

MMTCP Nov-Dec 2025 Pilgrimage



In the Footsteps of the Buddha: A Pilgrimage to the Source of Mindfulness For the MMTCP Alumni Community

with Dharmacharya Shantum Seth
and supporting MMTCP teacher Anne Cushman
Sponsored by the MMTCP Alumni Association

November 30 - December 13, 2025
December 13 - 14, 2025 (Agra Option)
December 14-17, 2025 (Caves Option)

Places to visit:

The Buddha lived and traveled along the Gangetic plains in Northern India. Besides New Delhi, the pilgrimage visits two states of northern India, Uttar Pradesh and Bihar. India's cities stand in contrast to her villages and have their own interesting (if seemingly chaotic) lifestyle. Varanasi and Bodh Gaya are both significant pilgrimage sites, having their own distinct character. In these places we get a closer view of how modern and traditional India co-exist. Kushinagar, Sravasti and Rajgir are smaller towns and relatively quiet, giving the pilgrims the opportunity to absorb the nuances of the local culture and society.

In Delhi, we will visit the place where Mahatma Gandhi, the *father of India*, lived his last days. This is a wonderful place to begin the pilgrimage. Gandhi reminds us of the Buddha in our living memory, and personified a unique way of peaceful living and politics. He was a man open to all cultures and religions but with a deep faith in his own.

Our journey will take us across the plains of the river Ganges to Bodh Gaya, where the Buddha attained enlightenment, and the Deer Park at Sarnath, where he gave his first teachings. We will visit his favorite meditation places such as Vulture Peak in Rajgir, the Jeta Grove at Sravasti (where he spent 24 rainy season retreats), and Kushinagar, where he passed away. We will also visit Lumbini, where he was born, and the palace at Kapilavastu, where he spent his childhood. Aside from visiting the places where the Buddha lived, we will visit monasteries, temples and shrines. The trip includes a gentle walk to the DUNGESHWARI Mountain (Mahakala Cave) where the Buddha practiced his austerities, Vaishali, where the first nuns were ordained and Nalanda, the site of the famed university from the 5th to 12 century CE. We will meet interesting people and visit the homes of both the homes of the poor and the privileged to get a sense of contemporary India. We shall take a boat ride on the Ganges river in Varanasi and get a sense of Hindu Brahmanism as also visit Jain shrines to understand the religious context and traditions that were prevalent at the time of the Buddha and still exist today.

We will combine this with the understanding of the Buddha's teachings, and the places he lived and visited so that we can examine what we are witnessing and experiencing both from an external and internal perspective. At each pilgrimage site along the way, Shantum will tell stories of the Buddha's life and give teachings to help

us understand the Buddha as a human being, the drama of his life and the significance of what he taught. We will schedule time for daily sitting and walking meditation, regular discussions, and contemplative time for ourselves. The creation of a traveling sangha will be an important aspect of this trip, giving the journey a greater cohesiveness and building a sense of support for those seeking to deepen their practice.

The pilgrimage is an unforgettable opportunity to explore areas that few tourists visit and to see and experience aspects of contemporary Indian life that, in many ways, have not changed since the time of the Buddha. We invite you to join other practitioners on a transformative journey that will allow you to touch an ancient and diverse culture and civilization, and experience the life of the Buddha through the places he lived and taught.

Building Love- *Agra, the Taj Mahal and Agra Fort (ending in Delhi) December 13-14, 2025 – US\$ 545*

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

The Exquisite Caves– *Ajanta & Ellora* (beginning & ending in Delhi) December 14-17, 2025 – US\$ 1810

Ajanta.

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

Ellora

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

DAILY SCHEDULE & SPECIAL EXCURSIONS

Our retreat schedule will include daily sitting and walking meditation, often starting with a morning meditation at one of the Buddhist sites. This will be followed by breakfast at the hotel, after which we'll visit one of the Buddhist sites listed in the itinerary. Shantum will offer a detailed talk on that site in the context of the Buddha's life and teachings, and what was happening in the area many centuries ago. Pilgrims will have some time at the site itself, after which we will go to lunch. We'll rest after lunch or we may visit another site, go to a village, school, visit a teacher etc. We return to the hotel by evening in time for dinner and usually end with a sharing about the day. On the days we travel, the itinerary will vary slightly, and there will be some flexibility depending on the size, needs, and interest of the group.