

## Surrender to the Divine at the Source of the Holy Narmada River

The beauty of nature is displayed in all her glory in Amarakantak, which is often referred to as a gateway to heaven. The enchanting scenic beauty and the sacredness of this place where great saints and sages have meditated for years draws one into a deep spiritual state.

Amarakantak, situated in the mountainous region of the Maikal Hills and at the source of two holy rivers, Narmada River and Sone River, is a sacred place of pilgrimage with many ancient places of worship. Narmada is considered one of the most holy rivers of India. There are various stories about the Narmada River. Some say the river emanated from the body of Lord Shiva when he was meditating, and others say the river is his daughter, Goddess Narmada. The Narmada is believed to be the embodiment of purity. It is said that the Narmada water absolves a person from sins, and by merely glancing at the river one is purified. Narmada means “one who is endowed with bliss.” It is said that Lord Shiva was pleased with Goddess Narmada’s devotion and surrender, so he blessed her, “May you be a holy river, and may your waters always be full.” When one surrenders to the Source, full blessings of the Lord are given.

Amarakantak is located 124 km from Bilaspur (Chhattisgarh) and lies in an area on the Madhya Pradesh border. Amarakantak is where the Vindhya and Satpura mountain range meet. Amarakantak’s unique natural heritage comprises of a number of places of scenic beauty. This holy town is famous for its temples that are visited by devotees.

“Once you enter this town (Amarakantak) you feel your soul has been purified whether or not you take a dip in the holy Narmadakund.”

During the retreat we will visit and meditate at a number of holy places in the surrounding area of Amarakantak.



Shri Yantra Mahu Meru Mandir



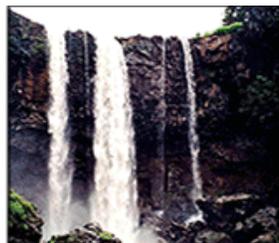
Dudh Dhara



Narmadakund



Jwaleshwar Mahadev



Kapil Dhara



Mai ki Bagiya



Durga Dhara



Kabir Chabutra

### Narmadakund and Temples

Where the Narmada River originated is an open pool known as Narmadakund that is surrounded by many temples. Narmadeshwar Temple, which is dedicated to Narmada Devi, is an ancient temple. The mythological belief of Narmada Udgam, an open kund at the origin of river Narmada, claims Lord Shiva descended from heaven at Narmada Udgam. Pilgrims visit Narmada Udgam to perform rituals and prayers. There are about twenty small temples around this 'kund, such as Shiva temple, Kartikeya temple, Shri Rama Janaki temple, Annapurna temple, Guru Gorakhnath temple, Shri Shuryanarayana temple, Vangeswar Mahadev temple, Durga temple, Shiv Parivara, Siddheshwara Mahadev temple, Shri Radha Krishna temple, Eleven Rudra temple, and others. Evening Aarti at temples in Amarakantak is another attraction for devotees.

### **Kabir Chabutra**

Kabir Chabutra is a holy place where Sant Kabir spent many years in meditation and achieved great spiritual powers. Sant Kabir and Guru Nanak met here and discussed spiritual matters and introduced a better way of living. It is also said that when Mother Narmada washed Sant Kabir's feet with milk, some drops fell into the kund and even now faint white strands form in the water.

### **Shri Jwaleshwar Mahadev**

The temple of Jwaleshwar Mahadev, situated at the origin of the Juhila River amidst thick forests, is where Lord Shiva established a Shivaling. He also established many other Shivalings over the Maikal Mountain, and this area is known as Maha Rudra Meru and is the abode of Lord Shiva. The only two Maha Rudra Merus are in Varanasi and Amarakantak. The famous black Shiva lingam is known as Jwaleshwar Mahadev. There is a sunset point near this temple.

**Kapil Dhara**, the Kapil Waterfall, is about 100 feet high and is surrounded with dense forests and mountains, which gives it a heavenly feeling. Narmada River is joined by Kapila and Erandi streams that form the Kapil Waterfall. According to scriptures, this is where Sage Kapil lived. He meditated and performed severe austerities here and received divine light. This is where he also wrote his sankhya philosophy. The Kapileshwar Temple is nearby. The surrounding mountains are full of caves where saints have been performing their spiritual practices. On the banks of the Narmada is a famous ashram where pilgrims can worship the footprints of Lord Kapileshwar Shiva and Sage Kapil.

### **Dudh Dhara**

Through a thickly forested area, not far from Kapil Dhara, is a serene and tranquil waterfall. It is relaxing just watching the quiet beauty of the waterfall. The water appears to look like milk as it falls from a height of just ten feet, which is the reason for its name Dudh Dhara.

### **Mai ki Bagiya**

Mai ki Bagiya (the Garden of the Divine Mother) is said to be where Goddess Narmada plucked flowers and played as a child. Bagiya means "orchard" and Mai ki Bagiya is a beautiful natural garden that has a variety of fruit trees, Gulbakavali, roses, and other flowering plants. Mai ki Bagiya is famous for its many varieties of medicinal herbs and plants. There is feeling of complete serenity walking through this orchard's walking trail. Many shrines are situated in this garden as well as a rain-fed kund. It is said to be one of the prettiest places in Amarakantak and is sure to keep all mesmerized.

### **Sonemuda**

Sonemuda, the origin of the Sone River, is a small pond (two square miles) from which water flows into a nallah. The Sone River flows down from the Maikal Mountain in a waterfall that is hundreds of feet long. Tiny granules of gold can be found in this river. The scenic beauty of this place is breathtaking, especially as a sunrise point.

### **Bhrigukamandal**

A highly spiritual place is the Bhrigukamandal, which is where it is said that Sage Bhrigu meditated. There is an intriguing rock formation here that resembles a pitcher and is oddly filled with water. Apparently the pitcher belongs to Sage Bhrigu. This mysterious rock formation is supposed to be full of water all the time.

### **Dhuni Pani**

Dhuni Pani, situated in the thick forests of Amarakantak, is a natural hot spring. The spring is regarded as a philosopher's stone and it is believed that the water of the spring has an elixir like property that can heal people from diseases.