

AULI - *A paradise*



By **SOMEN SENGUPTA**

The bus stand of Joshimath is crowded - thousands are heading for a journey that they will undertake once in a lifetime, and will remember it forever.

This is the place from where the road goes up to 11000 ft above sea level, the place where Lord Vishnu is believed to be present in the form of Badrivishal. Badrinath *dham* as it is popularly known is one of the prime pilgrimage for any devoted Hindu where many years ago Adi Shankaracharya, the great Hindu religion exponent from Kerala did his penance and later set up a temple.

Only a handful of people from Joshimath ignore the attraction of Badrinath and head for another 16 km to a hill top that is situated above 10000 ft plus. Those who choose this path reach Auli & needless to say they reach heaven before Badrinath *dham*.

Once in Auli the presence of God is felt in its silence. The panorama, here at Auli, is armed with 180 degree picture postcard view of Garhwal Himalaya where an army of snow peaks in king size stand before you. Here you do not need to watch the beauty of Himalaya, rather with it's larger than life presence the Himalaya watches you in every moment.

If Auli is a painting on the canvas of nature by God, then one thing should be taken for sure - that God has painted it with best colours chosen from his palette. The colours around Auli has an extraordinary vivacity. The sky here is the best shade of blue and the snow around is the best shade of white. The deep dark oak and pine represents best of green while the bushes full of known and unknown flowers unfold a rainbow on the meadows.

The place entered the tourist map in 1978 when two Italians named Alberto Re & Ezio Laboria first introduced a ski training camp on it's snow covered slope. Ever since Auli became a more popular ski destination than Gulmarg in Kashmir. Because of the non-stop political disturbance in Kashmir from 1986 to 2000, Auli came as the first choice of all snow sports lovers in India and abroad.

You take the name of any snow sports and Auli is game for that. Thanks to the support received from Uttarakhand Government and Indian army, Auli is blessed with best possible amenities.

In winter the landscape of Auli converts into a mini Antarctica except for the presence of penguins. The sky takes its cavern off to expose the deepest blue over the horizon, while on the ground green grass and white snow form a peerless symphony.

In Auli God appears in form of Himalayan snow peaks. Be it Kamet or Trishul or Ghuri parvat the plethora of peaks all around makes Auli the most adorable place in Garhwal Himalaya. Among all the most panoramic and famous is Nanda Devi. At 7816 mt high, this unique shaped peak is now India's 2nd highest peak after Kangchenjungha and before 1975 till the time Sikkim was not accessed to India, Nanda Devi was considered the highest peak of India. Before 1808, it was considered highest peak of the world. However since then lot many new peaks have surpassed Nanda Devi in height.

In its extraordinary shape and size Nanda Devi looks like a mysterious yet colossal female figure standing like a silent sentinel over the snow kingdom of Himalaya. On a clear day when its apex is enveloped with cotton candy white clouds it looks more like a lady standing with her hair waving in air. No wonder this peak is considered one of the most sacred by local Hindus and worshipped as patron Goddess of Garhwal Himalaya. Infact the word Nanda Devi means bliss giving Goddess. First climbed in 1936, Nanda Devi expedition is the most common among mountain lovers.

Next to that stands Kamet (7756 mt) the 2nd highest peak of Garhwal. There are elephant looking peak called Haati parvat and a horse looking peak called Ghuri parvat. Both are splendid and gigantic. The breathtaking view of Mana Parvat (7273 mt) & Dunagiri (7066 mt) are also seen from



Auli.

If you have had enough of the mountains, next is the ski that makes Auli a heaven for tourists. Auli, today is one of the top ice-ski centres of the world and many opine it is one of the finest. No wonder this place was chosen as the venue of South Asian Federation Winter Game in January 2011. With a lofty view of Himalaya on back ground the slope of snow provides an unmatched thrill to skier both for professionals and novices. The slopes run through deep oak forests that cuts velocity to the minimum. All classical movement of ski sports like cross country, slalom and downhill are possible in Auli. The main 3 km ski path is situated at the height of 2519 mt to 3049 mt with a deadly drop elevation of 500 mt. Garhwal Mandal Vikas Nigam (GMVN) has developed an excellent infrastructure here to enjoy all kinds of snow sports including paragliding and snowboarding.

The modern ropeway that connects Auli and Joshimath is another amazing ride. Covering a zigzag distance of 4.15 km over the sea of snow this ropeway is the 2nd longest of its kind in Asia. Supported on 10 steel towers and moving at the height of 3030 mt, the ropeway ride is operated with remote controlled hydraulic and pneumatic braking system. A journey in this ropeway is another lifelong experience.

For trekkers and wildlife enthusiasts, Auli is the gateway to visit Nanda Devi National Park, a UNESCO world heritage site. Extremely enriched with flora and fauna this reserve forest is home of snow leopard, wild cat, himalayan bear and many more. Needless to mention that in the trekking route the panorama is dominated by Mana *parvat*, Dronagiri, Trishul and omnipresent Nanda Devi.

For an adventure sports enthusiast or for somebody who just wants to enjoy nature, Auli has plethora of magic to offer all around the year.

Travel Logistics:

Auli is a small town in the Chamoli district of Uttarakhand. It is just 16 km from Joshimath which is a popular centre well connected from Delhi & Hardwar. From Hardwar Auli is 266 km.

Nearest airport is Jolly Grant - 350 km from Auli.

Best time to visit - January to March for snow sports and for watching Himalaya anytime of the year.

GMVN has an excellent accommodation facility that offers rooms with best view in very moderate rate.

Online booking is possible - www.gmVN.com

Trekking to various places from Auli is subject to permission - pls check more before you plan. GMVN conducts ski training course every year.

In ropeway cable car only 10 kg of belongings is permitted per passenger.

Auli tour can be clubbed with visit to valley of flowers, Hemkund sahib, Tapovan Chenab lake and Badrinath.

(Pics: SOMEN SENGUPTA)