



UNITARIAN UNIVERSALIST
PARTNER CHURCH COUNCIL

Varanasi & Sarnath Itinerary

Optional pre-trip1 to India 2020

March 2 – March 5

SARNATH

One of the most famous Buddhist centers of India, Sarnath is located 6 km north of Hindu pilgrimage center Benares - in Uttar Pradesh.

There are four sacred Buddhist pilgrimage centers in the Indian subcontinent. The first of these is the birthplace of Buddha at Lumbinivana, east of Kapilavastu. The second most sacred place of pilgrimage is Buddha Gaya where he attained enlightenment. The third most sacred pilgrimage center for Buddhists is Sarnath or Isipatan where Buddha delivered his first sermon, and the fourth is Kushinara or Kashi in Uttar Pradesh, where he finally gave up his mortal self.

The earliest remains here at Sarnath are from the Mauryan period ascribed to Emperor Ashoka the great.

The Lion Capital is the national emblem of India. The Dharmarajika Stupa was built by Ashoka, and it was expanded and enlarged several times up to the 12th century CE. The structures here were destroyed by repeated invasions - and by gradual neglect - and what are seen today are the results of repeated reconstruction efforts.

The Dhamekh stupa is a cylindrical tower, 143 feet high, and 93 feet high. The stones in each layer were bound together by iron clamps. This tower dates back to the Gupta period.

The Chinese traveler Hsuen Tsang who visited India in the 7th century CE, speaks of the glory of Sarnath and of the structures that existed then.

A modern temple to Buddha was built here in the 20th century, housing several of the Buddhist relics excavated here. On Buddha Purnima, the birthday of Buddha, relics of the Buddha are taken out in procession. The archeological museum at Sarnath houses several Buddhist sculptures and relics. The Mahabodhi library here houses a rich collection of Buddhist manuscripts and writings.





VARANASI

One of the oldest inhabited cities in the world, Varanasi is located on holiest river of India--Ganga. This relation is unique and has attracted thousands of pilgrims. One theory is that the city is located on the land between the river Varuna and Assi, hence the name Varanasi.

From time immemorial Varanasi has been the center of education, religion, art and culture. With the finest river frontage in India, with miles of ghats, or steps, for religious bathing; an array of shrines, temples, and palaces rising tier on tier from the water's edge.



For every visitor Varanasi has different experiences to offer. The shimmering red and golden water of the Ganges when rays of dawn falls on them, the high banks, the temples, the Ashrams, the pavilions and the monkeys near the Durga Temple are just a few.



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Varanasi Extension Itinerary – India 2020

Monday, March 2. DELHI

Arrive Indira Gandhi airport. Transfer to hotel. Overnight Delhi hotel.

Tuesday, March 3. DELHI – VARANASI AI-406 10:30/11:45 HRS

Buffet Breakfast at Hotel. On time transfer to airport to connect flight to Varanasi.

Upon arrival in Varanasi, transfer to hotel, with en route visit to the buried Buddhist city of Sarnath, north-east of Varanasi. It is as holy to the Buddhists as Varanasi is to the Hindus. Having achieved enlightenment as Bodhgaya, Buddha came to Sarnath to preach his message of the way to nirvana. Later, Ashoka, the great Buddhist emperor erected magnificent stupas and monasteries at Sarnath. Visible today are the ruins of a once flourishing Buddhist monastery and a fine museum, which houses an excellent collection of Buddhist art and sculpture.

On arrival check in at Hotel.

Overnight stay at Hotel.

Wednesday, March 4. VARANASI

Buffet Breakfast at Hotel.

Early morning, drive to Daswamedh Ghat and take a boat ride on the sacred river Ganges. The best time to visit the ghats is at dawn, when pilgrims take their morning dip. There are over 100 ghats in all, but Daswadwamedh Ghat is probably the most convenient place to begin the boat ride .

Evening visit to see GANGA ARTI . The Ganga Aarti ritual, where flame from lamps burning oil or ghee lights up the night and the faces of priests and worshippers to create an unforgettable spectacle. Amidst the sound of prayer, prayer bells and ancient prayer-songs are heard.

Overnight stay at Hotel.

Thursday, March 5 VARANASI-DELHI (by flight)

After breakfast, morning flight to Delhi. Join Golden Triangle extension



Continues next page



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Extension package costs \$689 *(per person, USD)*

ABOVE COST INCLUDES:

- **1 Night at The Metropolitans New Delhi (or similar) on room and breakfast basis**
- **2 Nights at Taj Ganges Varanasi (or Similar) on room and breakfast basis**
- **Morning Boat Ride.**
- **Transportation as per the itinerary.**
- **English Speaking guide for sightseeing tour.**
- **Airfare Delhi to Varanasi – back to Delhi**

NOT INCLUDED IN ABOVE COSTS:

- **Any meals other than breakfast as stated.**
 - **Any Visa fees**
 - **International airfare unless stated above**
 - **Any expenses of purely personal nature like liquor, laundry, telephone/fax calls, Insurance, Room service, tips to porters, guides.**
 - **Any other service or item not specified above.**
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