

Sacred place of pilgrimage

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Sacred place of pilgrimage was a means to establish contact, not with any living beings in space but with enlightened souls who once lived on this earth. A very deep and intense experiment on Samved Shikhar was made by the twenty-two tirthankaras, just as they were leaving their bodies. On that mountain they tried to intensify and multiply the vibrations of their developed consciousness so that it would be easier for us to communicate with them.

It was thought that if so many souls of such consciousness left their body from the same place, a path between that place and another plane could be laid. And such a path has existed. The rainfall is not the same everywhere on earth: there are some areas of heavy rain, where it rains as much as five hundred inches, and desert areas where there is no rain or it is very scarce. Similarly there are places which are very cold, where there is nothing but snow everywhere; and there are areas so hot that it is difficult to make ice.

In the same way on the earth there are places with high density consciousness and low density consciousness. Conscious attempts have been made to create areas of high consciousness, fields charged with human consciousness. They do not happen automatically, but are a result of the consciousnesses of powerful individuals.

Twenty-two tirthankaras traveling to that one mountain, entering samadhi and leaving their bodies there, created a highly charged field of consciousness, in some special sense, at Samved Shikhar. It was intended that if someone sits there, chanting the special mantras given by those twenty-two tirthankaras, his journey in out-of-the-body experiences will immediately begin. This is as scientific an experiment as any which takes place in a laboratory.

The only reason for creating the places for pilgrimage was to experiment with creating powerfully charged fields of conscious energies, so that anyone could easily begin his inner journey. There are two methods of making a boat move. One method is to open the sails at the right time in the direction of the wind and not use the oars; the other method is not to open the sails, but to help the boat move with the use of the oars.

The places of pilgrimage are places where a stream of consciousness is flowing automatically: you just have to stand in the middle of the stream where the sails of your consciousness open up and you begin your journey onwards. You will be able to travel far more easily and faster in such places than anywhere else, and alone. Elsewhere, you may unknowingly reach some negative place and open up your sails in the wrong direction: you may move further away from your destination and become lost.

For example, if you are sitting in meditation at a place which is full of negative emotions – where butchers are killing animals the whole day – there will be a great struggle and conflict in your mind. In meditation you become very receptive, open and vulnerable, so whatever is happening around you at that time enters you. So when you meditate it is always necessary to choose a place which will not take you in a wrong direction.

Whenever, during meditation, you have disturbing thoughts or find it difficult to be silent,

move from such a place. You can sit in meditation in a jail too, but that requires a very strong individuality. There are different methods to help you meditate in a jail: you create a line of demarcation over which negative forces cannot enter.

But in a tirtha, a holy pilgrimage place, such a line is not necessary. In such a place you drop all resistance and open all your doors and windows. There, positive energy is flowing in abundance. Hundreds of people have traveled into the unknown from there and have created a path. It is as if they have made a path by cutting down trees and removing the bushes blocking the path, so that those walking behind them find it easier to travel.

On the religious path, efforts are made by the higher, stronger consciousnesses to help weaker people, in every way. The place of pilgrimage was one such experiment. A place of pilgrimage is where the currents are flowing from the body towards the soul, where the whole atmosphere is charged; from where people have achieved samadhi, from where people realized their enlightenment. Such places have become specially charged. In such a place, if you just open your sails, without doing nothing else, your journey will begin.

So all religions have established their places of pilgrimage. Even those religions which were against temples have done it. It is surprising that religions that were against idol worship and temples established places of pilgrimage. It was easy to remove idols, but places of pilgrimage could not be removed because such places have a value which no religions could oppose or deny. Jainas are not basically idol worshippers, nor are Mohammedans nor Sikhs nor Buddhists; in the beginning Buddhists were not idol worshippers at all.

But all of them have established their sacred places of pilgrimage. They had to. Without such places there is no meaning for a religion. If there were no such places, everything would have to be done by the individual, and in that case there would be no meaning or purpose in a religious commune. The word tirtha means a sort of jumping board from where one can take a dive into the infinite ocean.

The Jaina word tirthankara means a creator of a tirtha, of a place of pilgrimage. A person can only be called a tirthankara if he has charged an area into which ordinary people can enter, open themselves up and begin their inner search. Jainas call them not incarnations but tirthankaras. A tirthankara is a greater phenomenon than an incarnation, because if the divine enters a human form it is good, but if a man makes a place for others to enter the divine, it is a far higher event.

Jainism does not believe in a god, it believes in man's potential. That is why Jainas could benefit more deeply from the tirtha and the tirthankaras than followers of any other religion. In the Jaina religion there is no concept of "God's grace" or "God's compassion." Jainas do not think that God can give any help; the seeker is alone and has to travel by his own effort and energy.

But then there are two ways in which he can travel. On the first, every man has to travel in his own boat, with the strength of his own hands, using the oars. One out of many may succeed. But on the second path you can take the help of the winds and open up your sails so that you can travel faster and more easily.

But are such "spiritual winds" available? This is the whole purpose of the places of pilgrimage. Is it possible that when a person like Mahavira is there, all around him, from some unknown direction, a flow of energy begins? Can he create an energy flow in a particular direction so that if anyone enters that current he will just be carried along by it

and will reach his ultimate destiny? In fact, this flowing in a spiritual direction is the holy pilgrimage.

There are physical indications of such places of pilgrimage, but as time passes, those signs may disappear. So they have to be protected by building temples or erecting huge idols so that the footprints of those great seers can be preserved. Great care has to be taken so that those places do not shift even by an inch from where the event had happened sometime in the past.

Hindu Deities Temples

There are different temples dedicated to various deities who are worshipped religiously in India.



The temples dedicated to various gods are a common feature in India. In every state there are a number of temples, which are maintained properly years after years. In India the most part of total population irrespective of their caste and creed are religious and so all the temples are regarded as most sacred in India. The various temples are dedicated to various gods like there are Temples dedicated to Lord Ganesha, Lord Shiva Temples are also there, there are Hanuman Temples, Shakti Temples, Vishnu Temples, and Lord Surya Temples. All the temples in India always reflect the religious as well as spiritual value of the devotees.

Lord Ganesha Temples: These temples are regarded as holy places. Lord Ganesha is also called "Siddhidata" as in India all good work starts with the name of Ganesha. Hence the Lord Ganesha temple stands as the insignia of religiosity in India.

Lord Shiva Temples: Shiva is regarded as restorer and destroyer as the two sides of a coin. There are various temples dedicated to Lord Shiva. He is the part of Trimurty. Loads of people fast the whole day and offer puja on special days in Shiva Temples.

Lord Krishna Temples: There are various temples dedicated to Lord Krishna and the most popular Iskcon Temples

of today's time is one of them. Krishna is generally seen with Radha, his childhood love, they are usually remembered and worshipped as Radha-Krishna. The pair symbolizes the eternal love from ages.

Lord Hanuman Temples: There are some temples, which are devoted to Hanuman the main follower of Lord Rama. Hanuman is renowned for bravery, courage, devotion, selfless service, power etc. that are admired by all his devotees. The men folk who want to be a bachelor offer puja to this god and become his follower as well.

Lord Durga Temples: The temples that are devoted to Lord Durga are regarded as sacred places for all the devotees. Lord Durga symbolizes the power of Shakti and Kali i.e. goddess of destruction. Lord Durga has a charming personality and usually adored by married women for a happy married life.

Lord Vishnu Temples: Lord Vishnu Temples are very famous in India as this god is the part of Trimurty and various temples are there for Lord Vishnu. Lord Vishnu's preserving and protecting powers have been evidenced to the world in a variety of forms, called Avatars. There are many temples dedicated to these Avatars also.

Lord Brahma Temples: The Temples dedicated to Lord Brahma are comparatively less in number. There is one or two temple in whole India. Brahma is the creator of Trimurty as well as he is the creator of the whole universe. The temple devoted to this god is admired by all in a great manner.

Shiva Temples In India

Shiva temples in India are not only known for their beautiful architecture but also for their religious importance.

Shiva temples in India are the major places of attractions for pilgrims coming from different corners of the country. Lord Shiva is considered to be one of the most significant Hindu pantheons. There are several temples in India which are devoted to the Lord Shiva. The Lord is considered to be very kind and he is famous for obliging his devotees and therefore, he is also called as Bhole Shankar. The Indian Shiva temples also display a remarkable architectural design and thus attract a large number of worshippers as well as tourists.



One of the most prominent Shiva temples in India is the Kashi Vishwanath temple situated in the oldest existing city in the world, [Varanasi](#). The word 'Kashi' is derived from the word 'Kas'. The meaning of Kas is to shine. There is repetitive mention of the word Kashi in the scriptures like the [Upanishads](#), Brahmanas and the [Puranas](#). The oldest center of learning in India is Kashi and its University is famous even today for its Philosophy, Sanskrit and Arts faculties. In the 7th century, the Chinese traveler by the name of Hyuen Tsang visited Varanasi. Filled abundantly with mythological legacy and tradition, Kashi is believed to be the original ground formed by [Goddess Parvati](#) and Lord Shiva. The Kashi Vishwanath Temple in Varanasi is devoted to the [Lord Shiva](#). The temple was destroyed due to several invasions in the past and it was again reconstructed by Rani Ahilyabai of Indore in the year 1776. The [Kashi Vishwanath temple](#) is a living example of Indian spiritual values, tradition and culture. This temple in Varanasi is a witness to the visit of several renowned saints like Ramkrishna Paramhansa, [Adi Shankaracharya](#), Goswami Tulsidas, [Swami Vivekananda](#), [Swami Dayanand Saraswati](#), [Guru Nanak](#) and a number of other renowned spiritual personalities.

Another well-known Shiva temple in India is the Amarnath cave temple which is located at a distance of about 145 km towards the east of [Srinagar](#) in Kashmir. The major attraction for the devotees here is the ice Silva linga which changes its shape and size with the change in season. With the waning and waxing of the Moon, the Linga changes its size and becomes smaller and bigger. The height of the linga attains a height of 6 ft on a full moon day. Every year, on a full moon day, which falls between July and August, the Shiva linga achieves its maximum height. At this time of the year, a festival is organized at this cave temple dedicated to the lord Shiva. There is a belief that the Lord Shiva appeared first on this auspicious day. This cave temple is situated at a height of 4,175meters or 13,700 ft. The height of the cave is 150 feet and 90 feet in length. There are about four or five formations on ice inside the cave apart from the main deity which resembles different Gods. An ice formation towards the left of the main deity is regarded as Ganesha and towards the right of the Lord Shiva there is a formation of Bhairava as well as Parvati. The entire place is blanketed with snow from the month of September to June every year. This cave temple opens for the pilgrims only in the month of July and August. Around 25,000 people take part in this Hindu pilgrimage every year. Amarnath Yatra is regarded as the most famous events taking place in the month of July and August. Thousands of Hindu pilgrims from different parts of this world take part in this annual Hindu event. There is a saying that Lord Shiva narrated to his consort Parvati the mystery at Amarnath, inside a cave. Without their knowledge, two mating doves overheard the entire conversation. After knowing the secret they are born again and again and thus have made that

cave their resting place. Several pilgrims tell that they have seen a pair of doves while they were trekking the difficult



route to get to the Ice Shiva lingam at Amarnath cave. There is an interesting story behind the discovery of this cave at Amarnath. There was a Gujar or a shepherd by the name of Buta Malik. The shepherd was given a bag completely filled with coal by a saint, but when the shepherd opened the bag after reaching home, he found that the bag was entirely filled with gold coins. Thus delighted with joy he ran to express his sincere gratitude to the saint who gave him the bag. But Buta Malik could only find the cave and the Shiva Lingam there. He gave this message to the villagers and it is said that from that day, the place has become one of the most sacred places of

worship for the Hindus all over the world. There is another story with regard to the Amarnath cave temple which is narrated by an ancient epic. According to the epic, the Kashmir valley was previously under water and it was in the form of a large lake. The great Rishi Kashyap drained the water of the lake through several rivulets and rivers. At that time Bhrgu Rishi visited the Himalayas and he was also considered to be the first person to have a glimpse of the holy cave. And from then onwards the cave temple at Amarnath became a holy place for the Hindus.

Among numerous Shiva temples in India, [Lingaraja temple](#) in the city of [Bhubaneswar](#) is one of the most splendid work of art in stone with its remarkable architectural designs. This temple possesses a fifty four meter tower overlooking the landscape. Enclosed by tall walls from all directions, this is an architectural wonder of the 11th century. The outer surface of the walls of this temple display spectacular carvings. Delicately sculpted and carved images of Gods and Goddesses in this temple have no comparison. There are three compartments inside the temple complex and each compartment possesses a temple. The image of [Lord Ganesha](#) is there towards the south of the entrance of the main temple and the image of Goddess Parvati is there at the back. The image of [Lord Kartikeya](#) is to the north of the entrance. The beauty of the temple is enhanced with the presence of several halls and pillars.



The [Somnath temple](#), [Gujarat](#) is another significant Shiva temple in the Indian subcontinent. It is also regarded as one of the twelve Jyotirlingas of Lord Shiva located at a distance of about 79 kilometers away from [Junagadh](#) and at a distance of 25

kilometers from Chorwad. As per legend, the Somnath temple is considered to be as old as creation. It is said that the temple has been constructed by the Moon God. Presently the remains of this temple have resisted the wrath of time and also lasted various attacks of destroyers. The architectural design of the Somnath temple is marvelous and it is

situated beautifully in a place overlooking the Arabian Sea. As per Hindu mythology the name of moon is Soma who is the son-in-law of Daksha. Soma, on an occasion, did not obey a certain instruction given to him by Daksha. Daksha got agitated and thus angrily he cursed Soma. The curse was that; 'Thou shalt wane!' Thus, the moon that used to shine previously with full glow started to shrink. Finding the moon in a miserable condition several Gods and Goddesses prayed before Daksha to take back his curse. Hence Daksha asked Soma to bath at the meeting point of the river Saraswati with the sea and then to worship Lord Shiva. Thus Shiva came to be worshipped as Lord Somanath or the Lord of the moon.

Eklingji temple is regarded as the most sacred temples in India and it is also famous as the protector deity of [Mewar](#). This temple dedicated to the Lord Shiva is situated at a distance of about twelve miles towards the north of [Udaipur](#), [Rajasthan](#) in India. The deity at Eklingji temple was considered to be the main ruler by the Mewar Maharajas and they treat themselves as the dewans or regents under the Lord Eklingji. Situated in a very beautiful town of Rajasthan, the [Eklingji temple](#) pulls several thousand visitors. It is said that this temple was erected by Acharya Viswaroopa who lived during the time of Adi Sankaracharya and is also connected to the Sharada Math at Dwaraka which was constructed by Adi Sankaracharya. Eklingji temple spreads over an area of 2500 sq. feet and its height is about 65 feet. The entire area of the temple is protected by massive walls from all sides and the entrance to this temple welcomes its visitors into a large hall leaning on extravagantly carved pillars. A silver image of Nandi is displayed in this big hall. There are also two images of Nandi in the Eklingji temple; one made of brass and the other made of black stone. Several other deities found in this temple complex include Ganesha, Parvati, Kartikeya, Ganga, Saraswati and Yamuna. A number of other small temples devoted to Kalka Mata, Ambamata and Ganesha are there inside the temple complex. One temple called the Nathon Ka Mandir is there inside the temple complex bearing inscription which dates back to the 10th century CE. In this temple no worship is done.

Shiva temples in India are the places of great religious and spiritual importance. Devotees from all corners of the country and various other parts of the world visit these temples to worship their Lord Shiva and take his blessings. Some of the famous Indian Shiva temples are Baijnath Temple, Kedarnath, Rameshwaram Temples, Thanjavur Temples, Badami Cave Temples, Sthaneshwar Mahadev Temple, Mukteswara Temple, Bull Temple, Sri Chandeshwar Temple, Gundala Mallikarjuna Swami Temple, Sri Manguesh Temple, Shankeshwar Temple, Bhutanath Temple, Bijli Mahadev Temple, Sudh Mahadev, Lakha Mandal Temple, Vaikom Temple, Parasurameswara Temple, Leaning Temple, etc.

Krishna Temples in India

Krishna Temples in India are a tribute to the commonly worshipped Lord Krishna, symbol of supreme power and love.



The Krishna temples in India are scattered throughout the country. Lord Krishna is integrally associated with love, friendship, benevolence and mischief. Hence whether, it is north, south, west or east India, this deity is worshipped by all. While some devotees are fond of the `bal gopal` (Krishna in his childhood), others are in awe of Krishna who delivered the messages inscribed in Bhagawad Gita to Arjuna. Yet he stands for power as well. He is powerful because the universe starts and ends with him; he is the one who stands up in the face of injustice to deliver justice. Steeped in mythological tales, Lord Krishna is one of the Hindu gods who are widely worshipped. Hence a number of temples dedicated to this deity can be found all over the sub-continent.

Krishna is hailed as the eighth avatar of [Lord Vishnu](#). Lord Krishna gave the highest form of teaching on the battlegrounds of Kurukshetra to its disciple [Arjuna](#) and this teaching later came to be known as the [Bhagwad Gita](#) which is recited by some people on a daily basis and also on auspicious occasions. The Bhagwad Gita is also regarded as the holy book of the Hindus. He is known for his bravery in destroying evil powers throughout his life and some of the Krishna Temples in India portray his leelas or deeds. The Lord is usually depicted as playing the flute or murali, an indication of the spread of the melody of love to people.

Krishna [Janmashtami](#), the day on which the [Lord Krishna](#) was born, is regarded as one of the most auspicious occasions and it is celebrated all over India with much enthusiasm. Lord Krishna is also shown with his childhood devotee Radha. The Lord is usually remembered and worshipped as Radha-Krishna. The pair symbolizes the eternal love between people and god. Lord Krishna is also shown with his pet white cow. He performed many divine sports or leela as a child.

A majority of the Indian classical music collection in almost all the languages have their subject as the celebration of the childhood of Lord Krishna. Several Krishna Temples in India are found where the Lord is worshipped a large number of devotees. Some of the temples are Iskcon Temples in Delhi, West Bengal, Bengaluru and Tirupati, [Dwarkadhish Temple](#) in Dwarka, Guruvayoor Temple, [Vrindavan](#) Temples, Mathura Temples, Ashvakra Temple in [Guwahati](#), Shri Govindji Temple in Imphal, Gopinath Temple in Balasore, [Govind Devji Temple](#) in Jaipur, Lalji Temple in Haldia, Aranmula Temple in Tiruvalla, Radha Shyama Temple in [Kolkata](#), [Nathdwara Temple](#) in [Udaipur](#), temple of Shreenathji in Nathdwara, etc.

Hanuman Temples in India

Lord Hanuman regarded as the symbol of bravery, loyalty and courage in the Hindu mythology.

Lord Hanuman is well-known for his bravery, power, selfless service, courage, devotion and loyalty. He is a great devotee of Lord Rama. He is the symbol of devotion, knowledge, valour, strength, courage, and humility and staunch dedication to virtue or justice. He is omnipresent, and can be available just by chanting the name Ram. Hanuman, the Monkey God, is also a noble hero in Hinduism. There is a number of Hanuman Temples in India where the deity of this God is worshipped. This deity is a provider of courage, hope, knowledge, intellect and devotion. He is pictured as a robust monkey holding a mace or gada that is a sign of bravery and having a picture of Lord Rama tattooed on his chest, which is a sign of his devotion to Lord Rama. He is called as Mahaveera or the great hero and Pavan-suta or son of air. He is also called as Bajrangbali.



Lord Hanuman is a common name in almost every Hindu household in India. Since the Lord is a symbol of courage, bravely, loyalty and hard work, there are several Hanuman temples constructed in different parts of India. A large number of devotees visit these temples throughout the year to worship the Lord.

Near the Khajuraho village one will find a Hanuman Temple built by Raja Sujana Singh, the then Orchha ruler in 1717. There is a massive statue of Hanuman of 8 ft high inside the temple. The Hanuman Temple situated at Baba Kharak Singh Marg close to Connaught Place is a small but a very well-designed temple, built in 1724. This temple is very



popular amongst the devotees of Lord Hanuman where 24-hour recitation of the mantra `Sri Ram, Jai Ram, Jai Jai Ram`, since 1st August, 1964, is on and it has included this temple in the Guinness Book of Records. The Bala Hanuman Temple in Jamnagar is famous for the endless singing of the mantra of Shri Rama or the `Ram Dhun`.

Jhakhu Temple in Shimla, Hanuman Mandir in New Delhi, Hanuman Tok in Gangtok, Sri Viswaroopa Panchamukha Anjaneya Swami Ashram in Chennai, Sri Viswaroopa Adhivadhara Bhaktha Anjaneyaswami Temple in Chennai, Mehandipur Balaji Temple in Dausa, Sri Bhaktha Anjaneya Temple, Sri Yoga Anjaneyaswamy Temple, Sri Veeramangalam Anjaneyar Temple, Sankatmochan Temple, Sri Anjaneya Temple are some of the famous Hanuman Temples in India

Bada Mangal is a major festival which is celebrated on all Tuesdays in the month of Jyeshtha in Hindu calendar. On this day, a large number of devotees visit the Hanuman Temple. Sankat Mochan temple is among the most sacred Hanuman temples in India, situated at Varanasi, close to the Banaras Hindu University. Every Tuesday and Saturday, a large number of devotees stand in line in front of the Sankat Mochan temple to worship Lord Hanuman.

As per the Vedic Astrology, Lord Hanuman safeguards human beings from the wrath of evil forces. People visit the Lord Hanuman temples to offer prayers and get the blessings from the lord to live a peaceful and prosperous life.

Durga Temples in India

Durga Temples in India are situated in several places where the Goddess, Maa Durga is worshipped.

More on Durga Temples in India



• [Shakti Peethas In India](#)

Goddess Durga, also known as Parvati or Lalitha, is the wife of Lord Shiva and exists in various divine forms. Two of her fierce but very powerful forms are Durga i.e. goddess beyond reach and Kali i.e. goddess of destruction. Both have great power and energy i.e. Shakti. Durga rides on a lion and Kali rides on a corpse of a demon. Parvati was called Sati in her previous divine incarnation. The family of Lord Shiva, Parvati and their sons Ganesha and Kartikeya is an ideal example of family unity and love. Goddess Durga has a charming personality and usually adored by married women for a happy married life.

The feminine aspect of divinity or expression of energy is referred to as Shakti. Parvati who is wife of [Lord Shiva](#) and [Goddess Lakshmi](#) who is wife of Vishnu is respected in temples dedicated to Shakti. There is a large number of Durga Temples in India scattered in every nook and corner. Some of the famous ones are [Mahalakshmi temple](#), Kanyakumari, Kalikambal, Kamakshi Amman, Vaishno Devi, etc. Some of the other mentioned temples are Lakha Mandal Temple in [Dehradun](#) and Srisailam Temple in Kurnool.

The true expression of the supreme energy that runs the universe, the Ma Durga, is worshipped in the Durga temples in India. The Durga temples help the Hindu culture, religion and philosophy to flourish further. In addition to that, these also help the Hindu community to display and learn a number of characters possessed by Ma Durga by participating in customs, rituals and a variety of other activities, organised in the temples.

Vishnu Temples in India

The true, the timeless and the eternal Vishnu, is ideally worshipped in the different Vishnu temples throughout india.



The Lord Vishnu temples with their religiosity and serenity bring out the age-old concept of Vaishnavism.

Lord Vishnu is the preserver God of the trinity or trimurti, has four hands. Reckoned as the preserver of the universe Vishnu is basically the eternal, unchangeable and immutable illustrating the very traditional concept of Hinduism 'Omnipresence of the Omnipotent'.

Lord Vishnu's preserving and protecting powers have been evidenced to the world in a variety of forms, called Avatars. Numbers of temples are there in India to offer puja to Lord Vishnu in His varied form. Some of the important Lord Vishnu temples in India are:

Thousand Pillar Temple situated in Warangle, Lakshmi Narayan Temple in New Delhi, Cave Temple at Badami. Guruvayoor Temple at Trichur, Tirubhalla Temple at Alapuzha, Badrinath Temple in Badrinath, Vithala Temples in

hampi, Sri Mahalasa Temple at Mangueshu, Lakshmi Narayan Temple in Chamba, Deogarh Temple in Gwalior, Thirunavaya Temple in Malappuram, Thirunelli Temple in Wayanad, Ananta Vasudeva Temple in Bhubaneshwar, Sas Bahu Temple in Udaipur, Ulahalanda Perumal Temple in Kanchipuram, Parthasarathy Temple in Chennai, Varadaraja Temple in Chennai, Ananthapura Lake Temple in Kasaragod, Ranchhodraiji Dakor in Ahmedabad, Hayagriva Temple in Guwahati, Ananthasana Temple in Udupi, Keerthinarayana Temple in Mysore, Jagan Mohini Keshava Swami Temple in Rajahmundry, Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple in Thiruvananthapuram, Kubara Perumal Temple in Tiruvannamalai.

North Indian Temples

North Indian temples figure many in number. They serve as a popular pilgrimage centre among the tourists for followers of Hinduism, Buddhism and Jainism



The North Indian temples have been constructed in the typical Nagara style architecture. The basic structure of temples in India is more or less the same throughout, and the same features are seen in the temples of the north as well.

Architecture of North Indian Temples

The sanctuary, which is the main part, is called the vimana. In the vimana, a small chamber called the [garbhagriha](#) or the inner sanctum where the divine emblem or image is kept. The part surmounting the vimana is known as the sikhara. The mandapa or pavilion for the assembly of devotees and the antarala which is a vestibule connecting the vimana and the mandapa, and the pradakshi-napath.

According to the Nagara style, the temple structure consists of two main buildings. The main place of worship is taller

and has an adjoining shorter mandapa. The key difference between these two is the shape of the sikhara. The sikhara of the temples in North India resembles an upturned cone that is decorated with miniature conical Shikharas. There are also some temples in North India which developed their own local flavour, setting aside their basic native style. In the main shrine, a bell shaped structure helps to increase the height of the temple. There is the kalasa at the top as in all Hindu temples. The ayudha or emblem of the presiding deity is also present. Fundamentally, there is no structural difference between the Hindu and the Jain temples in the North except that the need for housing the various Tirthankars dominates the disposition of space in the latter. Moreover, the Jain temples achieve their effect from the grouping together of a number of shrines on such high spaces as the hills can provide, and are



characterised by an air of seclusion and aloofness. **Some of the most well known temples found in the different states are discussed below:**

Jammu and Kashmir

The state of Jammu and Kashmir has many towering temples standing tall against the skyline. The [Raghunath temple](#) in [Jammu](#) city is the largest in North India. [Mata Vaishnodevi temple](#) in Jammu and Amarnath in Kashmir attract millions of pilgrims throughout the year, as these are places of great religious importance.

Himachal Pradesh

[Himachal Pradesh](#) is said to be the land of God and Goddesses, often called 'Devabhoomi'. There are a number of temples dedicated to village deities. Some of the caves found here include [Chamunda Devi temple](#) situated at [Kangra](#), [Jwalamukhi Temple](#) at [Dharamshala](#), [Jhakhu Temple](#) at [Shimla](#), Chaintpurni Temple at Una, [Naina Devi Temple](#) at [Bilaspur](#), Bhutanath Temple at [Mandi](#), [Bhimakali Temple](#) at Sarhan, [Lakshmi Narayan Temple](#) at [Chamba](#), etc.

Haryana Temples

Many temples are found located in [Haryana](#). [Mansa Devi Temple](#), [Birla Mandir](#), [Sthaneshwar Mahadev Temple](#), [Shiv Temple](#), [Sheetala Devi Temple](#) are some of the important temples situated in the state of Haryana in North India.

Punjab Temples

[Sikhism](#) is present in [Punjab](#) in a big way, which can be seen in the many temples and gurdwaras found here. One of the most famous temples in all of India, the Harmandir Sahib or [Golden Temple](#) is found located here in Punjab.



Uttarakhand Temples

There are various temples situated in the [Uttarakhand](#) that gather devotees throughout the year. Char Dham makes one of the major pilgrimage centres that include the four most worshiped Hindu temples. They are [Yamunotri Temple](#), [Gangotri](#), Kedarnath and Badrinath. According to the Hindus the [Char Dham Yatra](#) is of highly religious significance.



Uttar Pradesh Temples

Some of the most ancient and sacred temples of India are situated in the state of [Uttar Pradesh](#). Important temples here include the Kashi Vishwanath Temple, Sarnath Temple, Vindhyanchal Temple, Baldeva Dauji Temple, Ram Janmabhoomi, Banke Bihari Temple and others.

Delhi Temples

Temples in [Delhi](#) are a blend of ancient and modern Indian architectural styles. Some of the important temples, which are remarkable in Delhi, are as follows - [Iskcon Temple](#), [Chattarpur Mandir](#), Lotus Temple, [Hanuman Mandir](#), [Kali Bari Mandir](#), [Kalkaji temple](#), [Lakshmi Narayan Temple](#) etc.

Some of the important temples in Uttarakhand of North India are as follows:

Rudranath temple, Badrinath temple, Kedarnath temple, Naina Devi temple, Mansa Devi temple, Madmaheshwar Temple, Lakha Mandal Temple, Har ki Pauri, Gangotri Temple, Gaurikund, Chandi Devi temple, Baji Nath temple, Hemkund Saheb, [Patalbhuvaneshwari temple](#), Gangotri temple, [Yamunotri temple](#), Neelkanth Mahadev are some of them.

Central India Temples

Central Indian temples amidst their religious fervor reverberates the true spirit of Hinduism.

The temples of Central India region are a center of enticement for the visitors through out the year. There are essential and effective prayers in stone. These are all exquisitely carved and embellished with breathtaking designs, they are the true symbols of ancient Indian cultural ethos. The temples of these regions exhibit a tremendous art, which is famous all over the world.

[Madhya Pradesh Temples:](#)



The temple art in Madhya Pradesh clearly highlights the extent to which a human mind can go. It also proves that creativity knows no limits. Never failing to amaze with their beauty and magnificence, the temples in Madhya Pradesh such as the Khajuraho temples are indeed monuments that are a must-see for any visitor to the state. The temples dramatizing the romantic carvings is perfect in execution and sublime in expressions these Khajuraho temples are dedicated to the womanhood. Listed in World Heritage Site, Khajuraho is situated in the state of Madhya Pradesh. Other than the Khajuraho temples there are Omkareshwar temple situated at Omkareshwar, Orcha temple at Orcha, Sanchi stupas in Sachi, Deogarh Temple in Gwalior, Bhjeshwar temple in Bhopal, etc are of equal importance.

Chattisgarh Temples:

The legacy of ancient temples and sculpture is a prime attraction of newly formed state Chhattisgarh. The visit to the temples enables the visitors to dig out the hidden legacy of the state. The holy water of this region is decorated with flower petals. Devotees come to this region all over the country as well.

Some of the remarkable temples that are of this part of the country are as follows: Mahamaya Temple situated at Bilaspur, and Boramdeo Temple at Raipur.

West India Temples

West India Temples are worth a visit for their beautifully designed masterpieces on stone.

The West India Temples are worth visiting as the pillars and columns of these temples are flamboyantly designed. People from all corners of the world come and take the delight. The artisans from over the period of time have created masterpieces in India specifically in this part of the country. They had the eye for each and every detail, passion for work, and ecstasy in life that is the reason they had created such an example of art and architecture. The visit to these temples would enable the visitors to prove all these points. The sincere dedication of the artists on every detail, fascination for work and likeness for all things which are beautiful has helped them to fill life into lifeless stones.

The most excellent among the West India temples are from the 10th century are the Ambika Mata temple at Jagat and the Ghatasvara temple at Badoli. The plain but attractive Badoli temple comprises of a sanctum with a superstructure which is curved and an open hall having six pillars and two pilasters to give support to a pyramidal spire. The walls of the central portion of the sanctum are decorated with niches having sculpture. Ambika Mata temple at Jagat is extremely beautiful, containing a sanctum, a parapeted porch with projecting eaves and an enclosed hall. The hall and the sanctum walls are decorated with fine sculptures, the superstructures are of the pyramidal and curvilinear types.

Some of the temples situated in western Indian states are:

Gujarat Temples:

The temples in Gujarat are marvelously structured and spectacularly viewed by the visitors. This is also the major industrial town of the country. A visit to the magnificent and sacred temples in Gujarat would enable a tourist to come to terms with the religion-oriented life in Gujarat. Temples in Gujarat are also architectural marvels apart from being the place of sacredness in the province. Some of the prominent temples in this state are Somnath Temple, Parsi Fire Temples, Akshardham Temple, Dwarakadhisha Temple, Dwarka, Rukmini Temple, Bhadreswar temple, Bhriku Rishi Temples and last but not the least the Gangeshwar Temple.

Maharashtra Temples:



The state of Maharashtra has a rich tradition of art and culture. From ancient time people all over the world come to this place and enjoy the beauty. This is also the commercial capital of India. This land is soaked in the stories of the gallantry of Marathas has a wealth of temples. The state of Maharashtra has an ancient history of pilgrimage centre as well as it serves as a landmark in the evolution of Indian temple architecture. Two of the grand ancient rock cut temples of India dedicated to Shiva - The Elephanta Cave Temple and the Kailasanatha Temple at Ellora are in Maharashtra. Also in this state do the saints of Maharashtra glorify three of the twelve Jyotirlinga shrines, two of the Shakti Peethas, the eight Ashta Vinayak shrines, and the revered Vitthala shrine at Pandharpur. Asta Vinayak temples in Pune,

Elephanta Cave Temple at Ellora, Mumbadevi temple in Mumbai, Mahalaxmi Temple at Kohlapur, Balaji temple, Dattatreya temple in Ganganagar, Gharishneshwar temple in Aurangabad, Babulnath temple, etc. are all of rare beauty which add to the glory of Maharashtra.

Goa temples:

The temples of Goa are in quintessence of most Hindu temples in India, based around a deity, which is worshipped. The architecture of Goan temples is a little different mostly because of historical reasons. Goa is a Gem of India. This place is arrayed with temples and churches that are the silent spectators to the intense religious history and culture of the bygone era. Hence a pilgrimage to Goa is a unique experience. Indeed, Goa could be cherished for this meager trait that one enjoys even on the shortest visit to this diverse land. There are some of the churches also which are really very famous. In that place a one-day trip can be dedicated to only the religious places like temples and churches. Some of the important temples in Goa are as follows: Sri Bhagavati Temple in Parshem, Sri Mahalakshmi Temple in Panaji, Sri Chandeswar Temple in Margoa, Sri Manquesh Temple in Panaji, etc.

West India is the abode of many pilgrimage sites including several beautiful temples. The beautiful architectural designs of the temples of west India along with some of the charming beaches in Goa, Gujarat, and Bombay attract tourists from all over India and the world.

East India Temples

East India temples are really fascinating and enthralling and visit to these places can mesmerize a person very easily.

East Indian temples comprise the shrines of West Bengal, Orissa, Jharkhand and Bihar. These ancient temples reflect the beliefs and culture of the natives. In fact, some of the most well known pilgrimage sites are located in eastern India. Puri and Konark are the most important pilgrimage centers for Hindus. Whilst Puri is the land of Lord Jagannatha, Konark is famous for its Sun god temple. Predominantly the East Indian temples follow the [Nagara style architecture](#). However, the terminology associated with the architecture of these shrines varies from the rest of the subcontinent.



Orissa Temple

The temples of Orissa mirror the outstanding craftsmanship of the by-gone eras. Some of the important temples here are Jagannatha temple, [Lingaraja temple](#), [Mukteswara temple](#), Parasurameswara shrine, Bramheswara temple, Ananta Vasudeva temple, Rajarani shrine, Khirachora Gopinath temple and others. Dotted with numerous Hindu temples the towns of [Bhubaneswar](#), Puri and [Konark](#) aptly constitute the "Golden Triangle" of east.

West Bengal Temples

Hinduism, [Jainism](#) as well as [Buddhism](#) is present in West Bengal. Hence temples belonging to these religious beliefs are scattered throughout the state. As far as Hindu temples are concerned they are built on the mores of Nagara style

of architecture. Kolkata and its neighbouring regions house several Hindu temples. Some of these, however, are found in the form of ruins nowadays. Buddhism is one of the major faiths in West Bengal. Darjeeling and the nearby towns have several Buddhist monasteries. The Hindu temples have a tomb like feature that is prevalent in all the creations.



Some of the major temples that are mostly visited can be mentioned as follows: [Dakshineswar Kali temple](#), [Belur Math](#), Laji temple, Suratheshwar Shiva, Hanseswari temple is some of the important one.

Bihar Temples

The state of [Bihar](#) is known for its ancient temples. It is interesting to note that most of the temples of Bihar are dedicated to [Lord Buddha](#). Being the seat of Mauryan Empire, shrines such as, Bodhi temple, are to be found here. Other important temples that are frequently visited by the tourists include Jalamandir, Mahabodhi temple, Aranya Devi, Harmandir Takth Gurdwara, Bari Patan Devi, Chaubishi Jain temple, Singheshwar Sthan Temple and several others.

Jharkhand Temples

The temples in [Jharkhand](#) are full of glory and religious heritage of India. The visit to these temples really enralls the visitor and takes them to a peaceful meditative state of mind. There are many sources yet to reveal in this region and need tourist's attraction. Deoghar, Ajqaivinath, etc are some of the important Hindu temples that are located in this eastern state.

Indian Regional Temples

Indian regional temples spanning the country still stand to manifest originality and excellence of sculptural different.



Indian regional temples can broadly be categorised into the four cardinal corners of east, west, north and south, together with the recognised central Indian and north-eastern temples. Each of these masterpiece temple architectures possess a unique style of their own, sculpted as they have been by maverick sculptors from mystical

times. The regions by which Indian can be designated do possess an archetypal fashion of their own in every sphere of living, depending upon weather and evolution. Quite evidently, a lasting impression is bound to impress upon temple styles, blissfully reflecting these regional singularities from architecture to temple compound and even temple managements.

North India, strategically the most crucial part of India, has shaped the course of India's historical and cultural evolution over the last 3500 years. The three chief religions: Hinduism, Buddhism and Jainism, the origin of sacred rivers Ganga, Yamuna and sources of many other important rivers lie in northern India. The mighty Himalayas ranging from Jammu and Kashmir to Arunachal Pradesh, safeguarding the country with its almost limitless periphery is also part of northern India. Delhi and New Delhi, the national capital has too witnessed umpteen battles between several emperors and has been ruled by them time and again. As such, such diverse introductions to establishing a region is sure to impact deeply upon its temple structures. Temples from North India behave as the abode of divine and serene compassion and awareness. Miraculous architecture influenced by cultural amalgamations emote profound devotion amongst devotees. It would not be an overstatement in Indian regional temple style if it is stated that north Indian temples ideally mirror the quintessential Indian laid-back living.

Temples in North India perfectly delineate the archetypal `Nagara` style. The Nagara style had developed in the 5th century and is characterised by a bee-hive shaped tower (called a shikhara, in northern nomenclature) made up of layer upon layer of architectural elements like kapotas and gavaksas. Each of these unusual architectures are all topped by a large round cushion-like element called an amalaka. The arrangement is based on a square, but the walls are sometimes so broken up that the tower often gives the impression of being circular. Moreover, in later developments, like in the Chandela temples, the central shaft was circumvented by many smaller reproductions of itself, creating a spectacular visual effect resembling a fountain. These temples were lucky enough to escape umpteen destructions due to incursions. In this style, the religious structure consists basically of two buildings, the main shrine taller and an adjoining shorter mandapa. The main difference between the two is the shape of the shikhara. In the principal shrine, a bell shaped structure adds to the additional height. As is usual in all Hindu temples, there exists the kalasa at the top and the ayudha or emblem of the presiding deity. The basic structure of North Indian temples is a room or Garbhagriha (sanctum sanctorum) where the idol of the main deity is preserved. Under Indian regional temples, a north Indian temple is approached by a flight of steps and is often erected upon a platform. A porch covers the entrance to the temples, which is further supported by carved pillars. A striking roof called the shikhara surmounts the top of the garbhagriha and commands the environs. As time passed, small temples germinated into enormous temple complexes. Some north Indian temples also possess a hall or mandap from where

one can directly move into the sanctum sanctorum.



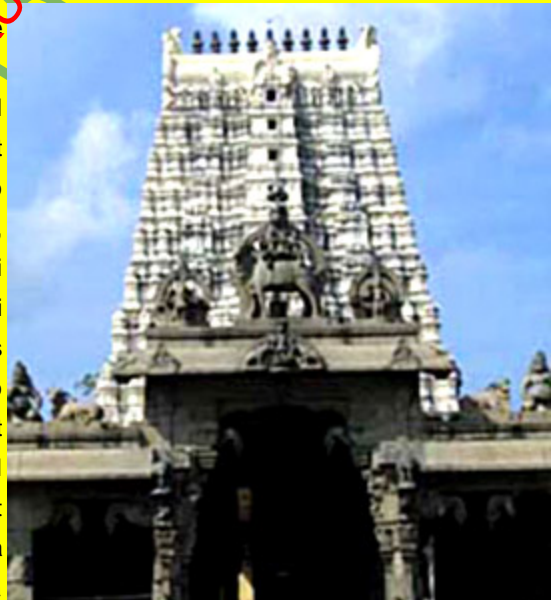
Flamboyantly erected and aesthetically contrived, the temples of South India are unmatched in architectural brilliance. But more than being just symbols of architectural brilliance, these temples are living embodiments of rich tradition and culture that has made India proud. Southern India is speckled and scattered with places of religious pursuit. In fact, there exists several towns that are referred to as the `temple towns` on account of their grandeur and the temples they are home to. Rameshwaram can perfectly be named

as an island of Lord Rama's temple in Tamil Nadu. Along with serving as a major pilgrimage for the Hindus, Rameshwaram doubles itself as a happening holiday destination too.

Indian regional temples and its architecture are broadly divided into northern and southern styles, classified by the form and shape of the shikhara and the individuality of its decoration. The shikhara of the temples in South India tend to be created up of distinctive horizontal levels that diminish to form a rough pyramid. Each level is further decorated with miniature temple roof-tops. The shikhara of the temples in North and Central India, in contrast, corresponds to an upturned cone that is decorated with tiny conical shikharas. Some temples had even developed their own local flavour, apart from adhering to their basic aboriginal style.

Architecture in south Indian temples was the singular style that had matured in the Dravida Desam. The Vimana and the Gopurams are the distinguishing characteristics of the southern regional temple style in India. Vimana represents a soaring pyramidal tower, consisting of several progressively smaller storeys. The structure stands on a square base. The gopuram, on the other hand, has two storeys separated by a horizontal moulding. The Prakara or the outer wall envelops the main shrine as well as the other smaller shrines and the tank. The Pallavas, the Cholas, the Pandyas, the Vijayanagara rulers and the Nayakas had all unanimously contributed to the southern style of temples.

East India is known to proliferate in both natural and man-made riches; the region also mysteriously doubles up as a travellers' paradise. Indian regional temples have since time immemorial been redefined and cultured through the stellar presence of East Indian temples. A visit to the temples from this region lets one to soak soulfully in the unruffled atmosphere from the environs, where life is cultured and serenity pervades everywhere. Bodhi Temple, Lingaraja Temple, Jagannath Temple, Maha Bodhi Temple, Dakshineswar Temple are some of the few religious institutions that forever etches a place in memory lane. Due to their separate regional development, some portions of an East Indian temple bear a different nomenclature than what is used elsewhere in India. For instance, the part of the temple that contains the shrine is called a deul in Orissa, but a vimana everywhere else. East Indian temples valiantly integrate a northern-style tower, or rekha deul in the Orissan dialect, with a southern-styled hall. The pattern of the tower corresponds to the one from Khajuraho in the Deccan region, while its adjoining hall characteristically bears a pyramidal-shaped roof. That roof atop the hall is additionally sculpted in rows named pidha (also mentioned as "pida"). Above the pidha there can be witnessed a ghanta ("bell," named after its shape), the whole edifice being crested by a kalasha-type ("pot") finial.



Indian regional temples complete the full square of maverick architecture and magnificence with West Indian temples at the forefront. Empowered with the inner eye for detailed decoration, passion for work and adulation for all things

beauteous, has helped West Indian sculptors to infuse life into lifeless stones and chisel masterpieces from them. There can be no superior way to prove the above statement than to pay a visit to the temple clusters in west India, where elaborately contrived columns and pillars of temples are ready to attest a trial. Magnificently chiselled temples are one of the prime attractions of this `never-never land` that is nevertheless one of the major industrial regions of the country. Dwarka, Rukmini Temple, Dwarakadhisha Temple, Somnath Temple are some of the religious abodes that are most revered in west India. The temples constructed in western India within a crucial period of post-Christian era, signify one of the richest and most luxuriant evolutions of Indo-Aryan architectural style. This post-Christian era is re-drawn by Muhammad Ghana`s expedition to Somnath in Kathiawar in 1025-26 A.D. and the epoch within the conquest of this part of the country by Sultans of Delhi in 1298 A.D. The mayhem and devastation caused by Mahmud of Ghazni`s maraud, however, did not last long. The Solanki rulers, reigning family during Ghazni`s plunder, were a stable and powerful dynasty who lost no time or energy in compensating the damages done. Contrary to what one might expect, Mahmud of Ghazni`s campaign of desecration seems to have lent an added drive and momentum to temple building in the non-violent period that followed. The immense prosperity of the Solanki rulers was due largely to the geographical positioning of Gujarat, which was then the focal centre of West Indian commercial merchandising. This was another factor which influenced the religious architecture of this region, because there exists a clandestine lavishness within the construction, which speaks of both material and emotional wealth.

History of Indian Temples

History of Indian Temples dates back to ancient times and has evolved through the various dynasties that have ruled the region through the ages.

More on History of Indian Temples



History of Indian temples is deeply rooted in the ancient period and is widely influenced by the impact of religion in various regions. India, historically associated to have served the territory bound by the Hindu Kush and the [Himalaya mountain](#) ranges, is a country saturated with exquisite temples. These unrivalled and artistic architectures profusely

contribute to the Indian cultural heritage. Irrespective of the grandeur, colossal perimeters, lofty spires, or being humble and decent in structure, Indian temples are unique and unparalleled in legend and history. The earliest temples and religious monuments can be witnessed in the rock cut cave temples by the Western Ghats and Eastern Ghats. They are traced through the [Barabar Hills](#) in [Bihar](#), [Elephanta Caves](#), [Bhaja Caves](#), [Karla Caves](#), [Kanheri Caves](#), Nasik and [Ellora Caves](#) - all in [Maharashtra](#), [Badami Cave Temples](#) in [Karnataka](#), and Pallavaram and [Mahabalipuram](#) in [Tamil Nadu](#) which date back to the 3rd and the 2nd century B.C. These cave temples were caverns directly cut out from the mountains.

Dominating amongst these countless bunch of Hindu temples, various religious monuments of Jains, Buddhists, Sikhs, Islamic or Christianity is also present. Running almost parallel in exquisiteness and grandness, Hindu temples indeed bear a rich history from even the uncounted epoch, ranging from mere brick structure, to massive rock-cut architecture.

Architectural History of Indian temples

Since the ancient period, Hindu temple architecture followed a set of fundamental rules. The sanctum sanctorum containing the statue or symbol of the deity is a square cell. A pyramidal structure rises above that, which symbolises the Meru Mountain, abode of the Hindu gods. This section of the temple was considered the most sacred of all. Apparently, Temples did not seem to have existed during the Vedic Period. The practice of casting images of deities mentioned in the Vedic mantras might have come into vogue by the end of Vedic age. The Yajnasala of the Vedic period gradually got metamorphosed into temples.

Historical archives on the earliest of Indian temples state that the edifices were built with perishable materials like timber and clay. Cave-temples, temples carved out of stone or built with bricks were to arrive much later. Heavy stone structures with flamboyant architecture and sculpture belong to a still later period. In spite of the basic pattern remaining the same, variations appeared, steadily leading to the fruition of different styles in temple architecture. Broadly speaking, these can be branched into the northern and the southern patterns. The northern style, technically termed Nagara, is spotted by the curvilinear towers. The southern style, known as Dravida, has its towers in the mould of truncated pyramids. A third style, Vesara by name, is sometimes added, which blends in itself both these mentioned patterns.



History of Indian Temples in Nagara Style

The earliest temples in north and central India which have withstood the ravages of time belong to the Gupta period, precisely from 320-650 A. D. Mention can be made of some of the extraordinary temples at Sanchi, Tigawa (near [Jabalpur](#) in [Madhya Pradesh](#)), Bhumara (in [Madhya Pradesh](#)), Nachna ([Rajasthan](#)) and [Deogarh](#) (near [Jhansi](#), [Uttar Pradesh](#)).

History of Indian Temples in Dravida Style

History of temples in the southern part of the country speaks about the earliest surviving instances found in Tamil Nadu and northern Karnataka. The cradle of Dravidan School of architecture, Tamil Nadu, was the country which evolved from the earliest Buddhist shrines, both rock-cut and structural. The later rock-cut temples which belong approximately to the period 500-800 A.D., were mostly Brahmanical or Jain, patronaged by three great ruling dynasties of the south, the Pallavas of Kanchi in the east, the [Chalukyas of Badami](#) in the 8th century A.D. and the Rashtrakutas of Malkhed. The Rashtrakutas had ascended to power and made unforgettable contributions to the development of south Indian temple architecture. The [Kailasanatha temple](#) at Ellora belongs to this period.

History of Indian Temples in Vesara Style

In the west (northern [Karnataka](#)) the [Aihole](#) and Pattadakal group of temples (5th to 7th centuries) exhibit early essays to evolve as an acceptable regional style based on tradition. Among the better known early structural temples at Aihole are the Huchimalligudi and Durga temples, as also the Ladkhan temple, all attributed to the period within 450-650 A.D. Equally authoritative are the temples of Kasinatha, Papanatha, Sangamesvara, Virupaksa and others in Pattadakal near Aihole, as also the Svargabrahma temple at [Alampur \(Andhra Pradesh\)](#). It is in some of these temples, built by the later Chalukyas, that the Vesara style can be wholly witnessed, an amalgamation of the northern and the southern patterns. History of Indian temples can be truly viewed to have metamorphosed in a pretty systematic basis, with reigning dynasties contributing incessantly.

Literary History of Indian Temples

One unique factor about history of Indian temples is that umpteen ancient texts laying down the formal architectural styles prevalent in the various regions have survived till date. They are referred to time and again, so that the comprehensive text called Vastu Sastra can acknowledge its sources in the Sutras, [Indian Puranas](#) and Agamas, besides Tantric literature and the Brihat Samhita. But all of them agree on one single issue that basically styles can be divided into three forms of Nagara, Dravida and Vesara. They employ respectively the square, octagon and the apse or circle in their plan of temple architecture. During its later evolutionary years, the Vesara style adopted the square for the sanctum, whereas, the circular or stellar plan was retained for the Vimana. These three styles however do not relate themselves sternly with three different regions, but as indicating only the temple groups.

The Vesara, which came to prevail mostly in western Deccan and south Karnataka, was a derivation from the apsidal chapels of the early Buddhist period which the Brahmanical faith adopted and improved enormously. In its origin, the Vesara is as much north Indian as it is of west Deccan. Similarly, among the 6th - 7th century shrines of Aihole and Pattadakal, evidence can be found of the Nagara style in the Prasadas or Vimanas (referring to various modes of architecture). The Dravida style from Tamil Nadu became widely popular throughout south India only from the [Vijayanagara](#) ruling onwards. While the Prasada or Vimana of the Nagara style rises perpendicularly from its base in a curvilinear form, the Dravida



risers like a stepped pyramid, tier upon tier. Historical evolution of Indian temples from northern style came to prevail in Rajasthan, Upper India, [Orissa](#), the Vindhyan uplands and [Gujarat](#).

History of Indian Temples in the Pallava Reign

During the next thousand years (600 A.D. to 1600 A.D.) of historical evolution of Indian temples, there was a phenomenal growth in temple architecture both in quantity and quality. The first in the series of southern or Dravidian architecture was initiated by the Pallavas (reigning from 600 A.D. to 900 A.D.) The rock-cut temples in Mahabalipuram, of the [Ratha](#) type, and the structural temples like the Shore Temple at [Mahabalipuram](#) and the Kailasanatha and Vaikuntha Perumal temples in Kancheiuram (700-800 A.D.) are the soundest illustrations of the Pallava style. Pallavas had laid the foundations of the Dravidian school, which blossomed to its full extent during the [Cholas](#), the [Pandyas](#), the Vijayanagara Empire and the Nayakas. The temples in this period were being built of stone, thus becoming bigger, more complex and flamboyant with sculptures.

History of Indian temples in the Chola Reign

Dravidian architecture reached its peak height during the Chola period (900 A.D. to 1200 A.D.) by becoming grandiose in size and endowed with blissful proportions. Among the most exquisite of the Chola temples is the Brihadeshwara temple at Tanjore with its 66 metre high Vimana, the most grandiloquent of its kind. The later Pandyans who succeeded the Cholas improved on the Cholas by introducing sophisticated and complex ornamentation and big sculptural images, many-pillared halls, new annexations to the shrine and towers (Gopurams) on the gateways.

History of Indian Temples in the Vijayanagara Empire

The mighty temple complexes of [Madurai](#) and Srirangam in [Tamil Nadu](#) established a pattern for the Vijayanagara builders (ruling from 1350A.D. to 1565 A.D.), who followed the Dravidian tradition. The Pampapati and Vitthala temples in [Hampi](#) are still-standing examples of this epoch. The Nayakas of Madurai, who succeeded the Vijayanagara kings (1600-1750 A.D), made the Dravidian temple complex even more intricate and meticulous, by making the Gopurams exceedingly tall and ornate and adding pillared passageways within the temple's extensive compound. Indian temple history was becoming more grand and majestic, with the edifices turning out to be even better than the previous instance.



History of Indian Temples in the Hoysala Reign

Contemporary to the Cholas were the Hoysalas, who had ruled the Kannada country and in the process improved on the Chalukyan temple architectural style. Hoysalas had accomplished their task by building exceptionally over-elaborate temples in various parts of Karnataka, that were

noted for the sculptures in the walls, depressed ceilings, lathe-turned pillars and fully sculptured Vimanas. Among the most famous of these temples are the ones at [Belur](#), [Halebid](#) and Somanathapura in south Karnataka, which are always classified under the Vesara style.

History of Indian Temples in Other Regions

In the northern part of the country, chief developments in Hindu temple architecture took place in [Orissa](#) (750-1250 A.D.) and Central India (950-1050 A.D.). History of Indian temples and its gradual building run was also rapidly witnessed in [Rajasthan](#) (10th and 11th century A.D.) and [Gujarat](#) (11th-13th century A.D.). The [Lingaraja temple](#) (Bhubaneshwar), [Jagannath Temple \(Puri\)](#) and Surya (Konarak) represent the quintessential Orissan style. The temple at Khajuraho built by the Chandelas, the [Sun temple, Modhera \(Gujarat\)](#) and another temple at Mt. Abu built by the Solankis possess their own distinct features under Central Indian architecture. Bengal with its temples built in bricks and terracotta tiles and Kerala with its temples having peculiar roof structure, suited to the heavy rainfall from the regions. As such, these two maritime states had formulated their own localised atypical styles.

History of Indian Temples Abroad

To add further to the prestigious and esteemed list of historical evolution of Indian temples, mention can also be made of the various Hindu temples outside India, especially in the South East Asian countries. These countries had in ancient times, actually included under the Indian ruling kingdoms. The earliest of such Hindu temples are found in Java; the Shiva temples at Dieng and Idong Songo. The group of temples of Lara Jonggrang at Pranbanan, is a magnificent example of Hindu temple architecture. Other temples worth mentioning include: the temple complex at Panataran (Java), the rock-cut temple facades at Tampaksiring of Bali, the 'mother' temple at Besakh of Bali, the Chen La temples at Sambor Prei Kuk in Cambodia, the temple of Banteay Srei at Angkor and the celebrated Angkor Vat complex built by Surya Varman II.

Hindu temples in India

Hindu temples are place of worship for Hindus that are specifically reserved for religious and spiritual activities.

A Hindu temple can be a separate structure or a part of a building. In most of the temples there is the presence of murtis or idols of the Hindu deity to whom the temple is dedicated. They are usually dedicated to one primary deity, called the presiding deity, and other subordinate deities associated with the main deity. Some of the temples are dedicated to several deities, whereas some have symbols instead of a murti.



The main focus of temple architecture in Vedic India was to blend the temple with its natural surroundings. A major consequence of this style of temple design, was the construction of several cave temples across the Indian subcontinent. The 5th century caves of Ellora are one of the most magnificent examples of Indian rock-cut architecture in the world. Most of the early Hindu cave temples were carved out of a single large rock. A prominent feature of these cave temples was the elaborate sculptures of various Hindu deities.

Temples in India were regarded as sacred places where man can forget all his sorrows and connect himself with almighty God. The temples are built on the principles of vastushastra. The vastushastras describe temple as a symbolic, miniature representation of the outer space. A typical Hindu temple consists of the following major elements - an entrance, often with a porch; one or more attached or detached mandapas or halls; the inner sanctum called the garbagriha, and the tower build directly above the garbagriha.

Some of the important Hindu temples in India are mentioned as below:

Lepakshi temple, [Tirupati temple](#), Chhattarpur temple, Akshar Dham, Lakshmi Narayan temple, Somnath temple, Dwarkadhish temple, Chamunda Devi, Sthaneshwar Mahadev temple, Jwalamukhi temple, Jhakhu Temple, Amarnath temple, Raghunath temple, Bull temple, [Vaishno Devi temple](#), Guruvayoor temple, Cave temple, Sabarimala temple, Tiruvalla temple, [Khajuraho temple](#), Omkareshwar temple, Orcha temple, Kailash temple, Jagannath temple, [Lingaraj Temple](#), Mahalakshi temple, Kalibari temple, Maha Bhairav temple, Hanuman mandir, etc are some of the significant one.

Religious rites and ceremonies in Hindu temples, India

The Hindu temples hold various rites and ceremonies around the year.



The rites and ceremonies are celebrated all round the year in the Hindu temples. Some of these religious rites and ceremonies are discussed here:

Consecration Ceremony (partisthavidhi):

This ceremony is performed after successful completion of constructing a Hindu temple. After the temple building is completed, it is sanctified formally with proper rites and ceremonies. For this purpose, a separate pandal is erected in the north-eastern corner of the main structure and the important religious ceremonies are performed there.

At first a usual puja and homa are performed for the vastupurusa. Then, nine balis (offerings) are given to the minor (and usually fierce) deities, by placing the balis all round the temple. Thereafter, the minor deities are requested to leave the place permanently.

This religious rite of the temple then allows the acharya, the yajamana and their assistants to enter the yagasala. Now, they establish kalasas (ceremonial pots filled with water, the number being up to a maximum of 32) all round the place. They perform particular preliminary rites and homas in the several homakundas to appease the main deity of the temple and other associated deities. In the meantime, the image of the main deity is taken in the ratha to a nearby source of water like a river or a pond and immersed in it for the first of the three adhvaya ceremonies (adhvaya=abode), called jaladhvaya. This is performed only after the ceremonial opening of its eyes, i. e., netronmilana. After three days, the image of the deity is brought in the ratha to the yagnasala and then put in grains for another three days, which is called `dhanyadhvaya`. From there, it is now taken out and put on a specially prepared bed for three days more and this rite is called `sayyadhvaya`.

This ceremony of the Hindu temples continue by placing a yantra in the centre of the garbhagriha, (a gold plate with occult designs) along with some precious stones, minerals and some seeds. The next ritual of this ceremony is the `astabandha`. Above this yantra, a paste of butter or oil and other eight materials like conch, whitestone, lac, perfume is smeared. The image is then fixed above this. The next rite is to connect a gold wire or a long thread, to the main homakunda in the yagnasala. This is called `nadisandhana` whereby the nadis or internal passages will become opened up as it were, to receive life. Thereafter, the deity is invoked into the image by `pranapatistha` (a simple ceremony for infusing life-force) and a simple worship is performed.

The image of the deity is then bathed with the water from the main kalasa of the yagasala. This is called kurhbbhabhiseka. An elaborate worship follows then with offerings and waving of lights. Now, the acharya, the yajamana, the sthapati and their assistants needs to take a ceremonial bath (called avabhatha-snana). This bath thereby indicates that they have successfully completed a great and meritorious act. After this, the devotees and poor people of the place are fed lavishly and the daily worship (nityapuja) is performed.

After the construction of the temple and the ceremonial consecration is done, daily worship must be done regularly. This daily worship should be done from a minimum of one time to a maximum of six times. It should be performed before sunrise, after sunrise, between 8 and 9 a.m., noon, evening and night.

During the performance of worship, all the dress and ornaments of the deity are removed and the image should be bathed successively with oil, ghee, milk, water and scented water. Then the image is dressed again and smeared with sandal paste as well as decorated with ornaments. Now, the ceremony continues with the offering of food articles to the deity. These rituals are performed after closing the doors of the garbhagriha.

Thereafter, the doors are opened, the lights are waved and several upacharas (items of special service) are done, including chanting of hymns and music. This ceremony also involves the ceremonial worship of the consort of the main deity and minor deities associated with it.

Occasional Worship (naimittika-puja):

The religious rites of the Hindu temples include the special pujas on particular occasions. These pujas performed mainly during Sivaratri, Vaikuntha Ekadasi or Dasara are known as the naimittika-puja. The occasional worships or ceremonies vary from place to place, or even from temple to temple. These are done in addition to the daily worship. The unique features of this type of worship include special homa, japa (repetition of the divine name), and abhiseka (bathing the image) as well as elaborate worship. The utsavamurti, which is taken out in procession, must be well decorated and exhibited to the devotees.

Rathotsava and Brahmotsava:

The religious rites and ceremonies may continue for several days during the special occasions. The Brahmotsava is the biggest among these festivals, which is also called rathotsava. It is called so because the utsavamurti is taken out in a procession in the temple car (ratha). This festival involves some other rites like beating the drum (bheritadana), hoisting the flag of the deity (dhvajarohana), inviting the deity to the yagnasala (avahana), establishing the kalasas and performing homa. Two days before the close of the festival, the temple car `ratha` is taken out. The `teppotsava` (boat-festival) is also performed on the next day of the `rathotsava` in those temples where there are facilities of a river or a big tank.

Hundreds of devotees take part in the `Rathotsava` and without any distinction of caste, creed or colour they draw the ratha, shoulder to shoulder. The deity is elegantly decorated on the festival day and the procession proceeds with music, lights and crackers.

Role of Priests, Hinduism

Role of priests is very important in the religion of Hinduism. He solemnizes all the activities in the temple.

In a temple especially that of the Hindus, the role of the priests is highly emphasized. The priests are generally Brahmans. They perform all the rites, [Puja](#) and sacrifices required in the temple. However, now Brahmans have overcome all ethics and are now found officiating in the large temples of Lord Vishnu and [Lord Shiva](#). The priests who belong to the lower castes officiate in the small and occasionally in the large temples.

Vellalars and Pariahs are the priests who belong to the low castes. Pariahs are closely connected with [Jagannath Temple in Puri](#). Now they are the priest of celebrated temples like that of Kanchipuram, Kumbakonam and Srivilliputtur. The main responsibility of the chief priest and his assistants is to maintain the spiritual atmosphere of the temple. The chief priest forms a strict code of conduct, which should be followed by all other priests and the devotees.

All the priests are expected to lead a very strict and pure life. They should know all the rituals and ceremonies associated with the temple worship and festivities. All the rules concerning personal and ceremonial purity should be observed by the priests of the temple. They should perform the worship with faith and devotion. But the priests are not allowed to misuse the temple property in any way. In brief, they must protect the temple properties. The priest should have real concern for the devotees and should treat them with sympathy and understanding. They are expected to be broadminded and a liberal outlook should be an additional qualification for modern priests.

Vital parts of a typical Hindu Temple, India

A typical Hindu temple consists of various parts and the `garbhagriha` is the most important part of such a temple.



A Hindu temple consists of various parts and these are built keeping in mind those parts. The most important part of a temple is the `garbhagriha` or sanctum sanctorum. This part of a temple is usually of square shape with a low roof and with no doors or windows except for the front opening.

The temple contains the image of the deity in the geometrical centre. The whole place here is fully dark, except for the light that comes through the front opening. There is a small tower over the roof of the whole shrine. In the North Indian temples, this tower is quite high and it is of low or medium height in the South Indian temples. In some of the temples, a pradaksinapatha (a circumambulatory passage) is provided just round the garbhagriha, to enable the devotees to go round the deity. This passage is not available in the vesara temples.

In front of the garbhagriha and contiguous to it is the mukhamantapa, sometimes called sukanasi or ardhmantapa, depending upon its proportion relative to that of the garbhagriha. This is also used to keep the articles of worship including naivedya (food offerings) on special occasions. The other part of a typical temple is the `antarala`, a narrow passage connecting the garbhagriha and the mukhamantapa to the mantapa (pavilion or hall). But, in most of the temples, the antarala is identical with the mukhamantapa or sukanasi. The mantapa is also called nrittamantapa or navaranga and it is a big hall, which is used for congregational religious acts like singing, dancing, recitation of mythological texts, religious discourses and so on.

Another vital part of a temple is the dhvajastarbha, which is in front of either the garbhagriha or antarala or the mantapa. It is said to represent the flag post of the `King of kings`. The lanchana (insignia) is another part of a temple, which is made of copper or brass fixed like a flag to the top of the post. It varies according to the deity in the temple. The lanchana has a figure of the vahana (carrier vehicle) of the residing deity. It is the figure of Nandi bull in case of Siva temples while it is the lion that finds its place in Devi temples. In Visnu temples Garuda gets that honour.

The balipitha (pedestal of sacrificial offerings) with a lotus or the footprints of the deity is one more vital part of a temple. It can be seen fixed near the dhvajastarbha, but nearer to the deity. Red-coloured offerings like rice mixed

with vermilion powder, are kept on this at appropriate stages during the performance of rituals. This is an indication of the feeding of the parivaradevatas (attendant and associate deities). A high wall (prakara) surrounds the temple with one main and three subsidiary gates, opening in the cardinal directions. These gateways are decorated with gopurams having high tower, which are sometimes called as the Cow-gate.

A typical Hindu temple contains minor temples or shrines inside the prakara, which are meant for the minor deities, connected with the main deity. For example, in a Siva temple, the minor shrines are dedicated to Ganapati, Parvatu Subrahmanya and Candesvara. Again in a Vishnu temple, Laksmi, Hanuman and Garuda find a place as minor deities. In a Durga temple, Siva, Ganapati and subrahmanya can be found.

Besides these, a typical Hindu temple include a yagnasala, (sacrificial shed), pakasala (cooking shed) and kitchen, place for the utsavamurti (processional image carried during the car festivals), well or a puskarini (tank), flower garden, stores and other essential structures linked with the management of the temple as also the rituals. Another vital part of a Hindu temple is the `dipastambha` (lamp post), which often can be found in South Indian temples. It is situated either in front of the balipitha or outside the main gate. The top of this post has a bud shaped chamber to receive the lamp.

Regulations of visiting a Hindu Temple, India

The devotees visiting a Hindu temple are needed to follow various rules to avoid enraging the residing deity.

It is a general etiquette to observe certain norms and decorum while a person meeting a person highly placed in life and in superior position. Hence, it is quite natural to observe a certain code of conduct when a devotee wants to visit the Lord of the universe in a temple.

A devotee willing to visit a temple must take bath and wear freshly washed clothes. This should be performed mainly in the Puskarini attached to the temple. The devotee should observe silence and try to withdraw the mind into the thoughts of God after entering the precincts of the temple. First, the devotee takes a darshan of the deity and then performs individual worship. Now, the devotee needs to circumambulate the main shrine three, five or seven times. As per the regulation of the Hindu temples, now the devotee bows down to the deity from a place outside the dhvajastambha. While doing so, the devotee should take care that his feet do not point in the direction of any of the minor deities.

According to the regulation of the Hindu temples, the devotee should then visit the minor deities of the temple. The devotee should sit quietly in some corner and meditate there before leaving the precincts of the temple. Earlier,

distributing the alms to deserving beggars in the vicinity of the temple was considered to be very meritorious, hence the devotees are recommended to do so.

Other than these general rules and regulations, the devotees should also be aware of the daivapacharas, modes of behaviour which will offend the deity in the temple. These regulations are considered very important as when a temple is built and the image is sanctified ceremonially, the power of the deity manifests itself through that image. This is technically called `archavatara`.

There are some other modes of behaviour which can offend the deity in the temple. This can bring misery and suffering upon the transgressor for not observing the rules concerning personal, environmental and ceremonial cleanliness, missing the important festivals of the temple, Even not bending ones head or not performing circumambulation, carelessly treating the things offered to the deity, not offering the best kind of things even though one can afford to do so, disposing of the offered articles to people who have no faith or devotion, engaging in purely secular and nonreligious activities in the presence of the deity, boisterous behaviour, observing caste restrictions, misusing the things belonging to the temple can enrage the deity. Therefore, the devotees should follow all the regulations when visiting a Hindu temple.

Iconography in Hindu temples, India

The icons of deities are must to be found in a Hindu temple and are made by following some rules and regulations.



The temples are built as per Hinduism to keep the image of the deities. Therefore, the images and icons of deities are must to be found in a Hindu temple. Iconography in India is a very ancient science and art.

The references of icons and images of gods and goddesses in the temples were found in the Rigveda and in the Atharvaveda. Many ancient works also have reference of the same. The images in the Hindu temples can be grouped under three main categories: Saiva, Sakta and Vaishnava, respectively belonging to the three cults of Siva, Sakti and Vishnu. Again, the icons of the temples can be divided into `achala` or `dhruvabera` (immovable) or `chala` (movable). The previous icons are typically made of stone and are permanently fixed. While the latter icons are usually made of metals like bronze or panchaloha (alloy of five metals) and are used for taking out in procession on festive occasions for bathing, for ritualistic worship etc. A third category of icons called `calachala` (both movable and immovable) is added at times.

An icon is called `calachala`, when the same image that is kept and worshipped in the garbhagriha is also taken out on the ratha (temple car) like in the case of the temple of Lord Jagannatha at Puri (Orissa). Again, these icons can be seen in three postures: `sthanaka` (standing), `asana` (sitting) and `sayana` (lying down). The only icon, which is seen in the sayana posture also, is that of Lord Vishnu.

Deities have their own particular mudra (position of the hands and fingers), asana (posture of legs and feet), cihna (symbol), vasana (dress) and abharana (ornaments). These deities can be recognised by their particular forms. The dhayamudra (assuring protection), varadamudra (granting boons), padmasana (lotus posture) and yogasana (meditation posture) are most common mudras and asanas of the deities in their icons. The icons of all deities carry a particular symbol and vahana. Saiva and Sakta images have damaru (drum), trisula (trident), pasa (noose), arikusa (goad), bana (arrow), khadga (sword) and so on, as their symbols. Chakra (discus), sankha (conch), gada (mace) and padma (lotus) are symbols of icons of Vaishnava.

The dress and ornaments also have different variety in these icons. There are elaborate rules guiding the sculpturing of the icons. The height or length, width girths are also given a particular proportion. The limbs of these icons are fixed according to the tala mana system. A `tala` is the measurement of the palm of hand (from the tip of the middle finger to the wrist) and is equal to the length of the face. The navatala system is the total length or height of the image is nine times (`nava` means nine) the length of the face, is recommended for the icons of gods. These rules and regulations are sometimes changed by the sculptors for the sake of showing his creativity and skill.

Temple and the Society, India

The temples have provided employment to a lot of people including many architects, artisans and sculptors.

The temples have remained an important part of the Indian society since a long period. The temples have been a great strengthening factor in keeping the people united and also kept the torch of dharma up. The frustrated minds can find peace in the shrines and icons of the temple.

The temples have given employment to a lot of people, as they needed people for the construction and maintenance of the building. They also employed the architects, artisans, sculptors and labourers in the temple complex for various works. The temples were a place of religious conversations and musical

discussions especially the pravachanas and harikathas. All these have facilitated the propagation of religion, music, dance and other fine arts in the society. All these got great encouragement and provided pure and uplifting entertainment to the devotees.

Being a centre of learning, the temple helped in the acquisition and propagation of knowledge. The temples were shelter for both the scholars and students of the society. The temples had enormous wealth hence they also acted as a bank to the needy people of the society giving easy credits. The temple granaries were used to feed the hungry and those unable to earn their livelihood due to disease and deformity. The temples also used to run several hospitals and dispensaries.

Several disputes among the people of the society were also settled in the temples, which acted as a court of law. During war period, people used to take shelter in the temples. Thus the temple was all in all in the social life of our country for centuries.

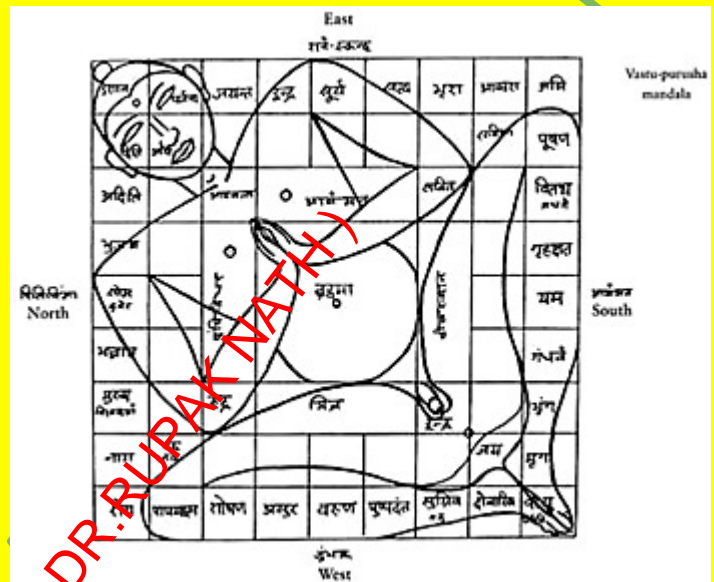
But, the temples had also implemented a system, which was not accepted by the Brahmin group of the society. Considering the god in the temple to be a living being, people used to offer him all enjoyments to which an emperor or a king is entitled and accustomed. And in this way, the system of offering unmarried girls to the temple for the service of the deity originated. The brahmanas opposed the system was by but due to the pressure of the kings and noblemen it continued in the society for a long time. The girls chosen to become devadasis, i. e, servants of god were married to the deity in the temple in a ceremonial way. These girls used to clean the temple, fan the image, carry the lights, sing and dance before the deity and the devotees and so on. This system might have started in the temples some time during the 3rd century A.D and unfortunately, this system soon deteriorated into prostitution.



Meenakshi Temple

Steps of constructing a Hindu temple, India

The construction of a Hindu temple involves various rites and rituals, which involves the participation of a `sthapaka`.



During earlier times, construction of temples was considered to be an extremely pious act, which could bring great religious merit. Therefore, rich people having enough wealth would spend their money in building several temples.

All these steps involved in constructing a Hindu temple are performed either as religious rite or with religious overtones. A proper guide or sthapaka or acharya is first chosen by the `yajamana` (means the sacrificer; here, the financier and builder) for overall guidance and supervision. This particular acharya must be a pious brahmana, with a sinless life. He must be an expert in art, architecture and rituals. The sthapati i, e, the chief architect was then selected by the acharya and he was also given the charge of the whole construction. The sthapati is given an equal status and respect to that of the acharya. The sutragrahin (surveyor), the taksaka (sculptor) and the vardhakin (builder, plasterer and painter) assist him in the construction process. After the day of `sankalpa` (religious resolve), the `yajamana` and the acharya need to take some specific religious vows and lead a very strict life in accordance with those vows.

The next step for constructing a temple is the selection of a suitable site situated in or near a holy place and endowed with natural beauty and peace. Then the site should be cleared of all its vegetation. The place is then purified and evil spirits are disposed of.

The detailed designs and engineering drawings are done earlier. The next work is the `vastuvinyasa`, which includes

the drawing of the vastumandala on the site of the temple construction at an appropriate auspicious time. The mandala, which is a geometrical drawing of 64 squares represent the `vastupurusa`. Vastupurusa is the cosmic man embodying the whole creation including the different deities of the Hindu pantheon in the different limbs and parts of his body. After drawing the vastumandala ceremonially, it becomes `alive` with the vastupurusa fixed on it. Later, the image or the symbol of the deity is installed in the centre of this mandala at the appropriate time.

`Ankurarana` i. e, the rite of the seeds and their germination is another important religious ceremony linked with the various stages of construction of Hindu temple. The main purpose of it is to facilitate the completion of the work without obstructions and obstacles. It is done before starting the construction of the temple even before laying the last brick or stone (murdhestaka) into superstructure and prior to the installation of the main image, before the opening of the eyes (aksimocana) of the image and so on. This particular rite of temple construction includes placing of the seeds of different varieties of rice, sesamum, mustard etc in 16 copper vessels in front of Soma (the lord of germination). They are offered to the concerned deity after germination.

The next step of a temple construction is the `silanyasa` or foundation stone laying ceremony. In this step, the first stone (square in shape) or brick signifying the start of construction is laid. Usually, this brick is laid in the north-western corner of the building plan, drawn on the ground after excavating the foundation to the required depth. The construction of the foundation is started after this. The foundation is built and the ground is filled up to the platform level, except in the middle portion of the garbhagriha which is filled up to three-fourths only.

The adharasila (a base stone) is placed in the centre of this place. Various articles like a pot (called nidhikurbha), a tortoise and a lotus, all made of stone, a tortoise and a lotus made of silver, a tortoise and a lotus made of gold are placed above this adharasila. From there, a funnel-shaped tube called yoganala, made of copper leads up to the plinth. Then the entire thing is covered by another stone slab called `brahasila`. One more important step of a temple construction is the `garbhanyasa` (insemination` of the temple site), which is a very significant rite. Then, on an auspicious night, a treasury or tray of copper, whose dimensions are proportional to the dimensions of the temple, is ceremonially lowered into the ground after filling its 25 squares with various articles and duly worshipping it. The Mother Earth is represented by it and the ceremony itself is done with the intention of achieving the smooth consummation of the temple project.

The necessary materials for construction of temple like the stones, bricks and wood are bought newly from their sources. There are also guidelines for them, like the all the tools and implements used in the construction should be worshipped first. After building the foundation up to the basement level, the superstructure is constructed either with pillars or with walls or a combination of both. The next step of constructing a temple is adding the doors, openings, niches, windows and porches with suitable decorations at the appropriate stages, ending finally with the sikhara (the crest or the finial).

The preparation and installation of the image of the main deity as also the images of the subsidiary deities is the most important part of temple construction.

Symbology of the Hindu Temples, India

The Hindu temples are referred as `Devalaya`, which means `the house of God` with some particular symbology.



The temples are link between man and God between the earthly life and the divine life. Hence, it needs to be symbolic. The symbolic word `devalaya` used for temples frequently actually means `the house of God`. It is considered to be the place where God dwells on earth to bless mankind.

The term `Prasada`, which means a palace with a very pleasing appearance is also sometimes used to denote the temples. The dhvajastambha symbol represents the flag post on which flies the insignia of the deity. The outer walls, prakara, are the walls of the fort. The gopuram (high tower at the entrance) of the Hindu temples is one of the symbols, which represent the main gateway.

Another word `Vimana` is often used to denote a temple in general, and the `garbhagriha` (sanctum sanctorum) in particular. The simple etymological meaning of the word is a `well-proportioned structure`. It also means an aeroplane of the gods landed on the earth to bless mankind. In Hinduism, temples are regarded as a place for pilgrimage. A place of pilgrimage is called a `tirtha` and hence the temple is also called a tirtha. The temple is believed to help in crossing the ocean of samsara (transmigratory existence). The more significant is the conception of the temple, its plan and elevation. The `garbhagriha` horizontally represents the head and the `gopuram` represents the feet of the deity. Other different parts of the temple building complex are recognised with other parts of the body. For example, the `sukanasi` or `ardhamantapa` (the small enclosure in front of the garbhagriha) represents the nose of the deity, the `antaralai` (the passage next to the previous one, leading to passage next to the previous one, leading to the

main mantapa called nrittamantapa) is supposed to be the neck of the deity. The various mantapas are said to be the body and the `prakaras` (surrounding walls) are the hands of the deity.

Again, vertically, the `garbhagriha` of the Hindu temple symbolises the neck; the `sikhara` (superstructure over the garbhagriha) identifies the head, the kalasa (finial) the tuft of hair (sikha) and so on. The Hindu temples also represent God in a cosmic form, with the various worlds located on different parts of His body. His feet are symbolised by the bhuloka (earth) and Satyaloka (also called Brahmaloaka) forms His sikha, with the other lokas (bhuhvarloka, svarloka, maharloka, janaloka and tapoloka) forming the appropriate parts of His body. The worlds bhuvah, svah, mahah, janah, tapah, and satyam are symbolised by the adhisthanapTtha (the base-slab below the image), the stambhas (pillars), prastara (entablature, supported above the pillars), sikhara (superstructure over the garbhagriha), amalasara (lower part of the finial) and the stupika (topknot or the finial) respectively. The Hindu temples also represent the `Meruparvata`, the mythical golden mountain described in the puranas (Hindu mythological literature), as the central point of the universe.

The Hindu temples symbolise this world in all its aspects, the actual and the ideal. The magnificent `gopurams` at the entrance symbolise the grand majesty of the external world. The animal world and the dull life of the ordinary human beings including the absurd side and the abnormalities are symbolised by the wall paintings and the sculptures on the external walls of the temple proper. These are followed by the scenes from the epic and mythological literature as also religious symbols and icons of gods and goddesses, to remind the onlookers of our great cultural and religious heritage.

As the temple symbolises the body of God on the macrocosmic plane, in the same way it also symbolises the body of man on the microcosmic plane. The names of the various parts of the temple are also the very names used to symbolise the various parts of human body. For example, the technical names of different things of the Hindu temples like the paduka, pada, carana, anghri, jarigha, uru, gala, griva, kantha, sira, strsa, karna, nasika, sikha are symbols of different parts of human body. Gala or griva (neck) is the part between mouldings which looks like the neck. Nasika (nose) is any noseshaped architectural part of the temple and so on. The garbhagriha of the temple symbolises the heart and the image, the antaryami (the sitting deity). This symbology tries to impress upon the devotees to seek the Lord within their own heart and not outside.

The Hindu temples also represent the delicate body with the seven psychic centres or chakras. The anahata cakra (the fourth psychic centre in the region of the heart) is symbolised by the `garbhagriha` and the topmost part of the kalasa point to the sahasrara (seventh and the last centre situated at the top of the head). The first three centres (muladhara, svadhisthana and manipura situated respectively near the anus, sex organ and navel) are below the ground level. The fifth and the sixth (visuddha and agna chakras, situated at the root of the throat and in between the eyebrows) are on the sikhara area.

The ground plan of a Hindu temple is often a `mandala`. A mandala can also be extended to the temple itself, which is a geometric diagram with occult potentialities. The main feature of a mandala is its symmetry. The movement of the

devotees in the mandala is from the outer details to the inner centre, which is a point symbolising the one creative Principle, the deity from which everything has evolved. The devotee starts from outside, passes through roundabout routes and successive stages to come to the centre.

In the same way, a devotee who enters the temple has to pass through several gates, courtyards and passages, leaving the grand externals, and progress towards the garbhagriha, the very heart of the temple complex, housing the one cosmic Principle. All these features are the symbology a Hindu temple in India.

Rathas , Temple Chariots

Exemplarily work of art, the Rathas or the temple chariots is used to parade deity through the streets of the city on fe



Indian art is highly introspective. Contrasting the art of many other countries of the world, Indian art is not merely confined to sculptures, paintings, music and dance. Indeed, almost every object that an Indian uses- right from the traditional vessels to the mat that one sleeps on is a piece of art work. In India, religion too is closely associated with art. In olden days, the temples patronized the artists. Even now, some of the best art objects can be seen in the temples of India.

When you visit any large temple in India, masinly in South India, you may find a huge chariot standing in an isolated corner of the campus. This is the rahta. The term `ratha` denotes not only these temple chariots but also the carts or chariots used by ancient kings in warfare.

Ancient Tamil and Sanskrit literature furnish interesting descriptions of these chariots. In the famous war described in the epics Mahabharata, God Krishna himself acts as the charioteer for the epic hero Arjuna. To the King, the war chariot is a symbol of strength and royal authority. Often, the war chariot is adorned with colourful flags and banners featuring the emblem of the kingdom. In the temples, the chariot is used to parade the utsava-murti or the



processional image of the deity through the streets of the city on festive occasions. Many temples in India celebrate the Ratha-utsava or the chariot festival. On this day, the processional deity is brought to the chariot before sunrise. The deity is bathed and adorned with flowers, silk garments and jewels before being driven in the chariot. It is believed that God sanctifies those who pull or drive the chariot.

The temple chariot is modeled as a miniature replica of the temple itself. The chariot is mostly made of wood. Figures of gods and goddesses, geometric designs, floral scrolls and friezes of animals such as the lion and the elephant are carved on the chariot. Some of the important temples possessing beautiful chariots are the Ranganathasvami temple at Srirangam, the Varadaraja Perumal temple at kanchipuram, the Parthasarathi temple at Triplicane (Chennai city), all in Tamil Nadu. Besides, the Venkateshvara temple at Tirumala (Andhra Pradesh) also has a pretty chariot.

When not in use, the chariot is usually kept in a hall or pavilion within or close to the temple. This pavilion is called ratha mandapa. Rarely, some of the halls or mandapas in the temples were built with huge stone wheels to resemble a chariot. Such chariot-shaped mandapas are seen in some of the temples of Imperial Chola and Vijayanagar times (9th to 16th centuries AD). In these days of nuclear warfare, war chariots are no longer in use. But temple chariots are still being made in certain parts of India. The artisans not only make new chariots for new temples but also repair and renovate the old chariots.

Siddhivinayak Temple, Mumbai

Siddhivinayak Temple is among the most prominent Hindu temples situated in Mumbai, the capital city of Maharashtra.

Siddhivinayak Temple in Mumbai is one of the most-renowned Hindu temples of Maharashtra, India. Here, Ganpati or the Lord Ganesh is the prominent deity who is worshipped by people from all parts of India. The foundation of this famous religious architecture was dated back to the earlier parts of the nineteenth century. This temple was constructed by Mr. Laxman Vithu in association with Mrs. Deubai Patil in the year, 1801. Situated in Mumbai at Prabhadevi, the Siddhivinayak temple is



visited by thousands of devotees from all parts of the city and various other parts as well.

There is a Mandapa or hall of small size inside the Siddhivinayak together with the shrine and from this place the image of Siddhivinayak or the Lord Ganesha is clearly visible. It is believed that Siddhivinayak provides good wishes to his devotees. There are several images of Ashtavinayak carved on the main doors of the shrine made of wood. The images carved on the wooden doors of the temple symbolize the eight different manifestations of the Lord Ganesha in the state of Maharashtra. The entire roof or ceiling is enclosed with gold sheet, which makes Lord Ganesha's crown, inside the sanctum. In the Siddhivinayak temple, the major deity, the Lord Ganesha is displayed having four arms. With the four hands the lord holds an axe, a lotus flower, garland of beads and a plate of modakas, in each hand. The statue of the Lord Siddhivinayak was engraved on a single black stone and is 600mm wide and 750mm high. The peculiar form of this deity is that the trunk of Ganesha is towards the right. A snake is hanging from the left shoulder of the lord towards the right side of the belly, depicting the sacred thread. There is an eye on the forehead of Siddhivinayak looking like the third eye of Lord Shiva, the father of [Lord Ganesha](#). The two companions or wives of the Lord Ganesha, Riddhi and Siddhi, grace the spiritual surrounding with their presence in both sides of the main deity. The image of the Lord Hanuman is also there in the main entrance of the Siddhivinayak temple. The auspicious day of worship in the Siddhivinayak temple is on Tuesday, and devotees in large numbers visit this spiritual place on every Tuesday to worship the Lord Ganesha. People visit the Siddhivinayak temple on Tuesdays much before the scheduled time of the opening of the temple in order to have a glimpse of the Lord. There is a major belief that the Lord fulfils each and every prayer of his true devotees.



The Siddhivinayak temple is exactly located on the corner of S.K.Bole Marg and Kakasaheb Gadgil Marg in Prabhadevi. The temple was founded by Late Mr.Laxman Vithu Patil, a professional contractor along with the financial assistance of Late Mrs.Deubai Patil, a rich lady having no child. The idea to build the Siddhivinayak temple came into the mind of Late Deubai while she was praying. She asked God to let other women to have children, who are childless, by visiting the Siddhivinayak temple and praying before the deity. Thus the temple was constructed. This temple in Mumbai was revamped in the year, 1994 in order to facilitate the presence of a large number of devotees.

On Ganesh Chaturthi, the most prominent festival at the Siddhivinayak temple, a large number of devotees move into the temple premises to offer their holy prayer. Out of the temple, there is a narrow lane close to it by the name of Phool Gali. There are several stalls available in this lane selling tulusi flower garlands, coconut and a variety of sweets. Among the variety of sweets to be offered to the Lord Siddhivinayak, the Modak or Ladoo is the most sought after since it is the much loved sweet of Ganesha.

As per the available source of information, the area of the Siddhivinayak temple complex was around 2550 square meters. Towards the southern and eastern parts of the temple there was a lake constructed by Nardulla during the earlier parts of the 19th century. The aim of the construction of the lake was to meet the water scarcity of that area. Later, the lake was filled up and today the place has made way for a part of Kakasaheb Gadgil Marg and children's

playground. Previously, there was also a pair of stone masonry, a dharmashala or rest house and a place of residence for the complex owner.

While the road extension work of the Sayani Road close to Elphinston Road of Mumbai was underway, the workers of the municipality found an idol of Shree Hanuman. The workers put the idol by the side of the road and continued with their work. Devotees to the Shree Siddhivinayak temple told the then head priest of the temple Shree Govind Phatak regarding the idol of Hanuman. The head priest, without delay, brought the idol and constructed a compact temple where he kept the idol of Hanuman somewhere in the year 1952. The reformation of the Lord Hanuman mandir gave a new appearance to it. From the starting of the day with the rise of the Sun till the closing hours, this temple dedicated to [Lord Hanuman](#) possesses its specific list of naivedya, pujas & aartis. On every Saturday, the devotees of Lord Hanuman get traditional offerings of Rui garland and oil in a cheaper rate on the basis of coupons.

The Siddhivinayak temple one of the major religious places for the Hindus in [Maharashtra](#) and devotees from various parts of [Mumbai](#) and several other parts of India visit this temple on auspicious occasions. With this in mind, the Indian government has made arrangements for tight security outside the temple premises in order to facilitate the devotees a calm and peaceful environment to worship. During Sankashti Chaturthi and Angaraki, there are large gatherings of devotees.

Khajuraho Temples, Madhya Pradesh

Khajuraho Temples are known the world over for their beauty and architectural construction. This group of temples is situated in the central Indian state of Madhya Pradesh.

Khajuraho temples are known the world over for their marvellous architectural style. Situated in [Bundelkhand](#) in the state of [Madhya Pradesh](#), a total number of 85 temples had been originally constructed by the Rajputs of the [Chandella dynasty](#) between 950 and 1050 AD. Of these, only 20 now remain. These, however, are well preserved, considering that they have been neglected for nearly a thousand years. Unlike the temples in [Orissa](#), these shrines are not the result of a slow, concerted development spread over several centuries, but rather a brilliant, although comparatively short phase in Hindu temple architecture when intense religious feeling and aesthetic talent combined to produce buildings of great beauty.



Khajuraho Temples

One of the most unique features of the Khajuraho temples is that, contrary to custom, they are not enclosed within a wall. Instead, they stand high on a terrace of solid masonry, as though in an effort to rise above their temporal surroundings. In addition, the constituent parts are not built as separate units but present an architectural synthesis of striking unity. The Khajuraho temples are, however, not as imposing in size as the Orissan, but achieve the same grandeur through their graceful proportions and superb surface decoration. The largest of these is only about a hundred feet in length. As a rule there are three main compartments, namely, the [garbhagriha](#), the mandapa and the ardhmandapa or entrance portico, arranged in the manner of a cross. The antarala, the mahamandapa or the transepts and the perambulatory passage supplement the other compartments in the more developed examples.

The aspiring quality associated with most styles of temple architecture is emphasised in the Khajuraho group to a

marked degree. The entire mass of granite or sandstone, of which most of these are constructed, appears to have an upward movement, the effect of loftiness being further enhanced by a number of pronounced vertical projections. The range of open porches with overhanging eaves running horizontally around the temple serves to let in light, thus throwing a band of vivid shadow over the entire composition.

The exterior of the temples, decorated with parallel friezes in high relief, displays a rare wealth of human and divine forms, pulsating with life and warmth. They present varied themes of myriad interests. The graceful animation of these life-like forms, the skill with which they are executed on stone walls, and the vast variety and ingenuity of the techniques employed are unparalleled in any other similar style of temple architecture.

The tenuous, flowing lines of the *sikhara* give it an elegant and refined quality. The solid strength of these temples is further enhanced by the graceful *sikharas*. The halls of the Khajuraho temples are richly adorned with sculptures.

In addition to the oversailing courses of masonry, the highly sculptured ceiling is supported by four pillars, one at each corner of the hall which bear heavily ornamented bracket capitals- The pillars are carved above and below, with grotesque half human figures of dwarfs and griffins. In the spaces in between are statuettes of sculptured feminine forms in attitudes of enchanting grace and loveliness. The sharp contrast presented by the forbidding appearance of the former and the pervasive beauty of the latter perhaps symbolises the triumph of beauty over ugliness, or that of the spiritual over the bestial.

Eroticism is a recurrent theme in the shrines at Khajuraho. A number of different theories have been put forward to explain this. The most commonly accepted theory is that the many erotic groups depicted here with such abandon represent the *mithuna* ritual of the Tantric cult according to which personal salvation can be attained only through experience, both sensual and spiritual. Yet another theory holds that since such sculptures are usually found on the exterior surfaces of a temple and are absent from the interior, it may be concluded that they are meant to test the devotion of the worshipper or to warn him against entering the sanctum until he has conquered carnal desire. Whatever the significance of these sculptures may be, it is fairly clear from their intrinsic artistic merit that the sculptors who fashioned them found the temple walls an easy canvas for the depiction of such an elemental theme as love between man and woman.

The twelve Vaishnava and Saiva temples to the north-west of the site form the most important of the groups at Khajuraho. Among these is the Siva shrine of [Kandariya Mahadeva temple](#), the largest and most representative of all the Khajuraho temples. The temple has been planned as a double cross and has an air of vibrancy seen in the superb gallery of sculptures that embellish its walls. Built on the same principle as one Khandariya Mahadeva, but much smaller in size, are the [Lord Shiva](#) temples of Viswanath and the [Lord Vishnu](#) temple of Chaturbuj. The former is believed to have been built about 1000 A.D. and both are of the *panchayatana* type. Facing the Visvanath temple and built on the same platform is a small temple which houses a colossal statue of [Nandi](#), [Lord Shiva's](#) bull. The temple of Devi Jagadamba, now dedicated to the [goddess Kali](#), was originally a Vishnu shrine. There were four additional shrines, but these have now disappeared. The *Chhatra-ka-patra* temple is dedicated to [Lord Surya](#), the sun-god, and is noted for its elegant proportions. Another notable temple is dedicated to the [Varaha avatar](#), the boar

incarnation of Lord Vishnu, a colossal monolithic statue of which is installed in the centre. The Matangeswara and [Parvati](#) temples are also notable examples of the north-western group at Khajuraho.

Basically similar to the Brahmanical temples, the six Jain temples grouped together on the south-east of the site are remarkable in that there is an almost complete absence of window openings. The Parsvanath is the largest and most beautiful Jain temple at Khajuraho. The sanctum contains an ornamental throne and a sculptured bull, the emblem of Adinath, the first of the Jain Tirthankaras. The modern image of Parsvanath was installed late in the 19th century. It is significant that this Jain temple also houses images and sculptures of Brahmanical gods and goddesses, for it speaks of a spirit of toleration not often seen in places of worship.

There can be seen a cluster of 12 pillars standing a little apart from the main group. This is all that remains of the Jain temple known as Ghantai. These have attracted considerable attention on account of their attic beauty. Along with Jain temples, this south-eastern group also includes Brahmanical ones such as the Dula-dev and the Chaturbhuj. The Kunwar Math, lying south of the Jain group near Kurar Nala, is perhaps the finest example of this class.

The remains of temples, belonging to the same period and of the same type, have been found as far as Rewa in Madhya Pradesh (e.g., the Visvanath temple at Maribag).to Jhansi, and as far as Osia in [Rajasthan](#). The Shiva temple at Baroli believed to date from the 9th or 10th century, compares very well with contemporary structures in Orissa, both from the point of view of richness of design and fineness of sculpture.

Meenakshi Temple, Madurai, Tamil Nadu

One of the greatest Shiva temples in India and one of the most important places of Hindu pilgrimage.

More on Meenakshi Temple, Madurai, Tamil Nadu

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The most beautiful buildings in Madurai including its most famous landmark, the Meenakshi temple, were built during the Nayak rule. Located in the heart of the city of Madurai, the Meenakshi-Sundareswarar temple is dedicated to goddess Meenakshi, the consort of [lord Shiva](#). For the people of Madurai, the temple is the very center of their cultural and religious life. The Meenakshi-Sundareswarar temple has long been the focus of both Indian and international tourist attraction. It is one of the greatest [Shiva temples in India](#) and one of the most important places of Hindu pilgrimage. The Meenakshi temple boasts an excellent work of Dravidian architecture, and there are 985 richly carved pillars here and each one surpasses the other in beauty. This architecture includes gopurams (large gateways) and mandapams (multi-pillared halls) covered from top to bottom in an abundance of multi-coloured images of gods, goddesses, animals and mythical figures.



It is said that the people of the city wake up, not by the call of nature but by the chant of hymns at the temple. All the major [festivals of Tamil Nadu](#) are celebrated here with gaiety, most important being the Cittirai festival that is held in April/May, when the celestial marriage of Meenakshi and Sundareswarar is celebrated, drawing a huge crowd of people from all over the state. The sculpted pillars are adorned with the exquisite murals that celebrate the ethereal beauty of princess Meenakshi and the scenes of her wedding with Lord Shiva. At the Sundareswarar temple across the courtyard, Lord Shiva is represented as a lingam. The pillars depict scenes from the wedding of Meenakshi and Sundareswarar.

Mata Vaishnodevi Temple, Katra, Jammu

Mata Vaishnodevi Temple is in Kashmir. A pilgrimage to this shrine is considered to be the holiest.

More on Mata Vaishnodevi Temple, Katra, Jammu

- [History of Vaishnodevi temple](#)
- [Architecture of Mata Vaishnodevi Temple](#)

The pilgrim to Mata Vaishnodevi is to the cave where She merged her human form with the astral form of the three energies. A pilgrimage to this shrine is considered to be the holiest. She resides in a cave located among the Trikuta Mountains. Over five million pilgrims visit here every year. It is situated at an altitude of 5200 feet above sea level. The pilgrims trek 12 km from the base camp at Katra with the journey ending with the darshan of the pindis within the cave.

The journey usually starts according to the pilgrims with the



call from Her - Maan Aap Bulandi or Bulawa aya hey. For no one can visit the Shrine without her express blessings.

History of Mata Vaishnodevi

The cave according to geological studies is a million years old. Rigveda does mention Trikuta but has no reference to worship of Mother Goddess. The worship of Shakti started only in the Puranic period. The first mention to the Mother Goddess is in the Mahabharat during the battle of Kurukshetra, Arjun is said to have invoked the blessings of Mother. He calls her as Jambookatak Chityaishu Nityam Sannihitalaye - you who always dwell in the temple on the slope of the mountain in Jamboo. It is also believed that the Pandavs were the first to build the temples at Kol Kandoli and Bhawan in gratitude. Here there are five stone structures believed to represent the five Pandavs.

Pilgrims on pilgrimage Reaching Bhawan

A pilgrim can get the first glimpse of Bhawan around 1.5 km before reaching there. The last kilometer is either level or gently sloping downwards.

Bhawan: It is believed that after leaving the Garbh Joon cave at Adhkawari, where Bhairon Nath located her, Vaishnavi started ascending the hill till she reached the cave. He located her again and challenging her. Here lies the petrified body of Bhairon Nath at the gate of the holy cave.

Group Number: Yatries have to obtain a Registration Slip from the Yatra Registration Counter located at Katra. This is checked and stamped at Banganga. At the Bhawan the slip is revalidated and used to issue a group number. It is used to a lot the Yatra Slip Counter located on the left hand side immediately after the luggage check post. This group number determines the sequence in which the yatriis go for a darshan. They are grouped in 200s and are called one by one for darshan. During lean season it takes one to two hours and in peak season 9-10 hours before the group number is called out.

Facilities available at Bhawan: The Shrine Board has provided various facilities for the yatriis at Bhawan, to facilitate comfortable darshans. Self contained and furnished rooms are available on rent for the yatriis at the Main Bhawan complex as well as Gauri and Vaishnavi Bhawan complexes. Dormitory accommodation is also available at Manokamna Bhawan complex. This accommodation can be booked from the Enquiry and Reservation section, Niharika complex at Katra. Yatriis are advised to suitably plan their journey and get the bookings of the rooms done in advance from the Enquiry and Reservation section. The facility of on line booking is also available. There are a number of large halls, which are available for the yatriis free of cost and is made available on a first-come-first-served basis.

The Shrine Board runs three Bhojanalyas at Main Bhawan complex and one at Manokamna Bhawan complex. These Bhojanalyas provide wholesome vegetarian food to the pilgrims on a no profit basis. Run round the clock and serve a

varied but traditional menu. In addition to full meals, packed snacks, beverages, mineral water and milk etc. are also available here.



Medical facilities are available for the yattris at Bhawan. In addition, other facilities include free toilet facilities, drinking water, enquiry and announcement booths are available all through the Bhawan Complex. STD/PCOs, Bank branches, a Police Station and a post office are also functional. There is also a small market complex where toiletries, medicines, eatables and other utility items are available. Fair price Bhaint shops selling Prasad and Souvenir shops selling photographs and cassettes are also located inside this market complex. It is reiterated that all establishments of the Board are run on a no profit basis and yattris can be sure of the quality and prices of goods offered in these

establishments.

The Holy cave is situated at a height of 5200 ft above sea level. Even during summers, the nights are cool. Shrine Board has arranged for free blanket stores at various locations. For a nominal and refundable security deposit, yattris are issued blankets for the night.

The Shrine Board has posted various levels of officers including senior officers at all important locations including Bhawan. Yattris are welcome to contact any of them for advice or assistance.

Preparing for Darshan of Mata Vaishnodevi

Most pilgrims prefer to take a bath before proceeding for darshans. In the olden days pilgrims used to take a bath at the Bathing Ghat, with the water that flows from the feet of Mata. Attempts have been made to channelise the water from the Holy Cave to all these new Bathing areas, so that irrespective of where the pilgrim takes a bath, he receives the cleansing effect of the Holy Water. The traditional Bathing ghats have also been enlarged and developed many pilgrims would still like to take a bath at the original ghats. Pilgrims are required to deposit all their belonging in the free cloakrooms, as nothing except cash and selected offerings are allowed inside the Holy Cave. All articles of general use like belts, wrist watches with leather belts, combs, pen, pencil, purses, handbags, etc. are prohibited. For the convenience of the yattris. In particular, a shoes/bags cloakroom has been made operational just outside Gate No.1, which is the entrance to the queue complex. This cloakroom can be used for depositing all leather and other goods, which are prohibited, inside the Holy Cave. No sweets are allowed either. After taking a bath at the Bathing Ghat or elsewhere, pilgrims can reach Gate No.1 where upon announcement (and/or display on the display board) of the group number, they are allowed inside the queue which would lead them eventually to one of the greatest moments of their lives, a Darshan of the Divine Mother inside the Holy Cave in the natural rock form i.e. the Holy Pindies.

Waiting in the Queue in Mata Vaishnodevi Temple

Immediately after a pilgrim's group number is called or displayed, he/she is ushered in through Gate No.1 into the

queue complex. The queue complex is a long corridor, which opens first into two large waiting halls, one after the other and finally opens at the mouth of the Holy Cave. The Shrine Board has installed colored Television sets all along the queue corridor. These television sets relay a direct telecast of the Holy Cave and the Holy Pindies. Pre recorded messages explaining the procedure of darshans are also relayed since the time available for darshans inside the Holy Cave is limited, yattris are advised to carefully watch the television sets and hear the pre-recorded messages. This will help them in having proper darshans inside the Cave.

Prasad of Mata Vaishnodevi

The traditional offering to the Goddess invariably comprises a coconut. However for reasons of time and security, coconut offerings are not allowed to be carried by the pilgrims beyond a designated point.

Instead, at a designated point in the main waiting hall, pilgrims have to deposit their coconuts to the temple priests who then take responsibility for the rituals. The pilgrim is handed over a token and the offered coconuts can be reclaimed after darshans upon producing the token at the Coconut Prasad Counter.

Outside the exit tunnel and just beyond the Amrit Kund lies the Prasad counter. The temple priests hand over the blessings of the Mother Goddess in the form of Prasad pouches to the devotees. Each Prasad pouch comprises the Mishri Prasad plus a blessed coin, carrying the image of the Holy Pindies. In addition, Khazaana (coins) are given to the devotees. This Khazaana Prasad is believed to be a good luck coin(s) and devotees would do well to keep it in their cash boxes, temples or other important places in their homes or establishments. There are other blessed items too, especially the chunnis and the cholas which are used for Shringar of the Holy Pindies. Since the Vastras of the Pindies are changed twice a day during Aarti, the Vastras, which have been used once but are subsequently changed are offered as Aashirwad (blessings) to the devotees. These are readily available at the Souvenir shops run by the Shrine Board at Katra, Adkuwari, Sanjichhat and Bhawan. Gold and Silver coins of the Holy Goddess are also available. One may contact the officials of the Shrine Board for more details.

[Architecture of Mata Vaishnodevi Temple](#)

While on the way to the Sanctum Sanctorum, one crosses a small patio type of structure on the right hand side of which is a Cave opening. This is the original Cave leading to the Holy Pindies. In the olden days, the yattris used to reach the Sanctum Sanctorum through this cave only. Nowadays, this cave is kept closed for a large part of the year. Since this cave is quite narrow, it takes several minutes for a single person to cross it and reach the Sanctum Sanctorum. Considering the rush that the Holy Shrine normally witnesses, it is not possible to keep the original cave open except when the yatra is less than 8000 pilgrims per day.

[The three Pindies in Mata Vaishnodevi Temple](#)

The three Pindies in Mata Vaishnodevi Temple are Maha Kali ,Maha Lakshmi , Maha Saraswati .Mata Vaishnodevi is considered to be an incarnation of the three Supreme Energies.

Darshan of Mata Vaishnodevi

Just like the Trikuta Mountain, which is one at the base but has three peaks (hence the name Trikoot), the revelation of the Mother Goddess in the Holy Cave is in a natural rock form, which is one at the base but has three heads at the top. The entire rock body is immersed in water, and a marble platform has now been constructed all around. The main Darshans remain to be of the three heads called the Holy Pindies. The uniqueness of the Holy Pindies is that although they emanate from one single rock form, each one is distinctly different from the other two in colour and texture.

Puja of Mata Vaishnodevi

The arti is performed twice a day first time in the morning just before the sunrise and second time in the evening immediately after the sunset. The procedure is very sacred and a lengthy one. It is performed by the pujaris inside the sanctum-sanctorum and than again outside the cave. Before the arti the atam pujan or self-purification is done. Then the Goddess is bathed in water, milk, ghee (clarified butter), honey and sugar. Thereafter She is dressed in a saree, chola and chunri and ornaments. This takes place while the mantras are being recited. The tilak is placed on the forehead of the deity and prasad is offered. The pujaris also perform puja of various Gods and Goddesses, as it is believed that during the arti, all the Gods and Goddesses are present inside. The jyoti (lamp) is lighted and arti is performed. After this the thaal-plate that contains the lamp is brought outside the holy cave, where arti is again performed in the presence of pilgrims. After the arti the pujari distributes prasad and the charanamrit (the holy water) to the devotees. This takes nearly two hours during which darshan remains suspended.

How to go: Vaishno Devi shrine is on the top of Trikuta Hills, 61 Km north of Jammu.

Best Time to Go: The shrine can be visited throughout the year, but it is difficult during the peak season of winter.

Important Note

You are required to register at the Yatra Registration Counter at the Tourism Reception Centre located at the Katra Bus Stand. The Yatra Slip is free but mandatory to commence the Yatra.

By air - The nearest airport is at Jammu (48 km from Katra),

By rail - The nearest railway station is also at Jammu .

From Jammu : - Jammu is well connected by the Inter State Bus Service, which leave for Katra every 10 minutes. You can also hire private taxis or travel from Jammu Railway Station, Airport or the Tourist Reception to Katra via taxi.

Dilwara Temples, Mount Abu, Rajasthan

Dilwara temples located at Mount Abu in Rajasthan date back from the 11th to 13th century. These exquisite temples made of marble are dedicated to Jain Tirthankaras.



Dilwara Temple

Jain Dilwara temples are one of the finest Jain temples and are regarded as the epitome of Jain art. It is known for its extraordinary architecture and marvellous marble stone carvings. The temple is located about two-and-a-half kilometers from [Mount Abu](#), Rajasthan's only hill station. These temples date back from the 11th to 13th century and are world famous for their use of marble. This is a pilgrimage site for the Jains. According to the inscription found at Mount. Abu, it was basically a seat of [Shaivism](#) and [Jainism](#) made its appearance only in 11th century.

The door opens on to a blend of irresistible beauty and elegance. The temples are surrounded with mango trees and wooded hills and a high wall that shrouds the entire temple complex. The ornamental detail is spread over the minutely carved ceilings, doorways, pillars and panels and is truly stunning. The first of these temples was built in 1032 AD.

History of Dilwara Temples

Mount Abu located in the southwest part of [Rajasthan](#) is a part of the [Aravalli Mountain Ranges](#) and is separated from the Aravalli by a narrow valley and Guru Shikhar is the highest point at the northern end.

According to legend, Hindus revere this place because once Nandini, the cow of the sage Vashisht was trapped in a deep gorge and could not free itself. The sage asked for [Lord Shiva](#)'s assistance. Shiva sent [Goddess Saraswati](#), the divine stream, to help flood the gorge so that the cow could float up. Sage [Vashishta](#) then decided to ensure that such mishaps would not occur in future and asked the youngest son of Himalaya to fill the gorge permanently. He took the help of the snake Arbud. This spot came to be known as Mount Arbud since then and was later reduced to its present form Mount Abu. Ancient Hindu and Jain scriptures refer to it as Arbudgiri. The Dilwara temples are dedicated to the [Jain Tirthankars](#) and served as storehouses of illustrated manuscripts and treatises. The temples at Mount Abu were constructed between 800 AD and 1200 AD. Vimala Shah, Vastu Pala and Teja Pala contributed a lot toward the development of Jain art and architecture.

Temples of Dilwara



Sculpture of Dilwara Temple

There are five temples in all, each with its own identity and these are named after the village in which they are located. These temples are Vimal Vasahi (Shri Adi Nathji temple), Luna Vasahi (Shri Nemi Nathji temple), Pithalhar (Shri Rishabh Deoji temple), Khartar Vasahi (Shri Parshavnathji temple) and Mahavira Swami (Shri Mahaveer Swamiji temple). The most famous of these are the Vimal Vasahi and Luna Vasahi temple.

Vimala Vasahi Temple

It is the earliest and most important temple here and is dedicated to the first Jain Tirthankara, [Bhagwan Rishabh Dev](#). It stands in an open courtyard with 58 cells containing the small icons duplicating the saint's image found in the main shrine. The plan of the temple resembles that of [Sun temple](#) found at Martand in [Kashmir](#). It is elaborately columned with porticoes surrounding the main shrine and front cells that line the courtyard. The entire temple is carved out of white marble. The corridors, pillars, arches, and mandaps are richly carved. The ceilings feature engraved designs of lotus-buds, petals, flowers and scenes from Jain and Hindu mythology. The Rang Mandap is an impressive hall and is supported by 12 decorated pillars and carved arches with a spectacular central dome. It has 11 concentric rings, five having patterns of figures and animals. The lowest part contains 150 figures of elephants with intertwined trunks. The pillars have carved female figurines playing musical instruments and 16 Vidhya devis or the goddesses of knowledge each holding her symbol. The Navchowki i.e. collection of nine rectangular ceilings, contains beautiful and different designs carved and are supported on ornate pillars.

The Gudh mandap is a simple hall with a heavily decorated doorway. Installed here is the idol of Adi Nath. The mandap is meant for Aarti of the deity. The Hastishala ([Elephant](#) Cell) was constructed by Prithvipal, a descendant of Vimal Shah in 1147-49 A.D and features a row of elephants in sculpture.

Legend: According to the local legend before becoming the minister, the two brothers Vastupala and Tejapala went on a pilgrimage carrying huge wealth, which they decided to bury under a tree, but while digging they found more gold. At this point Anupama Devi, wife of Tejapala advised them to build temples at Shatrunjaya and [Girnar](#) with their wealth. During their term in office they heard about the holiness of Mt Abu and decided to build a temple there dedicated to [Lord Neminath](#) to commemorate the death of their brother, Luniga.

It is also believed that when the elaborate and intricate carvings were finished, Tejapala asked the carvers to add greater delicacy to the floral patterns by more chiselling, offering them reward in silver weighing as much as the marble filed. Later Tejapala offered gold in weight to the marble if it could be chiselled further.

The Luni Vasahi

The temple is dedicated to Lord Neminatha. It is also known as Tejapala temple and resembles the architectural plan of Vimala Vashistha temple built nearly 200 years ago. The temple stands as the last of the monument built in the Solanki architectural style, which came to an end with the occupation of [Gujarat](#) at the end of the 13th century. Vastupal and Tejal built this temple in 1230 AD.



Ceiling

The striking feature of this temple is its dome, which stands on eight pillars. The pendant of the dome drops from the ceiling looking like a cluster of half open lotuses. Next is the [Garbhagriha](#), which when lighted reveals the massive idol of Neminatha. There are 39 cells here each containing one or more images. Most of the ceilings in front of the cells are highly ornamented. The reliefs in the porticoes of the cells depict incidents from the life of Neminatha, his marriage, deification etc. The representation of the marriage pavilion describes the scene and portrays the reason for the conversion of Neminatha who was betrothed to Rajimati, the daughter of the king of Girnar.

The Rang Mandap has a central dome from which hangs a beautifully carved ornamental pendent. 72 figures of seated Tirthankaras are portrayed in a circular band and just below this band are 360 small figures of Jain monks.

The Hathikhana has 10 carved elephants inside the cell. Formerly these elephants carried the idols representing the members of Vastupala's family, but these have now disappeared. Behind the elephants are 10 panels, each bearing a male and female figures on it (representing Vastupala's family). In northern end, the 7th and 8th panel carries the figures of Vastupala with Lalitha Devi and Virya Devi and Tejapala with Anupama Devi, the guiding spirit behind this venture of Tejapala and is rightly described in the inscription as a "flower of celestial beauty, whose whole family was distinguished for prosperity, modesty, wisdom, decorum and talent."

The Navchowki features the most magnificent and delicate marble stone cutting work in the temple. Each of the nine ceilings exceeds the other in beauty and grace. The Gudh mandap has a black marble idol of the 22nd Jain Tirthankara Neminath. The Kirthi Stambha is made of black stone pillar and stands on the left side of the temple. It was constructed by Maharana Kumbha of [Mewar](#). The remaining three temples are smaller but just as elegant.

Pittalhar Temple



This temple was built by Bhima Shah, a minister of Sultan Mohammad Begada of [Ahmedabad](#). A massive metal statue of Bhagwan Rishab Dev (Adinath), cast in five metals is installed in the temple. The main metal used in this statue is 'Pital' (brass), hence the name 'Pittalhar'. The shrine consists of a main Garbhagriha, Gudh mandap and Navchowki. The temple is also known as Shri Rishabh Deoji temple.



Parshavanath Temple

This temple is dedicated to Lord Parshavnath and was built by Mandlik and his family in 1458-59 AD. It is a three-storied building, and is the tallest of all the temples at Dilwara. On all the four sides of the sanctum on the ground floor there are four big mandaps. The outer walls of the sanctum comprise of beautiful sculptures in gray sandstone, depicting Dikpals, Vidhya devis, Yakshinis, Shalabhanjikas and other sculptures. The temple is also known as the Khartar Vashi temple.

Figurines of Dilwara Temple

Mahavira Swami Temple

It is a small structure constructed in 1582 A.D. and is dedicated to the 24th Jain Tirthankara, [Lord Mahavira](#). There are pictures painted by artists from Sirohi on the upper walls of the porch in 1764 AD.

Apart from this there are many other types of attractions here that include the Bikaner Palace, the Nakki Lake, the Adhar Devi temple, Achalgarh Shiva temple and the Gaumukh Shiva temple.

[Architecture of Dilwara Temple](#)

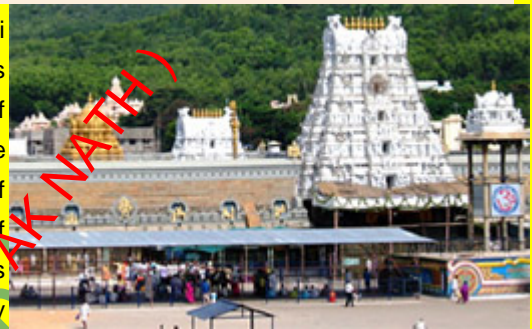
Dilwara Temples stand as a unique example of perfect architecture with intricately carved ceilings, entryways, pillars and panels that reflect the aesthetic appeal of this temple. The temple is built in the [Nagara style of architecture](#). The

temple is spread across a vast area and most of the temples are single-storied structures. There are total 48 pillars in the temples. Even all the parts of the ceiling at "bhamati" (cloisters) which surrounds "Vimana" (main shrine) is adorned with carvings such as lotuses, gods, and abstract patterns.

Tirupati Balaji Temple, Tirupati, Andhra Pradesh

This temple is located on the seventh peak of Venkatachala and so the Lord is also called Venkatachalapati.

Tirupati and Tirumala are those places well known to all Indians. Sri Venkateswara, the presiding deity of Tirumala or engadam, is revered by lakhs of people all over the country. The chief centers of pilgrimage are Sri Venkateswara's temple on the Tirumala hill, the shrine of Govindaraja in the town of Tirupati and the shrine of Padmavati, situated in Tiruchanur, three miles to the south of Tirupati. The Hill on which the temple of Sri Venkateswara stands popularly known as Venkatachalam is low and surrounded by many hills of an altitude.



About the Deity: Balaji - [Krishna](#) The town of Tirupati Balaji is considered the most sacred place in India. It is famous for Lord Venkateswara, the deity who is called [Tirupati Balaji](#) which here means the 'lord of [Laxmi](#)'. The shrine is located on a hill at **Tirumala**, a group of seven hills known as Venkatachalam. This temple is located on the seventh peak of Venkatachala (Venkata Hill) and so the Lord is also called Venkatachalapati or Lord of the Seven Hills, which lies, on the southern banks of Sri Swami Pushkarini.

The seven peaks represent the seven hoods of Naag Adishesha. There are several legends associated with the manifestation of the Lord in Tirumala. The Shastras, Puranas, Sthala Mahatyams and Alwar hymns clearly say that in Kali Yuga, one will be able to attain mukti only by worshipping Sri Venkateswara. The benefits of the pilgrimage to



Venkatachalam are mentioned in the [Rig Veda](#) and Asthadasa Puranas. These epics describe the Lord as the bestower of boons. All the great dynasties from the southern peninsula paid homage to Lord Sri Venkateswara in this ancient shrine - [Pallavas](#) of Kancheepuram (9th century AD), the **Cholas of Thanjavur** (10th century), the **Pandyas of Madurai**, and the kings and chieftains of [Vijayanagar](#) (14th - 15th century AD). They competed with one another while giving endowments to the temple.

During the Vijayanagar dynasty the contributions to the temple increased.

Krishnadevaraya had statues of himself and his consorts installed in portals at the temple, and they can still be seen. After the decline of the Vijayanagar dynasty, nobles and chieftains from all parts of the country continued to pay homage and offer gifts. The Maratha General Raghoji Bhonsle set up a permanent endowment to conduct the worship in the temple. He also presented valuable jewels including a large emerald, which is still preserved in a box named after the General. Among the later rulers who contributed large amounts were the rulers of Mysore and Gadwal. After the fall of the Hindu kingdoms, the Muslim rulers of **Karnataka** and then the Britishers took over the supervision and under their protective control. In 1843 AD, the administration of the shrine and its estates were entrusted to Sri Seva Dossji of the Hatiramji Mutt at Tirumala.

Darshans: Sarvadarsanam means `darshan for all`. The timings for Sarvadarsanam are different on different days of the week. For normal days, 18 hours are allotted for Sarvadarsanam and on peak days, it is open for 20 hours. The Sudarsanam token system was introduced to minimize the waiting time for Sarvadarsanam, Special Darshan and other paid darshan/sevas. They are available free of cost at the First Choultry (opposite the Tiru Railway Station), Second Choultry (behind the Railway Station), Alipiri Bus Stand, Tirupati, Vaikuntam Queue Complex, Pilgrim Amenities Centre (Near CRO) and near the Rambagicha Guest House in Tirumala.

Festivals: Everyday is a day of celebration at Tirumala. The most famous is the annual festival called `[Brahmotsava](#)`, celebrated on grand scale for nine days in September, and attracts pilgrims and tourists from all over. The fifth and ninth days of the festival are especially significant in as much as Garudostavam and Rathotavam takes place on those days.



Getting There

Tirumala can be reached either by vehicle or by climbing on foot. Those preferring vehicles can avail the buses plying between Tirupati and Tirumala every 15 minutes. One should purchase the return journey tickets for Tirumala at Tirupati itself to avoid standing in the ticket queue at Tirumala. The tickets are valid for three days and entitle ticket holders to board any bus at any time.

Those who wish to reach the hilltop by foot can walk up can use either of the two well-made stone footpaths. From Chandragiri, Tirumala is 5 km, whereas from Alipiri, it is 11 km. Chandragiri is the more difficult of the two and Alipiri is the more commonly used route. Usually pilgrims climb up the path as a part of their vow.

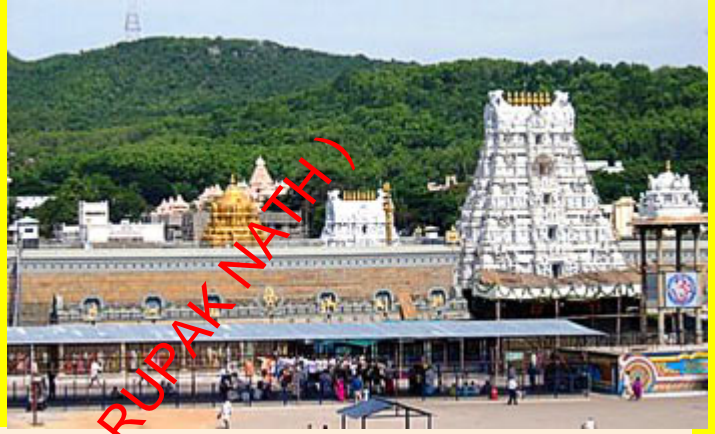
Air: The nearest airport is at Reni Gunta, 15 km from Tirupati. Indian Airlines operates daily flights from Hyderabad, Vijayawada, Chennai and Bangalore.

Rail: The famed pilgrim town is well connected to Hyderabad, Mumbai, Chennai and Bangalore.

Road: Tirupati is linked to all the major towns and cities of South India by road. Chennai is 150 km; Bangalore, 250 km; and Hyderabad, 725 km from Tirupati. Tourist buses ply regularly between the cities.

Legend of Tirupati Balaji Temple

In the Kali Yuga, Akasaraaja became the ruler of Tondamandalam and his daughter Padmavathi was married Venkateswara.



Once Rangadasa, a staunch devotee of Vishnu, joined Vaikhanasa Gopinatha, who was going to Tirumala to worship Lord Venkateswara. After bathing in the Swami Pushkarini, he beheld the lotus-eyed and blue-bodied Vishnu resting beneath a tamarind tree. He lay exposed to the sun, wind and rain and was protected only by the wings of Garuda. Astounded Rangadasa raised a rough wall of stones around the deity, and started supplying flowers to Gopinatha for worship everyday. But one day he got distracted and forgot to supply flowers. The Lord revealed himself and told Rangadasa He had been testing the latter's continence. However, the Lord accepted his devoted service and blessed Rangadasa that he would be reborn as an affluent ruler and would continue to serve the Lord, and would construct a beautiful temple with a vimana and high surrounding walls, and earn eternal glory.

Rangadasa was reborn as Tondaman, son of rulers Suvira and Nandini. Tondaman. One day, he set out on a hunting expedition on the Tirumala Hill, and saw Vishnu under the same tamarind tree. He returned home, deeply affected. On inheriting the kingdom Tondaman according to the directions constructed a prakaram and dvara gopura, and arranged for regular worship of the Lord. In the Kali Yuga, ruler of Tondamandalam daughter of Akasaraaja, the Tondamandalam ruler, Padmavathi was ultimately married Venkateswara.