

In The Footsteps of the Buddha & Kathmandu: 21-Day Pilgrimage Itinerary

Destinations Covered: Bodhgaya – Vaishali - Varanasi –Kushinagar - Shravasti - Lumbini (In Nepal) – Kathmandu.

Duration: 21 Days / 20 Nights

Outline Itinerary:

Day 1: Bodhgaya
Day 2: Bodhgaya
Day 3: Bodhgaya
Day 4: Bodhgaya
Day 5: Bodhgaya
Day 6: Bodhgaya - Vaishali (146 kms/4 hrs)
Day 7: Vaishali to Kushinagar (180 kms/6 hrs). Visit Kesaria stupa on the way.
Day 8: Kushinagar
Day 9: Kushinagar - Varanasi (266 Km /6 -7hr)
Day 10: Varanasi
Day 11: Varanasi
Day 12: Varanasi - Shravasti (316 Km/7-8hr)
Day 13: Shravasti
Day 14: Shravasti – Lumbini, Nepal (180 kms/5-6 hrs)
Day 15: Lumbini
Day 16: Lumbini
Day 17: Lumbini – Kathmandu (by flight)
Day 18: Kathmandu
Day 19: Kathmandu
Day 20: Kathmandu
Day 21: Dep. Kathmandu

Detailed itinerary

Day 1. Arr. Gaya. Assistance on arrival and drive to the hotel in Bodhgaya. (16 kms)

Day 2. Bodhgaya

Day 3. Bodhgaya

Day 4. Bodhgaya

Day 5. Bodhgaya

Things to see in & around Bodhgaya.

On one of the days, the group can drive to the Mahakala cave (45 mins /1hr), visit the ancient charnel ground Cool Groove (Dur khrod Silwe Tsal), Sujata village where Buddha was offered rice milk by a woman named Sujata. There is a stupa erected here.

Gurpa - The hill, considered to be one of the tallest peaks in the Gangetic plains is located 26 km away from Bodhgaya. It is said to be the site where the Buddha's disciple, Mahākāśyapa, is said to have died while waiting for the future Buddha, Maitreya to arrive on earth. There are about 1400 steps that leads to the summit. At the top of the mountain is a stupa and a Buddhist temple.

Note: Gurpa, Mahakala cave, Sujata village can be combined for a day tour.

One morning can be spent visiting some of the different monasteries in Bodhgaya notably Shechen Monastery, Thai monastery, Bhutan monastery, Sakya monastery, etc

Rajgir & Nalanda (78 kms/2.5 hr) will be a day trip.

On this day, you will drive to Rajgir. Take the ropeway to the Japanese peace pagoda and hike down to Vulture peak. Or take the stairs straight to vulture's peak. Spend some time on Vulture's peak reciting the heart sutra. Enroute visit Bamboo grove, probably the first property owned by the Buddha's Sangha. After lunch drive to Nalanda to visit the ruins of the erstwhile great Nalanda University where the greats like Nargarjuna, Shantideva, Asanga, Shilabhadra, Dharmapala (just to name a few), studied and later taught there. Also visit Huiyen Tsang's memorial hall at Nalanda. Huiyen Tsang was the famous Chinese pilgrim who visited India in the mid seventh century. He studied in Nalanda for 6 years.

It was in Rajgir, on Vulture's peak where Buddha spent many rainy seasons. The Buddha turned the 2nd wheel of Dharma here at Vulture's peak at Rajgir before a small and select group of students. Buddha gave more esoteric teachings in the privacy here. It was here where he taught the famous Mahayana text, the heart sutra.

Day 6: Bodhgaya – Vaishali (146 km / 4 hrs)

Drive to Vaishali.

Visit:

- Ashokan Pillar.
- Buddha Relic Stupa.
- Kutagarasala Vihara.
- Abhishek Pushkarini (Coronation Tank).

Vaishali was one of the Buddha's favourite places. Here he preached many sermons, admitted women into the Sangha through Mahapajapati Gautami, and announced his approaching Mahaparinirvana.

It is also the legendary home of **Amrapali**, the famous royal courtesan who renounced her wealth to become a disciple of Buddha.

One of India's best-preserved monolithic pillars, carved out of a single block of red sandstone and topped by a **life-sized, single-seated lion** is here at Vaishali.

Overnight: Vaishali

Day 7: Vaishali – Kesaria – Kushinagar (180 kms/6-7hrs)

Drive to Kushinagar with a stop at Kesaria Stupa.

Kesaria Stupa

Visit the magnificent Kesaria Stupa, believed to be the largest Buddhist stupa in India, standing approximately 104 feet high. The site commemorates one of Buddha's final journeys.

Continue to Kushinagar.

Day 8: Kushinagar

Kushinagar is revered as the place where Lord Buddha attained Mahaparinirvana.

Visit:

- Mahaparinirvana Temple: Contains the 6-meter long statue of the Reclining Buddha.
- Ramabhar Stupa: The site of the Buddha's cremation (Mukut-Bandhan Chaitya).
- Matha Kuar Shrine: A giant statue of Buddha in "Earth Witness" mudra

Overnight: Kushinagar

Day 9: Kushinagar - Varanasi (266 Km /6 -7hr)

Drive to Varanasi

Evening: Witness the Ganga Aarti at Dashashwamedh Ghat.

Day 10: Sarnath Excursion

Visit Sarnath, where Buddha delivered his First Sermon (Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta), setting in motion the Wheel of Dharma.

Sites include:

- Dhamek Stupa
- Chaukhandi Stupa
- Mulagandhakuti Vihara
- Ashokan Pillar Site
- Sarnath Archaeological Museum
- Deer Park

Overnight: Varanasi

Day 11: Morning boat ride on the River Ganges.

Visit:

- Kashi Vishwanath Temple (optional)
- Bharat Mata Temple
- Local markets

Free afternoon.

Overnight: Varanasi

Day 12: Varanasi - Shravasti (316 Km/7-8hr)

Drive to Shravasti

Overnight: Shravasti

Shravasti was where Buddha spent 24 rainy seasons (Vassas) and delivered numerous important discourses.

Day 13: Shravasti

Visit:

- Jetavana Monastery.
- Gandhakuti (Buddha's Hut)
- Anandabodhi Tree
- Angulimala Stupa
- Pakki Kuti
- Kachchi Kuti

Overnight: Shravasti

Day 14: Shravasti – Lumbini, Nepal (180 kms/5-6 hrs).

Drive to Lumbini in Nepal. Cross the Indo-Nepal border and continue to Lumbini. Border Immigration formalities are to be completed at both sides.

Lumbini is the birthplace of Prince Siddhartha Gautama.

Overnight: Lumbini

Day15: Lumbini

Visit:

- Maya Devi Temple
- Sacred Pond
- Ashokan Pillar

Overnight: Lumbini

Day 16: Lumbini

Visit **Kapilavastu** at Tilaurakot (10 kms west of Lumbini), the ancient city of the Shakya Kingdom where Siddhartha Gautama (Gautama Buddha) spent the first 29 years of his life.

Note: The historical remains of Kapilavastu are primarily associated with two debated archaeological sites near the India-Nepal border: **Tilaurakot (Nepal)** and **Piprahwa (Uttar Pradesh, India)**.

Time permitting visit:

- Lumbini Museum.
- World Peace Pagoda
- Eternal Peace Flame
- International Monastic Zone (East & West Monastic Zones)

Overnight: Lumbini

Day 17: Fly Bhairahawa (Lumbini) to Kathmandu.

Several daily flights operate between Bhairahawa (Lumbini) and Kathmandu, beginning at approximately 8:15 AM and continuing until 7:30 PM.

The flight duration is approximately 30 minutes.

Overnight: Kathmandu

Day 18: Kathmandu

Day 19: Kathmandu

Day 20: Kathmandu

Day 21: Dep. Kathmandu

Places to visit in Kathmandu:

Kathmandu Durbar Square - Explore the historic seat of royalty, stone shrines, and the palace of the Living Goddess (*Kumari*).

Swayambhunath Stupa (The Monkey Temple)- Ascend the steps to one of Nepal's oldest and most sacred Buddhist complexes, featuring iconic painted eyes and surrounding monasteries.

Seto Machindranath Temple- Visit this unique shrine nestled in a local bazaar, highly revered by both Buddhists and Hindus. Revered by Newari Buddhists as *Avalokiteshvara*.

Boudhanath Stupa- Circummbulate around this massive stupa, the focal point of Tibetan Buddhism in Nepal, surrounded by vibrant monasteries and rooftop cafes.

Vikramashila Mahavihar (Bhagawan Bahal) - 12th-century Newari Buddhist monastery in Thamel that houses the sacred *Prajnaparamita* sutra written in gold ink.

Patan Durbar Square- Discover incredible Buddhist metal craftsmanship and Newari heritage, including the intricate Golden Temple (Hiranya Varna Mahavihar) and the Maha Boudha Temple (Temple of a Thousand Buddhas)

Thamel - One evening scroll through the vibrant, beating tourist heart of Kathmandu, known for its maze-like alleys, colourful shops, and energetic nightlife. It is the ultimate basecamp for travellers, offering a mix of cultural hidden gems, shopping, and dining.

Mountain & Sunrise Viewpoints

Nagarkot: Located 32 km east of Kathmandu, this is the most famous hill station for catching a **brehtaking sunrise over the Himalayas**. On ultra-clear days, you can even spot the distant tip of Mount Everest. You can book an organized Nagarkot Sunrise Day Hike to walk through local terraced villages

Spiritual & Cultural Day Trips

Namobuddha (Thrangu Tashi Yangtse Monastery): Perched on a serene ridge beyond Dhulikhel, this is one of Nepal's **most sacred Buddhist pilgrimage sites**. It marks the legendary cliff where a prince (a past life of the Buddha) sacrificed his body to feed a starving tigress and her cubs.

Hotels:

At Bodhgaya – Sujata or similar

At Vaishali – Vaishali Residency

At Kushinagar – The Imperial, Kushinagar

At Varanasi – The Fern Residency or similar

At Shravasti – Shravasti Residency

At Lumbini – Buddha Maya Gardens or Hotel Crystal Palace

In Kathmandu - 4 Star property

