

**OUR HERITAGE
TEMPLES & SHRINES**



Dear Friends,

India has the world's largest number of places of worship. Many of them have centuries of history and legends attached to them. All of them are beautifully decorated with carvings and sculptures. It makes you wonder how they moved huge blocks of stone and placed them at great heights with the primitive tools available at that time.

Selecting the temples for this calendar has been a challenge. So many temples! How could I select only one for each month?

So, the calendar has 12 temples, but the booklet has many more!

The largest temple complex in the world is in Angkor, Cambodia. And they are Hindu temples. Angkor deserves the prominence of the cover page, not only for its size, but also for the exquisite sculptures and carvings that cover every inch. For centuries it was lost, hidden in a forest, sheltered by trees, covered by vines and surrounded by a moat 3 km long.

Besides important places of worship, I have also selected 5 temples which are very unusual. As for the sketches, you can judge for yourself. I can tell you that our artist claimed that he had to get stronger lenses for his spectacles.

Best wishes,


Pradip Burman

ABOUT THE ARTIST

Gautam Partho Roy has done it again! His sketches of India's temples are a form of worship.

The sculptures and carvings of the temples are intricate, and he has captured every detail, down to the last flower on an idol's garland.

The grandeur, beauty and majesty of our temples have been portrayed by a hand guided by love and reverence. He actually went to Cambodia to absorb the atmosphere of the temples of Angkor. He said he needed to get "a feel" of the place. That's dedication!

Every year he uses a different medium. He has used oils, ink, charcoal, poster and water colours.

This year it's ink again. We were wondering if there was a new medium he would find.

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Gautam Partho Roy



OUR HERITAGE TEMPLES & SHRINES

When people think of India, they think of a land of tigers and temples. They are not wrong, at least about the temples.

From the snow covered Himalayas to the tip of Cape Comorin, from the sandy wastes of Rajasthan to the verdant forests of the eastern hills, there are temples. On mountains, in valleys, beside rivers and even in the sea. There are monumental temples of marble, stone and gilding, which have survived for thousands of years. Some have been destroyed several times, but were rebuilt every time. More modest brick and cement temples exist in villages and the poorer areas of cities. Millions of homes have a space where their murtis live behind a protecting curtain, waiting till the time for puja. Little places under peepul trees have a metal cut-out of a figure with a red tikka, wearing a garland of six marigolds and, in front, a leaf with a sweetmeat on it.

Our temples are not just places to pray in. They are our history, our heritage, our pride, the glue that binds us together. They have survived war, pillage and destruction. They have been, and still are, the heart and soul of our people.

Anywhere one worships, there is a temple.

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Angkor Ta Prohm

Angkor Wat,
Cambodia

Angkor Thom

Angkor Wat, Cambodia

Deep in the alluvial plains of Cambodia lies the largest temple complex in the world and the largest Hindu temple in the world. Angkor Wat occupies almost 200 hectares. Over a fifteen hundred years ago, the king of the Khmer people, Suryavarman II, built a new city. In the middle of the city, raised on a platform, he built a magnificent temple, Angkor Wat. Other structures were built with light materials, probably bamboo, and did not survive the centuries.

A new city, named Angkor Thom, was built close to the temple. The architectural layout of the temple is an expression of Mt Meru surrounded by the oceans. It is enclosed by a formidable square wall, 8m high and 12km long and encircled by a 190m-wide moat. A bridge, guarded by stone lions on either side, was built across the moat.

Sandstone blocks for the building were quarried from a mountain more than 50km away, and floated down on rafts. The construction of Angkor Wat involved 300,000 workers and 6000 elephants.

The interior has countless carvings and sculptures. The first level of the temple has six bas-reliefs, each is a story carved in stone: The Battle of Kurukshetra; The Battle of Lanka; The Victory of Krishna over the demon Bana; the battle between the Gods and the Demons; The churning of the Sea of Milk and the army of the King.

The walls have carvings picturing the life of the city: women dressing their hair, carrying water jugs, weaving and making baskets. The men are shown taking elephants to the river, practising martial arts, wrestling and hunting. There is no space left un-carved.

Angkor Thom

Located in present-day Cambodia, was the last and most enduring capital city of the Khmer empire. It was established in the late twelfth century by King Jayavarman VII. Angkor Thom means Great City, and 22 temples were built within its walls.

The city walls were surrounded by a moat, enclosing an area of 900 hectares. The four gates into the city are carved with four gigantic faces of Lord Vishnu,

each facing a cardinal point, with a passage through the base. A smaller gate, called the Victory gate, leads straight to the royal palace.

The bridge that crosses the moat to the south gate has an avenue of statues. One side has a row of apsaras, and the other has a row of demons. Each side carries a giant serpent, a seven headed naag, very similar to the serpent that churns the Sea Of Milk.

Angkor Ta Prohm

The Khmer people usually added a temple to a hospital. Ta Prohm was one of 102 such temples. It is small, but had it's own gopura which is now in ruins. There are carvings of roundels enclosing figures. It seems that the deity in the temple was often bathed, because a small channel exists to remove the water.

Now smothered in creepers and vines, Ta Prohm was a Buddhist temple dedicated to the mother of Jayavarman VII, built in the early thirteenth century. It is a temple of towers, closed courtyards and narrow corridors. Many of the corridors are impassable, clogged with jumbled piles of delicately carved stone blocks dislodged by the roots of long-decayed trees. Bas-reliefs on bulging walls are carpeted with lichen, moss and creeping plants, and shrubs sprout from the roofs of monumental porches. Trees, hundreds of years old, tower overhead, their leaves filtering the sunlight and casting a greenish pall over the whole scene.



Kashi Vishwanath, Varanasi, Uttar Pradesh

This is one of the most deeply revered temples to Lord Shiva. It has seen continuous worship for about 2,000 years. Billions of devotees would have come here, to this, the oldest living city in the world.

Varanasi is considered the **spiritual capital of India** and is the **holiest of the seven sacred cities** (SaptPuri) of the Hindu and Jain faiths. Hindus believe that if they pass away at Varanasi, they will attain moksha - liberation from the cycle of life and death. In the 6th century BCE, Gautama Buddha gave his **First Sermon at Sarnath, the outskirts of Varanasi.**

The temple is dedicated to Shiva as Vishwanath or Vishweshwar, the 'Lord of the Universe'. As the city of Varanasi is also known as Kashi, the temple is popularly known as Kashi Vishwanath Temple. The temple has been reconstructed many times over the centuries. The Moghul Emperor Aurangzeb razed it to the ground and built the Gyan Vapi mosque on its foundations. In 1780, the **Maratha Queen Ahilya Bai Holkar** of Indore built the current structure. Subsequently, the Sikh ruler Maharaja Ranjit Singh donated gold, which covered two domes of the temple. The Ministry of Culture and Religious Affairs, Government of Uttar Pradesh, gold plated the third dome of the temple in the 20th century.

Over the centuries, the temple has been visited by many illustrious holy men, including Adi Shankaracharya, Goswami Tulsidas, Guru Nanak and Swami Vivekananda. It is believed that the merit or the blessings bestowed upon the pilgrim who views the jyotirling at Kashi Vishwanath Temple is equal to that earned by visiting the rest of the 12 jyotirlings, the holiest shrines to Lord Shiva. Thus, a visit to the Kashi Vishwanath Temple is an important step on the path to moksha.



Badrinarayan Temple, Badrinath, Uttarakhand

Dedicated to Lord Vishnu, the temple is at an altitude of over 10,000 feet, in the Garhwal hills, on the banks of the river Alaknanda. It is the **Northern Char Dham**.

The four Dhams are important pilgrimage sites and are deeply revered by Hindus. A visit to the Char Dhams is supposed to be one of the sacred duties in one's life.

Though the temple is located in the North of India, the **head priest**, or Rawal, is **traditionally a Nambudiri Brahmin**, from the state of Kerala in South India while the Chidambaram Temple, the most important Shiva temple in Tamil Nadu, South India, has Kashmiri priests, from the extreme North of India.

Badrinath became prominent when Lord Vishnu, it was believed, did tapasya or penance there. At that time, the place was full of berry or badri trees, so the place was named Badrika-Van, 'the berry forest'. The deity Lakshmi took the form of a large berry tree to protect him from the rain and sun. For this, Lord Vishnu decreed that people must always take Her name before His. Till this day, Hindus always refer to the divine couple as "Lakshmi-Narayan". The place was called Badrinath, 'the Lord of Berry forest'. Badrinath was the first of the Char Dhams.

Legend says that the temple was built by the Pandavas, to please Lord Shiva so that he would forgive their sin of killing their cousins. Lord Shiva accepted their penance.

The image of the presiding deity in the temple is a 3.3 feet tall, black stone statue of Lord Vishnu in the form of Badrinarayan. He is sits under a berry tree, with a gold canopy over it. The statue is considered by many Hindus to be **one of the eight swayamvyaktakshetras**, (self-manifested statues) of Vishnu.

The Tapt Kund, a group of hot sulphur springs just below the temple, are considered to have medicinal properties. Pilgrims bathe in the springs before visiting the temple.



Dwarkadhish, Dwarka, Gujarat

Located on the southern coast of the Gulf of Kutch, Dwarka was a flourishing port and the city was historically referred to as a "golden city". For Hindus, Dwarka is of great significance, as it is the **Western Char Dham**. It is also one of the **Sapt Puris**, or the **seven holy cities of India**: Ayodhya, Mathura, Haridwar, Varanasi, Kanchipuram and Ujjain.

Dwarka's beauty has been described by many poets and writers of ancient India. It is believed to have been the **capital of the kingdom of Lord Krishna**. Dwarka is derived from 'Dwar', a door. As the name suggests, it is believed to be a gateway to spiritual union with the divine. For traders, this port city was the gateway to the mainland of India.

The Dwarkadhish Temple is situated where the river Gomti joins the sea. It is also known as Jagat Mandir (universal shrine) or Trilok Sundar (the most beautiful in the three worlds). The temple may have been originally built around 200 BCE. It was greatly enlarged in the 15th and 16th centuries CE.

It is a glorious structure, seeming to rise from the waters of the Arabian Sea. Its exquisitely carved shikhara, or tower, is 43 meters high. The huge flag, 52 yards (47.5 meters) of cloth, can be seen from 10 kilometers away. There are two gateways: Swarg Dwar (gate to heaven), where pilgrims enter, and Moksha Dwar (gate to liberation), from where pilgrims exit. The interior of the temple is striking in its simplicity, the only exception being the elaborate ornamentation around the shrine of Lord Krishna.



Jagannath Temple, Puri, Orissa

Constructed in the 11th or 12th century CE, the temple is the **Eastern Char Dham** and is dedicated to Lord Krishna, as **Jagannath** or '**Lord of the Universe**'.

In the main shrine, on either side of Lord Jagannath, the figures of his brother, Balabhadra and his sister, Subhadra. Unlike other Hindu temples, the **images here are of wood**. Every twelve or nineteen years, these wooden figures are ceremoniously replaced, carved to create exact replicas, using wood from sacred trees.

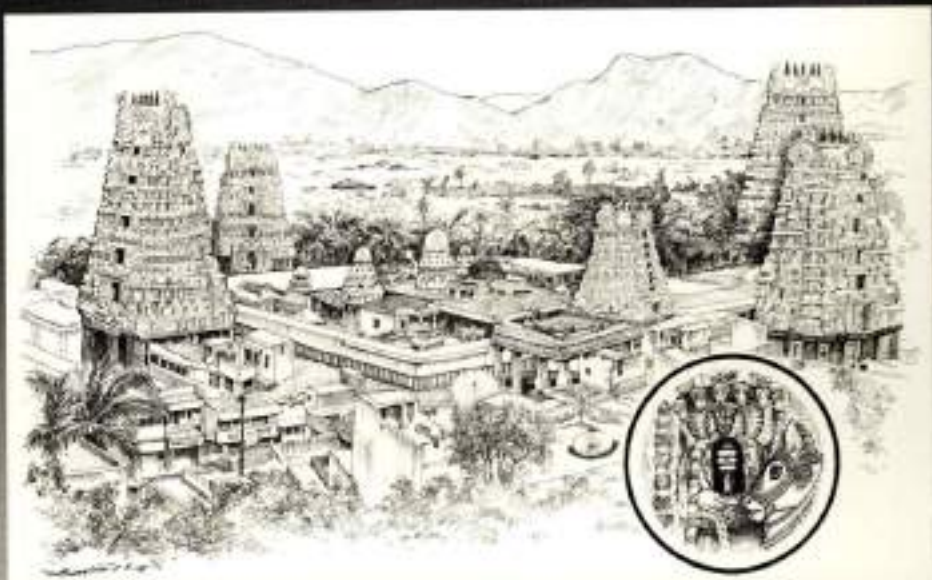
It is most famous for the **great rathayatra**, or annual temple chariot procession, when the deities emerge from the temple to bless their devotees on the streets.

The deities are carried on three huge ornamental chariots. Instead of horses, thousands of pilgrims take turns to pull the ropes which drag the chariots forward. Other pilgrims strew flowers on the road before the chariots. They are taken almost 3 km to the **Gundicha Temple**, for a nine-day visit. The Gundicha Temple stands in the middle of a beautiful garden and is known as the Garden House of Lord Jagannath. A 'Grand Road' has been constructed between the Jagannath Puri Temple and the Gundicha temple for the sole purpose of the rathayatra. It is an unforgettable spectacle.

Many miracles are attributed to this temple.

In coastal areas, the breeze blows from the sea to the land during the day and from the land towards the sea in the evening. It is said that at Puri, the breeze blows in the reverse order; No birds fly over the Jagannath temple; The shadow of the main dome of Jagannath temple is not visible at any time of the day.

In Puri, wherever you stand, the Sudarshana Chakra on top of the temple is always facing you!



Ramanathaswamy Temple, Rameshwaram, Tamil Nadu

Dedicated to Lord Shiva, it is located on the island of Rameshwaram. This is the southern **Char Dham**. It is also one of the twelve Jyotirling temples, which enshrine the Shivlings.

The original temple at this site and its revered **lings** are believed to date back to the time of Lord Rama. The temple was expanded during the 12th century. The gateway tower rises tall against the skies. The style of these imposing gateway towers in Tamil Nadu's temples started in the 11th Century onwards.

By the 16th–17th centuries, the kings of Tamil Nadu spared no effort or expense to create the largest and most magnificent temples. Their grandeur was further enhanced by enclosed corridors. These create a dramatic and impressive effect, as devotees walk through these passages on the way to worship. The temple has approximately one kilometre of corridors, with breadths ranging from 5 to 6 metres. **The ceilings are more than 7 metres high.** Every one of the **several hundred pillars** is elaborately sculpted.

The **lings** of Ramanathaswamy Temple, are believed to have been worshipped by Lord Rama,

After Sita's rescue from Ravana, Lord Rama and Sita landed here. Seeking atonement for killing Ravana, who was a Brahmin, Rama wanted to pray to Shiva. Hanuman was sent to bring a linga. Meanwhile Sita made a small linga. The one made by Sita is called Ramalingam, the one brought by Hanuman is called Vishwalingam. Lord Rama instructed that the Vishwalingam is to be worshipped before the Ramalingam. Till today, His decree is followed by his devotees.

The Rameshwaram temple is said to be built on the site of the original puja of Lord Rama.



Ajmer Sharif Dargah, Ajmer, Rajasthan

The tomb and shrine of the Sufi saint, **Hazrat Khwaja Moinuddin Chishti** is of the 12th -13th century. The saint is also known as Khawaja Gharibnawaz. It is believed, by people across all faiths, that wishes or boons, prayed for at the tomb of the saint, will be granted. Thousands of visitors come to pay homage to the saint. Prime Ministers of India, Bangladesh and Pakistan have visited the shrine.

The architecture of the complex of several tombs, buildings and courtyards are of the **Mughal period**. Several white marble buildings are arranged around two courtyards. There is a massive entrance gate, donated by the Nizam of Hyderabad.

Mughal **Emperor Akbar** is said to have **prayed here for a son**. When his wish was fulfilled, he and his queen went on foot every year, from Agra to the tomb. 120 large pillars, called **kosminars**, or 'mile pillars', were erected at intervals of two miles (about 3 kilometers) along the entire 370 km route between Agra and Ajmer, to mark the places where the royal pilgrims halted. Their grandson Shah Jehan, went on to build the Akbari Mosque, which houses the tomb of the saint.

The shrine may be entered through the Shah Jehani Gate, also erected by the Emperor Shah Jehan. The next gate is the **Buland Darwaza**, built by Sultan Mahmood Khilji, where the Urs flag is hoisted, marking the beginning of the Urs or death anniversary rituals. The Urs of Moinuddin Chishti is celebrated every year for 6 days, in the seventh month of the Islamic calendar. Besides other festivities on the occasion, there are night-long singing of qawwalis or Sufi devotional songs.



The Basilica of Bom Jesus, Velha Goa, Goa

In the early 16th century, at the mouth of the river Mandovi, the Portuguese built the great capital city, a bustling metropolis with a population of over 200,000.

The Portuguese built many magnificent churches, close to each other. In fact, there were so many churches, that letters were written to the King of Portugal by the priests, complaining that, "Their bells and our bells, their choir and our choir, there is cacophony here."

The building of the Basilica was started in 1594 and consecrated in 1605. **St. Francis Xavier** left Portugal to come to India and the Far East. He devoted himself to the welfare of the people and was loved by all. **He died in China** on the 3rd of December 1552, and his disciples brought his body back to Goa. He was canonised on May 12, 1662 and was adopted as the **Patron Saint of Goa**. The church was given the status of 'basilica' because of the deep reverence of the people of Goa have for their saint.

The silver and glass casket containing his body, rests above the altar designed by the 17th-century **Florentine sculptor, Giovanni Battista Foggini**. On the walls around the casket are paintings of scenes from the life of the saint. Once in 10 years, his miraculously intact body is displayed. The last Exposition in 2014 attracted more than 1lakh devotees.

The course of the river shifted and caused the port to be shifted to Panaji, which is now the capital of the state of Goa. The old city is known as Velha (Old) Goa.



Bankey Bihari Mandir, Vrindavan, Uttar Pradesh

Bankey means one who stands in the tribhanga posture, or 'bent in three places'. Bihari means 'partaker of supreme delight'.

Dedicated to Lord Krishna, the temple was established by **Swami Haridas Goswami**. He was the **teacher of Tansen**, who is still the most famous musician and singer in Indian history and was one of the Nine Jewels at the court of the Moghul Emperor Akbar.

In 1862 CE, the current temple was constructed in Vrindavan, where Lord Krishna spent his childhood. The architecture of the temple follows the beautiful Rajasthani style. The Goswami mobilised resources for the construction and to this day, Haridas Goswami's descendants are head priests of the temple.

Many myths surround the statue of Lord Krishna installed in this temple. One says that Swami Haridas was visited by Lord Krishna and his consort Radha. Their beauty and the bright light that shone from them was too much for the worshippers. Swami Haridas then begged Him to appear in a way that His people could see Him without being blinded. As desired, the Lord left behind a charming black image of Himself, in the tribhang' or 'banke' pose.

Various forms of sewa or service to the deity are offered at different times of the day. **Shringar** (which includes bathing, dressing and adornment with jewellery) and **Rajbhog** (feast) are offered in the forenoon. **Shayan sewa** (shayan means sleep) is offered in the evening. The temple does not have the usual tradition of early morning or **mangala sewa**. Swami Haridas did not favour this, as he wanted his child-like Lord to rest, so he did not disturb His slumber.



Parsi Fire Temple, Udvada, Gujarat

The Parsees are a community of Zoroastrians. They came from the Pars Province in Persia (now Iran), hence are called 'Parsis'.

Their ancient scripture, the *Avesta*, is in a language which is almost exactly the same as Vedic Sanskrit, except that the script is different. The Zoroastrian priests still study Sanskrit, in preparation for their religious studies.

Parsees are fire worshippers and their Prophet is Zarathushtra. Their faith dates back to antiquity. The remains of an ancient **Fire Temple** are in **Balkh**, Afghanistan, which pre-dates the 1st century.

After the Arab conquest of Persia, Islam was declared the state religion. Zoroastrians sailed to the coast of Gujarat and sought refuge in the city of Udvada. The local king was reluctant to give them permission to stay, as he felt that his land was already densely populated. This message was given to them symbolically, by sending a vessel of milk, filled to the brim, to indicate that there was no space to accommodate them. The Parsi priest put a handful of sugar into the milk and sent it back, to indicate that they would add sweetness to the land. The king understood the message and gave them permission to stay.

Legend has it that the Parsis carried with them a part of the **holy fire from Persia** and it is believed that this same fire has been burning for thousands of years.

Parsi Fire Temples, called **Agarjes**, are mostly in the city of Mumbai. The first Fire Temple was built at Udvada, not very far from where the Parsis landed. The temple became the **Stash Behram** or senior-most Fire Temple.

Only one Fire Temple remains in Yazd province in Iran.



Har Mandir, Golden Temple, Amritsar, Punjab

The site of the Har Mandir was a meditation retreat for wandering mendicants and sages since time immemorial. In the 15th-16th centuries, a saint came to live and meditate by the peaceful lake. His name was Guru Nanak, founder of the Sikh religion. After he passed away, his disciples continued to frequent the site and this became the most sacred shrine of the Sikhs.

Guru Arjan Dev (5th Guru) decided to build a temple in the centre of the lake and named it Amrit Sarovar, or 'Lake of Nectar'. The objective of the Guru was to combine **both spiritual and temporal aspects**.

True to the pluralistic spirit of Sikh culture, Guru Arjan Dev invited the Muslim saint, Mian Mir, to lay the foundation stone of the temple in 1588 CE. The huge dome and the top storey were later plated with gold, donated by Maharaja Ranjit Singh of Punjab.

The structure, famed for its superb architecture, is built on a level lower than that of its immediate surroundings, symbolising the value of humility. It is open on all four sides, representing entry to all.

An underground spring feeds the sacred lake, in which pilgrims can immerse themselves, as a symbolic cleansing of the soul. There are huge dormitories for pilgrims and dining halls next to the temple complex, where all persons, irrespective of race, religion, or gender, are lodged and fed for free. The scripture is a collection of devotional poems, prayers and hymns composed by the ten Sikh gurus and various Muslim and Hindu saints. These verses are chanted to the exquisite accompaniment of a variety of musical instruments. **The Book is regarded as the last Guru. At night, it is put to bed and is awakened at dawn.**

It is a place of **great beauty and sublime peace**.



Gomateshwara Temple, Shravanabelagola, Karnataka

The monolithic statue of the eighth Tirthanka makes this Temple one of the most important pilgrimage sites for Jains.

Gomateshwara stood for so long in meditation, that creepers and anthills grew around his unmoving body. He is shown standing in the specific position of meditation known as **kayotsarga**. The limbs are held straight and the arms do not touch the body.

In 982 CE, Chamunda Raya, minister of King Rajmalla IV, built an impressive temple, commonly known as Chamunda Raya Basti. The granite temple is in the South Indian style. The minister dedicated a colossal statue of Gomateshwara, also known as Bahubali. The statue is about 60 feet (18 meters) high and is the **largest free-standing monolithic sculpture in the world**.

In the Hindu tradition, deities of all faiths are worshipped. They are treated with reverence and fondness. They are given ritual baths and offered fresh flowers and fruit. The tradition finds its most exuberant expression in the grand **Maha-mastaka-abhishekha** of the colossal Gomateshwara statue, which is held every twelve years. On this occasion, the colossal statue of Bahubali is ritually **bathed with water, milk, ghee and yogurt and showered with flowers, saffron, turmeric and gold coins**. The next ceremony will be held in 2018.



Brahma Temple, Pushkar, Rajasthan

The town of Pushkar overlooks the Pushkar lake. Pushkar is known as 'the rose garden of Rajasthan' and the essence of the Pushkar rose is exported around the world.

The temple is called the **Jagatpita Brahma Mandir**, as Brahma is the creator in the Hindu Trinity. The word Jagatpita means 'Father of the World'. Hindus consider a journey to Pushkar the ultimate pilgrimage that must be undertaken to attain salvation. Final Shraddhas may be done here.

According to legend, Lord Brahma saw a demon harassing people and trying to kill children. He slew the demon with his lotus flower. Petals of the lotus fell on the ground at three places and, where they fell, three lakes were created. **Pushkar is considered the most holy**, because the first petal fell there and created the largest of the three lakes. Brahma threw the pushp (flower) with his kar (hand), thus the place was named Pushkar.

Brahma decided to perform a fire-sacrifice there. His wife, Saraswati did not appear at the designated time. Brahma then married a local Gurjar girl, Gayatri, and conducted the yagya with his new consort sitting beside him.

When Saraswati finally arrived, she found Gayatri sitting in her rightful place. She cursed Brahma that he would **never be worshipped**. She then reduced the scope of the curse, permitting his worship in Pushkar, which has one of the very few temples dedicated to Brahma.

The temple, situated in the middle of the lake, is believed to be 2,000 years old. In the 8th century, the sage, Adi Shankaracharya, renovated the temple. The current 14th-century structure dates from the time of Maharaja Jawat Raj, ruler of Ratlam, who renovated and extended it. The beautiful gates are decorated with the hams or swan motif. The swan is the vehicle of Lord Brahma. The shikara, or tower, is bright red. A closer inspection reveals that the slabs and blocks of stone, used to build the structure, are joined with lead.



Akshardham Temple, Delhi

This vast temple complex is located near the banks of the river Yamuna. The word Akshardham means the 'abode of the divine'. It was opened in 2005.

The principal deity of Akshardham is **Lord Swami Narayan**, from Gujarat, who has temples in the U.K. and the U.S.A. He is the central figure of a modern branch of Hinduism known as Swaminarayan Hinduism. He is believed by followers to be a manifestation of the divine. His idol, installed below the temple's central dome, is surrounded by statues of gurus, depicted in postures of devotion and sewa or service.

The inner sanctum or garbhagriha of the Akshardham temple has representations of Swaminarayan and his divine succession of gurus. Each figure is made of **Panch Dhatu**, or five metals, in keeping with the guidelines of the **Shilpa Shastra**, the ancient Sanskrit text on the making of deities and temples.

The gigantic temple has 234 ornately carved pillars, 9 domes, and 20,000 statues of sadhus, devotees and acharyas, as well as the statues of Sita, Rama, Radha, Krishna, Shiva, Parvati, Lakshmi and Narayan. Architecturally, the temple follows the norms set by the **Shilpa Shastra**, the treatise which gives the proportions of temple architecture, as well as the themes for the sculptures made on different parts of it.

The whole building rests on a plinth which has 148 life-sized elephants, weighing a total of 3,000 tons, as if the temple rests upon their mighty backs. This is an ancient tradition which was first seen in the 2nd century BCE at the Buddhist cave temple of Pitalkhora and in the 1st century CE at the cave temple of Karle, both in Maharashtra. **Akshardham revived the tradition.**

It uses modern technology, such as audio-visuals, to inform visitors of their philosophy and the lives of saints.



Dilwara Temples, Mount Abu, Rajasthan

The complex of Jain temples here comprise of the Vimal Vasahi Temple, the Tejapala Temple and the Pittalhar Temple. They are among the most deeply revered of Jain temples.

Vimal Shah, a minister of King Bhima I of Gujarat, constructed a Jain marble temple at Mount Abu. This was in the 11th century and was the first of the beautiful Dilwara Temples. Vimal Shah built this to honour Adinatha or Rishabha Dev, the first Jain tirthankara. In succeeding centuries, other Jain temples were constructed at Mount Abu.

The **Vimal Vasahi Temple**, carved entirely of white marble, was built in 1031 CE. The temple, dedicated to Lord Rishabha, has richly carved corridors, pillars, arches, and porticos. The exquisite ceilings are engraved with designs of lotus buds and flowers, as well as scenes from Jain mythology.

The **Luna Vasahi Temple** was built in 1230 CE by two brothers, both ministers of the ruler of Gujarat. The temple was built in memory of their late brother Luna. It was modelled on the Vimal Vasahi Temple and dedicated to the tirthankara Lord Neminatha.

The **Pittalhar Temple** was built by Bhima Shah, a minister of Sultan Begada of Ahmedabad. A massive statue of Rishabha Dev, the first tirthankara, was cast in five metals and installed in the temple.

The **Parshvanatha Temple** is a three-storied structure, the tallest shrine at Dilwara. The outer walls of the sanctum have beautiful sculptures in grey sandstone.

The **Mahaveer Swami Temple** is the smallest of the temples, but has the most elaborate and delicate carvings.

Tourists are attracted to the temples for their beautiful architecture and the delicacy of their carvings.



Sun Temple, Konark, Odisha

In the mid-13th century, a grand temple was built, dedicated to Lord Surya, the Sun. It was the tallest and most magnificent temple in India at that time. It was built by **King Narasimha Mahadeva I** of the Ganga Dynasty. Surya is believed to ride his chariot across the skies each day, driven by Aruna or the Dawn.

The Konark temple was conceived as the giant chariot of the sun. Twenty-four large wheels, twelve on each side, representing the twelve months of the year, were carved for the chariot. In front are seven horses, appearing to pull it forward at a spirited gallop. It is also famous for its erotic sculptures.

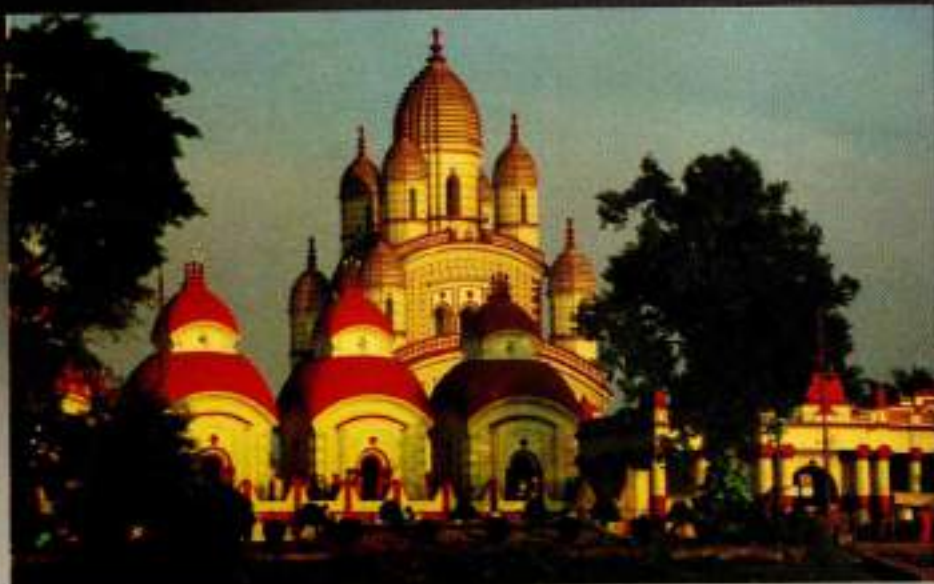
The tower of the Sun Temple at Konark originally stood over 200 feet tall, **higher than any other temple in India**. The hall still stands over 130 feet tall.

The great temple drew considerable admiration over the centuries. Abul Fazl, the court historian of the Mughal Emperor Akbar, visited the Konark temple and wrote in the sixteenth century, "Even those whose judgment is critical and who are difficult to please, stand astonished at this sight."

When the tower collapsed, the then British governor ordered that the temple be filled with sand to prevent more damage.

Even with the once-soaring tower lost, the Sun Temple is still **a vision of majesty and grandeur**. The structures are perfectly proportioned and covered with an endless wealth of sculpture. The beauty of the place is best summed up by Rabindranath Tagore, who said "Here, the language of stone surpasses the language of man."

Legend has it that Lord Krishna cursed Samba, one of his sons, with leprosy. For twelve years, Samba worshipped Surya, the Sun God. Pleased with his devotion, Surya healed him. In gratitude, Samba built the Sun Temple.



Kalighat Temple, Kolkata, West Bengal

This Temple is one of the 51 **Shakti Peethas**, (temples of the deity Shakti.) Bengalis are ardent worshippers of Kali.

According to legend, Sati, was the daughter of Raja Daksh Prajapati. She married Lord Shiva against the wishes of her father. Raja Daksh performed a great yagya or fire sacrifice, to which he invited all the deities, except his son-in-law, Shiva. Against His wishes, Sati attended her father's yagya and grievously insulted, she threw herself into the sacrificial fire.

Crazed with grief, Shiva cut off Daksha's head. He picked up Sati's body and **danced the tandava**, the dance of the destruction of creation. Vishnu cut the body of Sati into many pieces, so that they would fall away and Shiva could calm down. Parts of the body fell over the Indian sub-continent. **Wherever these pieces fell, there are Shakti Peethas.** Kalighat is the site where the toes of the right foot of Sati fell.

The name Kolkata is said to have been derived from the word Kalighat. The temple was on the bank of the river Hooghly. In time, the river shifted and the temple is now on the banks of a small canal, Adi Ganga, connecting to the Hooghly.

The temple was originally a small hut, but important enough to find mention in 15th and 17th century literature. The present temple, erected by the Sabarna Roy Chowdhury family, was completed in 1809.

The image of Kali, **with her tongue protruding, presents a fierce sight.** She is depicted with four hands. In one hand she holds a sword, which represents divine knowledge. In another hand, she holds the severed head of the asura king, Shumbha, who represents the demon of ignorance. With the other two hands, she blesses her devotees.



Kamakhya Temple, Guwahati, Assam

Located on Nilachal Hill, in the western part of Guwahati, it is dedicated to Shakti and is also known as Kamarupa-Kamakhya. Kamarupa is the ancient name of Assam, which was one of the greatest centres of tantric worship.

This is one of the **oldest and deeply revered of the 51 Shakti Peeths**, centres for the worship of Shakti. It is the main temple in a complex dedicated to the ten Mahavidyas, or female manifestations of supreme knowledge. Three of them are within the main temple, while the other seven have individual temples in the complex.

According to the Kalika Purana, when Shiva carried the dead body of Sati and danced the tandava, or dance of destruction, different parts of her body fell to the earth. The places where they fell became the most sacred Shakti Peethas. It is believed that her yoni, or vulva, fell on Nilachal Hill, where the Kamakhya temple is located today.

The original temple was destroyed in the early 16th century and was rebuilt by King Narayanaraya, in the middle of the 17th century.

The garbhagriha, or inner sanctum, of the Kamakhya Temple is small and dark and can only be reached by steep, narrow steps. It is deep inside a cave in the rock face. There are no images of deities there, but a large rock that slopes downwards from both sides, meeting in a yoni-like depression, about 25 centimetres deep. This hollow is constantly filled with water from a perennial underground spring. It is the vulva-shaped depression that is **worshipped as the deity Kamakhya herself** and is considered as the most important abode of Shakti. The Khasi people sacrifice goats at the shrine.



Khajuraho, The Temple City, Madhya Pradesh

In the 9th and 10th centuries, the Chandela Dynasty rose to power in the ancient land of Vatsa, present-day Madhya Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh. Their capital city was Khajuraho, also known as the City of Temples.

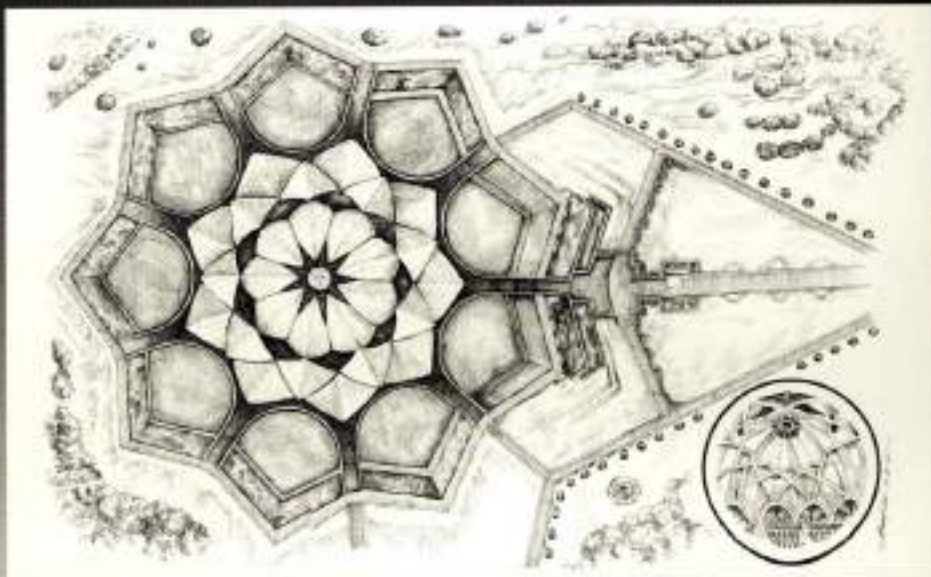
Between the 10th and 12th centuries, were created one of the most splendid temple cities in the history of the world. There were originally **85 temples at Khajuraho**, of which 25 remain.

The Lakshmana Temple, completed by 945 CE, is one of the early structures at Khajuraho. The shikhara of the temple is flanked by a number of smaller replicas. These created an effect like mountain peaks. An inscription on the temple states that this temple "rivals the peaks of the mountains of snow".

The largest and most magnificent temple in Khajuraho is the **Kandariya Mahadeva**, dedicated to Lord Shiva, said to be constructed between 1017 and 1029 CE.

The 10th century **Jain temple of Parsvanatha** was built soon after the Lakshmana Temple, and its beautiful sculptures have a striking resemblance to that temple. The numerous deities of the Hindu pantheon are represented here along with the Jain images. Next to it stands a temple dedicated to the Jain Adinatha. This is a smaller temple of a later date. The temple is girdled by three bands of sculptures, and we see images of both Hindu and Jain divinities. Ancient inscriptions show that people, within the same family, worshipped different deities.

On the walls of the temples of Khajuraho, there is a profusion of depictions of men and women, in every possible posture. They portray the rich abundance of nature and the joy of life. Mithunas, or loving couples, were seen in Indian art since the 1st century CE. In Khajuraho the depictions became more erotic.



Lotus Temple: Bahai House of Worship, Delhi

The house of worship of the Bahai faith was completed in 1986. The lotus represents the rise of purity out of the murky waters of the material world around us. It is one of the **most beautiful structures in India**.

The Bahá'í Faith was founded by **Bahá'u'lláh** in 19th-century Persia. He taught the 'Oneness of God, the Oneness of Religions and the Oneness of Mankind'.

The temple is a place to worship the creator of the universe and not any particular deity. Therefore, people of all religions and races are welcome.

The building is composed of 27 free-standing marble-clad 'petals', arranged in clusters of three, to form nine sides. The marble for the structure came from the Penteli Mountains in Greece, the same stone **that was used to make the Parthenon in Athens**.

Nine doors open into a central hall, with a height of slightly over 40 meters and the capacity to hold 2,500 people. Pools of water surround the temple. At night, when the temple is lit, it gives the impression that the temple is floating on the water.

The Bahai rules stipulate that the house of worship is a gathering place where people of all religions may worship the divine, without denominational restrictions. Readings and prayers are allowed to be set to music and sung by choirs, but **no musical instruments may be played, no sermons may be delivered and ritualistic ceremonies are not allowed**.

The Lotus Temple has won numerous architectural awards and been featured in hundreds of newspaper and magazine articles. It is regarded as one of the most visited buildings in the world.



Mahakaleshwar Temple, Ujjain, Madhya Pradesh

The temple is located in on the banks of the river Kshipra. Ujjain was the capital of the ancient Avanti kingdom and is dedicated to Lord Shiva as Mahakala. Here, Shiva is the conqueror of Time and thereby, the conqueror of Life and Death.

The Mahakala Temple is **one of the 12 jyotirlinga temples**. The linga here is colossal. It is not possible to trace the early history of the temple structures at this site. The Scindia rulers of Gwalior re-built it in 1736 CE and further developed the site in the mid 19th century.

The idol of Mahakaleshwar is known to be **dakshinamurti**, which means that it is **facing south**. This is a **unique feature** among the 12 Jyotirlingas, found only in Mahakaleshwar.

The temple has five levels, one of which is underground. Brass lamps illuminate the stairway going down to the garbhagriha or sanctum. At ground level, images of Ganesha, Parvati and Kartikeya are facing the west, east, and north respectively. The Nandi bull, the vahan or vehicle of Lord Shiva, is in the south. On the third level of the temple is the image of Lord Shiva, as **Nagchandreshwar**, as he is associated with the nagas, or snake deities and Chandra, the moon. This level is **opened to the public only once a year**, on Naga Panchami day, when cobras are worshipped.

On the day of **Maha Shivaratri**, a huge fair is held near the temple, and worship goes on through the night.

In the precincts of the Mahakaleshwar temple is the Shri Swapaneshwar Mahadev temple, where devotees pray to Shiva as Mahakaal. It is believed that prasada offered here can be re-offered, unlike all other shrines.



Meenakshi Temple, Madurai, Tamil Nadu

This vast Hindu temple is located on the banks of the river Vaigai. It is also the most beautiful example of temple architecture. The Government of India puts it on the cover of the booklets for tourists!

The temple complex is built around two shrines: one dedicated to Shiva as Sundareshwara, the 'Beautiful Lord', and the other to his spouse Parvati, as Meenakshi, the 'Fish-Eyed One', denoting the shape of her eyes. Every evening Meenakshi is placed in a bed chamber for the night. Shiva, symbolised by the image of his feet, is then carried to her. In the morning, they are awakened by the singing of devotional songs.

The Meenakshi Temple is one of the greatest achievements of temple building of the Nayaka period. The present structure was created in the reign of Thirumalai Nayaka, in the mid-17th century. It has the **largest covered area of any temple in India**. The original temple is said to date back 2,500 years.

The vast temple has **eight impressive gopuras, or gateway towers**, one of which rises to almost 200 feet (61 meters). The gopuras are covered with hundreds of sculptures. Temple authorities estimate that there are thirty-three million sculptures in the Meenakshi complex. If that number is not based upon an actual count, a view of the temple does indeed convey such an impression.

In the Nayaka period, the temples were made with spectacular halls with numerous sculpted pillars. In the Meenakshi Temple complex, an Ayiramkaal Mandapam, or 'Hall of a Thousand Pillars', has almost exactly that number of massive sculpted columns. Carved out of large slabs of granite, each pillar is a monumental work of art.

Once in twelve years, the temple is re-consecrated to maintain its sacred nature. At that time, the thousands of sculptures on the great gopuras are repaired, repainted and even replaced. It is a living and evolving temple till today.



Shrinathji Temple, Nathdwara, Rajasthan

Located in the Aravalli hills, on the banks of the river Banas, the town is famous for its temple to Lord Krishna, as a 7-year-old. Nathdwara means 'Gateway to the Lord'.

His swarup, or 'divine statue', is said to have manifested itself at Govardhan Hill near the ancient city of Mathura. The hill figures prominently in stories of his childhood. The deity was originally worshipped here, until, in 1672 CE, He was moved to the present location.

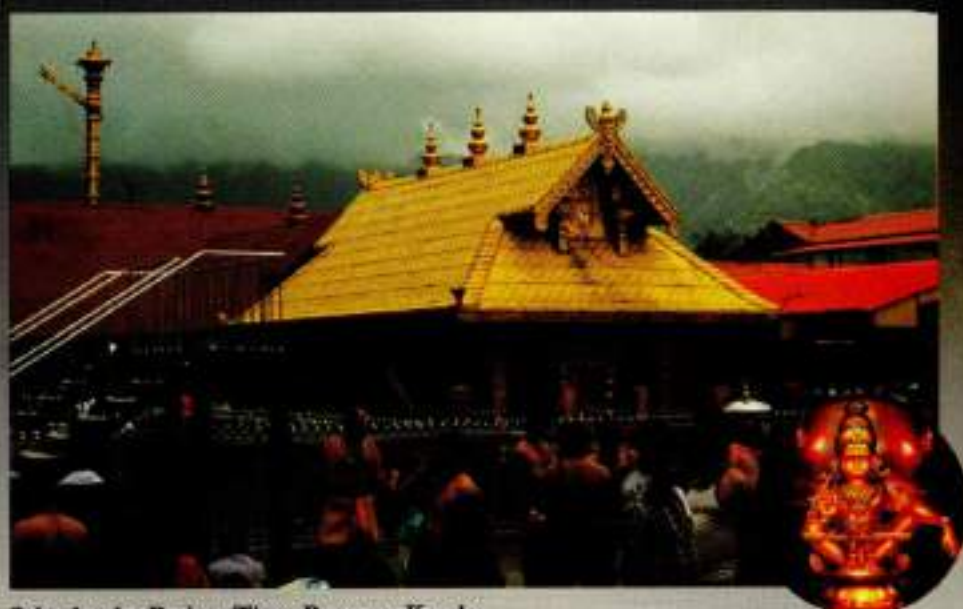
During the reign of the Mughal Emperor Aurangzeb, He was taken from Uttar Pradesh to Rajasthan, first by boat on the river Yamuna and then in a bullock cart. When the deity reached the village Sihad (or Sinhad), the wheels of the bullock cart sank in the mud and all efforts failed to move it any further.

The accompanying priests realised that this place was the Lord's chosen spot. Accordingly a temple was built there, protected by Maharana Raj Singh, the ruler of Mewar.

Shrinathji Temple is also known as 'Haveli (mansion) of Shrinathji'. The term was used because the temple is in a fortified mansion.

Shrinathji is not seen as an impersonal God. His worship is not like it is in temples. Shrinathji is seen as **Thakur or Lord of the Haveli and service is offered** instead of worship. Like a normal household, it has a chariot (the original in which Shrinathji arrived in Singhar), a store rooms for milk, betel, flowers and sugar and sweetmeats. There is a functional kitchen, a jewellery chamber, a treasury, a stable for horses, a drawing room, a gold and silver grinding wheel for various flours.

Shrinathji is addressed by the honorific 'Thakurji'. His name is not uttered as a mark of respect and reverence.



Sabarimala, Periyar Tiger Reserve, Kerala

Sri Dharma Sastha Temple is dedicated to Lord Ayyappa, is on a hilltop at an approximate altitude of 3,000 feet (915 meters) in the Western Ghats. It is the most famous of 108 temples dedicated to Lord Sastha.

The temple is situated amid 18 hills and is surrounded by dense forests. **There are temples on each of the hills surrounding Sabarimala**, many of which are still functioning. Remnants of old temples survive on other hills.

The temple is open to all, irrespective of caste or creed. **Pilgrims practice austerities for 41 days**, to cleanse their minds and bodies, before going to Sabarimala. To enter the temple, the pilgrim must climb eighteen holy steps. Each of these steps represents a desire which one must conquer. **Only those who observe the ritual of 41 days of austerity may climb these steps.** Pilgrims have to walk through the forest as there is no motorable road beyond a point.

This is one of the largest annual pilgrimages in the world. It is estimated that **over 100 million devotees visit the temple every year.**

Sabarimala pilgrims can be identified by their black, blue or saffron clothing. They do not shave until the completion of the pilgrimage, and they smear ash on their foreheads.

The temple was rebuilt after a fire in 1950. The earlier stone image of the deity was replaced with an idol about 18 inches (45 cms) high, made from panchdhatu, an alloy of five metals.

The temple is open for worship **only during the first five days of every Malayalam month** and on the days of Mandalapooja (approximately 15 November to 26 December), Makaravilakku or Makara Sankranti (14th January) and Chitra Vishu (14th April).



Sarnath, Varanasi, Uttar Pradesh

This is **one of the four most holy places for all Buddhists**, the other three being Lumbini, Bodhi Gaya and Kushinagar.

Today, there are a number of recent Buddhist temples in Sarnath. **Many of these are built and maintained by monks from other Buddhist countries.** The Archeological Survey of India Museum at this site has some of the finest Buddhist art in the world.

The Dhamek Stupa at Sarnath is **on the outskirts of the holy city of Varanasi.** This stupa marks the spot where the Buddha delivered his first sermon to his five companions. This event is known as the DharmachakraPravartin, or 'the setting into motion the wheel of law'.

The original stupa is believed to have been built in the 3rd century BCE by Emperor Ashoka. The present stupa is much larger than the original one and was probably made in the middle of the first millennium CE.

The Buddha spoke of Four Noble Truths. He said there is Dukkha, or suffering. There is Samudaya, or the cause of suffering. There is Nirodha, or the removal of the cause of suffering and there is Marg, or the Eight-fold Path, leading to the removal of the cause of suffering. This sermon was the foundation of Buddhism.

By the 1st century CE, Sarnath was an important centre of Buddhist philosophy and art. It continued as a great centre through the Gupta Period, from the 4th to 6th centuries CE. In the 7th century, the Chinese pilgrim Xuanzang visited Sarnath and wrote about the splendour of the city.

The illustration is of the Japanese Temple and the Stupa is on the right.



Somnath Temple, Veraval, Gujarat

The temple has the first and most revered of the twelve Jyotirlingas, which has been worshipped since time immemorial, at the confluence of the mythological Saraswati, Hiranya and Kapila rivers.

Somnath means 'Lord of the Moon', who is said to have worshipped this Shivaling. This is also believed to be the place where Lord Krishna gave up his mortal body.

The temple is believed to have been built sometime around AD 4. Remains, found from the region and the writings of Indians and foreigners, suggest that the place was an **Aryan colony** of ancient times. Somnath is one of the oldest pilgrimage spots in India and finds mention in ancient texts, including the Shivapurana, Skandapurana and Shrimad Bhagvat Gita.

Legend has it that the original temple of Somnath was built by the Moon God and was made of gold. After it was razed to the ground, it was rebuilt with silver, by Ravana, the king of Lanka. When the silver temple was demolished, it was reconstructed in wood by Lord Krishna. In the 10th century it is believed to have been rebuilt in stone by King Bhimdev Solanki.

Tales of the **great wealth of the temple** attracted a series of invaders, who looted it over the centuries. **Mohammed of Ghazni raided it seven times** between 1000 and 1027 CE. then came Afzal Khan, the army commander of Ala-ud-din Khilji and later, there was Aurangzeb. It is said that the temple was looted and destroyed as many as seventeen times.

The present temple was reconstructed in the Chalukya style of architecture and was completed in **May, 1951**. Commanding a breathtaking view from the tip of the Saurashtra Peninsula, kissed by the waves of the Arabian Sea, the temple has an imposing shikhara, or tower, nearly 50 meters tall.



Sri Venkateswara Swamy Temple, Tirupati , Andhra Pradesh

The temple is in the hilly town of Tirumala and is dedicated to Lord Vishnu as Venkateswara, also known as Balaji and 'Lord of the Seven Hills'. Lord Venkateswara is known by other names, including Govinda. Lord Venkateswara's eyes are kept covered, as it is believed that his gaze is so intense that it would scorch the universe. The temple is also called the Tirumala Temple, Tirupati Temple and Tirupati Balaji Temple.

According to the ancient Sanskrit text, the VarahaPurana, Lord Rama resided here along with his wife Sita and brother Lakshmana, on their return from Lanka. This is believed to have been in the TretaYug, or the second of the four yugs or 'ages of mankind'. We are presently living in the Kali Yug, the fourth yug.

The town was an established centre of Vaishnavism and was praised by the Tamil devotional poet-saints, the Alvars. It is believed that the temple rites were formalised by the saint Ramanujacharya in the 11th century.

The temple was expanded and renovated by numerous kings, over the centuries. Inscriptions in **Sanskrit, Tamil, Telugu and Kannada** are found in the temple complex, which specify the contributions of Pallava rulers of around the 9th century, Chola rulers of the 10th century and the rulers of Vijayanagara in the 14th century.

Devotees flock to the temple in large numbers. Their offerings make it the richest shrine in India. In gratitude for wishes which have been fulfilled, devotees sacrifice their hair at the temple, which earns the temple **US \$6 million annually, by auctioning the hair.**

The temple is one of the most important and **most-visited pilgrimage spots in India**. The temple trust of Tirupati runs many charitable and educational institutions and universities.



Hawai Jahaz Gurudwara, Jalandhar, Punjab

Shaheed Baba Nihal Singh Gurudwara in Talhan Village near Jalandhar in the northern Indian state of Punjab, is a unique place of worship. Here, devotees make offerings of miniature aircraft at the shrine, to fulfil their dreams of going abroad.

Shaheed Baba Nihal Singh Gurudwara looks like a typical Sikh shrine, with pristine white domes. It is famous as the Hawai Jahaz Gurudwara, or the 'Aeroplane Gurudwara'. The gurudwara is now a symbol of hope for a brighter and prosperous future, somewhere in the USA, Canada, UK or Germany.

It is believed that if you give a toy aeroplane here as prasad, or offering, you can be "assured" of a visa. This makes devotees flock to the shrine from across Punjab's Doaba region, with miniature aircraft as offerings. Six million persons from this area are known to have settled abroad and it is said that every family of this region has at least one member living overseas.

The gate to Talhan village has a cement model of a **British Airways aircraft** on top of it. Shops selling toy models of aeroplanes of international carriers, such as Lufthansa, British Airways, Air Canada and others, line the road heading to the Gurudwara. It is said that a visitor from Ludhiana once came here and promised that he would offer a model of an aeroplane if his wish of getting a USA visa was fulfilled. Four days later, he came back with a large model of an aircraft and offered it as prasad, for getting the visa. The news spread, and it became a tradition.



Karni Mata Temple, Deshnok, Bikaner, Rajasthan

Located at Deshnok, 30 km from Bikaner, in Rajasthan, India. It is also known as the **Temple of Rats**. The temple is famous for the 25,000 black rats that live and are revered in the temple. These holy rats are called kabbas, and many people travel great distances to pay their respects. The temple draws visitors from across the country for blessings, and tourists from around the world.

Local folklore explains the legend of the rats. A 20,000 strong army deserted a nearby battle and ran to Deshnok. The sin of desertion was punishable by death. **Karni Mata spared their lives but turned them into rats**, and offered them the temple as place to stay. The army of soldiers expressed their gratitude and promised to serve Karni Mata evermore.

The building was completed in its current form in the early 20th century in the late Mughal style by Maharaja Ganga Singh of Bikaner. The front of the temple has a beautiful marble facade, with solid silver doors built by Maharaja Ganga Singh. Across the doorway are more silver doors with panels depicting the various legends of the Goddess. The image of the Goddess is enshrined in the inner sanctum.

If one rat is killed, it must be replaced with one made of silver. There are a few white rats, which are considered to be especially holy. They are believed to be the manifestations of Karni Mata herself and her four sons. Sighting them is a special blessing and visitors try to bring them forth, offering sweet prasad.



Bullet Banna Mandir, Jodhpur, Rajasthan

The shrine to Om Banna is also known as 'Bullet Banna Mandir', near Jodhpur in Rajasthan. What is most unusual is that the object of worship is a motorcycle, a Royal Enfield Bullet, giving the shrine its name.

Every day, people from nearby villages and travellers from afar, stop and pray to the bike and its late owner Om Singh, for safe journeys. They leave offerings, which in some cases are small bottles of alcohol.

Devotees also **apply a tilak and tie a red thread on the motorcycle**. Folk songs about Om Banna have been composed and are sung by the people of the region.

More than two decades ago, Om Singh Rathore, also known as Om Banna, was travelling on National Highway 65, when he lost control of his motorcycle and hit a tree. Om Banna was killed instantly and the bike fell into a ditch. The local police took the bike to the police station. The next day, it had disappeared from the police station and was found at the accident site. The police took the motorcycle away again, emptied its fuel tank and secured it with a lock and chain. The next morning it had disappeared again and was found in the ditch. The story goes that the motorcycle kept returning to the same ditch. It foiled every attempt by the police to keep it at their station.

For the local populace, this was a miracle. They began to worship the 'Bullet Bike'. News of the miraculous motorcycle spread to nearby villages and some time later a temple was built to house the bike. The temple is known as 'Bullet Baba's Temple'. **It is believed that Om Banna's spirit helps travellers in distress.**



Ravana Temple, Jodhpur, Rajasthan

This shrine sees daily worship of Ravana. Legend has it that Jodhpur is the hometown of Ravana's wife **Mandodari**, daughter of the **King of Mandore**, the ancient capital of Marwar.

Shiva **Tandava Stotra** is a Hindu hymn that describes Lord Shiva's power and beauty. It is believed to have been composed by Ravana and is recited by devotees of Shiva in Indian households till today. Ravana is known to have been the greatest of scholars and an ardent devotee of Shiva.

Valmiki, the writer of the Ramayana, describes Ravana as a grand, almost glorious, imperial lord. He was **born to the great sage Vishrava** and the demon princess Kaikesi. He is depicted with ten heads to signify his vast knowledge. Ravana was also known to be a great ruler and his kingdom of Lanka was described as 'golden' and most prosperous. Besides, he was known to be a maestro of the veena, a stringed musical instrument. He was the author of the seminal treatise on astrology, called the **Ravana Samhita**. He is also famous as the author of *Arka Prakasham*, a major work on Siddha medicine.

When Hanuman first sees Ravana, he describes him in great detail, with wonder and amazement, remarking on his beauty, majesty and grandeur. Some regard Ravana as a kind of tragic hero with strong positive qualities.

There is an altar at Mandore known as **Ravana Ki Chanwari**, where it is believed that Ravana married Mandodari. It is believed that the Maudgil Brahmins came from Lanka to Mandore for the wedding. They moved to Jodhpur when the city was founded in the 15th century. They claim that their ancestors performed the annual homage to his memory, during **Dussehra**, which marks the day that Ravana was killed.



Sthambheshwar Mahadev Temple, Kavi Kamboi, Gujarat

This 150-year old **Shiva shrine** is flanked by the Arabian Sea on one side and the Bay of Cambay on the other. It is one of the most unusual Shiva temples in the country, as it can **only be seen at low tides**. At high tide, it is totally submerged, thus earning the name 'the disappearing temple of Shiva'. Here, Mother Nature herself performs the **jal abhishek**, or ritual bathing of the Shivalinga.

Access to the temple is through a walkway from the beach, which is also submerged at high tide. Worshippers stay till the last minute, to see the linga submerged by the sea. Then they have to run across the walkway, while it is being covered by the rising sea.

The Shivalinga is protected by a beautiful silver cobra, with its hood extended and ten heads. Jasmine flowers cover the hood and are held in place by rudraksha garlands, which are retrieved before high tide. The flowers on the linga are taken by the sea and the tilaks, or holy markings, are washed away by the waters. The Shivalinga is **wrapped in plastic sheeting to prevent erosion**.

Devotees are fascinated and wait to see the **ebbing tide**, when the 4-foot high **Shivalinga starts emerging out of the sea**, inch by inch. A visit to the temple should be planned in such a way that one gets to see the disappearing and the reappearing of the temple. One must see the temple and the Shivalinga, in its full glory framed by the shimmering sea and when the night engulfs it.

