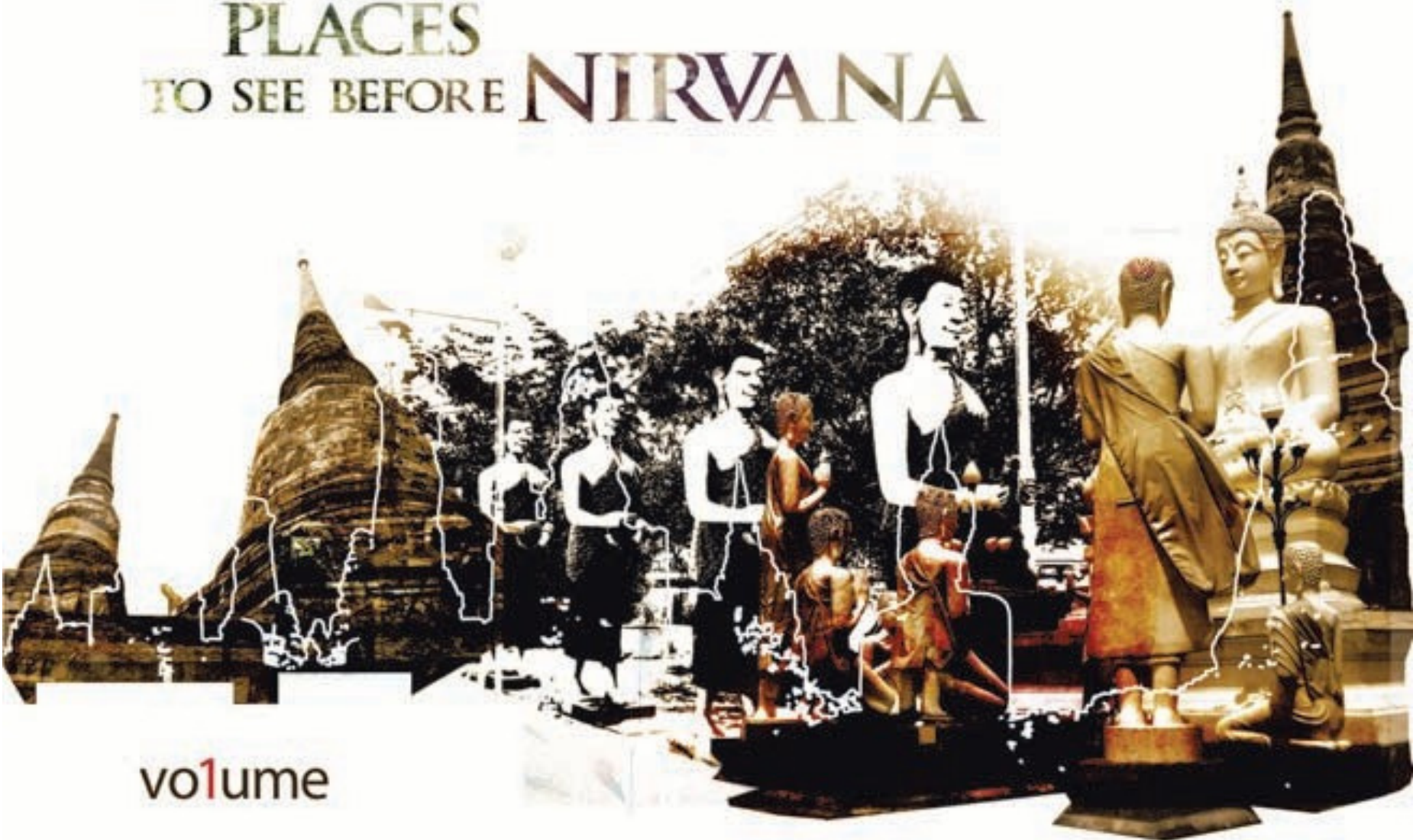


108

PLACES
TO SEE BEFORE NIRVANA



vo1ume

*To my mum, for always supporting my journey, no matter how
far-fetched, far-flung or far away I've to leave her...*

*And to my "3GEMS" mates who continue to inspire me in
Buddhist arts and architecture. May you also find your way to
your own salvation and enlightenment...*

Disclaimer

By no means is this book about achieving Nirvana nor is it intended as a pilgrimage guide. Rather, it is meant to help awaken you to your surroundings as well as offer a suggestion of the places that Buddhist travellers might wish to visit. To attain Nirvana, you need to achieve your own self-cultivation through mediation (Samadhi) and develop wisdom (Prajna) through the understanding of Buddha's dharma.

Buddhism has always been an inspiration to me both spiritually and philosophically, and I feel that the teachings that existed more than 2,500 years ago are still as relevant as ever today. The tranquillity of each Buddhist site, regardless of whether they are ancient temples, monuments or cities, never fails to give me a sense of peace. If you are a follower of Buddhism, what better way to travel than to trace the footsteps of that highly transcendent and sublime being, the Buddha?

There are, of course, many fascinating places to visit but for the purposes of this book, I have chosen to focus on Nepal, India, South East Asia, Sri Lanka and Taiwan. The course taken here begins in Lumbini, the birthplace of Buddha, and it traces his journey as he attained Enlightenment, gave his First Sermons and finally passed from the physical realm (Mahaparinibbana). It should be noted that the section on Nepal is not an exhaustive one as there are many things I have yet to discover about this mystical and wonderful country so please don't assume Lumbini is the only place worth visiting in Nepal.

Like all Buddhist scriptures or teachings, this book has been divided into three volumes. Each volume will introduce 36 places, bringing the overall total up to 108. But enough of my rambling. I'll now leave your imagination to guide you as you read about the places mentioned in this book.

Why 108?

Prayer bracelets, which are traditionally made up of 108 beads or smaller numbers divisible by nine, are commonly used by Buddhists to keep count as they recite, chant, or mentally repeat a mantra. According to Buddhist thought, human beings are said to have 108 afflictions or klesas. There are six senses (sight, sound, smell, taste, touch and consciousness), multiplied by three reactions (positive, negative, or indifference), thus making 18 "feelings". Each of these feelings can either be "attached to pleasure or detached from pleasure", making 36 "passions". Each of these passions can in turn manifest themselves in the past, present or future. The combination of all these manifestations makes a total of 108, which is represented by the beads.



About Me

As a freelance designer, I've always believed, probably because of my mother's assurances, that I can accomplish anything that I want. I can be who I want to be, without any question or doubt.

After getting in touch with the Buddha's Dharma, I've realised nothing is permanent. Since nothing is permanent, why am I attaching myself to the world? Why should I feel sad for what I've never had?

This is why I've volunteered myself as a Buddhist guide. The gratification I've gained as a guide by bringing Buddhists around temples has been a source of inspiration for me and it's helped me discover another passion (beside compassion ;)

Not only do the Buddhist sites and temples remind us that Buddha's teachings continue to exist 2,555 years after his death, they also remind us we're still going through samsara (cycles of existence) and that becoming a Buddha is never too far from impossible...

For book orders, email 108b4nirvana@gmail.com

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Before you travel

You can visit the sites in any order you like – there is no need to follow the order given in this book. That said, to be a savvy traveller, do take note of the following:

- * To reduce unnecessary waste and keep the sites clean, bring your own water bottle and a recyclable shopping bag.
- * Make an effort to support local communities by buying products from local craftsmen where possible.
- * When visiting Buddhist temples, do remember to dress appropriately. Avoid wearing shorts or sleeveless tops. Women should wear skirts that cover their knees.

Be a contributor

As you know, one pair of hands can only do so much. That's probably why Avalokitesvara Bodhisattva has one thousand arms and eyes ;) If you'd like to share your own Dharma-inspired travel experience with other readers, please send your story to 108b4nirvana@gmail.com.

Before you write your story, here are a few questions you might want to consider:

- * How did you come to know about the place and when did you visit it?
- * Can you provide any memorable anecdotes about your visit?
- * How would you describe your overall experience and what did you take away from the trip?

A picture speaks a thousand words – if you have any pictures of your trip, do send them together with your story. Alternatively, you can also send the links to the pictures if you have an existing blog or photo sharing account.

Legend

The symbols are used to represent the qualities of each place so you can understand why a certain place has been chosen.



Historical



Spiritual



Astonishing Architecture

Sponsor my trip

If you believe that my book can eventually draw more people to the Buddhist Path of Awakening and would like to sponsor my trip, I'd love to hear from you. Visit 108b4nirvana.blogspot.sg to find out more details about my next trip or email me at 108b4nirvana@gmail.com to let me know how you'd like to help!

Nirvana

Nirvana (Sanskrit) is the state of being free from suffering.



"Monks, after I have passed away, faithful
males and females of a good family should visit and
remember these four places
for as long as they live" What are the four?

Here (Lumbini) the blessed one was
Born

Here (Bodhgaya) the blessed one attain
Enlightenment

Here (Sarnath) the blessed one turned the
Wheel of Dharma

Here (Kushinagara) the blessed one passed into
***Mahaparinirvana**

Mahaparinirvana - Passing Physical

Lumbini



Imagine a wide ocean with a golden yoke adrift upon it. In the depths of the ocean swims a single blind turtle, who surfaces for air once every hundred years. How rare would it be for the turtle to surface with its head through the hole in the yoke? The Buddha said that attaining a precious human rebirth is rarer than that. ~ Lord Buddha

**Insider tip:**

The holy site of Lumbini is bordered by a large monastic zone. Only monasteries can be built here. No shops, hotels or restaurants are allowed.

It is separated into an eastern and western monastic zone; the former houses the Theravada (School of the Elders) monasteries while the latter is home to the Mahayana (Great Vehicle) and Vajrayana (Diamond Vehicle) monasteries.

By visiting the various holy sites, it brings awareness and reminds us of the Buddha's teachings. Our journey begins at this very place – the birthplace of the Lord Buddha*, near the Shakyani capital of Kapilavastu in the foothills of the Himalayas. Today the site is a large garden surrounded by a grove of pipal trees.

The main temple at Lumbini is the Maya Devi Temple, a simple white building that enshrines the exact spot where Buddha was born. On top of the temple is a golden stupa and near the Ashoka Pillar is a small temple that has rock carvings illustrating the scene of Buddha's birth as he emerges from Maya Devi's hip as she holds onto the Sala tree. Some believe the rock has Buddha's footprint on it. The sacred pool, believed to be the place where Maya Devi bathed before giving birth and the newborn Buddha was showered, is a tranquil spot surrounded by the long lines of colourful prayer flags.

For Buddhists, this sacred place is a reminder that his birth brings light into darkness.

001

Not to be missed: Mayadevi Temple, Ashoka Pillar & Puskarni Pond
Nearby attractions: World Peace Pagoda & Lumbini Crane Sanctuary

Bodh Gaya



Though my skin, my nerves and my bones shall waste away and my life blood go dry, I will not leave this seat until I have attained the highest wisdom, called supreme enlightenment, that leads to everlasting happiness. ~ Lord Buddha



Insider tip:

Buddha continued to meditate after his enlightenment for 49 days.

Every seven days, he will meditate and contemplate his experience.

There are stone-carved lotuses that represent his footsteps and marker signs that indicate the exact spot where he stood or sit.

Try finding all the various spots.

The Nirvana (enlightenment) mentioned here is not the kind you see in movies, where there's a white spotlight that shines directly from the sky. Rather, it refers to the spiritual awakening that takes place deep inside your heart.

Buddha fearlessly pursued Nirvana for six long years by practicing austerities and studying under various teachers. However he wasn't able to find the supreme bliss and unsurpassed wisdom he was looking for.

Eventually, one day as he sat in deep meditation, he suddenly understood the endless cycle of rebirth that causes misery: Karma*, which determines one's rebirth, and also the ignorance that causes the illusion of "I", which clings to things worthlessly, and transiency.

Finally, under the Bodhi* tree in Bodh Gaya, the truth he had been searching for awakened him. I sat beside the Bodhi tree for an hour to reflect on his triumph and journey. I was emotionally touched, not just by his determination and wisdom but also by the sacrifices he made to achieve this state of Enlightenment. It's awe-inspiring! Need I say more?

002

Not to be missed: Mahabodhi Stupa & the direct descendant of the Bodhi Tree, under which Buddha Sakyamuni attained enlightenment.

Nearby attraction: Great Buddha Statue

Sarnath



Rely on the Teachings, not just the teacher. Rely on the Meaning, not just the words.
Rely on the Real Meaning, not just the interpretation. Rely on the Experience, not just the
idea. ~ Lord Buddha

**Insider tip:**

Sarnath is located 13 km north-east of Varanasi so a day trip from there is possible.

The museum nearby yielded a rich collection of sculptures, artifacts and edifices comprising numerous Buddha images and other ancient remains. The star piece is the Lion Capital of Asoka.

After Buddha gained enlightenment, he did not remain seated for the rest of his life. What did he do? He taught. It was here, in Sarnath (or Deer Park as people used to call it as it was home to a large herd of deer belonging to one of the kings) that he preached his first discourse and set in motion the 'Wheel of the Dharma'.

This is a significant place for all Buddhists as it was here that the foundation of Dharma* was established together with the Sangha.* Together, Buddha, Dharma and Sangha formed the Triple Gem. He explained the Middle Way as a path of moderation that avoids a life of extremes and indulgences; taught the Four Noble Truths; and prescribed the Eight-fold path.

The Four Noble Truths are: 1. Life is subject to suffering; 2. Suffering has a cause; 3. The cause is removable; and 4. The way to remove the cause is to practice the Eight-fold Path: Right speech, Right action, Right livelihood, Right effort, Right mindfulness, Right concentration, Right attitude and Right view.

003

Not to be missed: Dhamek Stupa & Dharmarajika Stupa

Nearby attractions: Mulagandhakuti Vihara & Sarnath Archaeological Museum

Kushinagar



Even royal chariots well embellished got run down, and so does the body succumb to old age. But the Dharma of the good doesn't succumb to old age: the good let the civilised know. ~ Lord Buddha

**Insider tip:**

Lumbini, the birth place of Buddha, is accessible by car and public transport. You can cross the Indo-Nepal Border to Sonauli, which is 27 km from Kushinagar.

Buddha first experienced his own awakening under the Bodhi tree but I think the true place of awakening for all Buddhists is Kushinagar, which is where Buddha attained Mahaparinirvana*. As such, it is a place that places particular emphasis on his teaching, Anicca, which means impermanence.

It happened during the full moon of the month, Vaisakha (April-May) during the equivocal year. His funeral was placed under the direction of Anurudha, a fellow cousin and follower. The last ceremony was performed by Maha Kasapa and the body of Buddha was cremated with due honour.

The remains from the cremation, which consisted of a skull bone, teeth and inner and outer shrouds, were collected by the Mallas* as relics. These were then divided amongst the representatives from the eight kingdoms that made up ancient northern India during the time. Thereafter, they were further divided after King Ashoka decided to build 84,000 stupas across Asia, which you will read about later in this book.

The present temple was built by the Indian Government in 1956 and houses the famous 1,500-year old reclining Buddha image, which lies on its right side with its head facing the north.

004

Not to be missed: Mahaparinirvana Temple

Nearby attractions: Mathakuar Shrine, Ramabhar Stupa & Wat Thai Temple

*Mahaparinirvana: A release from the cycle of deaths and rebirths at the moment of physical death *Mallas: A powerful clan in eastern India during the time of Buddha