GULMARG, INDIA
BACKCOUNTRY SKIING

2020 TRIP NOTES
Join us in the Indian Himalaya for a powder ski and snowboard touring odyssey. Fifteen-hundred-vertical-metre runs, deep powder, steep trees, wide open alpine slopes, avalanche education, Kashmiri culture and great food. Gulmarg is a ski touring and cultural paradise, and whatever the weather, you can always get out skiing and riding.

We utilise the top stage of the massive Gulmarg Gondola when the weather is good, which deposits us above 4,000m/13,000ft near the top of Mount Apharwat (4,390m/14,403ft) with a wealth of steep bowls and ridges leading into perfectly spaced trees to explore. When the weather is inclement, and/or the top stage of the gondola is closed, we tour from the mid-station down, which is almost always open, including exploring the 10-15km Drang Valley, skiing through the roadless village of Drang where the friendly kids run out to play on the back of our skis, ending in the town of Tangmarg where we taxi back up to Gulmarg. When the weather is really bad, with heavy snow, we ski tour on Monkey Hill, or down below Gulmarg in the taxi-serviced Baba Rishi Trees. We enjoy the evenings in the most comfortable hotel in Gulmarg, one of the newest and most luxurious in town and on appropriate evenings (when everyone can stay awake!) We put on avalanche education lectures and workshops.

**EXPEDITION OVERVIEW**

We are operating both 8-day and 12-day trips in January and February of 2020.

You will be met on arrival into Srinagar airport by our Kashmiri driver and driven 60km/40mi (about 2hrs) to Gulmarg, situated in the very north of India in the region called Kashmir. Until the mid-19th century, the term Kashmir geographically denoted only the valley between the Great Himalayas and the Pir Panjal mountain range. The state is now much bigger and has borders with Afghanistan, China and Pakistan. The town has about 30 hotels, an ATM (not always reliable), gift shops and confectionery shops.

Your guide will meet you at the hotel for an introduction to the area and a check of your personal equipment. We also aim to do an initial avalanche
rescue training session that first afternoon/evening so that we are ready to ski the next morning.

On the day following your arrival, we will go skiing. The route options depend on avalanche risk, weather and gondola status but there are several distinct areas we can explore. They can roughly be segregated into Gondola Top, Gondola Mid-station, Barba Rishi Trees, Monkey Hill and Triple Peak.

**Gondola Top:** With a massive 1,500m vertical drop, Gulmarg Gondola is one of the world's highest operating cable cars. Descending down through vast alpine bowls and into perfectly spaced trees, it is becoming a mecca for adventurous ski and snowboard touring. When the top stage is open, we will usually use it to access the best skiing and widest touring options available. We could ski from the top every day of the 12-day trip and never repeat a run. The ski resort does avalanche control work and patrols the ski area directly under the gondola, known as Gondola Bowl. The rest of the terrain is backcountry and decisions about routes and avalanche safety are vital. This is the responsibility of your guide, but they will involve you in the decision making process.

**Gondola Mid-station:** The mid-station is about 400m above the town and operates in all but the worst weather. We will use it to gain some height and do some interesting runs like the half-day trip down the Drang Valley. It’s a 10–15km/6–9mi ski down the valley ending in the town of Tangmarg. We visit Drang village along the way, skiing through the roadless village, where the friendly kids run out to play on the back of our skis. The Kashmiri people are very friendly and curious about our skiing antics. They often stare and smile as we pass.

**Baba Rishi Trees:** On stormy days, when there's over 30–50cm of snow in Gulmarg, we will consider renting a taxi for the day to ski the Baba Rishi Trees. The taxi drops us at the top and we ski the 400–500m vertical tree run while the taxi drives around to pick us up at the bottom for another lap.

**Monkey Hill:** This 250–300m high hill is right behind the town and there's a well-used boot/skin track up to the summit. Then there's 360 degrees of options open to us to ski down, either to the Gulmarg access road or back to town. When it's really stormsing and the roads are chaos, this is a great day touring and a perfect place for avalanche workshops.

**Triple Peak:** On the 12-day programme you get an added bonus; a helicopter lift to a more remote basin. We will fly up to the nearby Triple Peak area using the local Kashmir heli-ski machines and tour for the day, exploring the high alpine region before dropping into the Drang Valley, down to Tangmarg.

The touring days are moderately strenuous and involve skinning for between 2–3 hours, with plenty of scenic places to stop along the way.

There is the minor issue of altitude, which most people will feel at the start of the trip. Gulmarg town is low enough (about 2,500m/8,200ft) and you may experience unusual dreams and mild headaches. But the top of the peaks are over 4,000m/13,000ft and on your first few trips to the summits, you’ll feel a little short of breath. But not to worry, once you descend you quickly recover and each time you go up it gets easier and easier.

In addition to our ski guides, we work in conjunction with the excellent Kashmiri ski guides who are not only exceptionally strong skiers and know the valley intimately, but who are affable
and friendly as well. Their involvement in our expeditions introduces a strong cultural component which we are sure you’ll enjoy.

WEATHER

The weather in January and February in Gulmarg is similar to Utah’s weather in the USA. It has 2–3 day storms separated by 3–5 day fine spells. The region doesn’t traditionally get much wind, so the powder is exceptional. During clear weather, the snow just gets better and better, usually stabilising so we can ski steeper runs. One of the biggest benefits of skiing in Gulmarg is there is always skiing to be done. It’s an incredible place and storms dropping over a metre of snow are common.

AVALANCHE CONDITIONS

Your guides make morning and ongoing avalanche assessments and instruction is given on how to contribute to this decision making process. We will probably only ski beyond the ski area’s small boundary and each member must be capable of assisting in an avalanche rescue. We all ski with avalanche transceivers, shovel and probe.

2020 EXPEDITION DATES

Trip 1: January 27 to February 3 (8 days)
Trip 2: January 27 to February 7 (12 days)
Trip 3: February 10–17 (8 days)
Trip 4: February 10–21 (12 days)

ITINERARY

The following is a sample itinerary for our Gulmarg Backcountry Skiing Expeditions:

Day 1 Arrive Srinagar, transfer to Gulmarg, avalanche rescue practice and a short ski tour, if possible.
Day 2 Ski tour to the top of the Gondola.
Day 3 Ski tour down to the Drang Valley (10-15kms/6–9 miles) and through Drang village. Ski to Tangmarg for a late lunch, taxi back to Gulmarg.
Day 4 Ski the Baba Rishi Trees below Gulmarg Township, use taxi back to the top of the run.
Day 5 Gondola mid-station tour and/or Monkey Hill.
Day 6–7 Ski tour to the top of Gondola.
Day 8  Ski tour to the top of Gondola. 8-day group transfer to Srinagar houseboat in the afternoon, dinner and trip ends.

Day 9  Ski tour to the top of Gondola.

Day 10  Helicopter to Triple Peak, alpine ski tour and then ski down to Tangmarg, taxi back to Gulmarg.

Day 11  Gondola mid-station tour, Monkey Hill

Day 12  Ski tour, transfer to Srinagar houseboat, dinner and trip ends

**NOTE:** Accommodation in Srinagar is included for one night at the end of the trip and the Houseboat manager will arrange your transfer to the airport.

**THE ADVANTAGES OF SKIING WITH ADVENTURE CONSULTANTS**

Adventure Consultants is renowned for the quality of its service and strategy applied to their trips. Our reputation is attributed to meticulous planning and experienced logistics coordination. We have a philosophy of investing in every expedition and trip to offer our ski tourers the best possible experience.

We employ strong and specialised leaders/mountain guides, who are some of the most pre-eminent in the industry. We pride ourselves on operating with small teams with the best back-up and support available.

Many of our climbers, ski tourers and trekkers come to us because they have seen us in action on a previous trip and decide to opt for our level of service and proven experience. Others return because they know we do our very best to make our expeditions and trips safe, enjoyable and successful.

**VISAS**

Trip participants will be required to obtain an entry visa into India at the beginning of the trip. This should be procured at home prior to travel and please allow 2–4 weeks.

**HISTORY & TRAVEL WARNINGS**

India and Pakistan have fought at least three wars over Kashmir, including the Indo-Pakistani Wars of
1947, 1965 and as recently as 1999. Currently, we feel the Gulmarg area is very safe and tourism is welcomed by the local Kashmiris. There is a lot of security and for the past several years, tourists have been travelling to Gulmarg without issue. However, in saying this, we advise people to take normal precautions in Srinagar and not travel alone at night away from the tourist regions and to avoid any protests. Some governments still advise against travelling to Kashmir.

**EQUIPMENT LIST & REFERENCE NOTES**

Expedition members will be sent a list detailing all the necessary clothing and equipment to be individually procured, contained within a set of Expedition Reference Notes with all the details of the trip. These notes provide extensive information, from suggestions on what type of camera to bring to training advice for your expedition preparation.

**MEDICAL EXAMINATION & INSURANCE**

Expedition members will be provided with a medical questionnaire to complete. This information will be sighted only by our Medical Adviser and treated with full confidentiality. We also require members to have rescue insurance and we will consult with individual team members on their insurance needs and solutions for coverage.

**FOOD**

Kashmiri cuisine is not as spicy as traditional Indian curry but still very tasty. Meals like rogan josh (lamb cooked spices), yakhyn (lamb cooked in curd), hakh (a spinach-like leaf) and rista-gushtaba (minced meat balls in tomato and curd curry) are available, alongside classic Indian curries. Vegetables are a bit sparse in Kashmir, but the food is tasty and plentiful. You can sometimes get salads that are safe to eat as well as fresh fruit.

**PASSPORT PHOTOGRAPHS**

Expedition members will be requested to provide 2 passport photographs and a copy of their climbing/skiing résumé.
EXPEDITION FEE

The cost of the 12 day expedition ex Srinagar, India is US$4,800 per person (includes heli-lift tour day).

The cost of the 8 day expedition ex Srinagar, India is US$3,700 per person.

This is an inclusive cost and covers the following:

- All expedition trip organisational requirements
- Transfers on arrival Srinagar airport to Gulmarg and return from Gulmarg to Srinagar houseboat
- 8 or 12 nights accommodation (Gulmarg hotel 7 or 11 nights and Srinagar Houseboat 1 night)
- 7 or 11 days ski touring respectively
- Emergency medical supplies
- IFMGA (UIAGM) and/or NZMGA qualified Adventure Consultants ski guide and local Kashmiri guide
- Breakfast and lunch in Gulmarg and an evening meal for the one night on the houseboat
- All lift passes and Baba Rishi taxi touring costs
- Avalanche safety and ski touring instruction
- One helicopter lift for heli-ski touring day on 12 day trip

The expedition fee does not include the following:

- Air travel to and from Srinagar, India
- Extra hotel accommodation and meals in Srinagar or Delhi outside of the itinerary
- All evening meals while in Gulmarg
- Personal snacks (suggest bringing 2 snack bars a day from home)
- Purchases of bottled water, gifts and alcohol
- Other charges at hotels such as laundry
- Entry visas for India (obtain a tourist visa prior to arrival in India)
- Personal clothing and touring equipment
- Personal travel/ cancellation /rescue insurance
- Any rescue costs or costs of early departure from the trip
- Gratuity for guides
- Houseboat to airport taxi (usually about US$15)

PAYMENT DETAILS

All payments should be made by bank transfer to the following bank and account:

Bank of New Zealand
Offshore Branch
42 Willis Street
Spark Central
Wellington
New Zealand

for the account of Adventure Consultants Limited.

Account Number: 1000-594771-0000
Account Type: US Dollars
Swift Address: BKNZNZ22

NOTE: All bank transfer charges are for the remitter’s account.

We can also accept your deposit and balance payment by credit card (Visa, Mastercard and Amex) plus a 3% card charge.

DEPOSIT

A non-refundable deposit of US$500 is payable to secure a place on the expedition.

BALANCE

The balance of payment is then due 90 days prior to the start date.
CANCELLATION & REFUND POLICY

An expedition member may cancel their participation on the following basis:

a) Cancellations outside of 90 days will result in the loss of the trip deposit.
b) For cancellations made within 89–60 days of the trip commencement date, we reserve the right to retain 50% of the balance payment fee.
c) For cancellations within 59 days of the departure date a cancellation fee of 100% of the full fee applies.

Team members should take out private insurance if they wish to be covered against cancellation due to medical or personal reasons. This is called trip cancellation insurance and can be obtained through your normal travel agent.

HOW TO JOIN THIS EXPEDITION

If you would like to join one of our Gulmarg Backcountry Skiing Expeditions, please complete our online booking form and forward your deposit payment at https://www.adventureconsultants.com/skiing/worldwide-backcountry-skiing/gulmarg-backcountry-skiing/book-now or contact us if you’d like further information and a detailed quote to assist in planning your expedition.

If you require more information, please contact us at:

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Adventure Consultants is affiliated to the New Zealand Mountain Guides Association (NZMGA), New Zealand Alpine Club (NZAC) and a corporate member of the American Alpine Club (AAC). Adventure Consultants is a supporter of the dZi Foundation in Nepal for their ‘Revitalise a Village’ programmes.

Adventure Consultants perform to IFMGA/UIAGM standards and are world leaders in high altitude guiding.

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