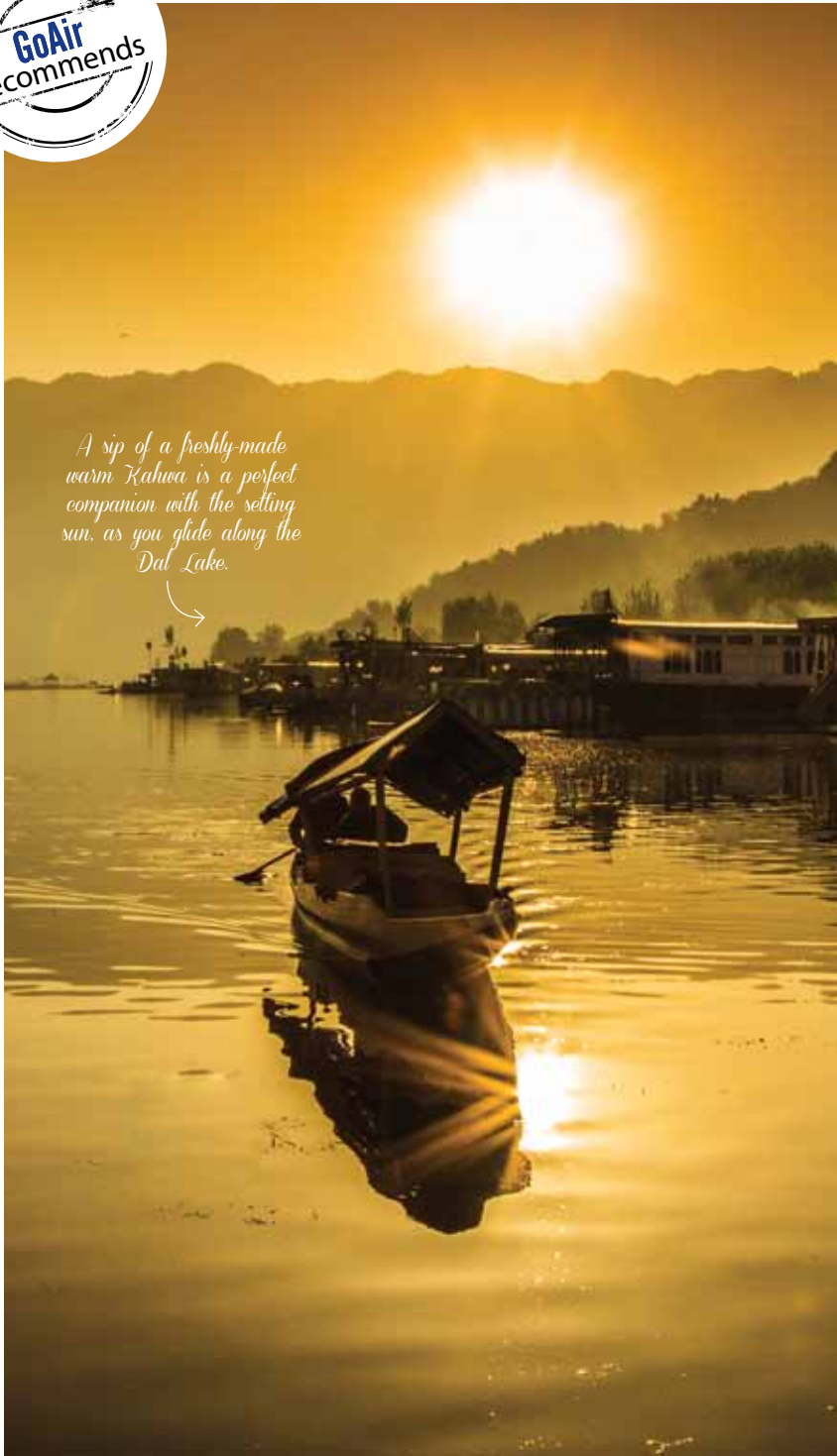




A sip of a freshly-made warm Kahwa is a perfect companion with the setting sun, as you glide along the Dal Lake.





SRINAGAR

Paradise on earth

Since time immemorial, Kashmir has often been referred to as a 'paradise on earth' for its pristine beauty, snow clad Himalayan peaks, lush green meadows with carpet of flowers, gurgling brooks and cascading waterfalls.

 Anindya S Basu

The vastness of Dal Lake never fails to amuse you. With multiple coloured house boats lined up across both the banks, it is almost like a world within a world. Shikaras are the names of the boats used in Dal Lake and other water bodies of Jammu and Kashmir. The colourful houseboats with their reflection in the water, boatmen with traditional local wear and an occasional shikara carrying vegetables for sale are a treat for the eyes. There are

about ten thousand or more shikaras plying the dal lake and about five thousand odd houseboats stationed for accommodation of tourists and some for the locals. For many, it is the mode of transport and means of livelihood also.

The backwaters of the lake have various shops including Kashmiri handicrafts, carpets, and wooden artifacts, to an extent a mini restaurant in the middle of the lake. Some occasional traders come on their Shikara to showcase their products, sell Kahwa or to click pictures in traditional

dress as a memento. It may be little boring for the slow start in the beginning but as you grow into the ride, the stipulated time feels less.

SERENE ENVIRONS

Through one of the narrow straits, one gets connected to Nagin lake or Nigeen lake. Although this lake is actually a part of Dal Lake, it is considered as another separate lake since it is connected to the Dal Lake via a very narrow stretch of water and a causeway appropriate for bikers and people on foot. However, it is

more serene and the best of the house boats for stay are here. As the activities are few here and little far from the main Dal Lake, the water is clearer and being surrounded by the large number of willow and other trees; this definitely gives a feeling of absolute peace and serenity. A sip of a freshly-made warm Kahwa is a perfect companion with the setting sun. The food often served here is cooked by the caretaker in the nearby kitchen houseboat and don't miss out on the charm of Kashmiri food, which one will come across throughout the

The glorious landscape of Srinagar beckons all with its lush green valleys, snow-topped mountains and verdant trees rustling in the breeze. It exudes absolute peace and serenity.

AMAZING FACTS



The shikara rides start normally at 7 am and it can be taken any time throughout the day.



At Jamia Masjid, spend time at the square garden and witness the Indo-Saracenic architecture.



For Kahwa lovers, there are Kahwa powders available at many local shops.



Khayyam chowk is the khao galli of Srinagar. This street comes into action when the sun sets, as rows of shops sell kebabs and other delicacies.



Above: Chashma Shahi; **Below:** Shops along the lake



Pic by Anindya S Basu

valley. The silence of this place is almost catharsis if you are alone.

ARCHITECTURAL MARVEL

Kashmir has been an abode of Sufis and saints for long and the architecture of Srinagar is a proof of this. Be it the Jamia Masjid that is often hailed as Kashmir's central mosque in Nowhatta, a part of Old Srinagar and built by Sultan Sikandar, the Mughul Gardens celebrating and protecting the fresh water of Chashma Shahi (water of the royals), the Shalimar and Nishat Bagh and many more that were initiated by emperor Jahangir as his love for

Kashmir. The characteristics of these gardens are natural appearance with the influence of Persian gardens and a testimony to Kashmir architecture. The central water channel sourced at the natural springs with chinar trees surrounding the cascading water bodies make it a huge tourist attraction.

TRADITIONAL SHOPPING

Kashmiri shawls have made a stamp of authority in the world as one of the premium woollen wear long back and same is the case with the carpets. It takes at least 10 months to weave a very basic carpet and more the number

DID
YOU
KNOW?



Srinagar is well known for the multitude of tulips that bloom here before summer. Rows and rows of vibrant, exotic varieties set against a backdrop of mountains, make for a magnificent view.



Top: Kashmiri Kahwa; **Above:** Local cookies; **Top right:** Kashmiri stole



of threads longitudinally, greater the time to weave and complete a carpet. Carpets that have intricate designs and large number of colours take more than two years to see daylight.


FLAVOURS OF KASHMIR

Kahwa tea defines tourism all across the valley and Srinagar as well. The tea leaves are boiled with saffron strands, cardamom and cinnamon bark. This is not the traditional green tea that we have mostly in the cities and as you sip, you will have bits of almond, walnuts and other dry fruits in your mouth adding and enhancing the flavour and experience of the tea in cold weather. There is another tea which is very popular with Kashmiri locals called 'noon chai'. It's a pink tea and like the

Kahwa, is had with dry fruits. The people of the valley drink this with the locally produced fresh breads as a part of breakfast and sometimes dinner.

Speaking of breads, the presence of innumerable bakeries along the streets also gives a shout out to the tourists. The shops with the aroma of freshly baked products are definitely worth a visit and possibly a repeat if you have the time. As you go out in the evening or on a late afternoon walk along the Dal Lake, drop in at one of the local bakeries and try out lavasa bread (a sort of lavash

the Persian bread) or a bakarkhani or kulcha. They also have an enviable array of freshly baked biscuits, some with peanuts, some with coconut or white sesame seeds or poppy seeds.

Experiencing one meal of Wazwan is a must when in Srinagar. The multi course meal is considered as an epitome of rich Kashmiri tradition and derives its name from 'Waza', meaning cook and 'Wan', meaning the shop. The wazwan includes a minimum of 8 to maximum of 38 to 40 dishes being served. 



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