



Sonepur Mela, also known as the **Sonepur Cattle Fair** or **Hariharnath Kshetra Mela**, is one of the largest cattle fairs in Asia, held annually in Sonepur, Bihar. This vibrant festival typically takes place during **Kartik Purnima** (the full moon day) in November and can last from **fifteen days to a month**. The fair is celebrated at the confluence of the **Ganges** and **Gandak** rivers, making it a significant religious and cultural event.

Historical Background

- **Origins:** The fair has ancient roots, dating back to the **Vedic period**. It was historically a site for trading animals, particularly elephants and horses. Emperor **Chandragupta Maurya** is believed to have sourced elephants from this region for his army. Over time, the fair evolved into a major marketplace for various domesticated animals.
- **Cultural Significance:** The festival is dedicated to the worship of **Lord Hariharnath**, a deity representing both Vishnu and Shiva. It attracts visitors from across India and beyond, serving as a melting pot of cultural exchange.

Key Features of the Fair

1. **Cattle Trading:** Sonepur Mela is renowned for its extensive cattle market, where various animals, including elephants, horses, camels, buffaloes, and even smaller pets like guinea pigs and birds, are bought and sold. It is notably one of the few places in India where large-scale elephant trading occurs.
2. **Cultural Programs:** The fair features numerous cultural activities, including folk music performances, dance shows, and traditional games. Local artisans showcase their crafts, adding to the festive atmosphere.
3. **Food and Shopping:** A wide array of regional delicacies is available at the fair, along with stalls selling handicrafts, textiles, and other goods. This aspect of the fair allows visitors to experience local cuisine and shop for unique items.
4. **Spiritual Practices:** Many attendees participate in religious rituals at nearby temples and take holy dips in the rivers during Kartik Purnima, which is considered auspicious.



Accessibility

- **Location:** Sonapur is located approximately **30 km from Patna**, making it easily accessible by road and rail. The nearest railway station is Sonapur Junction.
- **Accommodation:** Temporary camps are set up for pilgrims during the fair, along with options for lodging at local hotels and guesthouses.

Conclusion

Sonapur Mela is more than just a cattle fair; it is a celebration of culture, commerce, and spirituality that highlights Bihar's rich heritage. The festival continues to thrive as a significant event in the Indian calendar, drawing people from diverse backgrounds to partake in its unique blend of traditions and festivities.