadhus and 37 sadhvis.

Sources: newsonair.gov.in

How many pilgrims were expected?

Officials expected more than half a million devotees in 2026.

Pilgrims had to carry mandatory documents and RFID cards.

All routes were under extra watch.

Advance registration opened on 15 April 2026.

Pilgrims must also register months ahead and get quotas by state.

How long was the yatra in earlier years?

The length of the yatra depends on how long the ice lingam lasts.

In 1995 it stayed open for only 20 days.

From 2004 to 2009 it stayed open for 60 days.

In 2019 it ran for 46 days, from 1 July to 15 August.

Quick check 4. The 2026 yatra was scheduled to last 57 days. *(True or False?)* See answer ↓

Exam Traps

The cave is in Anantnag district, Kashmir, at about 3,880 metres.

The two routes are Pahalgam and Baltal. Baltal is shorter but steeper.

The 2026 yatra ran 3 July to 28 August, which is 57 days.

The first batch of 4,822 was flagged off by Manoj Sinha on 2 July.

The SASB runs the yatra, and the Lieutenant Governor chairs it.

Practice MCQs

1. How many pilgrims were in the first batch of the 2026 Amarnath Yatra?

A. 4,822

B. 5,000

C. 2,510

D. 3,707

See answer ↓

2. Who flagged off the first batch of the 2026 Amarnath Yatra from Jammu?

A. Narendra Modi

B. Omar Abdullah

C. Manoj Sinha

D. Amit Shah

See answer ↓

3. How many days was the 2026 Amarnath Yatra scheduled to last?

A. 60

B. 57

C. 30

D. 45

See answer ↓

4. On which festival was the 2026 Amarnath Yatra scheduled to end?

A. Shravan Purnima and Raksha Bandhan

B. Maha Shivaratri

C. Diwali

D. Guru Purnima

See answer ↓

5. Which two routes lead to the Amarnath cave?

A. Katra and Baltal

B. Pahalgam and Gulmarg

C. Sonamarg and Katra

D. Pahalgam and Baltal

See answer ↓

6. Which Amarnath route is shorter but steeper?

A. Baltal

B. Chandanwari

C. Pahalgam

D. Sheshnag

See answer ↓

Answer Key

1. **A.**
   The first batch had 4,822 pilgrims.
   ↑ Q1
2. **C.**
   Lieutenant Governor Manoj Sinha flagged it off.
   ↑ Q2
3. **B.**
   It ran from 3 July to 28 August.
   ↑ Q3
4. **A.**
   It was to end on 28 August 2026, Shravan Purnima.
   ↑ Q4
5. **D.**
   Pahalgam is in Anantnag and Baltal is in Ganderbal.
   ↑ Q5
6. **A.**
   The Baltal route is shorter but steeper.
   ↑ Q6

Quick-check answers

1. **False.** It is in the Anantnag district of Kashmir, high in the Himalayas. ↑ 1
2. **True.** Nandi was left at Pahalgam. The crescent was left at Chandanwari. ↑ 2
3. **False.** Baltal is the shorter but steeper route. ↑ 3
4. **True.** It ran from 3 July to 28 August. ↑ 4

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