SARNATH
(Where Lord Buddha delivered his first sermon)
Located at a distance of 10 kms from Varanasi, Sarnath is one of the most significant Buddhist pilgrimage sites in the country. Lord Buddha delivered his first sermon here at the Deer Park, after attaining Enlightenment at Bodh Gaya. His sermon, narrated as Maha Dharma Chakra Pravartanam, meaning “setting in motion the Wheel of Dhamma”, conveys the Four Noble Truths and presents the basic orientation of Buddhism in a simplified manner.
During the time of Lord Buddha, this town was called Rishipattana or Rishikarnika and Mirigaya, because it was the dwelling place of one of the great sages of that time, a deer in the surrounding forests. Emperor Ashoka, one of the biggest proponents to spread Lord Buddha’s message of love and peace, came to Sarnath during the 6th century B.C. and had a Stupa built here.
Sarnath, having a plethora of well-maintained enclosures, stupas and a museum, attracts followers from all around the world.

MAJOR ATTRACTIONS

CHAUKHANDI STUPA
Chaukhandi Stupa is an important Buddhist stupa in Sarnath, located 8 kms from Cantt. railway station. Varanasi. The Chaukhandi Stupa is thought originally to have been built during the Gupta period between the 4th and 6th centuries to mark the site where Lord Buddha and his first disciples met travelling from Bodh Gaya to Sarnath. It is a huge earthen mound with a brick edifice surrounded by an octagonal tower. The site has great significance for the Buddhist devotees.

DHAMEK STUPA
Dhamek Stupa is the most remarkable structure at Sarnath. 28 metres in diameter at its base, and at present 52 metres in height, built partly of stone and partly of brick. The stone facing the lower part is adorned with delicate floral carvings of Gupta origin, remnants from the original Ashoka’s structure. It is said to have been built to commemorate the first sermon of Lord Buddha given the first sermon to his five disciples after attaining Enlightenment, and showed them the Eightfold Path leading to Nirvana. This makes the Dhamek Stupa one of the most frequented pilgrimage sites in the city.

SARNATH MUSEUM
Archaeological Museum, Sarnath is the oldest site museum of the Archaeological Survey of India. In order to preserve and display the antiquities found from the site during the excavations, an onsite museum was constructed adjacent to the excavated area at Sarnath. Initiated by Sir John Marshall, the plans were drawn by Mr. James Rennome, to display and study the antiquities in their right perspective. The building forms half of a monastery (Vihara) and is so designed so as to intervene spiked crook-wheel.
There are five galleries and two verandahs in the museum that display the antiquities ranging in time from third century B.C. to twelfth century A.D.
The museum preserves a large number of sculptures, artifacts, statues of Goddess Tara, Bodhisattva and the iconic Ashoka Lion Capital, also known as the ‘National Emblem of India’.

TIMINGS: 10 AM – 5 PM
Closed on Fridays.

MULAGANDHAKUTI KUTI Vihar TEMPLE
Shri Angreka Dhamma Sri Lanka Buddhist saint revived almost all Buddhist sites at Sarnath and established the Maha Bodhi Society of India. The society built the new Mulagandhakuti Vihara Temple in 1931 to commemorate the original Mulagandha Kuti Vihara. Prayers are even offered to Lord Buddha's statue in the presence of the Mulagandha Kuti. The relics of Lord Buddha are kept in the temple and taken out every year on the occasion of Budh Purnima. The inner walls of the temple are adorned with beautiful frescoes created by the Japanese artist Koanb Kusao and said to have been completed in 1936. The frescoes display the life of Lord Buddha from birth to the attainment of Mahaparinirvana. One can also behold a Bodhi Tree here, planted by a branch of the Bodhi Tree of Anuradhapura (Sri Lanka). It is open from sunrise to sunset and the entry is free.

MAHA BOДHI TREE
It is located near Mulagandha Kuti Vihara. It is a part of same Bodhi Tree at Bodh Gaya under which Lord Buddha attained Enlightenment. Planted here in 1931 by Sri Devimata Dharmapala, founder of the Maha Bodhi Society of India, it marks the opening of the Mulagandha Kuti Vihara. In 1999, the Bodhi tree was cut down following a disaster of mediating and adorned with twenty images of the previous Buddhas, beginning from Taranakira Buddha to Gacanma Buddha. A granite plate inscribed with the date ‘17 July 572 B.C’ is set underneath the Mulagandha Kuti. The first sermon of the Sakayami Buddha was also held here. The entire Bodhi tree was cut on 17 December 1999 by His Holiness the Dalai Lama. The Waist of the tree was used to restore and promote peace and harmony.

VAJRA VIDYA INSTITUTE
Vajra Vidya Institute is a monastic college offering training in higher Buddhist education and was established by the Venemous Khenchen Thrangu Rinpoche to preserve the Karma Kagyu lineage of scripture and realization. The foundation stone for Vajra Vidya was laid in 1993 by the Varanasi District Commissioner, and in 1999 the Institute was inaugurated by The Dalai Lama and the high lamas of the Kagyu lineage.
A bas-relief mural of the four great kings just inside the monastery gate, welcomes the visitors to Vajra Vidya. The gate itself is dedicated to a Chakrasambhava statues. The central statue in the main shrine halls of Shakyamuni Buddha, depicted in the teaching mudra and a Tibetan Buddha are situated on either side of the main statue, while a thousand Buddha statues are displayed in the niches on the upper balcony.

EXCAVATED ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITE
The archaeological remains of Sarnath started attracting the scholars since the 19th century. In the recent past, the Sarnath Circle of Archaeological Survey of India has been taking care of the excavations work in Sarnath. It was started by Sir Alexander Cunningham (1825-36), and followed through by Major Knight (1851-52), Mr. C. Horne (1865), Mr. P.O. Orsall (1904-05), Sir John Marshall (1907), Mr. H. Hargreaves (1914-15) and Mr. Daya Ram Sahni (1927-30).

The archaeological site showcases the grandeur of the ancient times. An open exhibition of structures like Mulagandha Kuti Vihara remains, Dhammakaya Stupa remains, Dhamek Stupa, Ashokan Column, monuments, relics, monasteries from the Mauryan period are showcased here.

DEER PARK
The forest area gifted by the King of Varnasia holds pride for being the place where Lord Buddha taught the Dharmasaccakkappavattana Sutta and the Anattalakkhana Sutta to his disciples so they can propagate the same to the world. A large number of deer inhabited the area during those times. A huge enclosure populated with deer and a variety of bird life, it is a blissful place for those seeking solitude and peace away from their hectic schedule. Amongst the beautiful gardens and the ruins of Buddhist monasteries and stupas, the deer park is a prominent tourist attraction in Sarnath.

AMENITIES
- Purified drinking water
- Museum cafe
- Museum shop (souvenir shop)
- Touch Screen Information Kiosks
- Restroom
- Cloakroom
- Wheel chair & ramp
- Baby Care room
- Braille description for differently abled people
- Separate toilet facility for differently abled people

LOM CAPITAL OF ASHOKA
The Lion Capital of Ashoka is a sculpture of four lion statues standing back to back, on an elaborate base that includes other animals, which was adopted as the National Emblem of India in 1950. It was originally placed atop the Ashoka pillar at Sarnath by Ashoka, in about 250 BCE. The pillar, also known as ‘The Ashoka Column’, is still at its original location, but the Lion Capital is now placed inside the Sarnath Museum. Sculpture ‘C’ is found at the top, high including the base, the capital is carved out of a single block of polished sandstone, and was always a separate piece from the column itself. They are mounted on an abacus, carrying sculptures of an elephant, a galloping horse, bull and a lion, separated by intervening spiked crook-wheels.

LOM BUDDHA'S STATUE
The statue of Lord Buddha in his first sermon preaching posture (Dhamma Chakra Pravartanmu) was found at Sarnath during the archaeological excavations. The statue is kept in the museum and is considered highly sacred by the devotees.

LOM BUDDHA'S VIHARA

VRAJ AVEDY INSTITUTE
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BEST TIME TO VISIT
Winter (November-February) - Winter in Sarnath are pleasant and the best time for exploring the tourist attractions and engaging in other pursuits. Temperature during this season ranges from 15 to 33 degrees Celsius, with a slight chill in the air along with a fog cover.

Monsoon (July - September) - Monsoons bring in high rainfall to the area with pouring down the high day temperatures, thus making it a good time to explore the city. The rainy season makes it lush and green, providing a calming right to the eyes.

Summer (March-June) - Summers in Sarnath are hot and humid, temperature ranging between 25 and 45 degrees Celsius. Thus, mornings and evenings are comparatively comfortable.

PLACES TO SEE
THAI TEMPLE
Set amidst lush green gardens, the magnificent Ninaya Buddha temple was built by Thai dignitaries in 1993, who visited Sarnath. The main statue of Lord Buddha is in Bhumi-Sancha Mudra, where he touches the ground to summon the mortal spirits from the networld. There is also a statue of a laughing Buddha just before the main Thai temple and on the right side is an enactment of Buddha delivering a sermon to his disciples. There are three other statues of Buddha in various mudras beneath a tree and colourful flowers grow around it. The Tha call it the Wat Thai temple. Calmness prevailing inside the Thai temple makes it feel a divine experience, it is open from sunrise to sunset and the entry is free.

TIBETAN TEMPLE
The Tibetan temple is famed for its Triangular paintings and the beautiful statue of Shakyamuni Buddha. Built in the traditional Tibetan architecture, it has prayer wheels outside the building which is being rotated clockwise, release paper scrolls with prayers written on them.

JAPANESE TEMPLE
The temple has typical Japanese aesthetics, with a double storied pagoda and a sloping roof covering up the pavilions that gives it a feeling of tranquility. A pagoda outside the shrine suggests that it is run by Daihonzan Ikko-Jisen-Buddhist Cultural Society. The original name of the Japanese temple is Nishihongan Honpuku temple, but it is commonly referred to as Japanese temple by local guides and tourists. The pleasing architecture of the temple is reminiscent of the world-renowned Japanese temples in Kyoto, Japan.

Before the main temple, on the right side, there is a statue of the Buddha in a calm pose beneath a tree. On the left side, there is a pillar with Japanese inscriptions. The Japanese temple can be accessed from near the main market in Sarnath, and is just behind the government-run tourist bungalow.

TOURIST INFORMATION
Office of Assistant Tourist Officer, Modern Reception Centre, opp. Sarnath Museum, Sarnath.

Accommodation
Apart from hotels, lodges, guest houses and paying guest houses that are available in Sarnath, the residential Unit named Tourist Bungalows (Mridula), Sarnath of Uttar Pradesh State Tourism Development Corporation is an ideal place to stay.

Tourist Police
Tourist Police is deployed at the gate of Sarnath Museum to help tourists and visitors.

HOW TO REACH
By Flight: The nearest airport is Lal Bahadur Shastri International Airport, Babespur, Varanasi - 30 Kms.

By Train: The nearest railway station is Varanasi Railway Station, which is well-connected to major cities of the country.

By Road: Regular buses ply in from Varanasi to Sarnath. It can be easily reached by road from some major cities in Uttar Pradesh.

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THAI TEMPLE

CHINESE TEMPLE

JAPANESE TEMPLE

TIWAI TEMPLE

SRIYASANATHA JAIN TEMPLE

BUDDHA STATUS - THAI BUDDHA YARD

SHREYSANATHA JAIN TEMPLE

FOOD & CUISINE
Apart from food junctions serving the traditional Indian snacks, you can indulge in Chinese food offered by a few joints in the city. The cuisine in the city is mainly North-Indian and some of its popular delicacies are offered through various small and big eateries around the city.

SHOPPING
Being one of the most celebrated Buddhist pilgrimage sites in the world, the shopping in Sarnath is a totally different experience, offering beautiful statues of Lord Buddha in different shades, designs and sizes. Ashadrahu, the eight metals image of Lord Buddha is a must buy thing here. A wide varieties of artifacts, miniatures of stupas and temple, saltboxes, rosaries make up excellent souvenirs for one to take back home.

Buddha Puja: To mark the birth and death anniversary of Lord Buddha, the biggest annual festival at Sarnath is held on Buddha Purnima. The full moon in May - May. A big fair is held on this occasion. Behind the altar of the Mahapancha Kuti (Nanda temple is a relic of the golden Lord Buddha, preserved in a silver box, and is taken out on this day for darshan. Devotees from around the world pour in during the occasion.