

Amritsar



History & Culture

Brief History

Amritsar, literally a Pool of Nectar, derives its name from Amrit Sarovar, the holy tank that surrounds the fabulous Golden Temple. First time visitors to Amritsar could be forgiven for the impression that Amritsar is like any other small town in northern India. But Amritsar stands head and shoulders above any other city, its status elevated and sanctified by the presence of the venerable Golden Temple.

Located in the heart of Amritsar, the temple complex is surrounded by a maze of narrow lanes, or katras, that house one of the busiest markets in India. But the Golden Temple is a serene presence, radiating a calm that makes people bow their



heads in reverence. The gurudwara, as Sikh temples are called, is the holiest of Sikh shrines. It is not just Sikhs who travel to the Golden Temple to pay homage, the sacred shrine is equally revered by Hindus and people of other faiths who, too, make the pilgrimage to offer prayers at Harmandir Sahib.

There more to Amritsar than that - Amongst other sights is Jallianwala Bagh, site of the gruesome massacre of unarmed Indians by British troops. A major tourist attraction these days is the Indo-Pakistan border crossing at Wagah, just a short distance from Amritsar, with its elaborate change-of-guards drill with a lot of strutting and intimidatory showing off by both sides.

Amritsar is a city you should not miss. It's easy to travel there from Delhi by road and by rail. It is easy to navigate through the city; few guides bother you as tourism is not the most important commercial activity here. Ask them in Amritsar, and they will tell you that if for nothing else you must travel here for the roadside chhola-bhaturas.

Amritsar - The Cultural Hub of Punjab



The city of Amritsar a dazzling showcase of composite culture and secular heritage .It has a proud past .a glorious present and a promising future .This most important city of Majha has rightly been called the mukut-mani (Jewel of the crown)of the Punjab. A rich repository of spiritual and national heritage, It has been hailed as the home of all virtues'(sifti da ghar) .while praying, every devout Sikh longs to be blessed with a pilgrimage to Amritsar and a holy bath at the Golden Temple (Amritsar ke darsan isnan).A visit to Amritsar is believed to wash off all the sins.

A focal point of Sikh faith, a pivot of Punjab politics, a gateway to the Middle-East, a nursery of defence pool, an alert sentinel at the Indo-Pak border, Amritsar is the place where the first Sikh Army was raised by the sixth Guru, Guru Hargobind. The city saw the fierce onslaughts of the invading armies of Ahmad Shah Abdali and a reckless carnage at the Jallianwala Bagh. An epicenter of Kooka and Akali movements and a symbol of resistance against the British tyranny, Amritsar had been a favourite place of Maharaja Ranjit Singh. It was in Amritsar that the clarion-call for the liberation of India sounded louder and clearer. In the recent times, the has at regular intervals borne the brunt of Indo-Pak conflicts.

Amritsar is like a diamond with many facets. The essential spirit of the city is found not only in its gurudwaras & temples, mosques & churches, takias & khankahs but also in its theatres & galleries, parks & gardens, archives & libraries, art & architecture, museums & memorials, havelis & forts, fairs & festivals, vibrant folk dances & scintillating taans, narrow lanes & winding alleys, parlours & boutiques, clubs & pubs, traditional bustling markets & lip-smacking cuisine.

The most dominating asset, however, is its people who are friendly, God-fearing, hospitable, hard working informal, robust and with a tremendous zest for living. They are fond of good food, good dress and all the external symbols of life.

Amritsar is the heart-beat of the Majha region which has provided Punjabi literature with its standard language. A launching pad of several renowned artists, authors and poets, the city has been a home of handloom and carpet industry for more than a century. The city is proud to have the second largest Milk plant in the country.

Amritsar is not just bhangra or giddha, sarson ka saag and makki ki roti, it is an attitude and a way of life, despite the modern winds blowing, the city still enshrines and exudes its essential cultural identity. Being the only land-route opening to Pakistan the city has become a favourite rendezvous of Track-II diplomacy.

Location

Amritsar city situated in northern Punjab state of northwestern India lies about 15 miles (25 km) east of the border with Pakistan. Amritsar is an important city in Punjab and is a major commercial, cultural, and transportation centre. It is also the centre of Sikhism and the site of the Sikh's principal place of worship.

How to reach Amritsar ?

By Air

The Rajasansi airport, about 11 km. from town, is connected by domestic flights to Delhi, Srinagar and Chandigarh. You can get to town by a pre-booked rented car, taxis or auto-rickshaws.

By Train

Amritsar is connected by direct trains to major Indian cities like Delhi, Jammu, Mumbai, Nagpur, Calcutta and Puri .For more details visit <http://www.indianrail.gov.in>

By Road

You can drive into Amritsar from neighboring states. Bus services also connect Amritsar with most north Indian towns, including Chandigarh (235 Kms), Delhi (450 Kms), Shimla,

Kulu, Manali, Dharamshala and Dalhousie in Himachal Pradesh, Dehradun and Rishikesh in Uttar Pradesh and Jammu. There is also a bus service to Lahore, 35 km away, which is the only overland connection between India and Pakistan.

Languages

Punjabi,Hindi,English & Urdu

Tourist Places

1. Golden temple(Harmander Sahib)

The Golden temple is located in the holy city of the Sikhs, Amritsar. The Golden temple is famous for its full golden dome, it is one of the most sacred pilgrim spots for Sikhs. The Mandir is built on a 67-ft square of marble and is a two storied structure. Maharaja Ranjit Singh had the upper half of the building built with approximately 400 kg of gold leaf. The Golden Temple is surrounded by a number of other famous temples like the Durgiana Temple. The fourth Guru of Sikhs, Guru Ram Das, who had initially constructed a pool here, founded Amritsar, which houses the Golden Temple or Harmandir Sahib. It is here that Sage Valmiki wrote the epic, Ramayana. Rama and Sita are believed to have spent their fourteen-year exile in Amritsar, the epicenter of Sikhism. To the south of the temple is a garden, and the tower of Baba Atal. The Central Sikh Museum is atop the Clock Tower. The 'Guru Ka Langar' offers free food to around 20,000 people everyday. The number shoots up to 100,000 on special occasions. A visitor must cover his / her head before entering the temple premises. The Granth Sahib is kept in the Temple during the day and is kept in the Akal Takht or Eternal Throne in the night. The Akal Takht also houses the ancient weapons used by the Sikh warriors. Guru Hargobind established it. The rugged old Jubi Tree in the north west corner of the compound is believed to possess special powers. It was planted 450 years ago, by the Golden Temple's first high priest, Baba Buddha. Guru-ka-Langar or the communal canteen is towards the eastern entrance of the temple complex, and it provides free food to all visitors, regardless of colour, creed, caste or gender. Visitors to the Golden Temple must remove their shoes and cover their heads before entering the temple. The temple is less crowded in the early mornings on weekends.



Around the Golden Temple

Within the sacred precincts of the Golden Temple, a devotee can seek blessing at:

1. The Akal Takht
2. Har Ki Pauri
3. Dukh Bhanjani Ber (Jujube Tree)
4. Thara Sahib
5. Ber Baba Budha Ji
6. Gurudwara Ilachi Ber
7. Ath Sath Tirath
8. Bunga Baba Deep Singh

URL's <http://www.harmandirsahib.com> , <http://www.sgpc.net>

2. Durgiana Temple (Lakshmi Narain Temple)

Built in the third decade of the 20th Century it echoes, not the traditional Hindu temple architecture, but that of the Golden Temple and, in a similar manner rises from the midst of a tank and canopies and the central dome in the style of the Sikh temple. One of the greatest reformers and political leaders of resurgent India, Pandit Madan Mohan Malviya, laid its foundation stone. It is a well-known repository of Hindu scriptures



3. Wagah Border

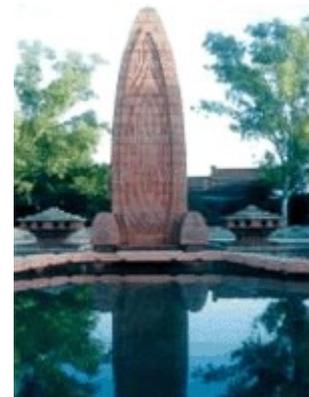
The international border between India and Pakistan. The pomp and pageantry of the Beating Retreat and the Change of Guard within handshaking distance of the Indian and Pakistani forces makes for a most charming spectacle.



Wagah, an army outpost on Indo-Pak border - between Amritsar and Lahore, is an elaborate complex of buildings, roads and barriers on both sides. The daily highlight is the evening "Beating the Retreat" ceremony. Soldiers from both countries march in perfect drill, going through the steps of bringing down their respective national flags. As the sun goes down, nationalistic fervour rises and lights are switched on marking the end of the day amidst thunderous applause.

4. Jallian Wala Bagh

The memorial at this site commemorates the 2000 Indians who were killed or wounded, shot indiscriminately by the British under the command of Gen Michael O'Dyer on April 13, 1919 while participating in a peaceful public meeting. This was one of the major incidents of India's freedom struggle. The story of this appalling massacre is told



in

the Martyr's Gallery at the site. A section of wall with bullet marks still visible is preserved along with the memorial well, in which some people jumped to escape. "The impossible men of India shall rise and liberate their mother land", declared Mahatma Gandhi, after the Jallian Wala massacre. "This disproportionate severity of punishment inflicted upon the unfortunate people and method of carrying it out is without parallel in the history of civilized govt." wrote Rabindra Nath Tagore the noble laureate while returning knighthood.

Where to Stay?

Main Hotels

S. No.	Name of Hotel	Telephone Number	Distance from Airport
1	Hotel Amritsar International	91-183-555991 91-183-556234	13 Kms.
2	Hotel Azaad	91-183-548171 91-183-559045	13 Kms.
3	Hotel Blue Moon	91-183-220416 91-183-220759	12 Kms.
4	Hotel Mohan International	91-183-566589	11 Kms.
5	Hotel Oberoi Castle	91-183-224462 91-183-224463	11 Kms.
6	Hotel Ritz Plaza	91-183-562836 91-183-562837	12 Kms.
7	Hotel Rosh	91-183-565420	11 Kms.
8	Hotel Sanjay International	91-183-213817 91-183-212555	11 Kms
9	Hotel Shraj Continental	91-183-565167 91-183-563237	11 Kms.
10	Hotel M K International	91-183-504610 91-183-504611	10 Kms.
11	Hotel CJ Intenational	www.cjhotel.net	10 Kms

Other useful links

www.amritsar.nic.in/
www.amritsar.com/
www.en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Amritsar
www.amritsar.net.in/
www.travelamritsar.com/
www.sgpc.net/golden-temple/index.asp