



Indian Council for Cultural Relations  
वर्तमानक संस्कृतिक सम्बन्धन केंद्र  
Swami Vivekananda Cultural Centre  
High Commission of India, Colombo

# Sanskarika

Newsletter of the Swami Vivekananda Cultural Centre

MAY 2023



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Amrit Mahotsav

# TRAVEL

## IN THE LORD'S FOOTSTEPS

Recently, the Kushinagar airport in Uttar Pradesh was opened for international flights, facilitating the arrival of tourists and pilgrims from across the world. On this occasion, we visit some of the revered Buddhist sites in the state that will become more accessible

While the world decked up for the holiday season in December, Buddhists in many parts of the world prepared to celebrate Bodhi Day (December 8), the day Siddhartha Gautama is said to have attained enlightenment under the Bodhi tree

in Bodh Gaya (Bodhgaya), Bihar, to become Lord Buddha or the 'Awakened One'. While Bodhgaya remains an important site associated with Lord Buddha, it is Uttar Pradesh that is home to two of the four most revered Buddhist sites: Sarnath (where the Lord delivered his first sermon after being enlightened) and Kushinagar (where he breathed his last and attained Mahaparinirvana). Add to this the news of Kushinagar airport being recently declared an international hub and Uttar Pradesh's Buddhist sites become

more prominent in terms of tourism opportunities. Here's tracing the Lord's journey across the state starting from the first site he arrived to his final resting place.

### Sarnath

After attaining enlightenment in Bodhgaya, Lord Buddha travelled to Sarnath, located about 229 km from Kushinagar. At Sarnath's Deer Park (also called Migdava), he delivered his first sermon as the Awakened One to five disciples that he had met at the Chaukhandi Stupa nearby. In his first preaching, the Buddha spoke about the Four Noble Truths and the eightfold path that frees people from suffering. He explained the two ways of life – to indulge in all the pleasures of the world and to deny oneself these pleasures – and the middle path that leads nirvana (salvation). Lord Buddha laid the foundation of his sangha (an organisation of Lord Buddha's disciples) in Sarnath. The massive 34-m-high Dhamek Stupa is

a major Buddhist attraction here, as it marks the exact spot where Lord Buddha preached his first sermon. The floral patterns and the geometric engravings on the facade of the stupa are said to date back to the 5th century AD, while the brickwork harks back to 200 BC. Another crowd-puller in Sarnath is the iconic Ashoka Pillar. Established by emperor Ashoka sometime between 272 and 232 AD, this glistening pillar is said to mark the foundation of the Buddhist sangha. The pillar was once capped by the Lion Capital, which was adopted as India's national emblem in 1950. Today, the Lion Head can be viewed in the Sarnath museum. One should not miss the Dharmarajika Stupa here. It denotes the spot where Lord Buddha is said to have rested and meditated.

### Kaushambi

Located about 378 km from Kushinagar, Kaushambi (Kosambi), once the capital of the Vatsa





kingdom, one of the 16 mahajanapadas of ancient India, was Lord Buddha's next stop. He spent his sixth and ninth year (after attaining enlightenment) here. He delivered several sermons in Kaushambi, regarded as one of the most prosperous cities during that time, and established it as a premier centre for higher Buddhist learning. Excavations here have revealed ruins of an Ashoka Pillar along with an ancient fort and the Ghositaram Monastery, all of which draw tourists and pilgrims from the world over.

### Sravasti

Situated on the banks of River Rapti about 237 km from Kushinagar, Sravasti (Shravasti) was the capital of the ancient Kosala kingdom (6th century BC-6th century AD).

*The Mahaparinirvana Temple and the stupa in Kushinagar were excavated under the supervision of British archaeologist ACL Carlleyle in 1876-77. The temple and the stupa assumed their present form in 1956 during the 2500th anniversary of Buddha Jayanti*



*Monks walk towards the Dhamek Stupa in Sarnath. This marks the spot where Lord Buddha preached his first sermon after becoming the Awakened One.*

According to local lore, Sravasti is named after Sravasti the mythological king who founded it. This town, strewn with a number of ancient stupas, majestic monasteries and beautiful temples, hosted Lord Buddha for over 20 years and was his favourite annual monsoon retreat. Sravasti is where Lord Buddha is said to have performed some of his greatest miracles, including creating multiple images of himself. According to legend, Sravasti is where Lord Buddha encountered Angulimala (Angulimala) and reformed him from a highway brigand to a monk. The Angulimala cave is one of the popular tourist sites here. Visitors can also visit the Anand Bodhi tree in Sravasti. Locals believe that the tree has grown from a sapling that was brought from the original Bodhi tree by one of Lord Buddha's main disciples,



*The Wat Thai Temple, one of the major Buddhist sites in Kushinagar, is said to have been originally conceived as a forest monastery and is, therefore, located amidst greenery*

Anand. The town is associated with the remains at the twin villages of Saheth-Maheth. Two main attractions of Maheth, sprawled over an area of 400 acres, are the Pakki Kuti (permanent hut) and Kacchi Kuti (temporary hut). Another attraction that should not be missed in Sravasti is the gigantic World Peace Bell that was established with the help of the Japanese. The bell is believed to convey Lord Buddha's message of humanity through its toll. Other noteworthy sites that should not be missed in this peaceful and serene town include the Thai-Sri Lankan-Myanmar-Chinese-Korean Buddhist Temples, the Shobhnath Temple and the Swarna Gandha Kuti.

### Kushinagar

One of the holiest sites associated with Buddhism, Kushinagar is where



*After media careers in advertising, radio, film and Internet, Anurag Mallick & Priya Ganapathy quit corporate life to specialise in travel writing. 'Loosely based' in Bengaluru, the itinerant duo runs Red Scarab Travel & Media, customising solutions for tourism.*

Source : India Perspectives | Issue 6 | 2020

Lord Buddha left his corporeal self to attain Mahaparinirvana. The Mahaparinirvana Temple, which was excavated in 1876, attracts thousands of devotees, pilgrims and tourists annually, houses a 6.1-m-long golden reclining statue of Lord Buddha. This monolithic

sandstone sculpture depicts the Lord resting on his right side with his face towards the west probably indicating the sunset of his life. The archaeological find that revealed the temple also unearthed a stupa next to it. The excavations also led to the discovery of a copper vessel that bore inscriptions in the ancient Brahmi script which stated that the remains of Lord Buddha were buried there. At stone's throw distance from the temple lies the Mathakuar shrine where a black stone statue of Lord Buddha in the bhumi sparsha mudra (earth-touching pose) was recovered. It is believed to be the site where the Lord delivered his last sermon. The 49"-high Ramabhar Stupa nearby marks the spot where the Lord was cremated.

# Events Calendar – May 2023



## INTERNATIONAL DAY OF YOGA 2023 CURTAIN RAISER EVENTS



<b>2</b> Tuesday 7.00 am	On the occasion of Buddha Purnima “Yoga : Five Precepts of Buddha” by Ajay Kumbhar, Yoga Expert from India
<b>5</b> Friday 7.00 am	On the occasion of Buddha Purnima “Yoga : Three Universal Truth of Buddha” by Ajay Kumbhar, Yoga Expert from India
<b>7</b> Sunday 7.00 am	On the occasion of World Athletics Day “Yoga : Yoga for Sports Injury” by Ajay Kumbhar, Yoga Expert from India
<b>17</b> Wednesday 7.00 am	On the occasion of World Hypertension day “Yoga for Stress management” by Ajay Kumbhar, Yoga Expert from India
<b>25</b> Thursday 7.00 am	Yoga and the Triple jewels of Buddha by Ajay Kumbhar, Yoga Expert from India

**162<sup>nd</sup> Birth Anniversary of Gurudev  
Rabindranth Tagore Jayanti**  
in collaboration with  
**Centre for Contemporary Indian  
Studies, University of Colombo**

**9**  
Tuesday

**Lecture**  
“Nandalal Bose, Somabandhu and  
the Tagorian Aesthetics”  
by Dr. Ravibandhu Vidyapathi, Professional  
Dancer & Choreographer  
Venue: SVCC auditorium

**19**  
Friday  
6.00 pm

**Mathuram**  
(Classical Bharatha Natyam Programme).  
Bharatha Natyam Students of SVCC,  
of Dr. Subashini Pathmanathan  
Venue: SVCC auditorium

**25**  
Thursday  
6.00 pm

**Free Events. All are cordially invited.**

We Conduct **CLASSES** on  
**Bharatha Natyam, Kathak, Sitar, Violin, Tabla,  
Carnatic Vocal, Hindustani Vocal, Yoga and Hindi**

for more information Contact us on

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For upcoming facebook live events, visit [www.facebook.com/ICCRSriLanka](http://www.facebook.com/ICCRSriLanka)

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