Get ready to embark on an inspirational journey to the most important Buddhist sites in India and Nepal. Explore the legendary Boudhanath Stupa in Nepal and Lumbini where the Buddha was born, before traveling to India where he attained Enlightenment, gave his first teachings and passed away into Mahaparinirvana. Take a boat ride on the River Ganges, visit holy mountain sites such as Vulture’s Peak and explore the ancient ruins of the famous Buddhist university, Nalanda. Lastly, finish the pilgrimage at the stunning caves of Ajanta and Ellora in Aurangabad.

**Trip Highlights**

- Kathmandu - The majestic Boudhanath Stupa, symbolic of the Buddha’s mind
- Morning nun’s puja, high on the mountains of Kathmandu*
- Lumbini - the birthplace of the Buddha, the Maya Devi Temple and World Peace Pagoda.
- Kapilavastu — where the Buddha grew up.
- Kushinagar - where the Buddha passed away into Mahaparinirvana, visit the Parinirvana Temple, Parinirvana Stupa and the Ramabhar Stupa (cremation stupa) of the Buddha.
- Vaishali – where the Buddha ordained the first Buddhist nuns; cured people of a great plague; Ashoka pillar; and the Buddha’s relic stupa.
- Bamboo Grove - where the Buddha spent many rains retreats.
- Vulture’s Peak - where the Buddha taught the Heart Sutra, visit Shariputra’s cave.
- Nalanda – incredible ancient ruins of the Nalanda Buddhist University; Shariputra’s stupa and museum housing hundreds of Buddhist artifacts uncovered during the excavations.
- Bodhgaya - the Mahabodhi Stupa where Buddha attained Full Enlightenment underneath the Bodhi tree; ample time for personal practice, meditation and reflection; visit to a nearby village to see how the locals live.
- Mahakala Cave – a small but powerful cave associated with the protector deity in Vajrayana Buddhism, also considered by many where Buddha meditated for 6 years before attaining enlightenment.
- Varanasi - take an unforgettable boat ride along the burning ghats on the River Ganges; view the exotic Ganga Aarti (light offering) ritual.
- Sarnath - where Buddha gave his first sermon on the Four Noble Truths; visit the Dhamekh Stupa and Archaeological Museum.
- Aurangabad – the magnificent Ajanta and Ellora Caves carved out to form impressive prayer halls and monasteries decorated with beautiful murals and stone carvings of the Buddha.

* Alternatively visit the Swayambhunath Stupa (also known as ‘Monkey Temple’), one of the most ancient and holy sites in Kathmandu.

**What’s Included**

- 16 nights – 3-4 star accommodation most nights, see website for details.
- 15 breakfasts, 12 lunches, 13 dinners
- Boat cruise on River Ganges
- All entry fees to the holy sites and museums
- All land travel in Nepal and India
- Four economy class flights: Kathmandu to Bhairahawa, Varanasi to Delhi, Delhi to Aurangabad, Aurangabad to Delhi
- Two small bottles of water each day
- Specialist local guides at some sites
- Airport arrival transfer in Kathmandu
- All tips for the drivers, waiting staff and shoe minders
- Fees for the main guide/teacher and their assistants

**What’s Not Included**

- Airfares to Kathmandu and flight home out of Delhi
- Visa fees for Nepal and India
- Personal travel insurance
- Excess baggage charges
- Taxis or rickshaws taken outside the normal group travel
- Communication costs (Wi-Fi, phone calls, etc.)
- Optional day tour in Delhi on Day 13
- Laundry and all items of a personal nature
- Any meals, snacks or drinks not part of the group buffet meals (including breakfast at Druk Amitabha Mountain, lunch at Ellora Caves, lunch in Delhi on Day 13, and 3 dinners in Aurangabad).
**PILGRIMAGE LEADER**

Mindah-Lee Kumar is a Buddhist teacher and practitioner from Canberra, Australia. She has been studying Buddhism for over ten years. She was ordained as a nun for three years in the tradition of the Sakya school of Tibetan Buddhism. She completed a total of three years solitary retreat in the same tradition. Her aim is to make Buddhist teachings as relevant and as practical as possible and she posts her work on her website, The Enthusiastic Buddhist.

**DETAILED ITINERARY**

**DAY 1: Arrival in Kathmandu, Nepal**

Friday. Upon arrival into Kathmandu, you’ll be met at the airport and transferred to the hotel. You are welcome to arrive earlier than this date and we can arrange a transfer and any extra night’s accommodation upon request. In the evening, we will have an introductory meeting with all pilgrims at the hotel followed by a buffet dinner. Stay overnight in Kathmandu.

**Day 2: Nun’s Morning Puja and Boudhanath Stupa**

We will begin our first day of our pilgrimage with an early 5am start to journey up the mountains to Druk Amitabha Mountain nunnery. Here we will experience the resonating and wondrous chanting of Tibetan nuns while they do their morning puja. After this we will have breakfast at the nunnery while enjoying their mountain views.

Then we will head back to spend the rest of the day exploring Boudhanath Stupa which is a spiritual hub for Tibetan Buddhists in particular, who visit to circumambulate this deeply-symbolic structure. We will also visit some surrounding gompas, including one housing a three-storey high statue of Maitreya, the future Buddha. You will have ample time to circumambulate and meditate at Boudhanath Stupa and even do some shopping. Around Boudhanath Stupa are the best places to purchase quality Newari handcrafted dharma items, including statues and thangkas.

Please note in the event that we cannot attend the nun’s puja, we will make a trip to Swayambhunath Stupa (also known as ‘Monkey Temple’), one of the most ancient and holy sites in Kathmandu, dating back to as early as the third century BC.

**DAY 3: Lumbini**

After breakfast, departing Kathmandu, we catch a short scenic flight toward the border of Nepal where we visit Lumbini, the birthplace of the Buddha. You will have ample time to circumambulate and meditate at Boudhanath Stupa and even do some shopping. Around Boudhanath Stupa are the best places to purchase quality Newari handcrafted dharma items, including statues and thangkas.

**DAY 4: Kapilavastu**

After breakfast, we will visit Kapilavastu where the Buddha lived as a prince before leaving his palace. In the afternoon, we return to Buddha’s birthplace in Lumbini Gardens where you can meditate in the peace and tranquility of the park.

**DAY 5: Kushinagar**

Departing Lumbini we will clear immigration at the Nepal/Indian border enroute to Kushinagar. Arriving in Kushinagar, we visit the Parinirvana Stupa and the Ramabhar Stupa (the cremation stupa) to pay our respects to the place where the Buddha passed away into Mahaparinirvana. This is an excellent place for us to reflect on the impermanence of our own lives as well as contemplate the extraordinary possibilities if we choose to live a life of kindness, virtue and meditation. Stay overnight in Kushinagar.

**DAY 6: Vaishali**

Early this morning we will depart Kushinagar and drive through rural India to Vaishali. Vaishali was frequented by the Buddha and is the place where he spent his last rains retreat (a three-month meditation retreat during the monsoon period).
Here the Buddha cured the local people of a great plague and famine, ordained the first Buddhist nuns, one of them being his step mother, Prajapati Gautami, and also announced his impending departure from earth (his Mahaparinirvana). This afternoon we will visit the Ashoka pillar and the Buddha’s relic stupa before journeying onward to Rajgir where we will stay overnight.

**Day 7: Bamboo Grove, Vulture’s Peak and Nalanda**

Today after breakfast, we will make a brief visit to Bamboo Grove where the Buddha spent many rains retreats, before taking a scenic walk up to Vulture’s Peak where the Buddha gave one of his most revered teachings, known as the Heart Sutra. After a short talk and guided meditation at Shariputra’s cave (one of the Buddha’s chief disciples) we’ll head back downhill and visit the ancient ruins of the Nalanda Buddhist University. This was a thriving center of higher learning for thousands of Buddhist monastics between the fifth to the twelfth century AD, before it was razed to the ground by Muslim invaders in 1193. After exploring the archaeological excavations of Nalanda and the Shariputra stupa, we will head over to the museum to view the hundreds of Buddhist artifacts uncovered during the excavations. Then, with great anticipation we will journey onwards to the most popular Buddhist pilgrimage site of all time, Bodhgaya, the place where Buddha attained Full Enlightenment underneath the Bodhi tree. Stay overnight in Bodhgaya.

**DAY 8: Bodhgaya**

This morning right after breakfast, we will visit the Mahabodhi Stupa and the Bodhi Tree in the main temple grounds which marks the spot where the Buddha attained Full Enlightenment. After exploring each of the significant places in the temple grounds associated with the Buddha’s awakening, we will make a visit to a nearby village to see how the locals live.

After lunch, we will visit Sujata’s stupa commemorating the village girl who offered the Buddha his first meal after breaking his fast. Following lunch, we will visit Sujata’s stupa commemorating the village girl who offered the Buddha his first meal after breaking his fast.

**DAY 9: Bodhgaya**

This morning we return to the main temple for free time to do personal practice. The afternoon is also free for you to spend more time in the temple grounds.

**DAY 10: Mahakala Cave**

This morning we take a short drive where we will walk uphill to visit the cave commonly known as Mahakala Cave. This cave is associated with the protector deity in Vajrayana Buddhism, as well as considered by some as the place where Buddha meditated for six years before attaining enlightenment.

After lunch, we will explore some of the many Buddhist temples close to our hotel, including some Bhutanese, Japanese, Thai and Tibetan temples. The rest of the day is free for you to spend more time in the blessed sanctuary of the Mahabodhi temple grounds.

**DAY 11: Varanasi**

Shortly after breakfast, we will depart early from Bodhgaya to travel to Varanasi, an ancient Indian city formerly known as Banaras. Following a late lunch we will make a trip to the River Ganges where we will take an unforgettable boat ride along the burning ghats where the Hindus cremate the deceased and view the exotic Ganga Aarti (light offering) ritual.

After making candle light offerings in the main temple, the rest of the day is free for you to read, meditate or simply sit under the Bodhi tree and watch the pilgrims of various countries and Buddhist traditions as they circumambulate the Mahabodhi Stupa.
We will then return for a lovely buffet dinner at our hotel. Stay overnight in Varanasi.

**Day 12: Sarnath**

Today we visit Sarnath, the place where the Buddha gave his first sermon on the Four Noble Truths. This place is marked by the Dhamekh Stupa and surrounded by the beautiful Deer Park. After exploring the ruins at Sarnath there will be a short talk and group meditation led by Mindah. This morning we will also visit the Archaeological Museum which houses a rich collection of Buddhist sculptures and artifacts excavated from the site at Sarnath. After lunch we will take an afternoon flight to Delhi.

**DAY 13: Delhi to Aurangabad**

Today there is an optional day tour in Delhi to see Red Fort and India Gate. This afternoon we make a transfer to the airport to board an evening flight to Aurangabad. Transfer to our hotel to rest for the night. Stay overnight in Aurangabad.

**Day 14: Ellora Caves**

After breakfast we take a drive to visit the magnificent Ellora caves. These caves are particularly well-known for their impressive size. They include not only Buddhist caves, but also Hindu and Jain caves as well. The Buddhist caves were built around the 5th – 8th century, while the Hindu caves were made around the 6th – 8th century and the Jain caves were constructed around the 9 – 10th century.

This morning we will view the Buddhist caves and the spectacular Kailasanatha Hindu temple flanked by beautiful large stone elephants. Following a late lunch at the caves, we will return to relax at our hotel. Evening is free.

**DAY 15: Ajanta Caves**

Today we drive to the Ajanta Caves located outside Aurangabad. Starting around the 2nd century BC, 29 caves were carved out to form impressive prayer halls and monasteries which were decorated with beautiful murals and stone carvings of the Buddha. These paintings and sculptures are not only visually inspiring but they seem to resonate with the devotion of the workers and the practitioners that once inhabited them. All in all, these caves are unforgettable and we have a whole day to explore them.

As we depart, there is the option to do some shopping of some local handicrafts in the markets outside the caves.

**DAY 16: Delhi**

After lunch we transfer to the airport to catch a late afternoon flight to Delhi where we will stay overnight.

**DAY 17: Departing Delhi**

Today our amazing pilgrimage comes to an end. After saying goodbye to our new found friends we check-out of the hotel and journey home with a heart full of the extraordinary blessings and memories of our trip.

This pilgrimage includes lovely scenic drives through the countryside and at times these journeys may be up to 4-6 hours in length. As a result we cannot guarantee all toilet stops will be held at designated toilet facilities, and ‘nature stops’ may be required as part of the travel. Also please note special dietary requirements cannot be catered for as the group meals will be taken at the hotels which have their own set menu.

**For more information and pricing visit:**

Enthusiastic Buddhist Pilgrimages
enthusiasticbuddhistpilgrimages.com

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