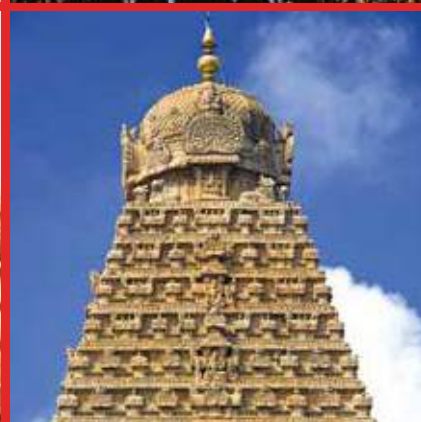
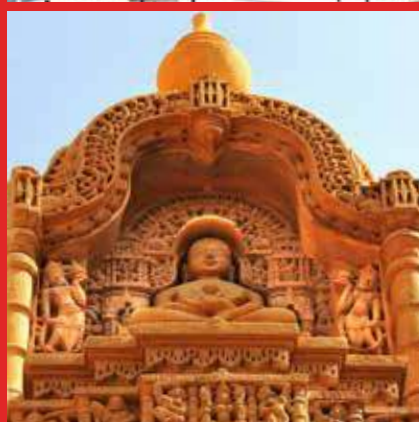
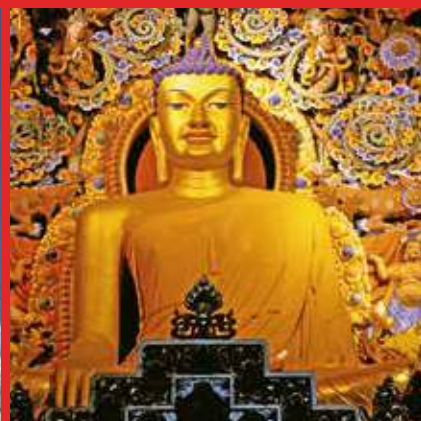


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Incredible India



Ministry of Tourism  
Government of India



# PRASAD

NATIONAL MISSION ON PILGRIMAGE REJUVENATION AND SPIRITUAL AUGMENTATION DRIVE



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# PRASAD

## Scheme Guidelines

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## **PRASAD**

### **Scheme Guidelines for National Mission on Pilgrimage Rejuvenation and Spiritual Augmentation Drive:**

#### *1. Rationale*

Pilgrimage tourism is a form of tourism motivated partly or wholly by religious sentiments. India is a land of many religions like Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, Sikhism and Sufism having their major pilgrimage centres in different parts of the country. Religion and spirituality are common motivations for travel, with major tourist destinations having developed largely as a result of their connections to sacred places, persons and events. The growth of domestic tourism largely depends on pilgrimage tourism. To tap this potential there is a need for holistic development of the selected pilgrimage destinations in cooperation with other stakeholders. In the Budget Speech 2014-15, the Government therefore, decided to launch a National Mission on Pilgrimage Rejuvenation and Spiritual Augmentation Drive with an initial provision of Rs. 100 crore for the current financial year.

Religious tourism destinations are not like holiday/leisure tourism destinations, which are primarily targeted at the segment having inclination to travel and spend. In developing a religious tourism product, it is essential to build in community participation at the given location/destination. Further, it is not only important to provide modern amenities at religious sites but also to see as to how the visitor interacts and seeks new experiences at such places. There is a need to identify core deficiencies, facilitate provision of products, services and subsequently address the issues that are important for paving the way for development and promotion of religious tourism in India.

The challenges which need to be addressed include inter alia, lack of infrastructure like budget hotels, roads, last mile connectivity, sewage, hygiene and cleanliness, solid waste management, lack of awareness, developing a code of religious etiquette to be observed by the religious tourists, etc.



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## 2. *Vision Statement:*

- To drive a national mission for rejuvenation and spiritual augmentation of important religious destinations.
- To position tourism as a major engine of economic growth and job creation.
- To provide complete tourism experience by enhancing tourist attractiveness of the religious destinations in a sustainable manner.
- To promote sustainable pilgrimage tourism in the country.
- To strengthen the mechanism for bridging the infrastructural gaps at identified pilgrimage destinations and develop a monitoring mechanism for timely implementation of the projects in collaboration with the States/UTs and other stakeholders.
- To strengthen the measures for safety and security of pilgrims and improve the quality of tourism services.
- To create employment through active involvement of local communities with pro-poor approach in a sustainable and inclusive manner through development of a 'Responsible Tourism' initiative.

## 3. *Mission Statement:*

To identify and develop pilgrimage tourist destinations on the principles of high tourist visits, competitiveness and sustainability in an integrated manner by synergizing efforts to focus on needs and concerns of all stakeholders to enrich religious/spiritual tourist experience and enhance employment opportunities.

## 4. *Mission Objectives:*

- Integrated development of pilgrimage destinations in a planned, prioritized and sustainable manner to provide complete religious tourism experience.
  - Harness pilgrimage tourism for its direct and multiplier effects on employment generation and economic development.
  - Follow community-based development and pro-poor tourism concept in development of the pilgrimage destinations.
  - Leveraging public capital and expertise.
  - Enhancing the tourist attractiveness in a sustainable manner by developing world-class infrastructure in the religious destination.
  - Creating awareness among the local communities about the importance of tourism for them in terms of increase in sources of income, improved living standards and overall development of the area.
  - Promote local arts, culture, handicrafts, cuisine, etc., to generate livelihood in the identified places.
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##### 5. *Mission Strategy:*

- To identify religious destinations that have potential to be showcased as world-class tourism products in consultation with the stakeholders.
- To ensure that the development of these destinations adhere to the sustainability and carrying capacities of the destinations.
- To create a framework for classifying infrastructural gaps in the identified destinations that have been major roadblocks in unlocking the potential of these places.
- To plan in an integrated manner the development of these destinations in a specific timeframe ensuring full convergence of State and Central Government schemes as well as private sector investments.
- To identify and prioritize projects that need to be taken up through dedicated public funding immediately and to leverage to the extent feasible, additional resources from voluntary funding (Corporate Social Responsibility) initiatives of Central Public Sector Undertakings and corporate sector.
- To promote local arts, culture, handicrafts, cuisine, etc., to generate livelihood in the identified destinations.
- To follow a comprehensive area development approach for ensuring all the facilities required by the tourists in the identified places.
- To centrally coordinate the development process of identified projects.

##### **6. This scheme is proposed to be implemented as a Central Sector Scheme during the 12th Five-Year Plan and beyond.**

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## 7. Management Structure

### 7.1 National Steering Committee (NSC):

To steer the mission objectives and vision of the scheme, a National Steering Committee will be constituted with the following composition:

1.	Minister in Charge, M/O Tourism	Chairman
2.	Secretary, M/O Tourism	Vice Chairman
3.	Addl. Secretary, M/O Tourism	Member
4.	Financial Advisor, M/O Tourism	Member
5.	Secretary (or his representative, not below the rank of Joint Secretary), M/O Culture	Member
6.	Director General, ASI	Member
7.	Secretary (or his representative, not below the rank of Joint Secretary), M/O Urban Development	Member
8.	Secretary (or his representative, not below the rank of Joint Secretary), M/O Housing and Urban Poverty Alleviation	Member
9.	Secretary (or his representative, not below the rank of Joint Secretary), M/O Civil Aviation	Member
10.	Secretary (or his representative, not below the rank of Joint Secretary), M/O Skill Development	Member
11.	Secretary (or his representative, not below the rank of Joint Secretary), M/O Road Transport & Highways	Member
12.	Secretary (or his representative, not below the rank of Joint Secretary), M/O Shipping	Member
13.	Secretary (or his representative, not below the rank of Joint Secretary), M/O Power	Member
14.	Secretary(or his representative, not below the rank of Joint Secretary), M/O Environment & Forests	Member
15.	Secretary (or his representative, not below the rank of Joint Secretary), M/O Water Resources, River Development & Ganga Rejuvenation	Member
16.	Secretary (or his representative, not below the rank of Joint Secretary), M/O Rural Development	Member
17.	Executive Director (Tourism & Catering), M/O Railways	Member
18.	Joint Secretary/Addl. Director General, M/O Tourism	Member Secretary

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Other Ministries may be also represented as invited members, if concerned, on case-to-case basis.

***Responsibilities:***

National Steering Committee will be responsible for overall guidance, review and monitoring of the scheme.

***7.2 Central Sanctioning & Monitoring Committee (CSMC):***

There will be a Central Sanctioning & Monitoring Committee (CSMC) responsible for sanctioning of the projects submitted by the Mission Directorate and regular monitoring of the progress of implementation.

Composition of the CSMC will be as under:

- |                                      |             |
|--------------------------------------|-------------|
| 1. Secretary, M/O Tourism            | Chairperson |
| 2. Financial Advisor, M/O Tourism    | Member      |
| 3. Additional Secretary, M/O Tourism | Member      |
| 4. ADG/JS, M/O Tourism               | Member      |
- (Member Secretary, NSC)

The Committee may invite representatives of other Ministries, if required.

***7.3 Mission Directorate:***

There shall be a Mission Directorate headed by Member Secretary, NSC (Joint Secretary/Additional Director General, Ministry of Tourism), as the nodal officer. Composition of the Mission Directorate will be as follows:

- |   |             |
|---|-------------|
| 1. Joint Secretary/Addl. DG (Member Secretary, NSC) | Chairperson |
| 2. Director/DS, Finance/Financial Controller        | Member      |
| 3. Secretary, Tourism of the concerned State        | Member      |
| 4. Representatives of other concerned Ministries    | Member      |
| 5. Director/DDG, MoT                                | Convener    |

***7.3.1 Key Responsibilities of the Mission Directorate:***

- Identification of projects in consultation with the State/UT Govts. and other stakeholders.
- Appointment of the Project Management Consultant.
- Outsourcing of independent specialized agencies for appraisal of DPRs, if required.
- Ensuring effective coordination with the State Govts./UT administrations and other stakeholders, Implementing Agencies, etc., for effective implementation of the scheme in a time-bound manner.
- Seeking approvals for the identified projects from the Central Sanctioning and Monitoring Committee and reporting the progress of implementation to the said committee at regular intervals.
- Sanction of projects approved by the Sanctioning Committee and release of funds to the identified agencies.
- Capacity development of States/UTs and other implementing agencies for undertaking various activities relating to identified circuits and destinations therein through setting up of Project Management Units (PMUs), if required.



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#### **7.4 Programme Management Consultant (PMC):**

The PMC will be a National Level Consultant to be appointed by the Mission Directorate.

##### **7.4.1 Key Responsibilities of the PMC:**

- Preparation of Detailed Perspective Plan (DPP) for the identified destinations, identifying the gaps in infrastructural amenities and related skills. The PMC may suggest suitable agencies for addressing the skill gaps. The perspective plan should also include assessment of the funds required, including sources of funds. Business models for investment and operations should be evolved. The thrust of the perspective plan should be on convergence between the different schemes of the Central Ministries, the State/UT Governments and other agencies.
- Identification of projects for development of the identified destinations.
- Preparation of Detailed Project Reports (DPRs) – Comprehensive DPRs should be prepared for each destination after consultations with the respective State Government/UT administration, local bodies, other stakeholders. For the components to be funded by public funding, DPRs should be prepared on the basis of Schedule of Rates prescribed by the CPWD/State PWD. The DPRs should include inter alia.
- List of individual projects aimed at integrated development of the identified destinations.
- Project Structuring (Capital structuring, implementation framework).
- Components meant for private sector or joint sector investment and possible financial linkages.
- Identification of sources of funds from various Government schemes/private sector.
- Liaison with States/UTs/other stakeholders.
- Submission of periodical progress report to the Mission Directorate for monitoring of the projects.
- Assistance for financial closure of projects for PPP and other projects.

#### **8. Identification of Pilgrimage Destinations and Sanction of Projects therein:**

##### **8.1 Selection Criteria and Procedure:**

- The pilgrimage destinations would be identified by the M/O Tourism in consultation with the stakeholders and States considering the factors such as importance of the site, current tourist traffic, connectivity, potential and holistic tourist experience, etc.

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- Central Sanctioning & Monitoring Committee (CSMC)/Mission Directorate will recommend the list of destinations to be taken up under PRASAD for approval by the Chairman, National Steering Committee.
  - Detailed Perspective Plan (DPP) for each destination, and DPRs for each individual project therein would be prepared by the PMC giving the details as specified in clause 7.4.1 above.
  - Appraisal of DPRs will be done by the Mission Directorate or any independent specialized agency outsourced by the Directorate for the purpose.
  - Projects recommended by the Mission Directorate after appraisal will be placed before the Central Sanctioning and Monitoring Committee for approval.

### **8.2 *Admissible Component under the Scheme:***

An illustrative list of components that would be eligible for Central Financial Assistance under the scheme is given below:

#### **8.2.1 *Infrastructure Development:***

- Development/upgradation of passenger terminals (road, rail, water, transport).
- Procurement of equipment for eco-friendly modes of tourist transport.
- Improvement of road connectivity leading to tourist sites/destinations.
- Use of clean energy sources for street lighting.
- Equipment for tourism activities such as sound and light shows, water/adventure sports, etc.
- Tourism Information/Interpretation Centres with ATMs/money exchange counters.
- Informatory/Directional signage.
- Wayside amenities with emergency vehicle breakdown, repair and refuel facilities.
- Infrastructure provision for stationing of caravan vehicles.
- General improvements such as earth filling, landscaping (including trees, shrubs), water fountains, fencing, lighting, pavements/walkways/pathways/driveways, seating facilities/shelters, drinking water points, garbage bins, storm water drainage, treatment facilities for sewerage/effluent.
- External infrastructure such as water supply, sewerage, drainage, electricity and roads.
- Restoration, conservation, illumination of monuments/heritage structures.
- Renewable sources of energy for tourist infrastructure.
- Environmental care and access to clean technology.
- Parking facilities for two-wheelers, cars, buses and caravans.

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- Toilet, cloak room facilities and waiting rooms.
  - Construction of craft haats/bazaars/souvenir shops/cafeteria.
  - Construction of open air theatres and amphitheatres.
  - Construction of nature trails, watch towers, rain shelters, log huts.
  - First Aid Centres (including Indian Medicines System).
  - Helipads, heliports, airstrips, ropeways required for tourists in the identified circuits.
  - Shoreline development & rejuvenation of natural water bodies such as rivers, lakes, streams and river fronts.
  - Improvement in communication through telephone booths, mobile services and internet connectivity, Wi-Fi hotspots.
  - Any other activity directly related to tourism and required for development of the identified circuit.

Consultation with the concerned administrative Ministries, wherever required, will be done on the project components under the scheme.

### ***8.2.2 Capacity Development, Skill Development &***

#### ***Knowledge Management***

- Special courses to address the skill gaps identified by the PMC in the Detailed Perspective Plan (DPP).
- Short duration skill development training programme under 'Hunar Se Rozgar Tak (HSRT)' and 'Earn While You Learn' programmes.
- Broadbasing of travel and hospitality education and training and engagement of Vocational Training Providers (VTPs).
- Emphasis on tapping the local potential and expertise in art and crafts.
- Documentation and preservation of the knowledge base in tourism for future use.

### ***8.2.3 Online Presence***

#### ***GIS-based interactive and intelligent portal development and mobile applications, providing:***

- Location based-services.
- Location based-contents.
- Booking facilities through e-Commerce application.
- Linkages to applications of existing service providers.
- Support dash-boards for tourists as well as operators.
- Decision support reporting for the department.

#### ***Project Management System***

- Tracking project progress through online UC submissions.
  - Tracking procurements through e-procurement system.
  - Tracking completion of milestones.
  - Tracking issues relating to escalation and variances.
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### *Permission-Based Knowledge Portal*

- Create a back-end digital library for content preservation.
- Push relevant research papers to appropriate institutions for future references.

### *Data Analysis and Reporting*

#### **8.2.4 10% of the scheme allocation to be earmarked for IEC components.**

#### **8.3 Inadmissible Component Projects under the Scheme:**

The assistance under this scheme shall not be admissible for the following components:

- i. Land acquisition for development.
- ii. Resettlement and rehabilitation package, operation, maintenance and management of the assets created.
- iii. Improvement/investments in assets/structures owned by private entities.

#### **9. Implementing Agency (IA):**

The projects identified under this scheme shall be implemented through the identified agencies.

#### **10. Funding pattern for the projects:**

The scheme shall be 100% centrally funded for the project components undertaken for public funding. Efforts will be made to achieve convergence with other schemes of Central and State Governments and also to leverage the voluntary funding available for Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) initiatives of Central Public Sector Undertakings and corporate sector. Efforts would be made to introduce suitable Public-Private Partnerships for improved sustainability of the projects.

The Viability Gap Funding (VGF) may be provided under the Mission in accordance with the relevant guidelines/instructions of the Govt.

- It is envisaged that the funding of individual project will vary from State to State and will be finalized on the basis of DPRs prepared by PMC enabling convergence with other Government schemes.
  - The State Governments would submit an undertaking with Government of India indicating their commitment to the scheme by ensuring that the operation and maintenance of the identified and developed projects should be the responsibility of the State. A Special Purpose Vehicle (SPV) may be created for the purpose, wherever feasible. The undertaking would spell out specific milestones to be achieved indicating the works to be undertaken by them in physical and financial terms. State Government contribution towards land, rehabilitation package, O&M should be quantified in the DPR.
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### ***11. Disbursal of Funds:***

The funds would be released to the identified agencies. The powers to sanction funds in the scheme shall be strictly in conformity with the GFRs and the directions issued by the M/O Finance from time to time. All the proposals will be routed through IFD of M/O Tourism and after obtaining their concurrence, funds sanctioned to the State Govt./UTs will be released as under:

- 1st Instalment – 20% of the project cost on approval/sanction of the project.
- 2nd instalment – 60% of the project cost after receipt of utilization certificate for the first instalment.
- 3rd instalment – Remaining 20% of the project cost on completion of the work and receipt of utilization certificate.

For the Himalayan and NE States, different funding pattern and duration of projects may be determined by the Mission Directorate keeping in view the difficulties in these areas.

The financial assistance sanctioned to the Central agencies under this scheme will be released as under:

- 1st instalment – 50% of the sanctioned amount on approval/sanction.
- 2nd instalment – 30% of the sanctioned amount after utilization of the first instalment.
- 3rd instalment – Remaining 20% of the sanctioned amount after utilization of the first and second instalments.

### ***12. Codal Formalities:***

The implementing agency shall follow all codal formalities while awarding contracts for works/material/equipment procurement, etc., and ensure complete transparency in its transactions. E-tendering/e-procurement will be compulsorily followed for all tenders.

### ***13. Milestones to be Observed by the Implementing Agencies:***

- Land to be used for the project must be free from all encroachments.
- Invitation and finalization of all tenders for the projects shall be completed within 3 months from the date of sanction of the projects.
- Work for different phases of the projects shall be completed within the period stipulated in the respective sanction letters.

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#### ***14. Management of Assets Created:***

The tentative operation and maintenance costs of the projects shall be worked out by PMC at the time of preparation of DPR & emphasis shall be given to working out options for sustainable operation and maintenance models through innovative revenue generation options and involvement of Government Trust/Committees, Private Sector/NGOs/Tour Operators in operation and maintenance. In maintenance of the assets created, the experience and expertise of the local bodies would be used for the maximum possible extent. However, the PPP partner would be explored for operation, maintenance and sustenance of the facilities created. The Programme Management Consultant shall assist the State Governments and PPP partner in the successful setting up of sustainable O&M models, if required.

#### ***15. Outcome Parameter:***

The outcome of the integrated development of Pilgrimage centres on a mission mode shall be regularly evaluated and measured on the following parameters:

- Increase in tourist traffic.
- Employment generation.
- Enhancement of awareness and development of skills & capacity to augment tourism with value added services.
- Increase in private sector participation in the identified tourist destinations.

#### ***16. Monitoring:***

The entire project would be 'outcome oriented' rather than 'process oriented'. Targets would be pre-set and benchmarked before being accepted as yardsticks to measure project progress.



# PRASAD Cities



\*Indicative map only, not to scale.





بِسْمِ اللّٰهِ الرَّحْمٰنِ الرَّحِیْمِ  
مَدِیْنَةُ نَبِیِّهِ ﷺ  
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مَدِیْنَةُ نَبِیِّهِ ﷺ

نائب مصطفیٰ غریب نواز دلیمر مرتضیٰ غریب نواز  
کوئی بتلائے کیا زمانہ میں ہے کوئی دوسرا غریب نواز

حضرت مولانا محمد امین الدین سنہ ۱۰۰۰ھ بمطابق ۱۵۹۲ء





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Ajmer, formerly written Ajmere, is a city (and the administrative headquarters) in Ajmer district in India's western State of Rajasthan. Surrounded by the Aravalli Mountains, Ajmer, also known as Ajaymeru/Ajaimeur (meaning the Invincible Hill), was founded by Ajaipal Chauhan (who established The Chauhan Dynasty) in the seventh century. The city was also ruled by the legendary Prithviraj Chauhan, the last Hindu king of Delhi.

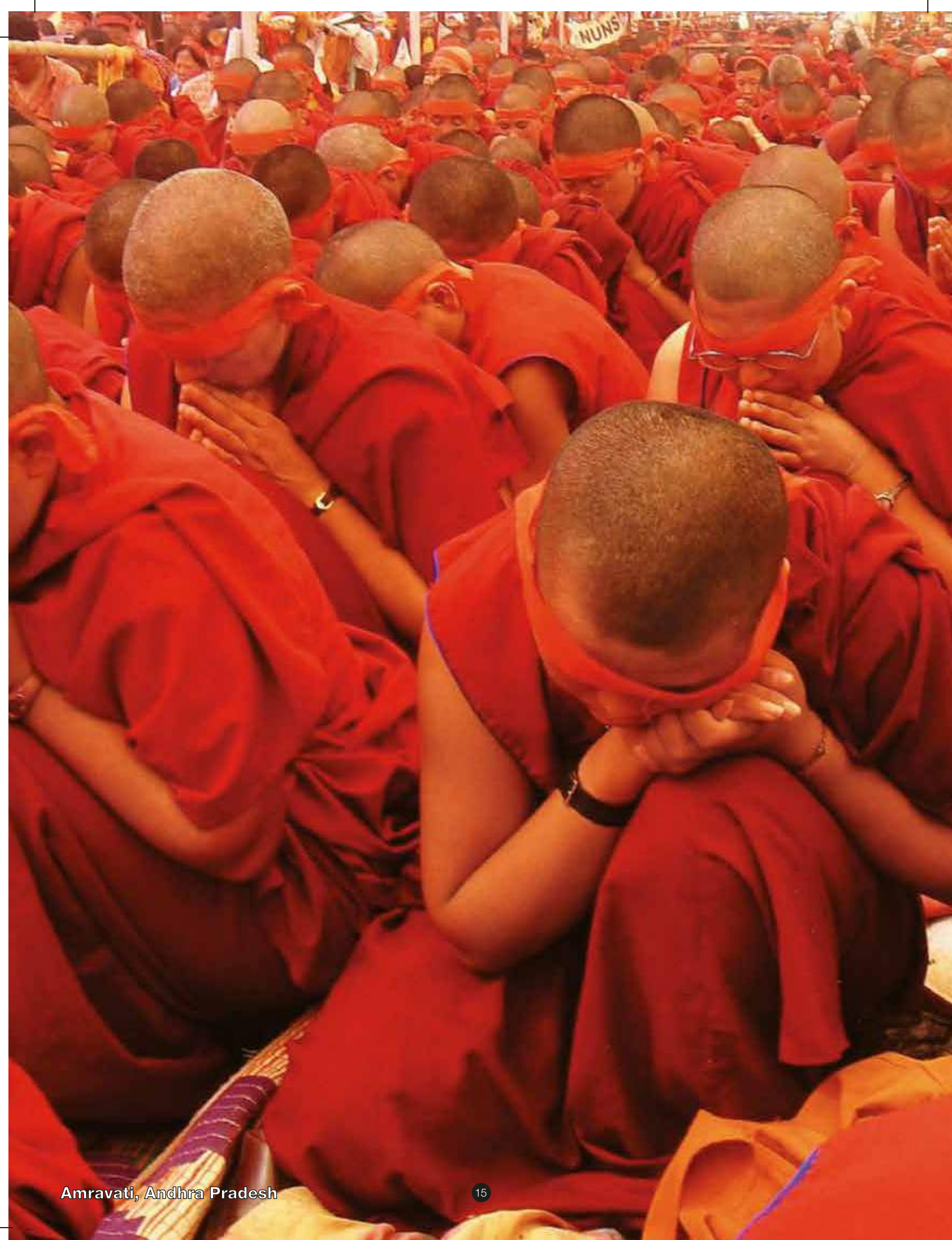
Ajmer, the city where the Dargah of the Great Sufi Saint Khwaja Moinuddin Chishti stands, is a sacred centre of pilgrimage. Hallowed by the memories of the great seer, Ajmer has earned the epithet of "Madinatul Hind or the Madina of India". Each year, the devotees of all sects and faiths congregate here from all parts of the world on the occasion of the annual festival of Urs to pay their obeisance to seek the Saint's blessings for fulfilment of wishes. Thus, the festival presents a unique picture of harmony and universal brotherhood.

Ajmer is a centre of culture and education. It is famous for its rich Indo-Islamic, Royal Rajasthani, Indo-Saracenic and Jain styles of architecture. The city is home to the prestigious Mayo College and King George Military School, both set up by the British. In addition, the city's built heritage includes Nasiyan (Red) Temple, Salemabad (Nimbark Peeth), Taragarh Fort, Adhai-Din Ka-Jhopra (a religious structure), Ana Sagar (an artificial lake), the museum (Magazine, once the royal residence of Emperor Akbar of Mughal dynasty). Ajmer is also the base for visiting Pushkar (11 km), the abode of Lord Brahma and a sacred town of Hindus, lying to its west with a temple and a picturesque lake.

In days gone by, the artists of this area did carving on wood and ivory, made vases and goblets, incised and embossed work on brass and blue pottery (few specimen of their craftsmanship: antimony boxes having ivory and appliqué work, ivory comb, necklace and knife, wooden dharau and pen holder, marble plates, stone grinder and some specimen of blue pottery have been put on display in the gallery).

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# Amravati

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Amravati is a city located in Guntur district in India's south-eastern State of Andhra Pradesh. The city is also known as Punyakshetra or Amareswaram or Dharanikota or Dhanyakatakam. It was also the capital of Satavahanas, the first great Andhra kings, who ruled from the 2nd century BC to the 3rd century AD, after the downfall of Maurya empire. The recorded history of Amravati is from 2nd century BC.

Amravati is considered sacred because of three things: the Krishna River; 'Sthalamahatyam', an important 'Kshetra'; and, the 'Sri Mahalinga Murthy'. In addition, according to Vajrayana traditional sources, the Buddha preached at Dharanikota and conducted Kalachakra ceremony, which would take the antiquity of Amravati back to 500 BC.

The city's built heritage includes the famous Amareswara temple (dedicated to Lord Shiva, present in the form of a 15ft high white marble Shiva Lingam), Mahachaitya (The Great Stupa, built around the 2nd century, with intricate carvings that depict the life and teachings of Lord Buddha), Buddhist sculptures and slabs with Buddhist inscriptions.









# Amritsar

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Amritsar is a city in north-western India and the administrative headquarters of Amritsar district in the State of Punjab. The city lies about 25 km east of the border with Pakistan and is a major commercial, cultural and transportation centre. It is also the centre of Sikhism and the site of the Sikhs' principal place of worship.

Amritsar, literally a Pool of Nectar, derives its name from Amrit Sarovar, the holy tank that surrounds the fabulous Harimandir Sahib or Golden Temple (the most revered shrine of Sikhs). The city was founded by Guru Ram Das Ji, the fourth Sikh Guru, in the year 1577, under the instructions of Guru Amar Das Ji, the third Guru of the Sikhs. The early name of the city was Chak Guru. Before its establishment, the area under the city was a part of the vast area covered under Indus Valley Civilization.

Besides the Golden Temple, Amritsar city is home to many sites of historic, spiritual and cultural significance, like Durgiana Temple, Wagah Border, Jallianwala Bagh, Ram Bagh, Jama Masjid Khairuddin to name a few. In addition, the city is famous for its woollens, carpets and blankets, kites, juttis, cut-glass work, bangles and embroidered stuff.

The city of Amritsar is a dazzling showcase of composite culture and secular heritage. It has a proud past, a glorious present and a promising future. The essential spirit of the city is found not only in its gurudwaras & temples, mosques & churches, takias & khankahs but also in its theatres & galleries, parks & gardens, archives & libraries, art & architecture, museums & memorials, havelis & forts, fairs & festivals, vibrant folk dances & scintillating taans, narrow lanes & winding alleys, parlours & boutiques, clubs & pubs, traditional bustling markets & lip-smacking cuisine.

A city of historic walls and impressive gateways, Amritsar gained importance under the reign of Maharaja Ranjit Singh, one of the most resplendent figures in Sikh history. The city lies on the Grand Trunk Road, Asia's one of the oldest and longest major roads connecting Eastern & Western parts of Indian subcontinent, built by King Sher Shah Suri in the year 1539.

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Hindu Temple at Dwarka Beach, Dwarka, Gujarat



# Dwarka

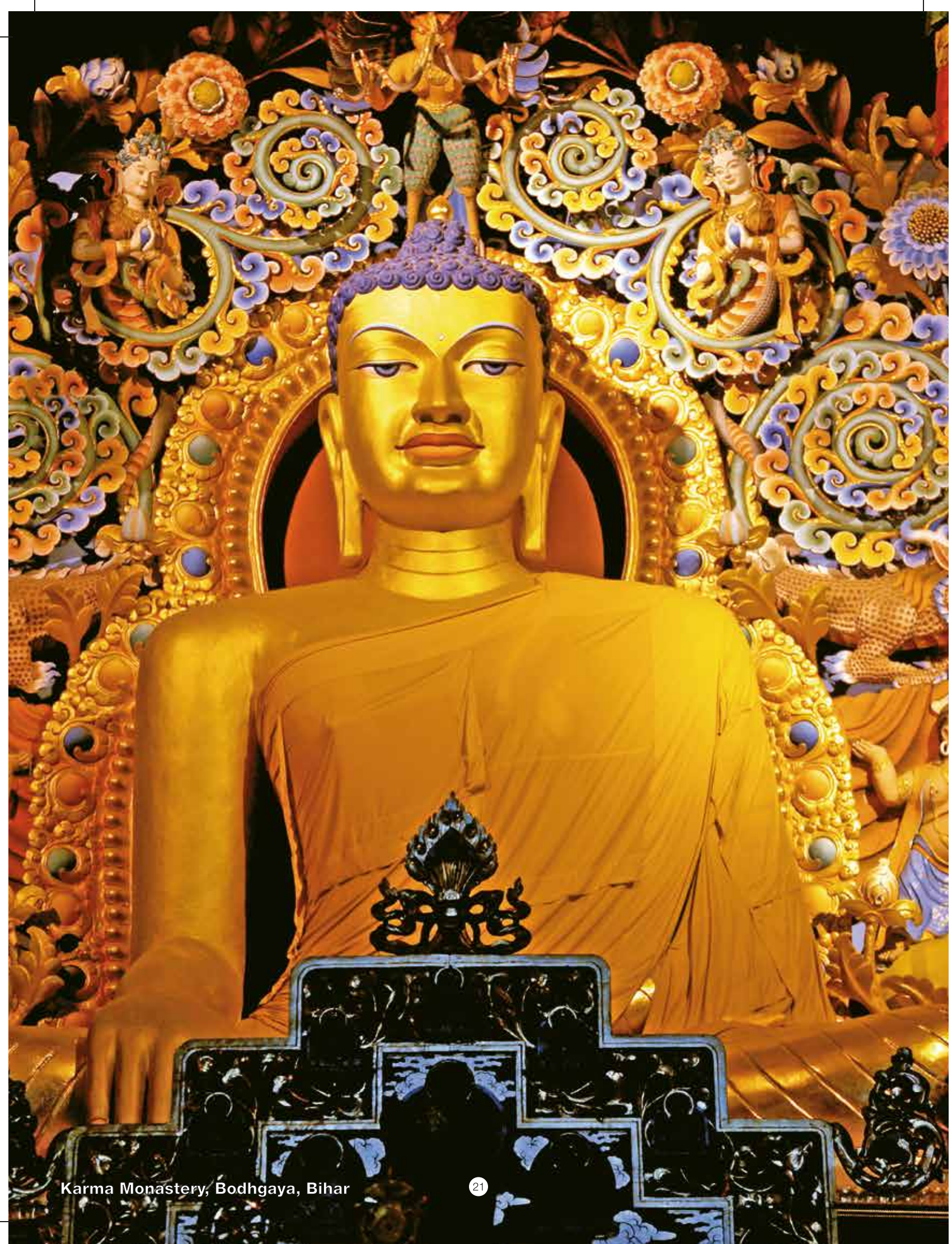
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Dwarka is a city located in Devbhoomi Dwarka district in India's western State of Gujarat. The city is one of the foremost four sacred Hindu pilgrimage sites (Chardham), and is one of the seven most ancient religious cities in the country. Dwarka is often identified with the Dwarka Kingdom, the ancient kingdom of Lord Krishna, and is believed to have been the first capital of Gujarat. The city is centred around Dwarkadheesh Temple (dedicated to Lord Krishna), which was built around 200 BC and was enlarged in the 17th century.

The city finds its mention in Indian epic literature in Mahabharata and Skanda Purana, and also in the copper inscription dated 574 AD. Before its establishment, the area under the city was a part of the vast area covered during Indus Valley Civilization.

Recent findings indicate that these stories of ancient Dwarka have a historical basis. Thirty copper coins, a foundation of boulders, old structures including a circular one and pottery samples dating back around 1500 BC were excavated. The recent underwater study on the coastal water of Dwarka conducted by the Archaeological Survey of India reveals the existence of a city dated to the 2nd millennium BC. The search for the lost city revealed a township that was built in six sectors along the banks of a river. They have also found a well-fortified township of Dwarka, that extended more than half a mile from the shore. The foundation of boulders, on which the city's walls were erected, proves that the land was reclaimed from the sea. The general layout of the city of Dwarka described in ancient texts corresponds with that of the submerged city discovered by the Marine Archaeology Unit (MAU).









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Gaya is a city in eastern India and the administrative headquarters of Gaya district in the State of Bihar. The city is located on the banks of the River Falgu and is in close proximity to famous Buddhist pilgrimage centre of Bodhgaya, the place where Lord Buddha attained enlightenment. The town is of ancient historical significance and finds mention in texts dating back to 600 BC. It was projected to the world by Bimbisara the Fifth of the Shishunaga dynasty who lived and ruled around 519 BC. Besides, Gaya finds mention in the great epics of Ramayana and Mahabharata.

Gaya is an important place of Hindu tourism for 'pind-daan' and sees a huge influx of visitors for the month long 'Pitra Paksh' mela annually. Gaya has 54 sites for 'pind-daan' including the Brahma Kund, Ram Kund, Uttarmanas, Brahma Sarovar, Rukmani Sarovar, Sita Kund, etc.

The city has several important heritage sites like the Vishnupad Temple, Mangla Gauri Temple, Pretshila Temple and Ramshila Temple. The Brahmayoni Hill is an important pilgrimage for Buddhists, while the largest mosque in Bihar, the Jama Masjid, is also located in Gaya. The city's natural heritage includes Pretshila Hill, Muchalinda Lake, to name a few.





Kamakhya Temple, Guwahati, Assam





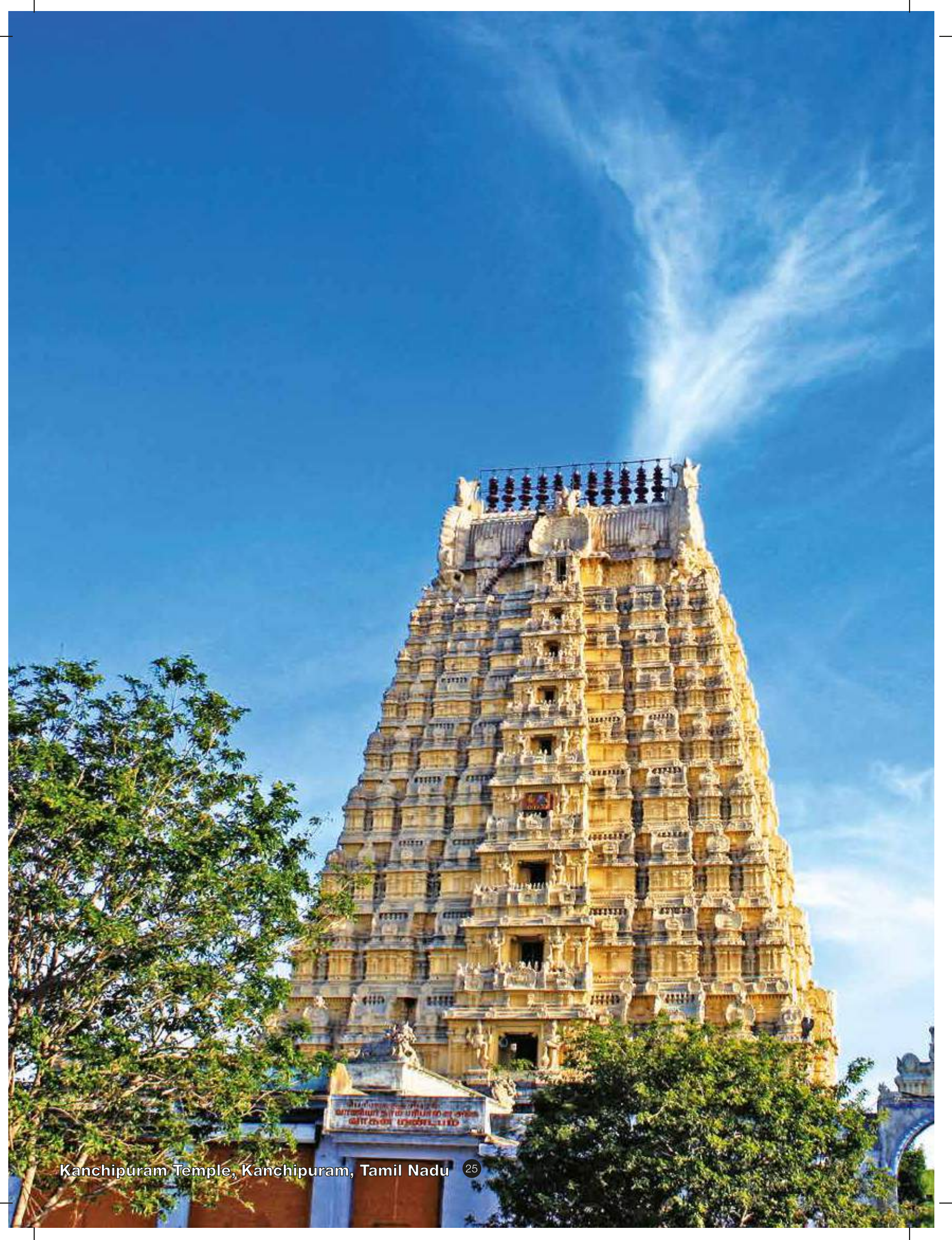
# Kamakhya

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Kamakhya Temple is an ancient seat of tantric and shakti cults of Hinduism and it is the most important shrine of Assam. This temple, situated on the hilltop of Nilachal Hills, overlooking river Brahmaputra, is 8km away from the railway station of Guwahati. This shrine is also mentioned in the inscription of Allahabad pillar of Samudragupta. This Temple is amongst the 51 Shakti Peethas related to the cult of Sati, and remains one of the most important Shakta temples and Hindu pilgrimage sites in the world.

This is one of the most important centre for Tantra worship hence this temple attracts thousands of Tantra devotees in an annual festival known as the Ambubachi Mela. Another annual celebration is the Manasha Puja. Durga Puja is also celebrated annually at Kamakhya during Navaratri in the autumn. This five-day festival attracts many visitors.





Kanchipuram Temple, Kanchipuram, Tamil Nadu





# Kanchipuram

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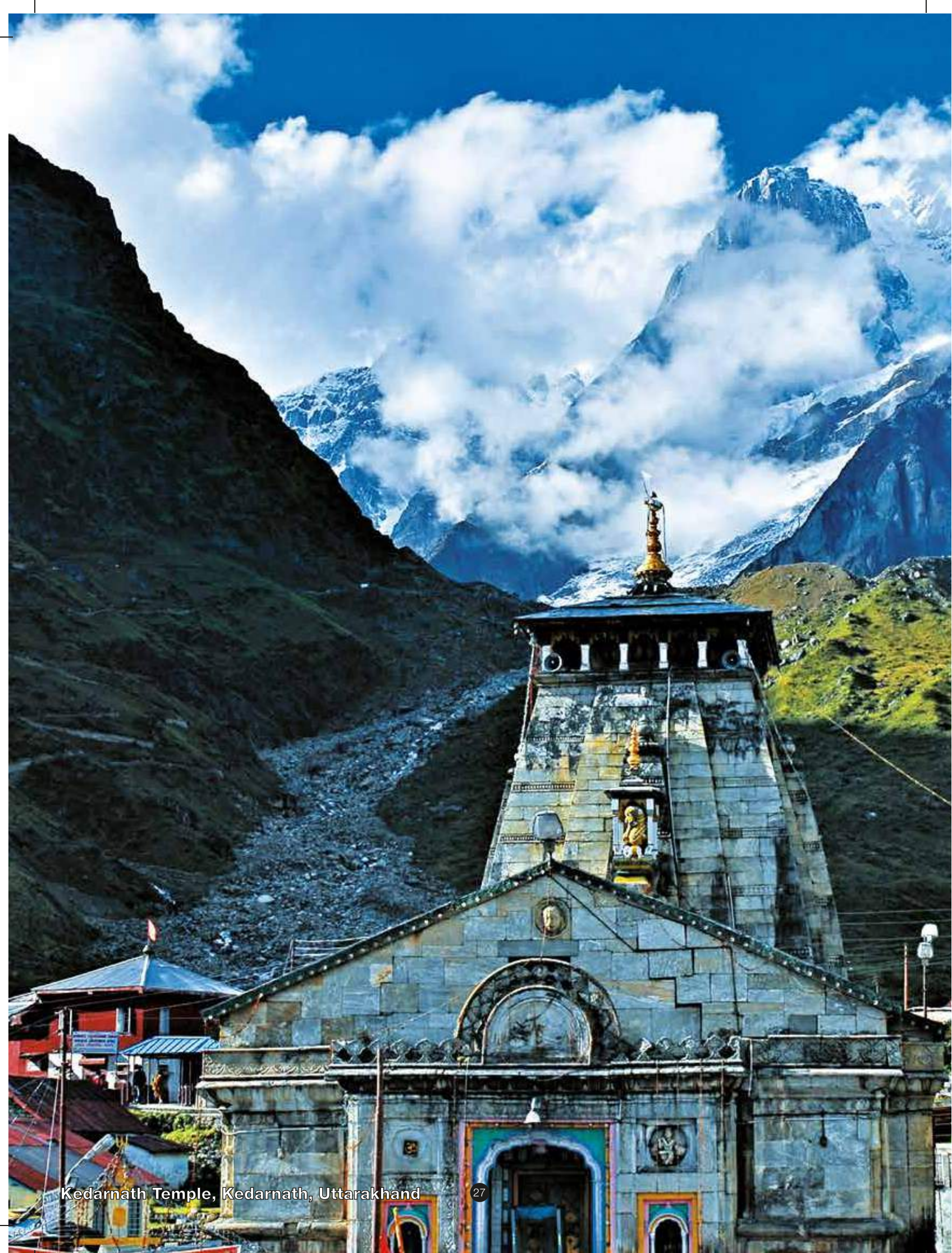
Kanchipuram city is situated in the Southern India and is also the administrative headquarters of the district of Kanchipuram in the State of Tamil Nadu. It was locally referred to as Kachi or Kachipedu.

Located on the banks of the Vegavathy river, Kanchipuram has been ruled by the Pallavas, the Medieval Cholas, the Later Cholas, the Later Pandyas, the Vijayanagar Empire, the Carnatic kingdom, and the British.

Kanchipuram is a spectacular temple city, known as 'city of thousand temples'. It is one of the seven sacred cities (as per Hindu mythology) to reach final attainment. The city was also a religious centre of advanced education for Jainism and Buddhism between the 1st and 5th centuries. The city's built heritage includes the Kailasanathar Temple, Vaikunta Perumal Temple, Varadharaja Perumal Temple, Ekambareswarar Temple (having one of the tallest temple towers in India), Kamakshi Amman Temple and Kumarakottam Temple. It is the headquarters of the Kanchi Matha, founded by the Hindu saint Adi Sankaracharya, and popular as one of the four dhams of Hinduism. The city is also known for its culture and civilization.

Apart from its temples, this small town is also known for its thriving handloom industry. The city is popular for its renowned crafted world-famous silk sarees and the main profession of the people is weaving silk sarees. As a result, Kanchipuram is also known as Silk City. The silk weavers of Kanchi settled more than 400 years ago and have given it an enviable reputation as the producer of the best silk sarees in the country.





Kedarnath Temple, Kedarnath, Uttarakhand





# Kedarnath

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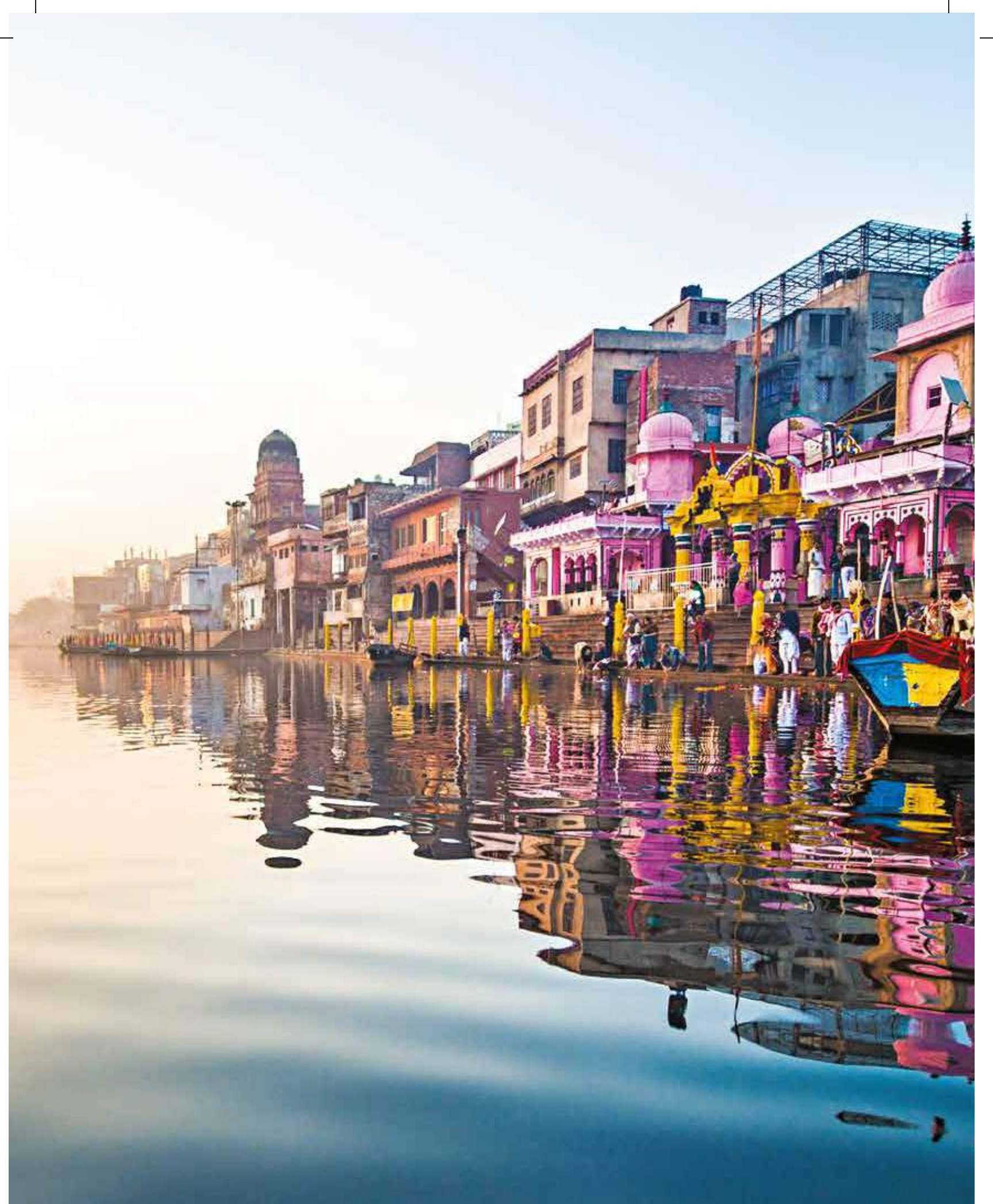
The holy city of Kedarnath is situated 3,581 metres above sea level, on the banks of the river Mandakini. Amidst the spectacular mountain ranges of the Garhwal Himalaya stands one of the twelve 'Jyotirlingas' of Kedar or Lord Shiva. The Kedarnath shrine is dedicated to Lord Shiva, the destroyer. The origin of the revered temple can be found in the great epic Mahabharata. According to legend, the Pandavas sought the blessing of Lord Shiva to atone their sins after the battle of Mahabharata. Lord Shiva eluded them repeatedly and while fleeing took refuge at Kedarnath in the form of a bull. On being followed he dived into the ground, leaving behind his hump on the surface. This conical protrusion is worshipped as the idol in this shrine. The remaining portions of Lord Shiva are worshipped at four places – the arms (bahu) at Tungnath, mouth (mukha) at Rudranath, naval (nabhi) at Madmaheshwar and hair (jata) at Kalpeshwar. Together with Kedarnath, these places are known as the Panch Kedar.

The Kedarnath Temple built in 8th century AD by Adi Guru Shankaracharya, lies adjacent to the site of an ancient temple built by Pandavas. The walls of the exquisitely architected temple are embellished with figures of deities and scenes from mythology. The temple has a conical Lingam - the main idol, a statue of Nandi – the celestial bull, a 'garbhagriha' for worship and a 'mandap' for assemblies of pilgrims and visitors. The temple is believed to be more than 1,000 years old.

Behind the Kedarnath Temple is the Shankaracharya Samadhi, where lies the Samadhi or the final resting place of Adi Guru Shankaracharya. It is believed, after establishing the four Dhams in India, he went for his Samadhi at an early age of 32 years.

Other holy places in Kedarnath are; Vasuki Tal, a picturesque lake, 4,135 metres, above sea level which is encircled by lofty mountains and offers a commanding view of the Chaukhamba peaks; Gandhisarovar, a small lake from where Yudhishtira, the eldest of the Pandavas, is believed to have departed to heaven. The floating ice on the sparkling waters of the lake is a fascinating sight. Sonprayag, where the Sone Ganga and Mandakini rivers confluence.









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Mathura is a city in northern India and the administrative headquarters of Mathura district in the State of Uttar Pradesh. Widely known as birth place of Lord Krishna (one of the most worshipped Hindu gods), the city is located on the western bank of river Yamuna and is revered a lot by Hindus. Politically, the city has remained under Mauryas, Sungas, Kushanas, Lodhis, Mughals, Jats, Marathas, Britishers, to name a few, before becoming part of the Indian mainland.

For about 3,000 years, it was the hub of culture and civilization and economic activities, as it was located at the junction of important trade routes. It became a centre of three cultures: Indian, Indo-Scythian and Hellenistic. Held in sanctity by the Buddhists, Jains and Brahmanical faith alike, it has a long and chequered history. Besides having extensive archaeological remains, the city was visited by the famous Chinese traveller Hiuen Tsang and also received a mention from Ptolemy, the great Egyptian writer.

Of all the sacred places in India, none enjoys a greater popularity than the holy city of Mathura, the capital of Braj. For nine months in the year, festival upon festival follows in rapid succession and the ghats and temples are daily thronged by thousands of pilgrims. Around 36 annual fairs are held.

Dozens of ghats line the Yamuna as it flows through the city. Some places of cultural and religious significance in the city are Keshav Dev Temple (Shri Krishna Janma Bhoomi), Dwaradhish, Vishram Ghat (bank of River Yamuna), Shri Jagannath Temple, Bhuteshwar Mathura, Prem Mandir, Vrindavan Mathura Museum, Birla Mandir, Naam Yog Sadhna Mandir (Baba Jai Gurudev Temple), Banke Bihari Temple and Iskcon Temple.

The great school of sculpture known as Mathura School of Art flourished here for 1,200 years. Such prolific creativity and gushing devotion to novel art forms and experiment in sculptures and clay figurines as found in this school are rare in the annals of Indian art history. A survey of this glorious School of Art can be made in the Government Museum, Mathura. In addition, practices like Sanjhee (the colourful art of decorating the ground with flowers), Raasillas and Rasiya (the tradition of folk-songs that describe the love of the divine couple Radha and Krishna), Charkula (a traditional folk dance of the Braj, where a woman balances a column of deepikas on her head and dances to the accompaniment of Rasiya songs by the menfolk), describe its culture the best.

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Rath Yatra, Puri, Odisha





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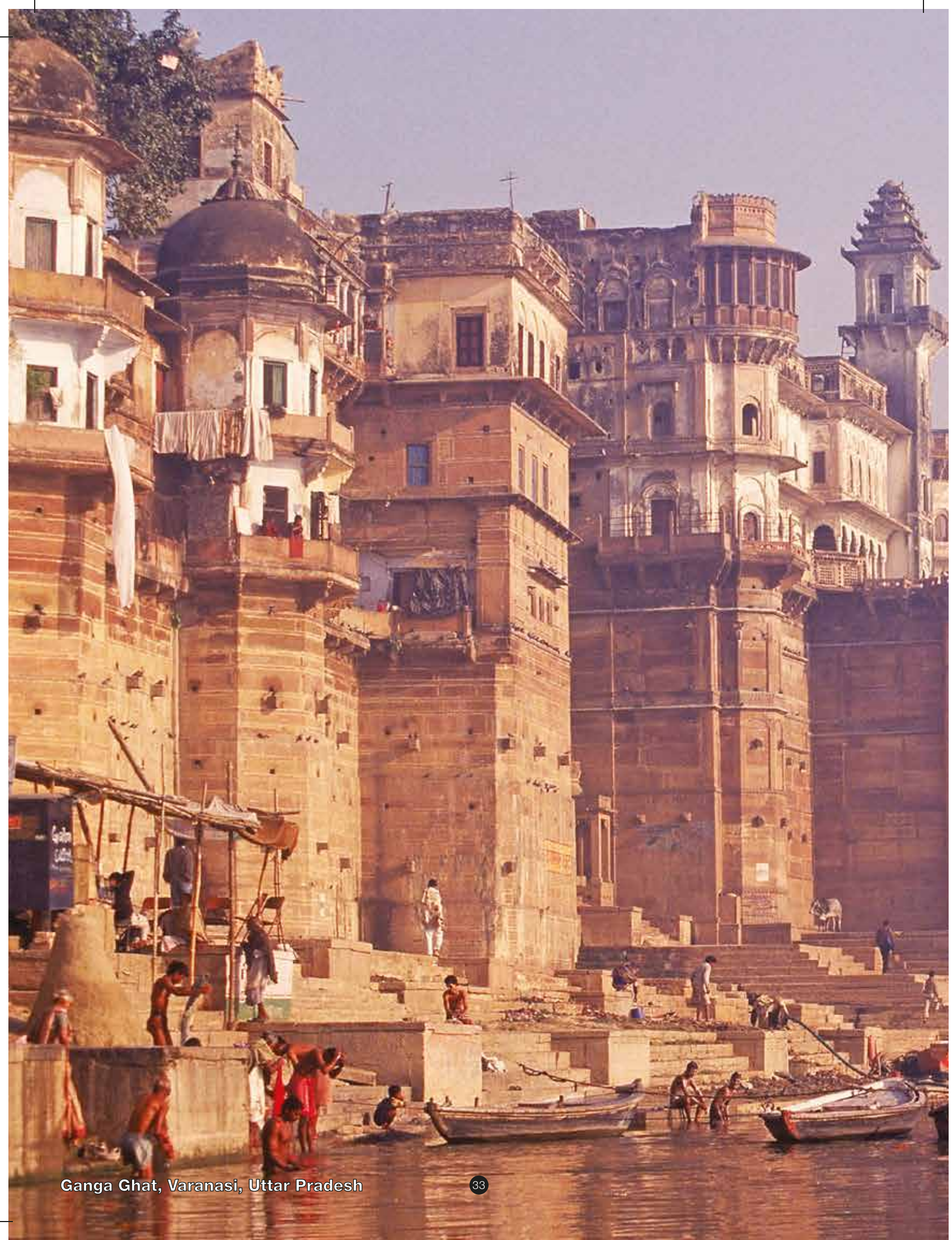
The coastal town, Puri, situated at a distance of about 60 km south of State capital Bhubaneswar, is the epicentre of Hinduism that revolves around the Hindu deity "Lord Jagannath", enshrined in a grand Kalangan Temple of the 12th century. It is the headquarters of the district of Puri, in India's eastern state of Odisha. It is a celebrated religious centre of the Hindus, as one of the five sacred Khetras of Odisha. Adi Sankaracharya (9th century AD), the great proponent of the Advaita Vada, sanctified the place by establishing a monastery called Gobardhan Matha, as one of the four Dhams of Hinduism.

Subsequently, several saints and philosophers, like Ramanuja (12th century AD), Madhavatirtha (13th century AD), Naraharitirtha, Sankaradeva, Nanak, Kabir, Chaitanya, Ballav Bhatta, Ramachandra Puri, Paramananda Puri visited and further sanctified the place through their preachings and left their imprints in the monasteries and ashramas that they established. Recorded history reveals that from the time of the Somavamsis (11th century AD), all ruling dynasties have extended liberal patronage for the growth and development of this area.

Puri comes into prominence every year during the car festival (Rath Yatra), when three chariots carry Lord Jagannath and his sister, Subhadra, and brother Balabhadra, from their great temple through the Grand Road to the Gundicha Temple for about 9 days. Puri is equally known for its tanks which is believed to contain water of immortality. Another important community institution in Puri is the Jaga Gharas and Akhadas in each Sahi (nuclear settlements), where martial art, physical exercises and gymnastics are practised regularly.

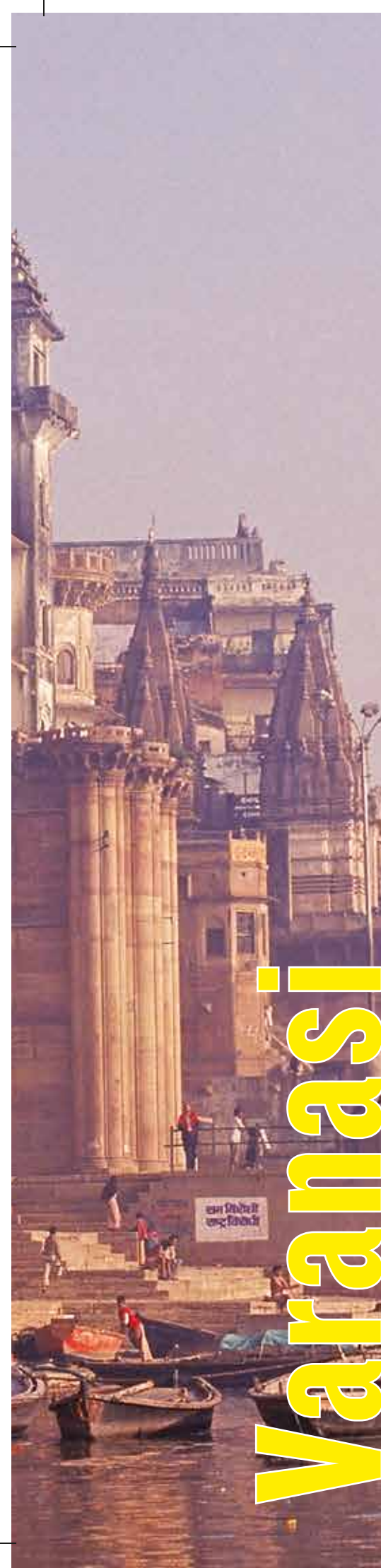
The built heritage in the city includes temples, monasteries (mathas), burial temples (gurvayatana), tanks, ashramas, jagagharas, secular buildings, cremation ground, gosala (cow sheds) and mandapas. The city's natural heritage includes its sunny beach, which is one of the finest in the world. The cultural heritage of Odisha is reflected in vibrant art forms, like tie-and-dye textile or applique work, sand art, terracotta, lacquer or brassware, filigree ornaments or patta (palm leaf), painting of gods, soap stone, sea-shell, horn work, wood carvings and solapith work to name a few.





Ganga Ghat, Varanasi, Uttar Pradesh





# Varanasi

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Varanasi city is situated in the north India and is also the administrative headquarters of the district of Varanasi in the State of Uttar Pradesh. The city is situated on Western Bank of River Ganga. Throughout its history, the city has been known by a number of names: Anandvana (the forest of bliss); Kashi (the city of light); Banaras (a name derived from rivers Varuna and Asi that flow into Ganga), Benares and finally Varanasi. For a brief period, city was also named Mohammadabad by the Mughal King, Aurangzeb. It is regarded as holy by Hindus, Buddhists and Jains and is one of the oldest continually inhabited cities in the world. To the Hindus, the city of Benares is the holiest place in the world, a sacred city and a place of pilgrimage.

Varanasi has been a centre of learning, enlightenment, culture and civilization for more than 3,000 years. The city was located on the old trade route and was also mentioned by famous Chinese traveller Xuan-Zang. The culture of Varanasi is closely associated with River Ganga and the river's religious importance. People often refer to Varanasi as the city of temples, the holy city of India, the religious capital of India, the city of learning and culture capital of India.

The city was birthplace of the famous Benares Gharana form of Indian Classical music. The city was home to many prominent Indian philosophers, poets, writers and musicians, like Kabir, Ravi Dass, Munshi Prem Chand et al, to name a few. Tulsidas wrote his Ramacharitramanas here, while Gautam Budha gave his first sermon at Sarnath (near Kashi). Ayurveda is also said to have originated here.

The built heritage of the city comprises of numerous ghats on the bank of River Ganga (used for various purposes like bathing, rituals, cremating dead bodies et al); numerous temples (the most famous amongst which is Kashi Vishwanath, dedicated to Lord Shiva); the old city (marked by crowded narrow lanes flanked by road-side shops and scores of temples); palaces, stupas. Historically, Varanasi has been famous for muslin, silk fabrics and its art of silk weaving, perfumes, ivory works and sculpture, textiles such as hand-woven carpets and handi-crafts, brassware, copperware, glass bangles, wood and clay toys, musical instruments and exquisite gold jewellery.

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Velankanni Church, Nagapattinam, Tamil Nadu





# Vellankanni

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Vellankanni, also known as Vailankanni, is a city located in Nagapattinam district in India's southern State of Tamil Nadu. It lies on the Coromandel Coast of the Bay of Bengal. The town is home to country's one of the biggest Catholic pilgrimage centres, dedicated to Our Lady of Good Health, origin of which can be traced back to the 16th century. Built in the Gothic style, the church was modified by Portuguese and then further expanded later on due to the influx of pilgrims.



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