

Sansaar Pilgrims



DISCOVER THE MYSTERIES OF KASHI

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Dive into a 7-day journey, towards the cascading flows of the Ganga, reaching into the land of raw mysticism and to be welcomed into the abode of Shiva. Arrive into the deep embrace of Kashi, to ruminate over your inner radiance as you journey into the city of light.

Varanasi also known as Benares, Banaras or Kashi is a city on the banks of the Ganges in the Uttar Pradesh state of North India.

In the Rigveda, an ancient Indian sacred collection of Vedic Sanskrit hymns, the city is referred to as Kāśī (Kashi) from the Sanskrit verbal root *kaś-* "to shine", making Varanasi known as "City of Light", the "luminous city as an eminent seat of learning". The name was also used by pilgrims dating from Buddha's days.

"Varanasi" is linked to the names of two Ganges tributaries forming the city's borders: Varuna, still flowing in northern Varanasi, and Assi, today a small stream in the southern part of the city, near Assi Ghat. The old city is located on the north shores of the Ganges, bounded by Varuna and Assi.

Beyond this foundational fact, Varanasi is witness to key Indic events of astounding range and depth due to the important people who came to its Ghats, the embankments made into steps of stone slabs along the Ganges where pilgrims perform ritual ablutions. Of particular note are the

Dashashwamedh Ghat, the Panchganga Ghat, the Manikarnika Ghat and the Harishchandra Ghat, the last two being where Hindus cremate their dead and the Hindu genealogy registers at Varanasi are kept here.

Varanasi is the birthplace of four Jain Tirthankaras. Buddha came here in the Sixth Century BCE and preached his first sermon to 'the Five' at Sarnath nearby. Adi Sankara came to Varanasi arguably in the Eighth Century CE and, it is famously believed, was taught a lesson in spiritual humility by Lord Shiva. Varanasi was 'Hindu-Muslim' Sant Kabir's hometown in the 15th century and, in the 16th century, Goswami Tulsi Das composed the Ramcharitmanas and the Hanuman Chalisa here, thereby changing Hinduism forever across north India. Carnatic eminence Muthuswami Dikshitar came here in his teens with his guru, learnt Hindustani ragas, met the world and went home to become a pillar of Indian musical excellence.



Kashi wrought profound transformations, and a variety of mystics left traces of their romance with this space in the form of innumerable Samadhi's, like the larger than life Swami Trailinga. Kabir, transcending the deities of Puranic lore, went to the Upanishads, to the earliest-known concept of a formless One. Another deeply Upanishadic reformer, Guru Nanak, came here in 1506, went to the (then) Kashi Vishwanath temple, met with the pandits of Kashi to discuss his views and collected the verses of Kabir and other local saint-composers.

Swami Dayanand Saraswati, founder of the Arya Samaj, Sri Ramakrishna Paramahamsa and Swami Vivekananda showed up on Kashi's Ghats as a matter of course on their respective reformist missions.

An intricate web of connections has emanated from Kashi, weaving a warp and woof of spiritual sensibility over the Indian subcontinent, across centuries and regions — a richly-textured weave of thought that included strands of both classical Hinduism and reformist worldviews spun from the deeply internalised cocoon of a seekers yearning. Today it still continues to nurture the seekers unrequited thirst for this unknown landscape of mysticism and spirituality. The foray of the land throbs with a feverish energy carving itself around the seductive Ganga, expressing her sinewy tenderness and ornatting a romance with the one who treads this most sacred land.

While rejecting the ritualised classical approach to religion, such seminal Indian socio-cultural reformers upheld the inclusive central philosophical core of Hinduism and its meditation, music and poetry. They honoured the centrality of Varanasi's symbolic importance in the collective consciousness, in which the spiritual and the temporal interfaced through the Ghats. These physical steps to the physical water stayed as the key metaphor for the journey of the soul towards its spiritual goal, in which 'Hari', 'Shiva', 'Sain' and 'Tat' ('That', the nameless and formless) often became interchangeable transcendental terms.

Varanasi, is therefore, the cultural crucible for a spectacular range of 'change within continuity' and is both the place of and the participant in these foundational narratives. Historical figures were drawn to Varanasi by the millennia of mystique invested in the city, through the river of pilgrim life that endlessly flowed to, through and away from it.

The satirical paan-chewing citizens of Varanasi have their own take on this perennial influx. It shrugs wryly at the fact this is where innumerable people from far-flung reaches of the land come to die in the hope of 'Kashi Labh' — the 'Profit of Kashi' — in the unshakeable ancient belief that Kashi is first among equals of the seven mokshapuri or 'salvation cities'.



Places to Visit in Varanasi

Sightseeing & Tourist Attractions



Beauty of Ghats

Ganga is flanked by a diverse array of these riverfront steps, each infused with its own subtle beauty, tale and legend; opening its reverence to this mighty river. The city has 87 Ghats. Most of the Ghats are associated with ritual bathing and devotional activities, while a few are used as cremation sites.



The Legendary Ganga Arti

This Arti performed at the banks of Ganga is an offering infused with devotion, to this most profound source of life, every evening at Dasashwamedh Ghat. This mesmerizing ritual is performed by a group of young priests.



Explore Ganga

The charm of Kashi is meandering in the Ganga atop a boat to lend a different perspective of these Ghats. In the evening, one becomes a witness to the city coming to life with the ceremonies and the various fires burning, expounding a cleansing process or yet another cremation. This unique moment has a resounding impact on the seeker.

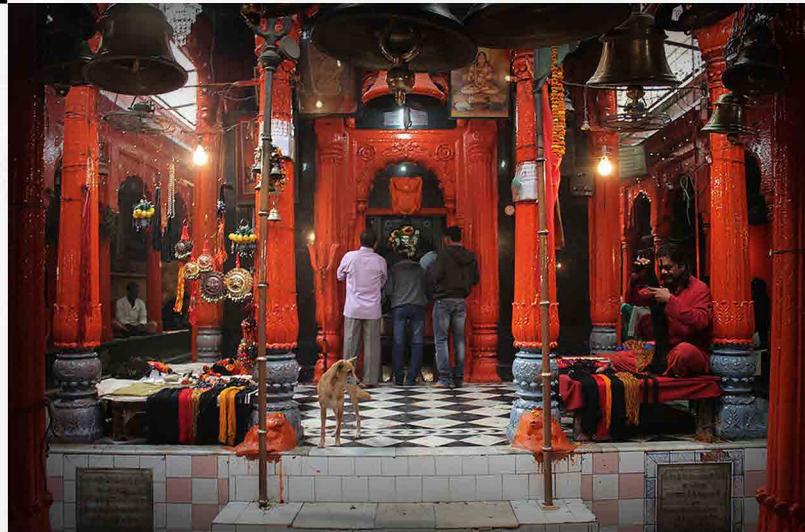


Kashi Vishwanath Mandir

Overlooking the Western bank of Ganga, Kashi Vishwanath Temple is one of the most prominent of the twelve Jyotirlingas of the country. This holy sanctuary is the heartbeat of Kashi and is devoted to Lord Shiva.

Kaal Bhairav Mandir

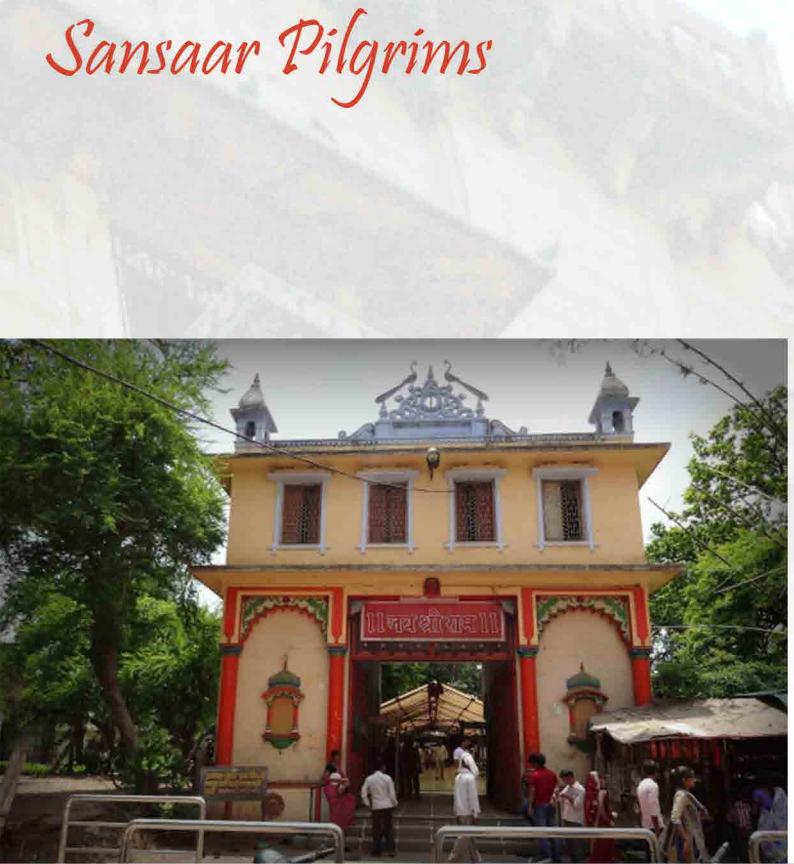
This is the fiercest form of Lord Shiva. The deity is portrayed as a man wearing garlands made with human skulls. It is said that death itself is afraid of this form. According to local folklore Kaal Bhairava decides who has to stay in Varanasi and who should not.



Annapurna Devi Mandir

Goddess Parvathi is represented here as the feminine spirit of Annapurna, or as the name suggests the one who nourishes everyone. This is the place where goddess Annapurna showed Lord Shiva that the material world, like the spirit, cannot be dismissed as an illusion.





Sankat Mochan Hanuman Mandir

Sankat Mochan Temple is said to have been established by the renowned saint Goswami Tulsidas and reconstructed by pandit Madan Mohan Malviya. This temple is famous for its resident monkeys that are fed by the daily throng of devotees.

Durga Mata Mandir and Durga Kund

Durga Mata Temple is in Durga Kund, and is dedicated to Goddess Durga. It is located near Tulsi Manas Mandir. The idol of the Goddess is said to be self-created and the local lore is that it miraculously protects and fulfills wishes of Devotees.



Vishalakshi Mandir

Vishalakshi Temple is dedicated to Goddess Parvathi. This temple is considered an acclaimed shaktipeeth. It is clearly mentioned in the Puranas that Varanasi and this particular place will exist forever.

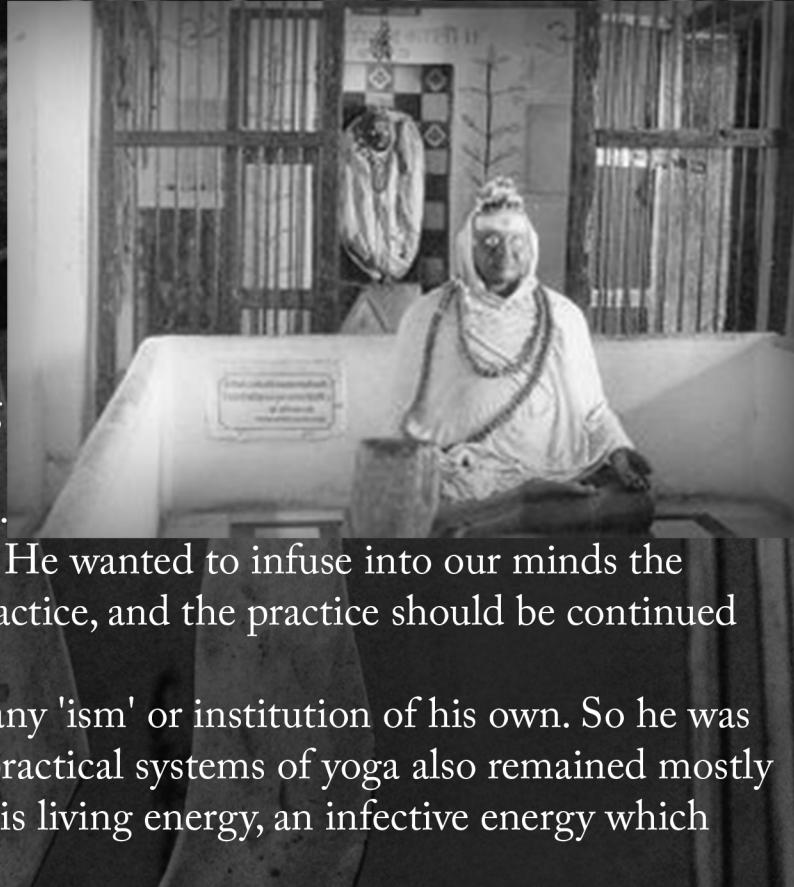


Shree Trailanga Swami Math

In the 17th century A.D., Swami Tailanga came as Lord of Yoga. Tailanga's life is a revival of ancient yoga. He followed the rishi method of practice - from the basic yoga to its fourfold elaboration, giving plenty of time to each for its perfection. In fact, Tailanga was an example of living yoga.

His interpretation was not so much verbal. He wanted to infuse into our minds the truth that yoga had to be experienced by practice, and the practice should be continued until it was perfected.

Swami Tailanga did not want to make any 'ism' or institution of his own. So he was not so widely known and his spiritual and practical systems of yoga also remained mostly hidden. And in such a hidden enclave lies his living energy, an infective energy which leaves the seeker infused in his void.

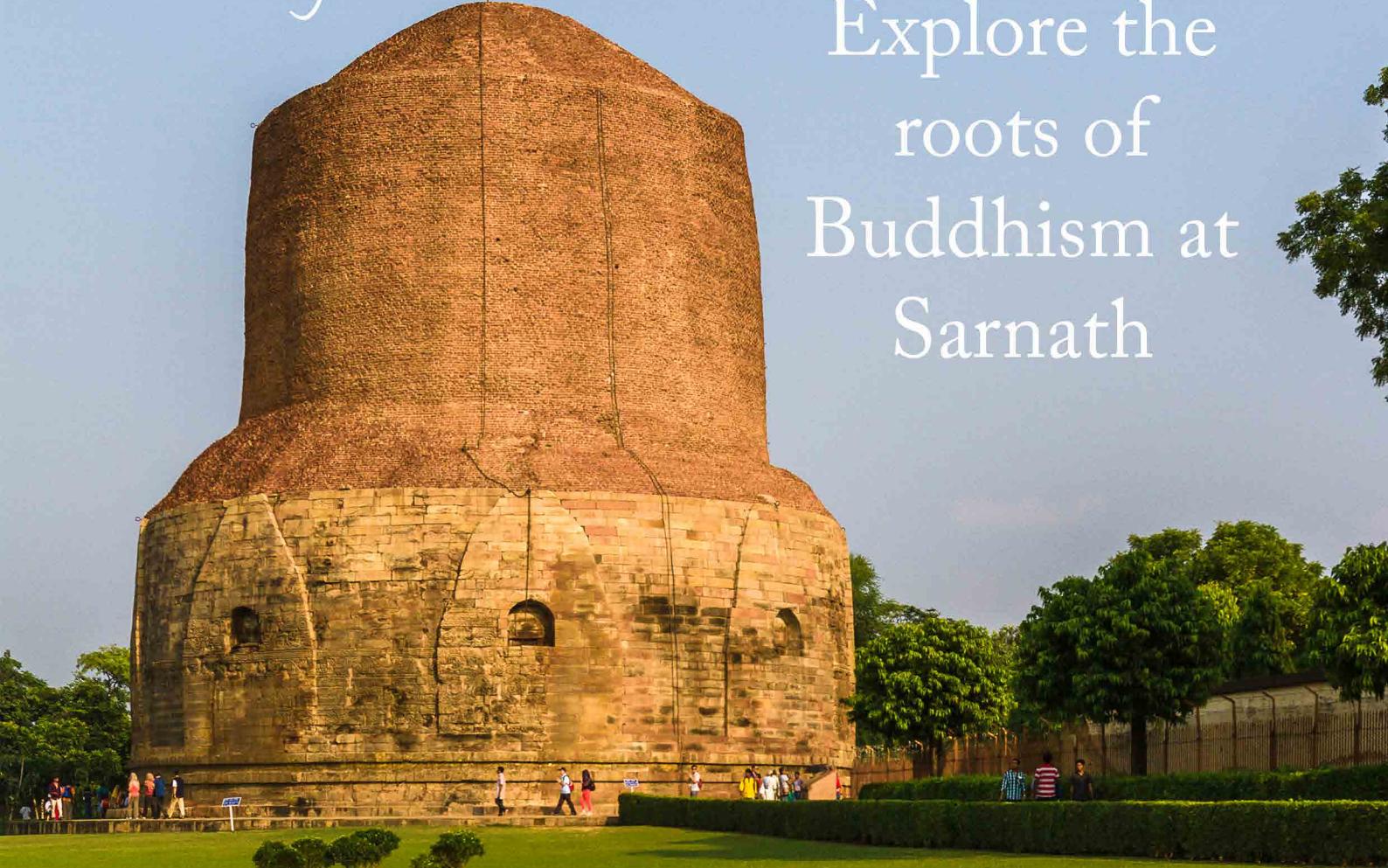


Aghori Kinaram Baba Ashram

Kinaram Baba, a yogi seeped in an intense sense of seeking arrived in Kashi, this seekers magnetism led him to Harishchandra Ghat. His path of aghortantra started when he set his king eyes on BabuKalu Ramji, in the midst of some skulls. Kinaram baba recognised

in that body the spiritual entity who had initiated him on Girnar with Sri Dattatreya. This intensity of guru and disciple still rages in the embers of the dhuni (sacred fire) that was established by both of them and is kept continuously burning till today. Many miracles and wonders are attributed to Kinaram baba. His huge fame attracted the curiosities of the powerful people of that period, from Shah Jahan to the cruel Aurangzeb and the king of Benares, Chait Singh.

Explore the roots of Buddhism at Sarnath



Sarnath, located 10 kilometers north-east of Varanasi near the confluence of the Ganga and Varuna river is the holy site where Guatama Buddha first taught Dhamma. It is considered the birthplace of the Buddhist Sanga, which came into existence through the enlightenment of Kondanna.

Singhpur is a village a kilometer away from Sarnath. The Village is the birthplace of Shreyansanatath, the Eleventh Thirthankara of Jainism. A temple dedicated to him is also located here.

Isipatana is one of the four places of pilgrimage that devout followers of Buddha should visit. Buddha's Dhammadakkappatayana Sutta was also taught here along with the four noble truths and their associated teachings.



The Ultimate Cremation Ground Manikarnika Ghat

Manikarnika Ghat, is one of the holier and sacred riverfronts alongside the river Ganga. It is believed that salvation (moksha) is attained here upon cremation of the body near the ghat.

Scores of elderly people seek to walk up to its edges to spend their last days absorbing the energies emanating from the Ghat – which makes even death a painless and insignificant event. Such is the nature of this powerful shaktipeeth.



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A photograph showing the back and side profile of a shirtless man with dark hair, wearing a light blue cloth wrapped around his waist. He is kneeling on a dark, textured surface, possibly a rock or a low wall, with his head bowed in a prayerful or contemplative pose. The background is a blurred, dark blue-green color, suggesting water or a cloudy sky.

The offerings from Sansaar Pilgrims for the next year are:
23-28 February 2019

If you need to register for either group or require further details please contact us via email at sansaarpilgrims@gmail.com

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