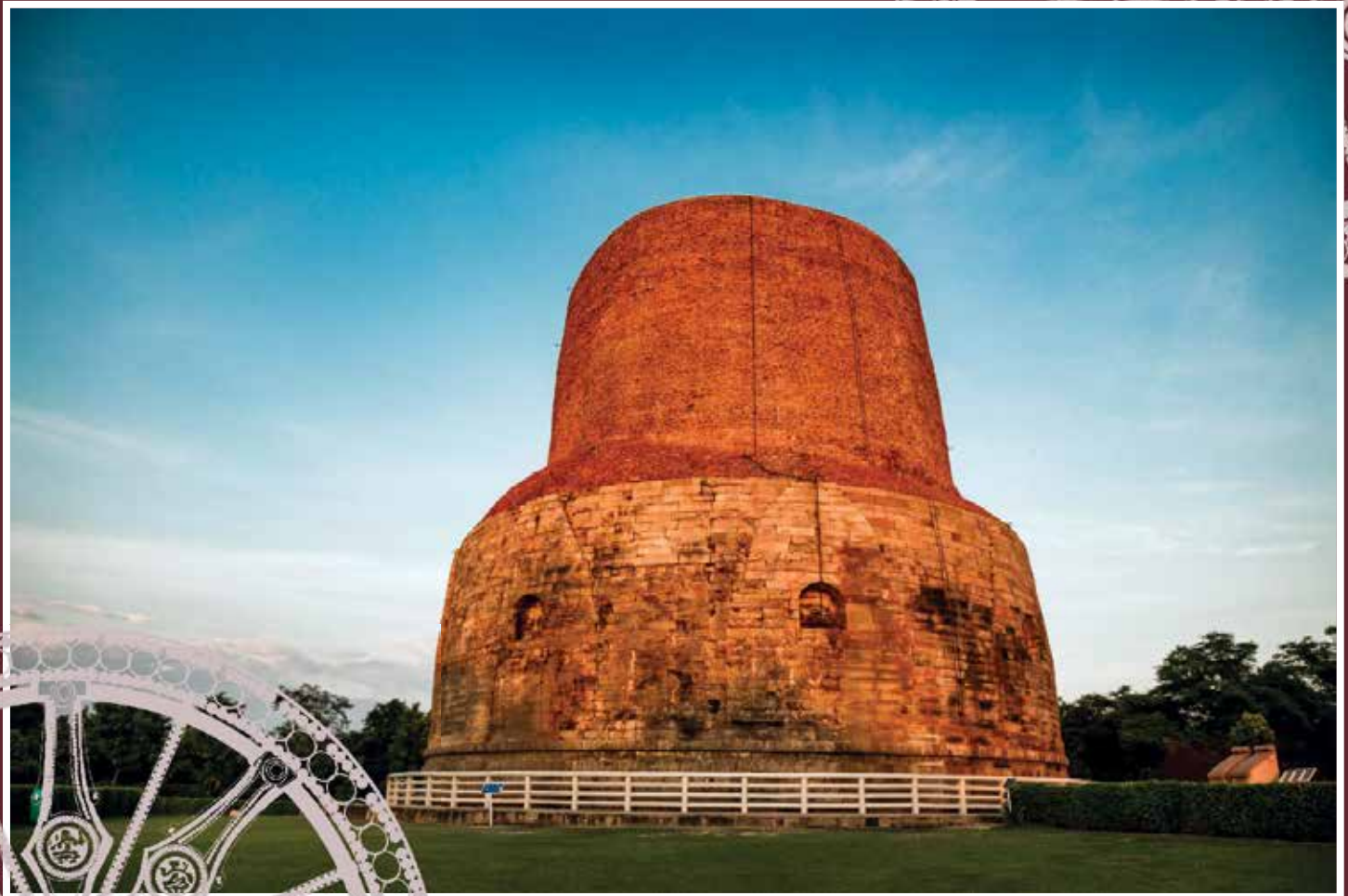
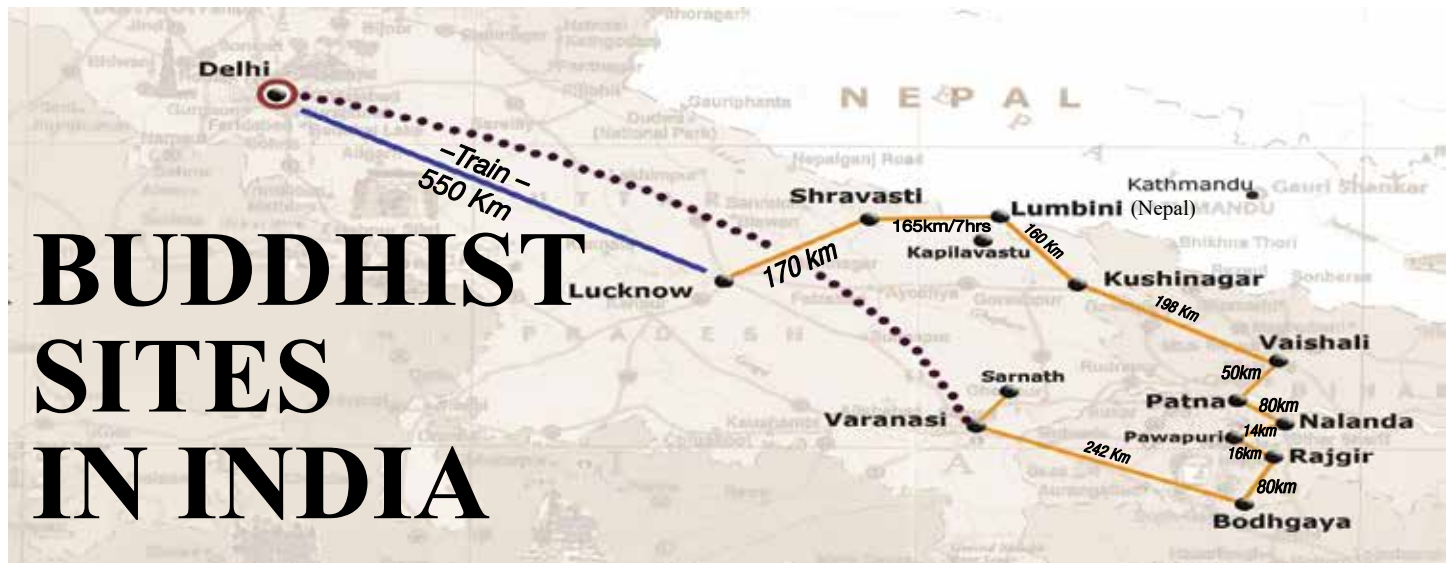


BUDDHIST SITES IN INDIA



Incredible India





Siddhartha Gautama was the noble prince of a Sakya clan, whose father ruled in Kapilavastu. He was born in Lumbini, lived in a palace, married, had a young son, and then, gave it all up, to seek the real meaning of Life. For six years, he wandered as a mendicant, and finally came to the village of Uruvela (now, Bodhgaya), on the banks of the river Nairanjana (now, the Phalgu river). Here, he devoted himself to severe penance and meditation, withstood many trials and tribulations. After 49 days, Siddhartha gained the knowledge he was seeking, and became the Buddha. He became the Enlightened One.

For the next 45 years, Buddha travelled endlessly around the country, preaching his Dharma, and spreading his Sangha. He received support from Emperors like Bimbisara of the Magadha empire, which led to the rise of many viharas (monasteries) in the capital-city of Pataliputra and other cities.

The profusion of viharas eventually led to the current name of 'Bihar', for the state that boasted of the maximum number of Buddhist sites, and its capital-city Pataliputra became the current capital 'Patna.'



Lumbini, the birthplace of Buddha



Since Buddha had no successor, the religion was propagated purely through oral traditions.

Buddhist tenets were spread through sermons, recorded on paper, sung as chants. When they spread outside the country, they were inscribed on Tangka paintings in Tibet, palm leaf manuscripts in Srilanka, prayer-wheels in Mongolia,

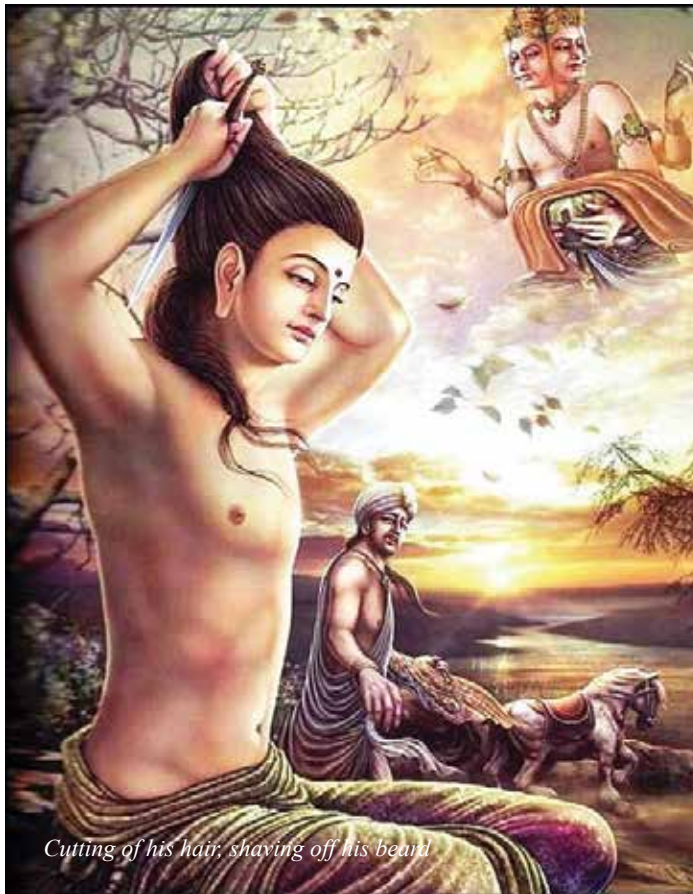
100 years after Buddha's Mahaparinirvana, the first Buddhist Council was held in the town of Rajgir, a city he often visited for his sermons.

The second Buddhist Council was held in the town of Vaishali, another city he frequented.

The third Buddhist Council was held in Pataliputra, during the reign of Emperor Ashoka.

Ashoka was the worthy king, who more than anyone else, resurrected the Buddhist religion, its stupas, viharas, chaityas, all of which had been lost or destroyed after the Buddha's time. Ashoka converted to Buddhism, after the Kalinga war in 262 BC, and ruled totally by the Dharma. He then intensively followed the Buddha's steps, tracing every route, studying every monument and celebrating every discovery by erecting his majestic Ashoka Pillars, not to mention stupas, temples and monasteries. Ashoka is said to have constructed at least 84,000 stupas, in his lifetime. It was a





phenomenal achievement, which hugely helped to resurrect the Buddha's life and ethos.

The Fourth Buddhist Council was held at Kashmir, in the time of Emperor Kanishka (127 AD- 141 AD.) He was another important king who propagated the Buddhist religion in the country.

Later, famed Chinese travellers like Fa Hien in the 4th century, and Hiuen Tsang in the 6th century, travelled extensively to the sacred Buddhist sites and recorded their discoveries, which helped to keep track of the ancient Buddhist Trail.

After that, came a regular spate of excavations , climaxing in many phenomenal discoveries. In the 19th century, the British archaeologist Sir Alexander Cunningham excavated numerous Buddhist monuments. In 1891, the Srilankan scholar Anagarika Dharmapala launched the Mahabodhi Society of India; at Bodhgaya.

Since then, the Archaeological Survey of India has been responsible for an endless range of excavations.

During his last sermon, Buddha himself mentioned the four most important places for the Buddhist 'Dharma Yatra' - Lumbini, where he was born, Bodhgaya, where he gained enlightenment, Sarnath, where he preached his first sermon, and Kushinagar, where he achieved Mahaparinirvana.

These four sacred sites, are as interesting and fascinating to the non-Buddhists as to the Buddhists, because they are expositories, not just of religion; but history, art, architecture, culture, and education. More importantly, they are imbued with a rare and rivetting sense of atmospherics.

So, welcome one and all, to the varied and vibrant Buddhist sites of India.





Mahabodhi Temple, Bodh Gaya

Bodhgaya is the holiest of holy places for the Buddhists, who always make this their first stop, on their Buddhist pilgrimage of India.

Here is where Siddhartha Gautama, did severe penance for 49 days, under the hallowed Bodhi Tree, to gain enlightenment, and become the Perfect One. From the Boddhisatva, he became the Buddha.

“When the great earth is shaken, this place alone is unmoved!” said the Chinese traveller Hiuen Tsang, when he visited this serene and sacred spot.

The Bodhi Tree is the most important attraction in the temple complex. It has been transplanted at least five times, at Bodhgaya. The present one is supposed to have come from a sapling brought by Emperor Ashoka. It is a lush, all-enveloping tree, which conveys a tremendous sense of peace and serenity, that permeates through the whole temple. The arresting atmospherics of Bodhgaya has been universally commented upon, by all those who have visited it, Buddhists and non-Buddhists.

Under the Bodhi tree, is the Vajrasana, a rich, red slab of stone which had been placed by Emperor Ashoka, to denote the exact spot where the Buddha had gained enlightenment. Made of sandstone, the Vajrasana features animal and bird motifs at the side and carved geometrical patterns on the surface.

There are several sacred spots in the temple, which must be all checked out, since the Buddha traversed over all of



Bodhi tree under which Buddha attained enlightenment

them. One feels a tremendous sense of awe, as one walks through this Buddha Path.

There's the *Animesh Lochan Chaitya*, where the Buddha gazed at the Bodhi tree without blinking, the *Ratnachakrama* or Jewelled path, where lotus flowers bloomed under the Buddha's feet, the *Ratnagar Chaitya*, where the rays of five colours emanated from the Buddha's body, and later became the colours connected with the religion (blue, red, yellow, white, orange). There are also the Rajayatna Tree and the Ajapala Nigrodha Tree, where the Buddha meditated



Mucalinda Lake, Bodhgaya

at length. Then, there's the *Muchchalinda pond*, where he meditated during the rains, arid was protected by the hood of the Nagraj serpent .especially when Mara, the demon, created thunder, lightning, storms, to distract him, and also sent his three daughters to tempt him. Infact, a stone-image of a hooded Naga-serpent protecting the Buddha, in the lake, adds an uncanny air of realism to the scenario.

A grandly carved torana or stairway leads from the main entrance, to the *Mahabodhi Temple*, which is the most magnificent building in the complex, and a World Heritage site. Just before entering the temple, make sure that you



Buddha statue in the Mahabodhi Temple

visit a small shrine on the left, which has the Buddhapuda or Buddha's footprints in black stone.

The Mahabodhi Temple was first built by the Emperor Ashoka in the 3rd century BC, and the present temple dates from the 5th century or 6th century AD. It is one of the earliest Buddhist temples built entirely in brick, still standing in India.

It is 170 feet tall, and is noted for its stunning architecture and superb workmanship. There are stone sculpted balustrades, grand turrets, minute inscriptions, intricate images of Buddha.

At the centre of the temple, is a grand and gorgeous gilded statue of Buddha, 8 metres tall, with the right hand touching the earth, in the Bhumisparsha Mudra. The statue is supposed to be atleast 1700 years old. Buddhists believe that their wishes would be fulfilled, if they pray before this statue.

It's important to visit the complex both in the morning and the evening, and experience its diverse and unique

atmospherics. The prayers and meditations start as early as 5 am, and it's a riveting sight to see Buddhist monks from different parts of the world, wearing diverse-coloured robes, chanting, praying, meditating during the day-time. Outside the temple complex, Bodhgaya has a plethora of attractions. One of the most important, is the home of Sujatha, the lady who gave the Buddha his first meal, when he arrived as a famished mendicant. Her house is set among green fields and rural charm, and is a charming experience. There are several beautiful temples and monasteries built by other Buddhist nations.

These buildings are unique because they reflect the architectural style of their respective countries. The statue of Buddha in the Chinese temple is 200 years old and was brought from China. Japan's Nippon temple is shaped like a pagoda, as also the Myanmar temple, which resembles its famous Bagan temple. The Thai temple has golden tiles, and a massive bronze statue of Buddha.

One of the most striking images in Bodhgaya, is a stunning 80 ft statue of Buddha, in the gorgeously peaceful 'Dhyani Mudra' pose.

The Bodhgaya *Archaeological Museum* is a treasure-trove of Buddhist sculptures, from the 1st century to the 11th century. A colossal image of a standing Buddha in the Abhaya Mudra pose, is particularly outstanding.

Many festivals are celebrated in Bodhgaya, the most important being 'Buddha Purnima'. This is the important day when the Buddha was born, gained 'Enlightenment', and went through 'Mahaparinirvana' - miraculously, all on the same date. This is in the month of Vaisakha, in April-May.

The best time to visit Bodhgaya, is between October and March.

Apart from the tour packages, it's worthwhile to consider the unique Buddhist Tourist Circuit Train operated by IRCTC which covers the important Buddhist sites. For more information: www.irctcbuddhisttrain.com

How to reach:

Air : Gaya International airport (10 km)

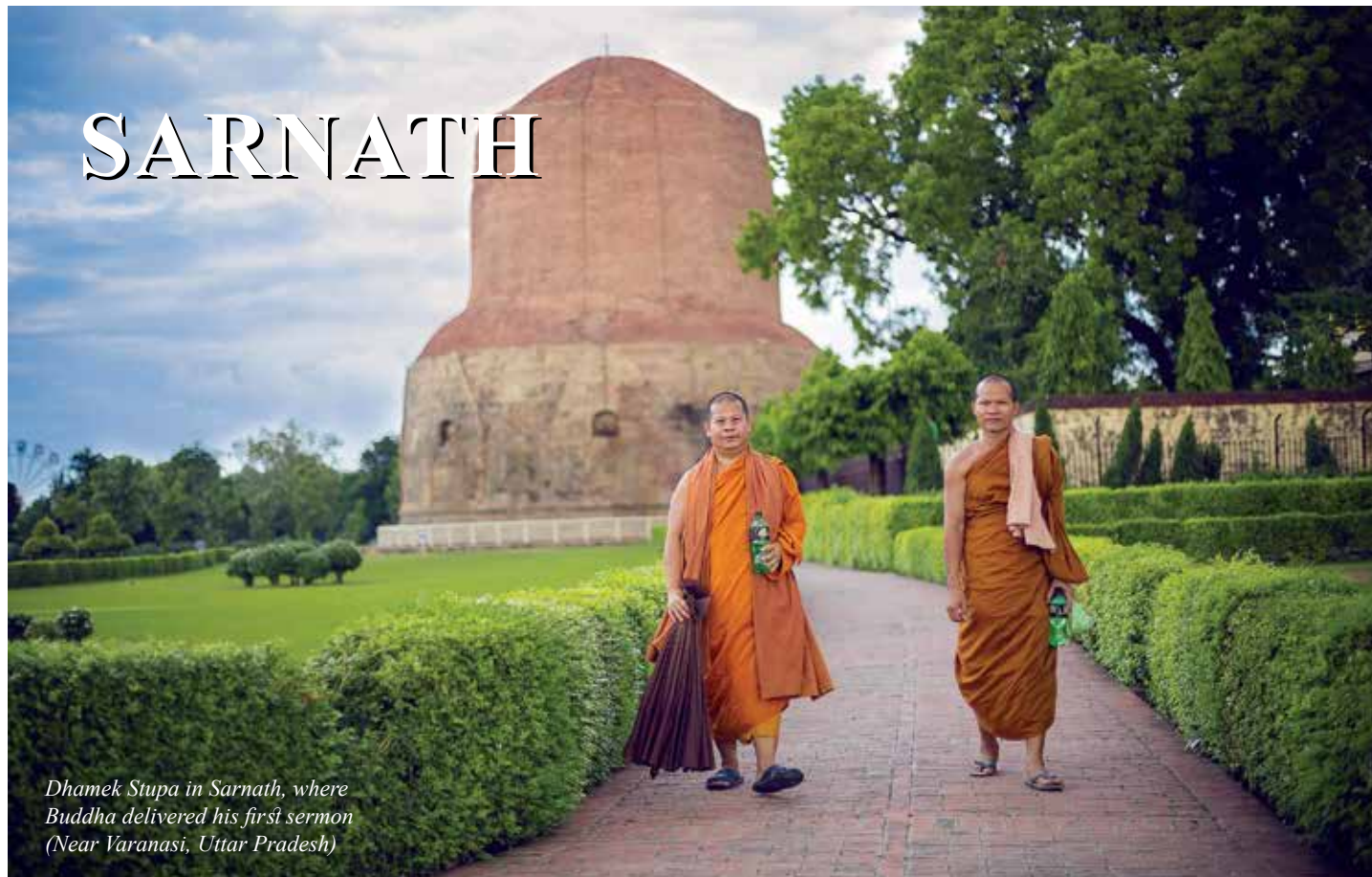
Rail : Gaya (15 km)

Road : It is well connected with other cities of India



Buddha Purnima Celebration, Bodhgaya

SARNATH



Dhamek Stupa in Sarnath, where Buddha delivered his first sermon (Near Varanasi, Uttar Pradesh)

Sarnath is a very important Buddhist spot, because this is where the Buddha gave his first sermon, called the Dharmachakraparavartana or the Wheel of Law, five weeks after his enlightenment. It was here that he propagated the important tenets of his Dharma - the Four Noble Truths, the Eight-Fold path, and the Middle Way. It was here also that he founded his Sangha (Council), with five of his former disciples.

The Triple Gem concept of Buddhism originated here (Buddha, Dharma, Sangha), as also the celebrated mantra 'Buddham Sharanam, Gachami.'

The Buddhist Sangha grew to sixty monks, whom the Buddha sent to different parts of the kingdom to spread his Dharma.

The Buddha also travelled widely, but he often returned to Sarnath, to meditate and preach, especially during the rainy season.

The *Deer Park*, where the Buddha gave his first sermon, is the most attractive part of Sarnath, with its emerald-green lawns, small hill-tops, surrounded by the majestic ruins of many stupas and chaityas.

The Chaukhandi Stupa, on a high mound, is one of the first sights in Sarnath. It has the ruins of a Buddhist monastery of the 5th century AD, supposedly to mark the spot where Buddha first met his five disciples, when he reached Sarnath.

Chaukhandi Stupa, Sarnath



It was Emperor Ashoka, who resurrected this sacred Buddhist town, when he visited it and erected famous Ashoka Pillar. The four lion-heads on top of the pillar, facing four different directions and called the Lion Capital, is on display in the Sarnath Museum.



Lion Capital of Ashoka

Ashoka also constructed the biggest and most striking stupa, the Dhamek Stupa. It's a solid cylindrical tower, 128 feet high and 93 feet in diameter. The borders have delicately carved geometrical and

floral patterns, and the figures of humans and birds, which are all very soothing to the eye. The name Dhamek has been connected to Buddha's 'Dharma'. Most Buddhists who visit Sarnath, circumambulate around this stupa, chanting mantras, as it's supposed to be very auspicious.



Dharmarajika Stupa



Mulagandhakuti Vihara

The town fell into obscurity for many centuries, until the excavations of the 19th century, resurrected it to its present position.

Like Bodhgaya, the town of Sarnath is also studded with monasteries from many Buddhist countries - Thailand, China, Japan, Burma, Korea, Tibet. The Central Institute for Higher Buddhist Studies is also an important building.

The Sound and Light Show depicting the life of the Buddha is also not to be missed when in Sarnath.

How to reach:

Sarnath is 10 kms from Varanasi, which is well-connected by air, rail, road, to the rest of the country.

There is also the *Dharmarajika Stupa*, which is one of the few pre-Ashokan stupas in existence, and which could possibly denote the exact spot where Buddha gave his first sermon.

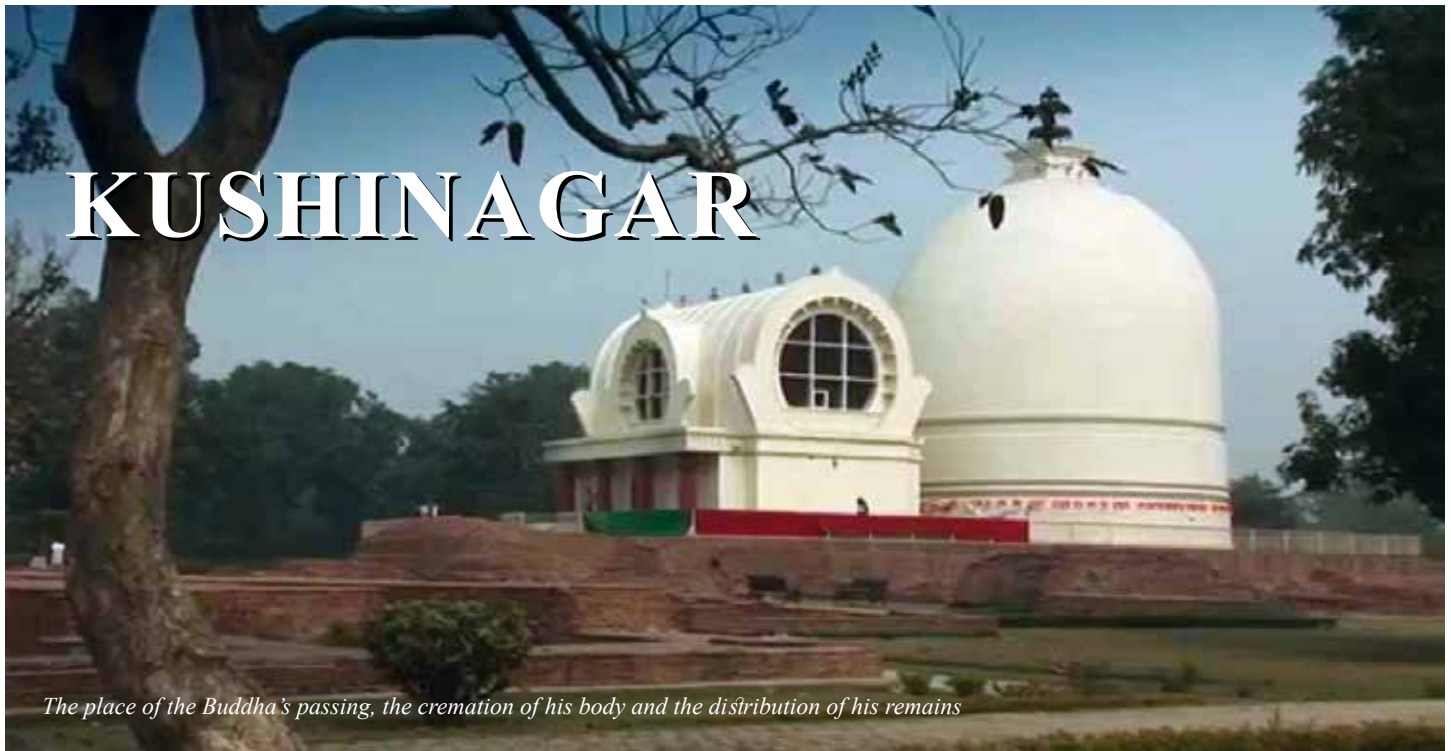
Among the other interesting sights in Sarnath, is the *Mulagandhakuti Vihara*, where the Buddha meditated, whenever he visited Sarnath, during the monsoons.

The *Sarnath Archaeological Museum* is the oldest site-museum of the Archaeological Survey of India. It's designed like a Buddhist vihara or sangham, with the central hall like a shrine and the galleries like monastic cells. The five galleries and two verandahs have a wealth of Buddhist sculptures, inscriptions, manuscripts from the third century B.C. to the twelfth century A.D. The paintings offer ample proof of the great Sarnath School of Art. There is an image of a serene Buddha with half-shut eyes and smiling lips, which is unforgettable.



Aarti at the ghat of Ganga, Varanasi

KUSHINAGAR



The place of the Buddha's passing, the cremation of his body and the distribution of his remains

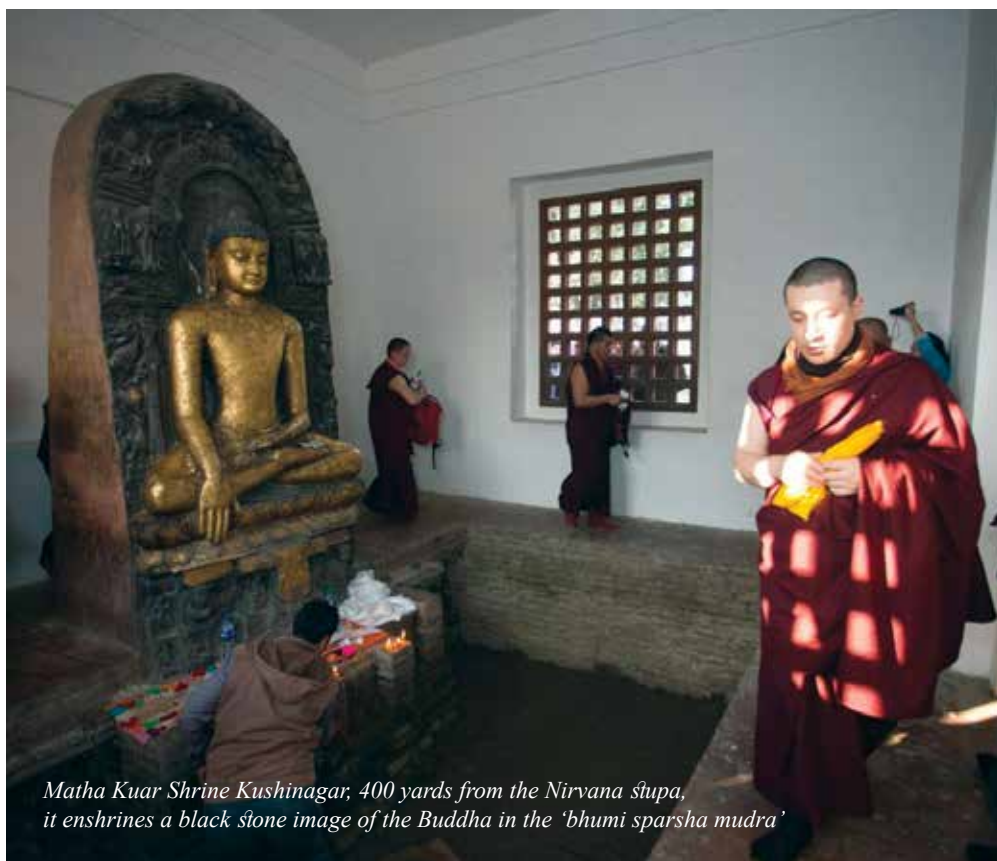
Kushinagar, at Gorakhpur, in the state of Uttar Pradesh, is where the Buddha attained Mahaparinirvana, in 486 BC. His mortal remains were collected in eight urns and distributed to various stupas in the country.

Outside the Mahaparinirvana temple, is the small Mathakuar shrine, with a riveting black stone image of Buddha in the Bhumi Sparsha pose.

The *Mahaparinirvana Temple* is the most important monument here. It has a stunning, 6-metre long image of the Buddha, in reclining posture.



Reclining Buddha gold statue at the Mahaparinirvana Temple in Kusinara (Kushinagar or Kusunagar)



Matha Kuar Shrine Kushinagar, 400 yards from the Nirvana Stupa, it enshrines a black stone image of the Buddha in the 'bhumi sparsha mudra'

The *Ramabhar Stupa* is 49 feet long, and is now, a large brick mound. This is where the Buddha was cremated.

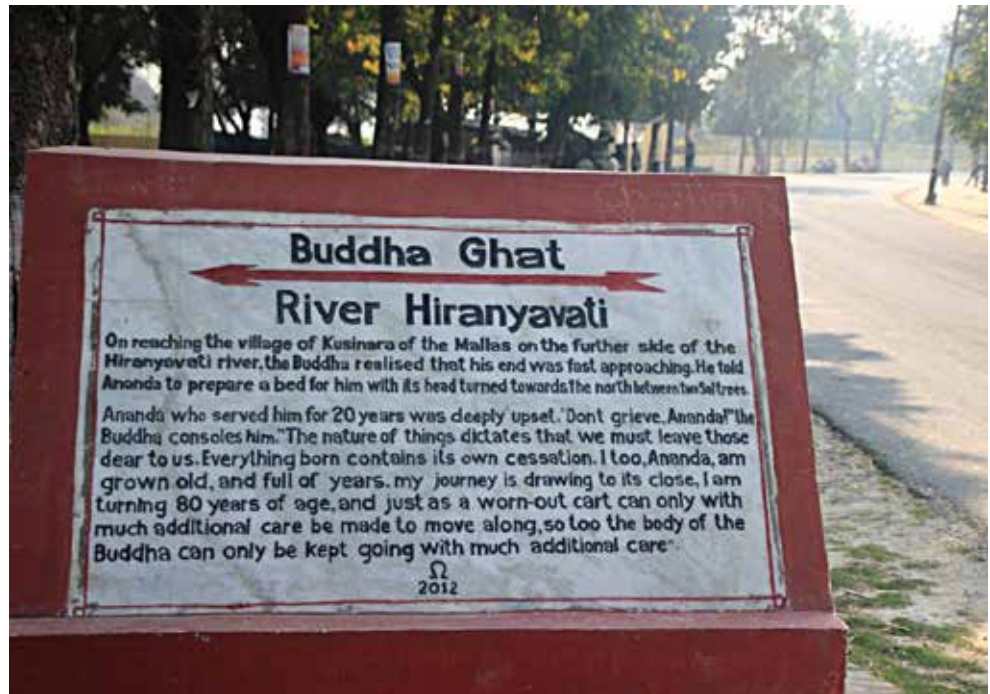
The Chinese travellers Fa Hien and Hiuen Tsang visited Kushinagar during different centuries. It was because of their records that the extensive excavations took place, many centuries later.

One also sees the Hiranyavati river, and the beautiful ghats, all of which evoke an air of peace and tranquility. Like Bodhagaya, Kushinagar has tremendous tranquility and offers plenty of scope for prayer and meditation. The regular chantings, from early morning to night, add to the incredibly soothing spirit of the last abode of the Buddha.



Ramabhar Stupa, site of cremation of lord Buddha

Like in the other sacred Buddhist places, Kushinagar has beautiful monasteries from other Buddhist countries.



How to reach:

Air : Kushinagar is well connected with Air.

Rail : The nearest railway stations are Deoria, (25km) and Gorakhpur.

Road : Kushinagar is well connected with other cities of India.



Meditation Park (Kushinagar)

RAJGIR



Vulture Peak – said to resemble the head of a vulture

The picturesque town of Rajgir, with its hills, gardens, caves, is 80 kms from Bodhgaya, and 100 kms from Bihar's capital city of Patna.

Formerly known as Rajagaha, Rajgir was the first capital of Magadha, ruled by King Bimbisara who was one of the most prominent supporters of the Buddha. Buddha used this city as his monsoon retreat, and preached his Dharma.

In Rajgir, the Buddha preached his sermons from the striking - looking *Gridhakuta Hill or Vulture Peak*, which had a unique rock formation, like a vulture's beak.

When King Bimbisara was imprisoned by his son Ajatashatru, he watched the Buddha on the hill, from his prison-window, and tried to be at peace. The "Bimbisara Jail" has been excavated in Rajgir, as also the *Ajatashatru Fort*, where his son Ajatashatru repented, after killing his

father, converted to a Buddhist, and placed a statue of Buddha in the 'Parinirvana' pose.

The Venuvana Vihara or the Monastery of the Bamboo Grove, was Bimbisara's first offering to the Buddha.



The Cyclopean walls of Rajgir



World Peace Pagoda (Viswa Shanti Stupa), Rajgir

Rajgir also boasts of hot sulphur springs, Satadhara, which supposedly have healing powers and which are now part of the Hindu Lakshminarayana Temple complex.

Other interesting sites in Rajgir, include an aerial ropeway which takes visitors up the hill to the gorgeous Vishwa Shanti Stupa built by the Japanese.

There are also the grand *Pippala Caves and the seven Sataparni Caves*, where the first Buddhist Council was said to have been held, after the Buddha's Mahaparinirvana.



Bamboo Grove (Venuvana)



Gridhakuta Hill - Rajgir

How to reach:

Air : The nearest airport is
Patna (100 kms).

Rail : Rajgir railway station.

Road : Patna (100 kms),
Bodhgaya (80 kms),
Nalanda (14 kms)

SRAVASTI



Sravasti is 150 kms from Lucknow, the capital-city of neighbouring Uttar Pradesh, and was the capital of the ancient kingdom of Kosala, and the biggest town in the Gangetic plains during the Buddha's time.

At Sravasti, the Buddha stayed in the Jetvana Vihara of the lush Jetvana Gardens, which attract many Buddhist pilgrims today, for its beauty and peace. Here again, the supreme serenity inspires travellers to rest and relax, pray and meditate.

The Buddha stayed in *Anandakuti* and *Gandhakuti*, whose ruins still remain, and are sacred to the Buddhist pilgrims.



Vihara Jetavana, India



*Gandhakuti or Buddha's hut in Jetavana monastery,
Shravasti, Uttar Pradesh, India*



Ananda Bodhi tree

The city is studded with many antique stupas, monasteries, and temples. The lush *Anand Bodhi tree*, planted by Buddha's favourite disciple, Anand, is very attractive.

The tree exudes almost as much peace and serenity as the Ananda Bodhi Tree, and is a favourite spot for Buddhist pilgrims to pray and meditate.

There is also the *Angulimala Stupa*, built in memory of the killer- dacoit Angulimala, notorious for wearing a necklace of human fingers around his neck. When he met the Buddha, the latter's serene words changed him, and he became an ardent disciple.

Like the other Buddhist sites, Sravasti has a range of beautiful monasteries built by other Buddhist countries.



Miracle of Sravasti, Lahore Museum

How to reach:

Air : Nearest airport is at Lucknow (151 kms).

Rail : Neareat railhead is Balrampur (19 kms).



Angulimala's Stupa, Shravasti

VAISHALI



Ananda Stupa and Ashokan Pillar at Vaishali

The city is 60 kms away from Patna, the capital-city of Bihar, and is lushly located on the northern banks of the Ganges river.

Five years after his enlightenment at Bodhgaya, the Buddha came to Vaishali, famed as one of the *first 'republican' states in the world*.

The *Kutagarshala Vihar* or 'Buddha Stupa 2' was built by the Lichchavis for the Buddha, and still looks impressive, with a large monastery, extensive courtyard and open verandah.

It was in Vaishali, that women were ordained into the Sangha for the first time. These included the Buddha's foster mother Mahaprajapati Gautami, who was one of 500 Sakyan women who came all the way from Kapilavastu to Vaishali, in order to join the Order. The Buddha was hesitant at first, but finally, admitted the women as bhikshunis or nuns.

This town is also noted for the famous courtesan, Amrapali, who joined the Sangha. The neighbouring village of Amvara is said to be the site of Amrapali's mango grove that she donated to the Buddha.

Emperor Ashoka erected his Asoka Pillar here, and a large brick stupa.

Among the important sights here, is the *Relic Stupa* or 'Stupa 1', where the Lichchavis reverentially encased one of the eight portions of Buddha's relics, after his Mahaparinirvana. This is now preserved in the Patna Museum.

All these were excavated in the 19th century by the British archaeologist Sir Alexander Cunningham.

Many of these finds are in the Site Museum which has an excellent collection of artefacts from the third to the sixth century.

Also worth seeing, are the Japanese Temple and the Vishwa Shanti Stupa (*World Peace Pagoda*), both built by the Japanese.

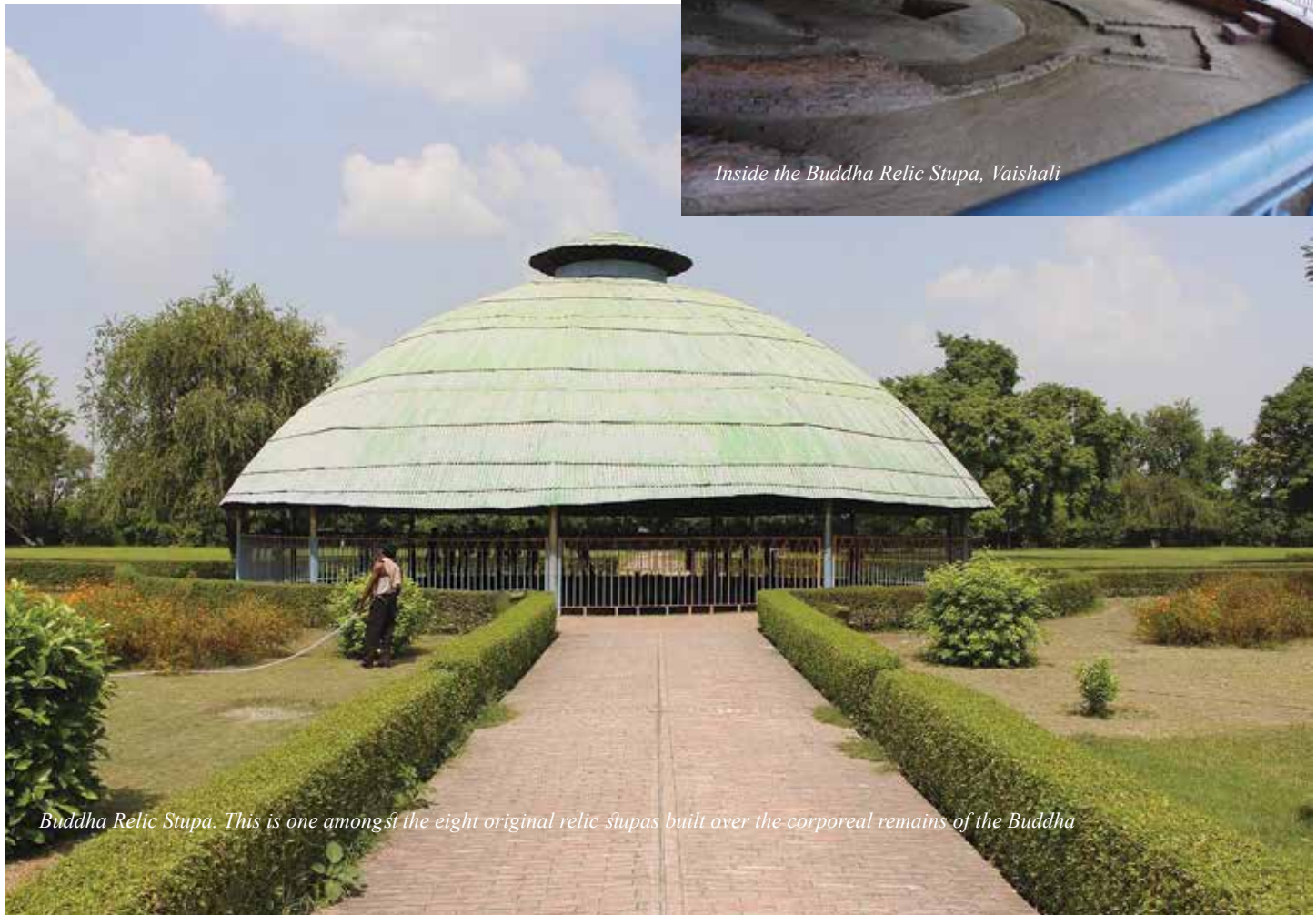
A hundred years after Buddha's Parinirvana, Vaishali was chosen as the venue for the Second Buddhist Council.

How to reach:

Air : Patna is 50km away from Vaishali.

Rail : The nearest railhead is Hajipur, which is 25km away.

Road : It is well connected with other cities of India.



NALANDA



Ruins of Nalanda University, it was an ancient center of learning in India

The world-renowned university-town was the first residential educational institution in the world, and had as many as 9 million books, 10,000 students and 2000 teachers.

It was a supreme centre of learning, between the 5th and the 12th century. Now a World Heritage Site, Nalanda is spread over an area of 14 hectares, and the excavations reveal the extensive remains of 11 monasteries and 5 temples, with verandahs, quadrangular courts, a shrine to house a large image of Buddha, and niches in the walls studded with small, exquisite Buddha images.

The Chinese traveller Hiuen Tsang and his disciple Hwui Li, both studied at this great institution.

The Nalanda University was noted for its vibrant and modernistic system of education, including the art of debate and public speaking. Many reputed Indian scholars emanated from this University, like Nagarjuna, Aryabhata.



Aerial view – Ruins of Nalanda University



Hieun Tsang Memorial Hall, Nalanda

Both Buddha and the Jain Guru Mahavira visited the Nalanda Village. One of Buddha's most learned disciples, Sariputra, who had an important place in the Sangha, attained Nirvana here.

The *Sariputra Stupa* was built by Empereor Ashoka, in memory of Satiputra. It's easily the most impressive structure, with its grand shrine chamber.

The university was destroyed by the Khalji Muslim invaders in the 12 century, and was resurrected after numerous

excavations established in Nalanda , which does important research on Pali and Buddhist studies.

The Archaeological Survey of India also opened a *Museum*, right across the main entrance of the Varsity. It has some exquisite bronzes of the 9th and 10th centuries, as well as many arresting artefacts from the excavations.

As in the other Buddhist sites, there are temples from other Buddhist countries in Nalanda.

How to reach:

Air : The nearest airport is Patna which is 80 km away.

Rail : The nearest railway stations are Rajgir (14 km) and Bhakhtiyarpur (30km).

Road : It is well connected with other city of India.



Stucco carvings on an excavated tower in Nalanda

SANCHI



Great Stupa of Sanchi

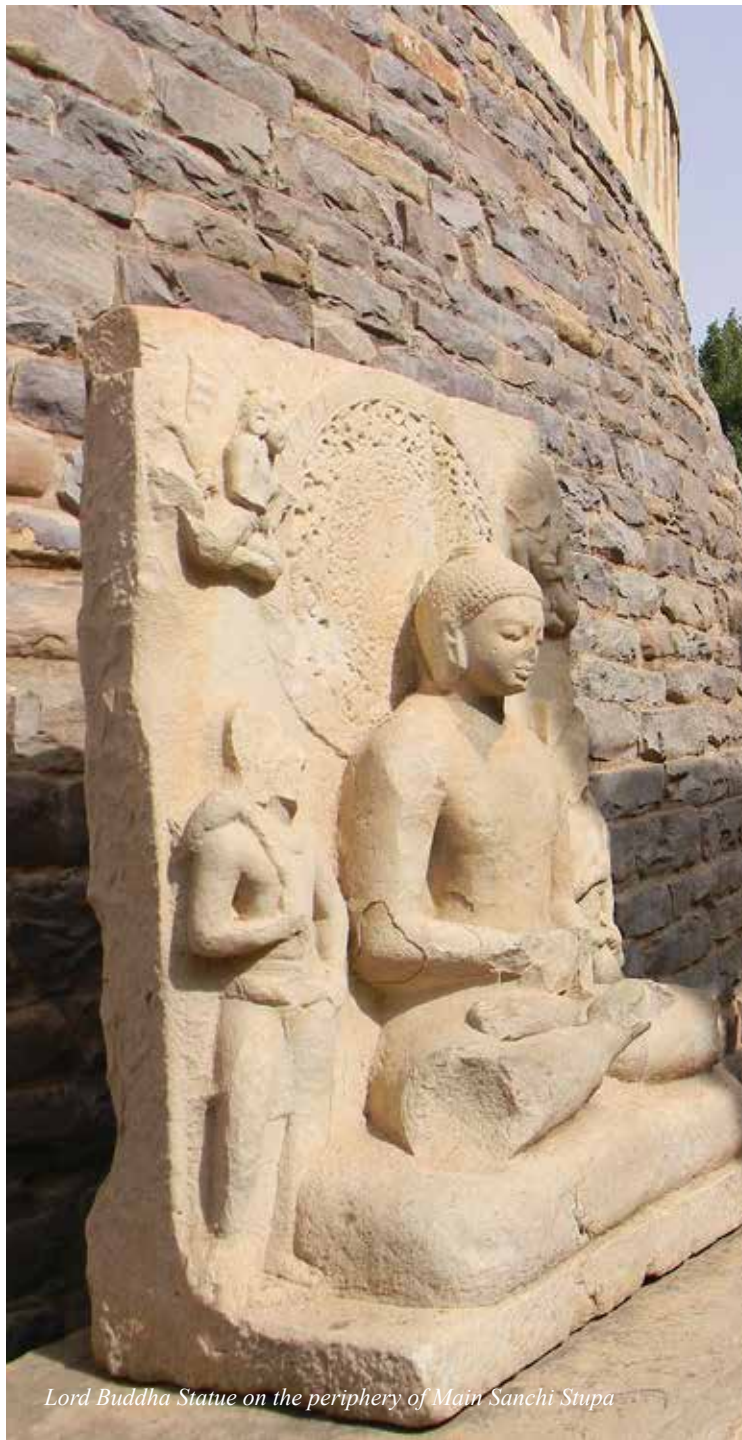
Sanchi, located in the state of Madhya Pradesh, is a World Heritage site and is best-known for a spectacular stupa, which is considered the most complete example of the early Buddhist architecture. The vast brick stupa dates from the 3rd century BC, but its carved gates and railings were probably executed two centuries later. Buddha is not represented in figures, but in

symbols, as was the tradition in the early period of Buddhism. Infact, the four magnificent Toranas (Gateways) of the stupa are intricately carved with stories of the Buddha's life, through a series of symbols - the lotus represents his birth, the tree, his enlightenment, the wheel, his sermon, the stupa, his nirvana. The foot prints everywhere, denote his all-pervasive presence.



This scene is depicted in one of the transversal portions of the southern gateway of Stupa No 1 at Sanchi. Ashoka is shown on the right in his

charriot and his army, the stupa with the relics is in the center, and the Naga kings with their serpent hoods at the extreme left under the trees.



Lord Buddha Statue on the periphery of Main Sanchi Stupa



Yakshi bracket figure, east torana of the Great Stupa, Sanchi



*Lakshmi, bas relief of Gaja Lakshmi
at Sanchi Stupa, 3rd century BCE*

Numerous 'Jataka' tales centering around Buddha's earlier incarnations are engraved here. The figure of a yakshi (demon) reaching out for a branch, is a very popular image. Emperor Ashoka erected a pillar here with his signature lion-capital. A second stupa has the relics of two famous disciples of Buddha - Sariputra and Mahamogalana. The Sanchi Museum is worth a visit too.

How to reach:

The nearest railway station and airport is Bhopal which is approx. 50 Km away from Sanchi. It is well connected with good roads with other cities of India via Vidisha (10 Km), Bhopal (50Km) and Indore (230Km).



Carved details on Toran Dwar, Sanchi, Madhya Pradesh, India

ODISHA



Scattered artifacts in the Diamond Triangle of Odisha

The capital city of Odisha, Bhubaneswar, is where Emperor Ashoka fought the famous Kalinga war, after which he converted to Buddhism in 262 BC. He erected his first Ashokan Edict at the spot where the war was fought. It's a picturesque spot in Dhauli, 8 kms from Bhubaneswar, with the pretty Dhaulagiri hills all around and the River Daya flowing in front. It's the earliest example of rock - sculpture in India, and portrays an elephant coming out of a monolith of stone, almost like a baby coming out of a womb.

An amazing range of Buddhist artefacts have been unearthed at a trio of places, 100 kms from Bhubaneswar - Lalitgiri, Ratnagiri and Udayagiri. They have been named the Buddhist Triangle or the Diamond Triangle.

Ratnagiri is the oldest Buddhist site of the 1st century BC. The famed Chinese traveller Huiyen Tsang wrote that he saw nearly 100 monasteries here.

Udayagiri is located in a unique U-shaped valley surrounded by hills. It reveals the remains of an extensive monastery complex, studded with amazing Buddha images.

Lalitgiri is also located among picturesque hills, with the pretty Kolu river flowing in front.



Rock-cut Elephant at Dhauli



Udayagiri Caves

The 'Buddhist Triangle' can be done on a day tour, by car, from Bhubaneswar.

Last but not the least, comes the Site Museum, which boast of spectacular Buddha statues in many poses - Avalokeshwara, Manjusri, Tara - as well as terracotta objects, copper plaques, rich bronzes.

For those interested in more sights, the Hindu temples of Konarak and Puri, are world-famous. Intact Konarak has a grand open-air Dance-Festival in December, on the temple grounds which attracts tourists from around the world.

Bhubaneswar, the capital city has an airport and railway station. It is well connected with other cities of India. Distance from Bhubaneswar to : Ratnagiri - 96 km, Udaygiri- 85 km, Lalitgiri - 89 km, Konark - 72 km, Puri - 70 km.

SANKISA (Uttar Pradesh)

Sankisa is situated in the state of Uttar Pradesh, a pretty spot on the banks of the Kali river, 47 Kms from Farrukhabad.

This is the place where the Buddha descended along with the gods, Indra and Brahma, after giving a discourse to his mother Maya Devi in heaven. It became well-known, after *Emperor Ashoka erected a pillar with an elephant capital*, here.

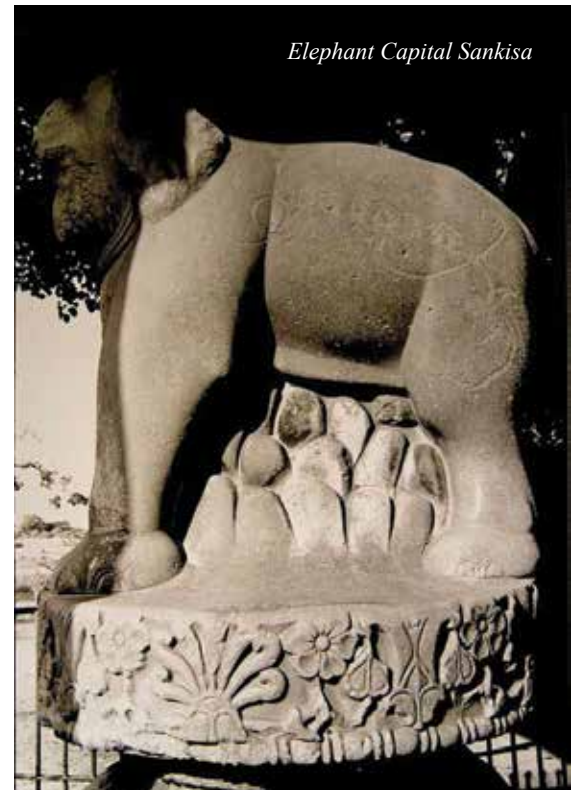
The town is also known for a temple dedicated to Bisra Devi, and a huge Shiva Linga.

How to reach:

Air : Agra(207kms), Lucknow 245km.

Rail : Fatehgarh (40-km).

Road : Kanpur (175km), Agra (200kms).



Elephant Capital Sankisa

Buddhist Sites in Andhra Pradesh

NAGARJUNAKONDA

Nagajunakonda ('konda' means 'hill') is a picturesque hill in the middle of a lake, which is studded with Buddhist artefacts. It's 150 kms from the capital city of Hyderabad, in the state of Andhra Pradesh, and there is a regular ferry-service to this spot, from Nagarjunakonda.

The name came from a great Buddhist scholar Nagarjuna, who lived during the 2nd century. Many monasteries and chaityas have been found here, as also statues, coins, friezes, which are preserved in a vibrant Museum.

How to reach:

It is 150 km from Hyderabad which has international airport.



Nagarjunakonda Maha Stupa

AMRAVATI

Amravati, which is 64 kms from the town of Vijaywada, is best-known for a grand stupa erected by one of Emperor Asoka's emissaries, who came here to spread the Dharma. There are also many caves with a large array of Buddhist images.

A Site Museum here contains many excavated objects, including railings, medallions, friezes.

How to reach:

The nearest airport and railway station is Vijaywada (40 Km).



Amaravati, Vijaywada, Andhra Pradesh

Buddhist Sites in Himachal Pradesh

DHARAMSHALA



Namgyal Monastery

This is the residence of His Holiness the 14th Dalai Lama. It is located in the state of Himachal Pradesh, among the Dhauladhara range of the Himalayas, and is a colourful scenario, with shops selling Tibetan artefacts, cafes selling momos and butter tea, maroon-robed monks moving in the monasteries.

The Dalai Lama's temple is the *Namgyal Monastery*, which has giant stucco statues of the Buddha, Avalokiteshvara, Padmasambhava. It's a serene, peaceful place which induces visitors to pray, meditate, rotate the prayer-wheels.

There's also the beautiful monastery of the Nechung Oracle, offering many prayers and services. The Centre

for Tibetan Medicines, the Norbulingka Institute with its cultural programs, are other arresting spots.

Dharamshala attracts many pilgrims and tourists from around the world.

How to reach:

Nearest airport - Kangra airport (Gaggal), 14km

The nearest railway station is at Pathankot (90 km)

Buddhist Sites in Himachal Pradesh

TABO

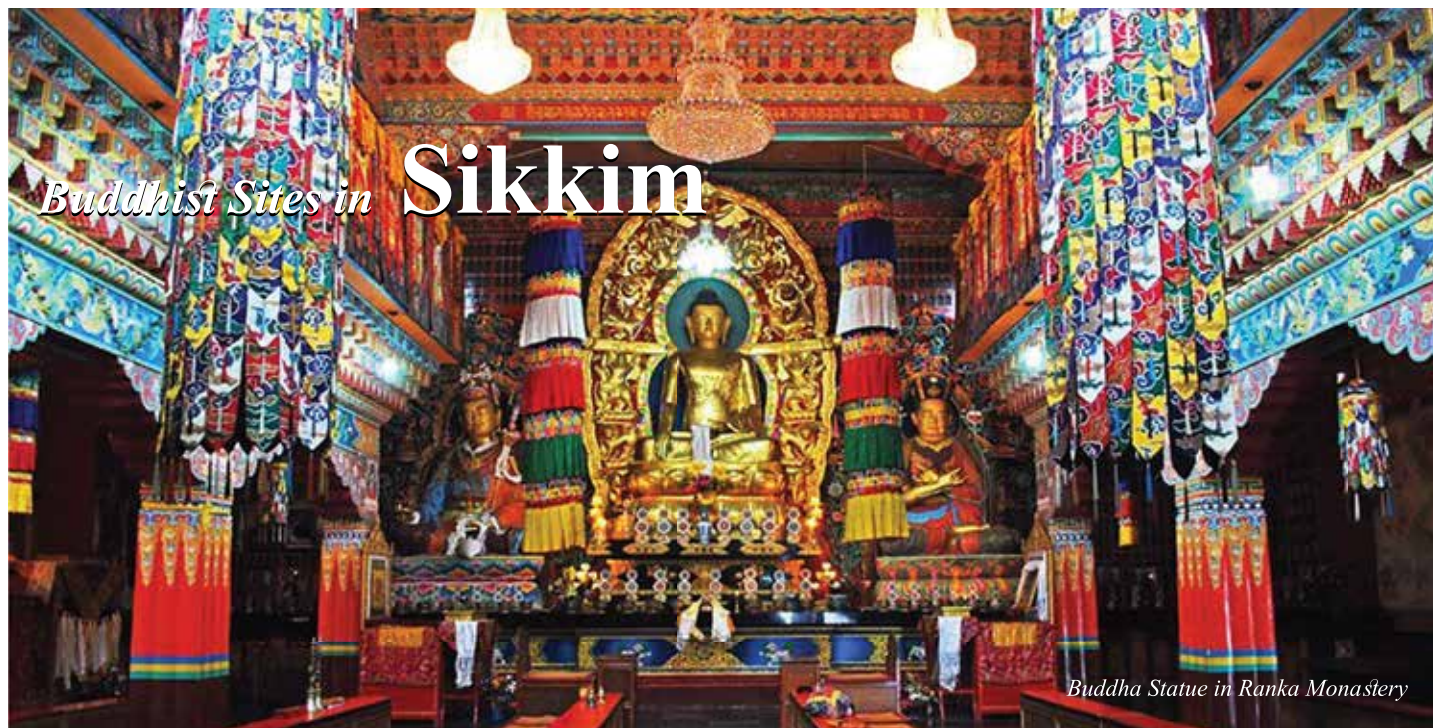


Key Monastery, Spiti Valley

The Tabo 'Gompa' or Monastery is situated in Himachal Pradesh, in the famed Spiti valley of the Himalayas, at a height of 3050 metres. It was founded by the great scholar Rinchen Zangpo as an institute for advanced learning, and has a rare collection of manuscripts, thangkas, and clay statues of Buddha painted in the Kashmiri style. There are monks' chambers and caves with beautiful paintings and inscriptions on the walls.

How to reach:

By bus from Kaza, the headquarters of Spiti district (40 km approx, 2 hours). Kaza can also be reached by road from Shimla, Manali which are popular hill station and are connected by air and rail with the rest of the country.



Buddhist Sites in **Sikkim**

Buddha Statue in Ranka Monastery

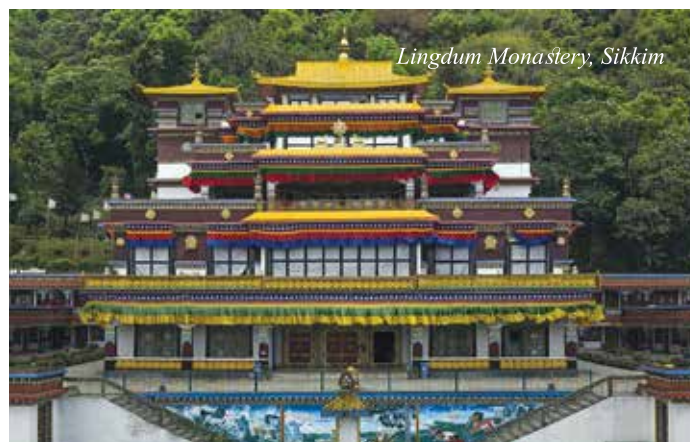
Sikkim is located in North-East India. Its lush mountains, cool weather, and attractive 'gompa' (monasteries) have made it very popular with Buddhist travellers.

The Rumtek Monastery is the most striking, which can be seen from the capital city of Gangtok, 24 kms. away. It has many unique art objects, and is the seat of His Holiness the XVI th Gyawla Karmapa, Head of the Karma Kagyu order of Tibetan Buddhism.

There is also the Enchey Monastery ,blessed by the great Tantric teacher Lama Druptab Karpa.

The Pemagyantse Monastery is 140 kms from Gangtok, and is a day-trip that's very popular with tourists, because the monastery commands a spectacular view of the Himalayas. Legend has it that the great Tantric saint Padmasambhava or Guru Rinpoche, while looking for a place to meditate, shot an arrow in the air, and the arrow landed on this spot. So, it's a sacred spot for Buddhists, apart from being a stunningly beautiful one. Above the monastery, is an intricate wooden structure, depicting Guru Rinpoche's home.

Sikkim's famous Cham Festival, where monks dance wearing masks, and burn an effigy depicting evil, is held in February.

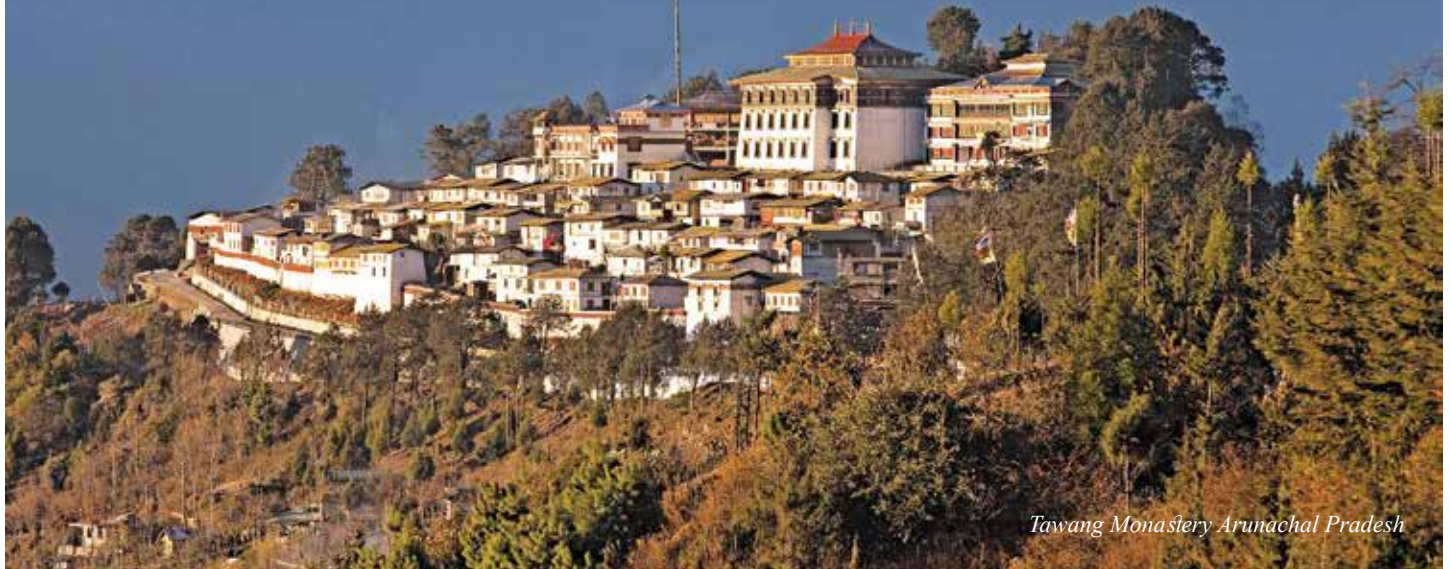


Lingdum Monastery, Sikkim

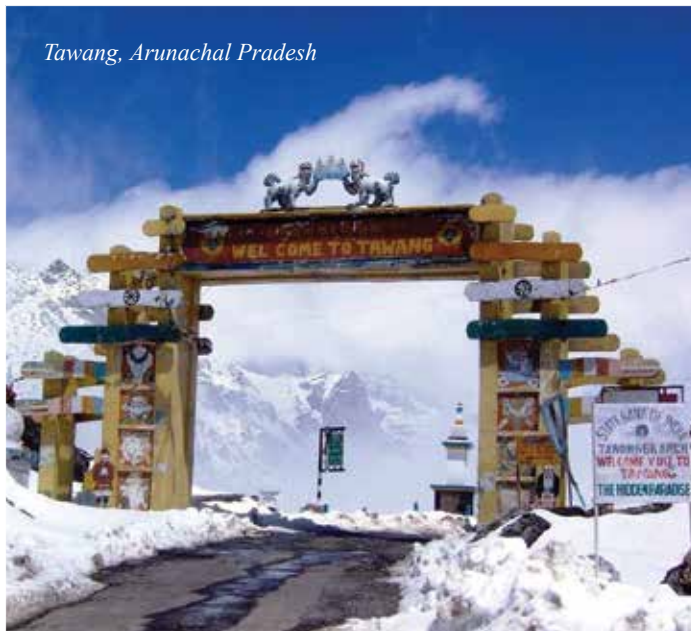
How to reach:

The nearest airport is Pakyong (35km) and other convenient airport is Bagdogra (124 Km).

Buddhist Sites in **Arunachal Pradesh**



Tawang Monastery Arunachal Pradesh



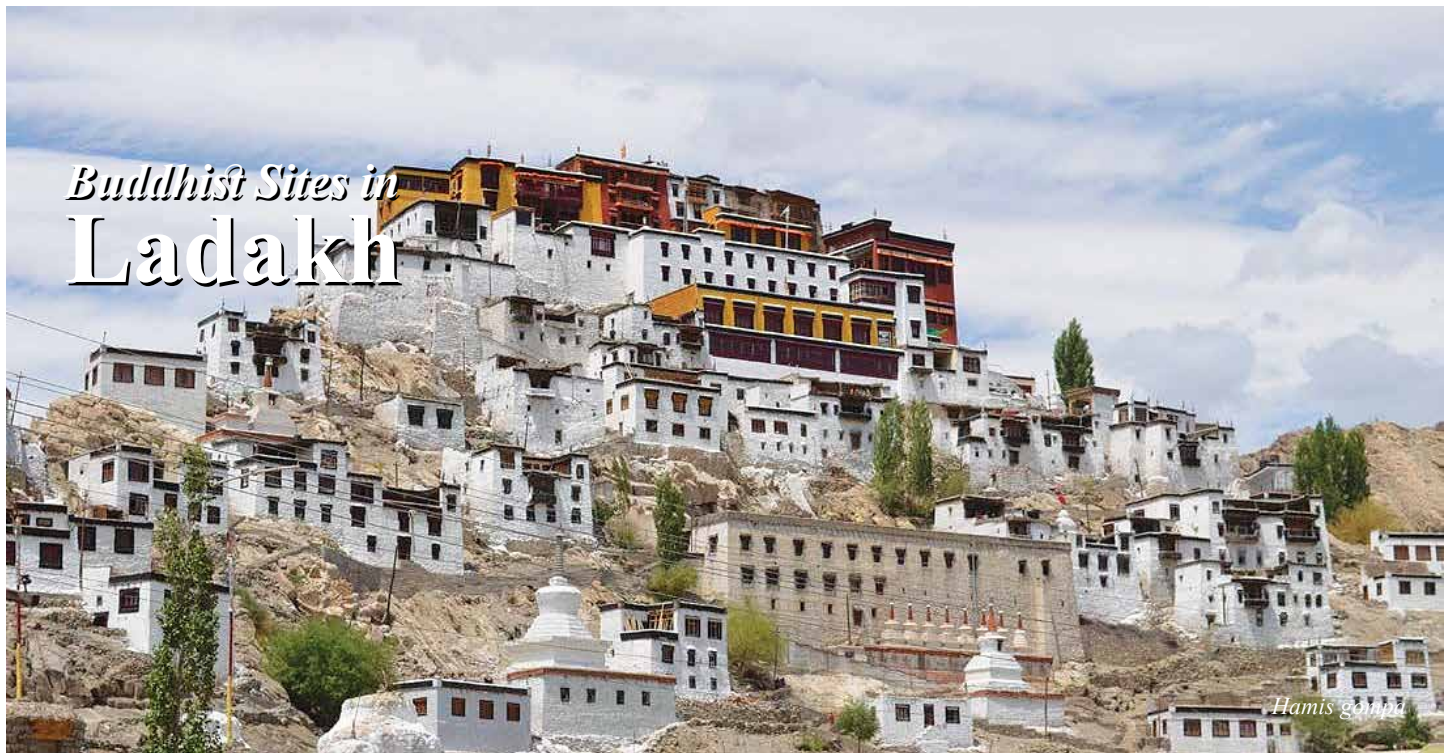
Tawang, Arunachal Pradesh

Tawang Monastery, located at a height of 3400 metres in the north eastern state of Arunachal Pradesh, is one of the largest monasteries in India. It has a community of Lamas who perform daily prayers and chantings which are serene and soothing. Tourists who visit this picturesque part of India make it a point to visit this isolated and inspiring monastery.

How to reach:

The closest airport is Tezpur, in Assam, 330 kms away, from where one can drive to Arunachal Pradesh.

Helicopter Service is also available from Guwahati airport 510km.



Buddhist Sites in **Ladakh**

Hamis gompa

Leh is the capital of Ladakh, which has one of the highest altitudes in the country.

It's a trekker's and nature-lovers paradise, with the snow-capped Himalayas all around. For the Buddhist lover, there are the gompas, placed stunningly in the precipices of the mountains. The largest and best-known is the 17 century Hemis Gompa, which also is the most accessible. It has an excellent library and the largest thangka painting in the world. Tourists flock here, during the annual Hemis Festival in June-July.

The Shey Gompa and Spituk Gompa are also accessible, as also the Stok Gompa and Stok Palace Museum, which have a rare collection of paintings and tankhas.

The Aichi Monastery is called the 'Jewel' of the Ladakh Buddhist sites, because of its exquisite range of murals of the 11th and 12th centuries. It was founded by the famed Rinchen Zampoandis 70 kms from Leh, which is well worth the drive .

The best time to visit Leh, is between mid-May and September.



Hamis gompa

How to reach:

Leh is an Airport. Leh is well connected with Srinagar & Manali. Lamayuru is on the Leh-Srinagar highway and is a very important Monastery.

Buddhist Sites in Maharashtra

AJANTA CAVES



These outstanding caves, which are a World Heritage Site, are located near Aurangabad in Maharashtra.

The 26 Caves, hewn out a horse-shaped cliff of the picturesque hill, portray the highest forms of Buddhist religious art, including sculpture, iconography, architecture, epigraphy, painting. There are rock-cut monuments covering a phenomenal 900 year-period, from the 2nd century BC. There are a large range of viharas and chaityas, which seem to have been used both for prayer and education. We see dormitory-like cells hewn within the walls of the caves, as also elaborately carved balustrades and pillars.



Ajanta Caves, Maharashtra

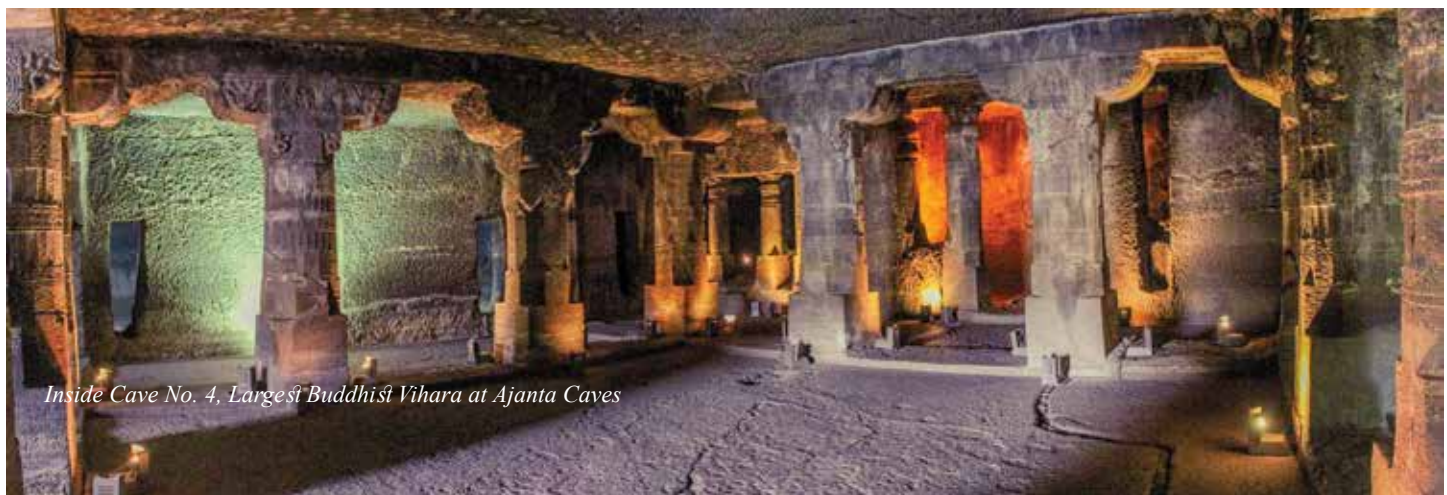
Cave No 1 is one of the most spectacular, with its gorgeous images of the Bodhisattvas of Padmapani and Vajrapani flanking the ante chamber doorway. The walls on the side depict the Buddha's temptation by Mara, and also his miracle at Sravasti. Cave 16 is striking, with many Jataka tales from the Buddha's life, Cave 17 has the greatest number of wall-paintings, which includes a row of eight Buddhas.

Cave 19 is a perfectly executed rock-cut chaitya. The best paintings are in Cave 1, 2, 16, 17, 19, and the best sculptures are in Caves 4, 17, 19, 26.

How to reach:

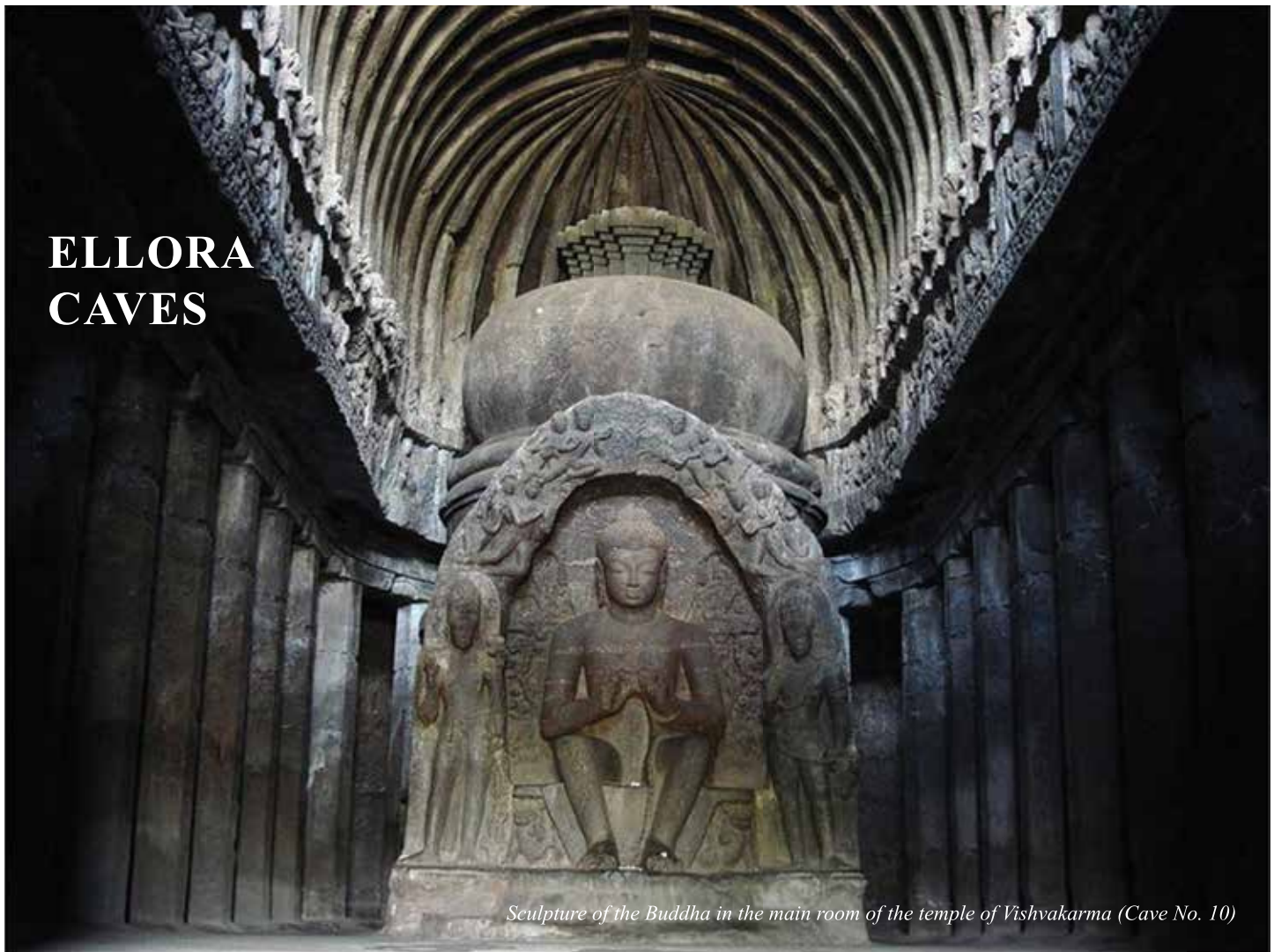
Air : Nearest Airport - Aurangabad (102km).

Rail : Jalgaon (60kms).



Inside Cave No. 4, Largest Buddhist Vihara at Ajanta Caves

ELLORA CAVES



Sculpture of the Buddha in the main room of the temple of Vishvakarma (Cave No. 10)

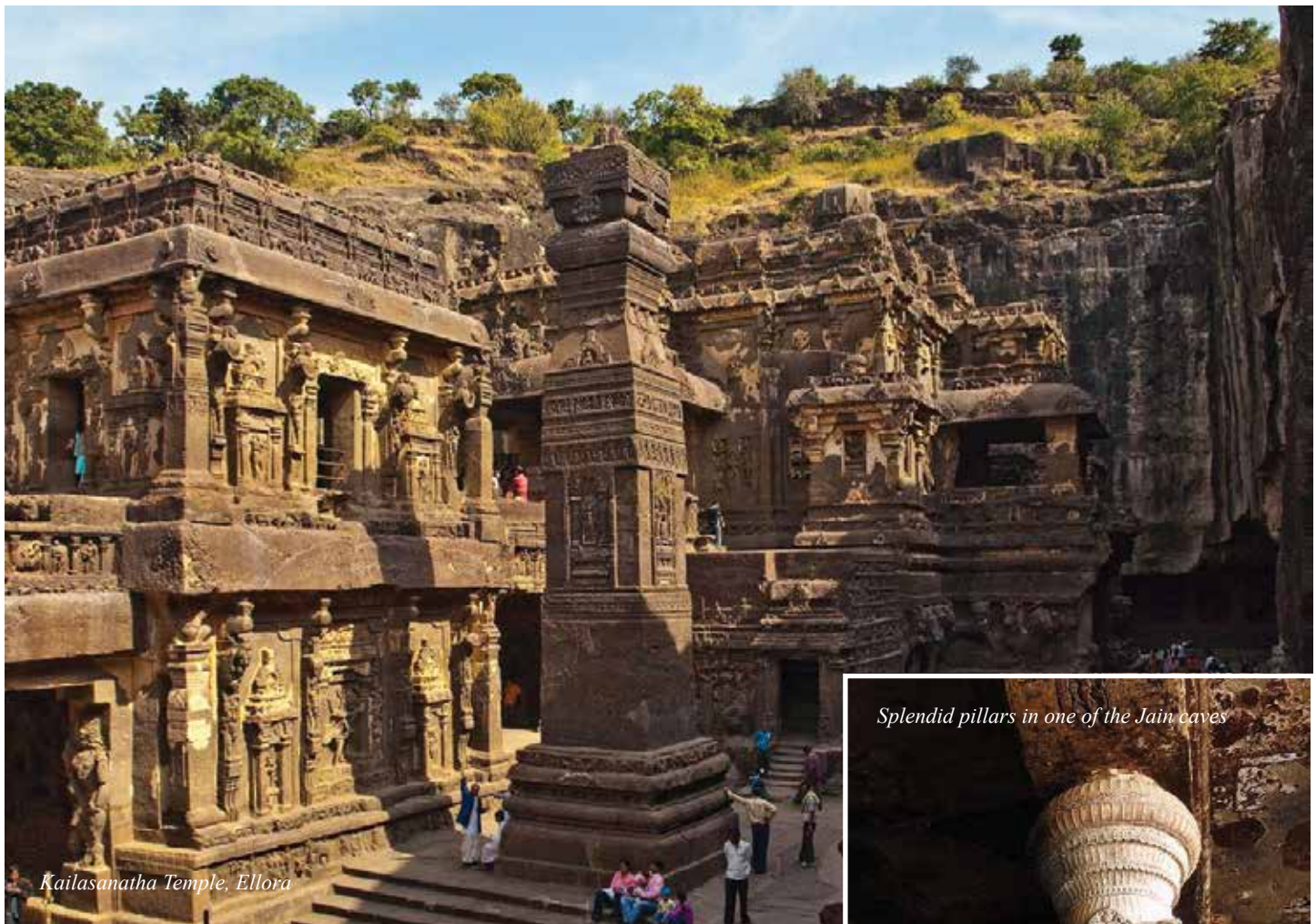
The Ellora Caves, which were sculpted in the 7 century AD, continued the legacy of Ajanta, and epitomize the best of Indian rock-cut architecture. The sculptures are massive and awe-inspiring.

There are 34 magnificent caves, twelve of which are Buddhist. There are large viharas with many storeys, which were used for living, sleeping, dining. Some of these monastery-caves have shrines with carvings of Gautama Buddha and the Bodhisattvas.

The most famous of the Buddhist caves, is Cave 10, a Chaitya hall or 'Vishvakarma Cave'. Beyond its

multi-storeyed entry, is a cathedral-like stupa hall, whose ceiling has been carved to give the impression of wooden beams. At the heart of this cave is a marvellous, 15-foot statue of Buddha seated in a preaching pose.

Among the Hindu caves, the best-known is the Kailashnath temple, Cave 16, designed like Mt Kailash, the abode of Shiva. It looks like a huge, multi-storeyed temple complex, but it was carved out of one single rock, and covers an area double the size of the Parthenon in Athens! There are gateways, courtyards, galleries, sculpted panels and carvings on many levels.



Kailasanatha Temple, Ellora

The grand sculpture of Ravana attempting to lift Mount Kailasa, is a landmark in Indian art, and one of the major attractions here. The construction of this cave took 100 years, using 200,000 tonnes of rock .

The Rameshwara Cave (Cave 21) and Dashavatara (Cave 15) are Buddhist monasteries, and included a huge range of Hindu images, including the ten avatars of Vishnu. The most striking is the image of Vishnu as Narasimha (lion), killing the asura (devil) Hiranyakaship.



Splendid pillars in one of the Jain caves

How to reach:

Air: Nearest Airport - Aurangabad (22km)

ITINERARY - 01

Day 01

Arrival at Kushinagar Airport

Kushinagar is a town in the Kushinagar district of the Indian state of Uttar Pradesh. It is an important Buddhist pilgrimage site, where Buddhists believe Gautam Buddha attained mahaparinirvana after his death. It is an international Buddhist pilgrimage centre.

Day 02

Kushinagar – Fazilnagar – Kushinagar

Visit Parinirvana Stupa & Temple. (The Parinirvana Stupa is a Buddhist temple in Kushinagar, India which is said to be the place of death of Gautam Buddha, the founder of Buddhism). Ramabhar Stupa (Ramabhar Stupa, also called a Mukutbandhan- Chaitya, is the cremation place of Buddha). Wat Thai, Japanese Temple & Burmese Temple.

Afternoon proceed to visit Fazilnagar Fazilnagar is also known by the name of 'Pawanagar', 21 Kms away from Kushinagar. It is also believed that Buddha, while going to Kushinagar from Vaishali, stayed here overnight to accept meals from one of his disciples. Evening return back to Kushinagar.

Day 03

Departure at Kushinagar Airport

ITINERARY - 02

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Day 03
Kushinagar – Lauriya-nandan –
Kushinagar

Excursion tour to Lauriya Nandangarh (Kushinagar to Lauriya Nandangarh is 120 Kms away)
Lauria Nandangarh, also Lauriya Navandgarh, is a city or town about 14 km from Narkatiaganj (or Shikarpur) and 28 km from Bettiah in West Champaran district of Bihar state in northern India. It is situated near the banks of the Burhi Gandak River. The village draws its name from a pillar (laur) of Ashoka standing there and the stupa mound Nandangarh (variant Nanadgarh) about 2 km south-west of the pillar. Lauriya Nandangarh is a historical site located in West Champaran district of Bihar. Remains of Mauryan period have been found here.
Evening return back to Kushinagar.

Day 04
Departure from
Kushinagar Airport

ITINERARY - 03

Day 01 Arrival at Kushinagar Airport

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Day 03 Kushinagar – Lumbini, Nepal

(Kushinagar – Lumbini : 175 Kms, one way). Lumbini is a Buddhist pilgrimage site in the Rupandehi District of Lumbini Province in Nepal. It is the place where, according to Buddhist tradition, Queen Mahamayadevi gave birth to Siddhartha Gautama at around 563 BCE. Visit Mayadevi Temple & Other International Monasteries in Lumbini

Day 04 Lumbini – Sravasti

(Lumbini – Sravasti : 220 Kms, one way). Sravasti was the capital of Kosala kingdom in ancient India and the place where the Buddha lived most after his enlightenment. It is near the Rapti river in the northeastern part of Uttar Pradesh India, close to the Nepalese border. Sravasti is one of the most revered sites in Buddhism. It is believed to be where the Buddha taught many of his Suttas (sermons), converted many of his famous disciples, and performed his "Sravasti miracles" – "great miracle" and "twin miracle" – a subject of numerous historic reliefs, statues and literature in Buddhism.

Visit Jetavana Monastery, Vipassana Meditation Centre, Angulimala Stupa etc at Sravasti.

Day 05 Sravasti – Varanasi

(Sravasti – Varanasi : 328 Kms, one way). Varanasi is a city in the northern Indian state of Uttar Pradesh dating to the 11th century B.C. Regarded as the spiritual capital of India, the city draws Hindu pilgrims who bathe in the Ganges River's sacred waters and perform funeral rites. Along the city's winding streets are some 2,000 temples, including Kashi Vishwanath, the "Golden Temple," dedicated to the Hindu god Shiva.

Sarnath is a place located 10 kilometres north-east of Varanasi near the confluence of the Ganges and the Varuna rivers in Uttar Pradesh, India. The Deer Park in Sarnath is where Gautama Buddha first taught the Dharma, and where the Buddhist Sangha came into existence through the enlightenment of Kondanna.

Visit Dhamekh Stupa , Chaukhandi Stupa , Sarnath Museum & Other International Monasteries at Sarnath

Also Visit Kashi Vishwanath Temple , Various Hindu Temples & Ghats of River Ganges at Varanasi.

Day 06 Departure at Varanasi Airport

ITINERARY - 04

Day 01 Arrival at Kushinagar Airport

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Day 02 Kushinagar – Fazilnagar – Kushinagar

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Also Visit Kashi Vishwanath Temple , Various Hindu Temples & Ghats of River Ganges at Varanasi.

Day 06 Varanasi - Bodhgaya

(Varanasi - Bodhgaya : 300 Kms, one way). Bodh Gaya is a village in the northeast Indian state of Bihar. Considered one of the most important Buddhist pilgrimage sites, it's dominated by the ancient brick Mahabodhi Temple Complex, built to mark the site where the Buddha attained enlightenment beneath a sacred Bodhi Tree. A direct descendant of the tree sits within the complex today, along with six other sacred sites, including a lotus pond.

Visit Mahabodhi Temple, Sujata Village & other international monasteries at Bodhgaya.

Day 07 Bodhgaya – Rajgir – Nalanda – Bodhgaya

(Bodhgaya - Rajgir : 100 Kms, one way). Rajgir is an ancient city in the northeast Indian state of Bihar. Surrounded by hills, it's known for its holy sites. Remains of the Cyclopean Wall, which encircled the city centuries ago, still stand in the center. Close by, Venu Vana park was once home to a monastery built for Buddha. The shield-shaped Japanese Temple contains a huge Buddha statue. Nearby there are hot springs believed to have medicinal properties.

Nalanda was a renowned Buddhist monastery and university in ancient Magadha, India. Located 25 Kms from Rajgir.

Visit Venuwan, Vulture Peak & Hot Water Spring at Rajgir & Old Nalanda University + Nalanda Museum at Nalanda .

Evening return back to Bodhgaya.

Day 08 Departure at Bodhgaya Airport



Kailasa temple, 1200-year-old Ancient Hindu Temple carved from a single rock in Ellora, stands majestically 29 kilometers away from the City of Aurangabad, Maharashtra, India


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