

Deer Park/Plum Village Peepal# Pilgrimage February 2025:

In the Footsteps of the Buddha - A Pilgrimage retreat through India and Nepal led by the Plum Village Monastics of Deer Park Monastery and Dharmacharya Shantum Seth

February 9 – February 22, 2025

#Peepal (Ficus religiosa) is the species of tree under which the Buddha awakened in Bodh Gaya

Sponsorship: For every 6 people who sign up for the pilgrimage, one monastic is sponsored free on the pilgrimage. You are also welcome to independently sponsor a monastic to come on the pilgrimage.

• PLACES TO VISIT



Walking up to Vulture Peak with Thich Nhat Hanh 2008



Ghats on the river Ganga, Varanasi



Vulture peak, Rajgir



Circumambulating the stupa, Sarnath



Dhamekh stupa, Sarnath, where the first teachings were given



In Sujata's Village, the girl who offered Buddha some rice-milk



Walking through the fields where the Buddha walked

Shakyamuni Buddha discovered the truth of overcoming suffering and bringing happiness to the individual, family and society. Before he died, the Buddha suggested that it would be of great benefit to those who are interested in his teachings to make a pilgrimage to the places associated with his life.

This 14-day journey will begin at noon in Delhi on Thursday, February 9, 2025.

In **Delhi**, we will visit the place where Mahatma Gandhi, the *father of India*, lived and died. This is a wonderful place to begin the pilgrimage as Gandhiji reminds us of the Buddha in our time. He personified a unique way of living, spirituality and politics where it became a practice of applied ethics.

The next day, we will fly to Varanasi. In Varanasi, the 'City of Light' we will visit the banks of the Ganges River where the Hindu faithful come to wash away their bad karma. We shall visit the Deer Park in **Sarnath** where the Buddha met his first five disciples and offered his teachings on the Four Noble Truths, the Eight-Fold Path and Non-Self, thereby 'turning the wheel of the Dharma', that continues to turn, 2,600 years later.

Thereafter we shall continue in our own private coach to **Bodh Gaya** where Siddhartha Gautama awakened to become the Buddha. We shall visit the Mahabodhi Temple, sit under the Bodhi Tree and visit the seven sites he visited after his enlightenment. We shall also walk across the countryside to the caves where the Buddha practiced austerities and to the village of Sujata, the young girl who offered him rice and milk when he was starving to death. We shall journey on to **Rajgir**, the capital of the Magadha kingdom at the time of the Buddha. We will visit Jethian, where the Buddha met with King Bimbisara, wander around and sit in the Bamboo Grove, the first land donated to the sangha, walk up to his favorite meditation place, Vulture Peak and may also climb to the Saptaparni Caves,

where the first Buddhist council was held, via the Hot Springs that he bathed. We shall visit **Nalanda** the site of the famous university from the 5th to 12th centuries CE where a lot of Mahayana teachings were developed, including being the source of the Manifestation school lineage of the Order of Inter-being.

We then travel across the Ganges to **Vaishali**, where the first nuns were ordained, and the Buddha spent his last rain retreat.

Next, we move to **Kushinagar**, where the Buddha passed away, and visit the stupas and temples to mark the spots of his last teachings, death and cremation. En-route, we pass **Kesariya**, where there was the largest stupa in the world and where it is thought the Buddha delivered the Kalama sutra.

We will then cross the border into Nepal to **Lumbini**, where the Buddha was born, then back across the border to the palace at **Kapilavastu**, where Siddhartha the Prince spent the first 29 years of his life. We continue to **Sravasti**, where the Buddha spent 24 of his rain retreats. We shall visit the famous Jeta Grove where the Buddha offered many teachings, including the Anapanasati Sutra, on the Full Awareness of Breathing, and the old city where he converted the dreaded terrorist, Angulimala to the path of peacefulness. These places are very moving and allow us to experience what the Buddha did and internalize his teachings.

We will go to **Lucknow**, the modern-day capital of the state of Uttar Pradesh. The next morning, Saturday February 22, 2025, we will fly back to **Delhi**, when the pilgrimage ends.

You should book your departure flight on the evening/night of February 22, 2025.

Some who want can opt for extension journeys to the exquisite Taj Mahal and the phenomenal Ajanta/Ellora caves.

India's cities stand in contrast to her villages and have their own interesting modes of living and economy.



After a teaching at the ancient Nalanda university



Mahabodhi temple, Bodh Gaya

Varanasi/Sarnath and Bodh Gaya are both significant pilgrimage sites, having their own distinct character with large transient populations. In these places we get a closer view of how modern and traditional India co-exist. Rajgir, Nalanda, Vaishali, Kushinagar, Lumbini and Sravasti are smaller towns and relatively quiet, giving the pilgrims the opportunity to absorb the nuances of the local culture and society. We shall take opportunities to go on extended walks so as to be more grounded and touch the earth and life unfolding around us more deeply.

Join us on this journey through a fascinating and mysterious India – as we walk 'In the Footsteps of the Buddha'. The pilgrimage is an unforgettable opportunity to explore areas that few tourists visit and to see and experience aspects of Indian life that, in many ways, that have not changed since the time of the Buddha. We invite you to journey with other practitioners on a transformative journey that will allow you to touch an ancient culture and civilization, and experience the life of the Buddha through the places he lived and taught. Shantum has curated three pilgrimages for Thich Nhat Hanh, and many for the Plum Village sanghas. As we walk on the Buddha's Path,

we also walk in the footsteps of Thay and the Sangha. Shantum shares about many of the places Thay paused and what he taught and some of the history of the Plum Village sangha.

We have optional Post-Pilgrimage Options:

Building Love - Agra, the Taj Mahal and Agra Fort February 22-23, 2025

Agra was the capital of the great Mughals. Emperor Akbar, was the sponsor of the phenomenal *Agra Fort*. His grandson Shah Jahan built the beautiful monument to love, the Taj Mahal, as a mausoleum for his beloved wife Mumtaz Mahal. Both these monuments are UNESCO World Heritage sites.



The Exquisite Caves– Ajanta & Ellora (beginning and ending in Delhi) February 23-February 26, 2025

Ajanta

Ajanta is situated near Aurangabad. Beginning in the 2nd century BCE and continuing for 900 years, twenty-six monumental caves were chipped out of a horseshoe shaped cliff by hammer and chisel. The early followers of the Buddha created an isolated haven, shrouded in the darkness of the caves where they could meditate in peace. The exquisite Buddhist paintings and sculptures created by using simple tools in the glow of lamps rank among the world's most important cultural treasures and the area has been declared a World Heritage site by UNESCO. Although the Jataka Tales form the main theme of the paintings, also depicted are scenes from contemporary courtly life all demonstrating a startling degree of sophistication. In the Ajanta paintings we see the brilliant union between sacred and secular art. Shantum recommends that if there is just one place you must visit in India, it is the Ajanta caves.

Ellora

Ellora Caves: Nearby is Maharashtra state's most phenomenal ancient monument, the Ellora caves which carried on the legacy of Ajanta from the 7th century CE and was subjected to Buddhist, Jain and Hindu influences. The sculptures at Ellora are massive in form and the entire spectrum of carvings pulsates with life and energy. The incredible Hindu temple of Kailash which is carved out of a hillside is the world's largest rock cut monolith. Ellora too, is a World Heritage site declared by UNESCO.

For those who take the optional journey to the Ajanta and Ellora Caves, (both UNESCO World Heritage sites) we fly from Delhi to Aurangabad on February 24, 2025. We will spend two nights in Aurangabad visiting Ajanta and Ellora and will return to Delhi on February 26, 2025.

You should book your departure flight for either late night of February 26, 2025. or early morning of February 27, 2025