

Design Resource

## Daily Life in Varanasi

The Land of Spirituality

by

Prof. Sumant Rao, Prof. Nina Sabnani, Ruchi Shah

and Piyush verma

IDC, IIT Bombay

Source:

<http://www.dsource.in/resource/daily-life-varanasi>

1. About Varanasi
2. Daily Activities
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3. Contact Details

## About Varanasi

The City of Temples or the Land of Spirituality - call it what you may. The intriguing city of Varanasi with its sanctity, stimulated Mark Twain a prominent figure from the field of English Literature to write 'Benares is older than history, older than tradition, older even than legend and looks twice as old as all of them put together'.

Varanasi gets its name from the two rivers, Varuna and Asi, a small stream near Assi Ghat. It is also popularly known as Kashi or Benaras. It is believed to be one of the seven holy cities or Sapt Puri - that can bring you Moksha. This makes it the pulse of the Hindu Universe.

Owing to its multifaceted character Varanasi unveils something different each time for each person. A devotee comes in the quest of - peace of mind, pilgrims remain unfettered in this little land full of temples, students come to experience diverse cultures, while some families come for a vacation, some come together for a cremation, writers come hunting for the hidden stories, and historians unfold the many layered pasts of this place and locals live here for the livelihood.

Each person glimpses Varanasi through their own coloured glasses, and each of them is offered a different shade from the city's palette. This small city has a wide acceptance for people from all walks of life, all parts of the world and creatures big and small.



A dog burrowed in the sandy bank of Assi Ghat on an early Monday morning.

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1. About Varanasi
2. **Daily Activities**
3. Contact Details

## Daily Activities

This city awakes at the crack of dawn. The prayers, chants, rituals and habits that are branded into the Hindu ideology are engrained into the daily life of the people here. Bathing, washing clothes, giving offerings, going for long walks, meditation or chanting all echo in the early morning sky. Crows and parrots all pitch in as well, indifferent to individual inclinations.

As the sun comes up locals, boats-men, tourists, chaiwalla's, paanwalla's, students, birds and stray animals all find their way onto the Ghats, there is something overwhelming about the River Ganges and her sandstone Ghats that gives you a reason to greet her every day.

Odd assortments of products like cigarettes, and incense sticks along with packs of chips and pens are sold by old women on the Ghats. Free spirited tourists sit in groups and play unusual music or are busy working with beggar children on the streets in the hopes to help them.

Having tea is mandatory in every hour of the day, and declining it is an offence. Benarasi Chai, unending walks and meeting old acquaintances are some ingredients contributing to the slow motioned pace of this peaceful city. Newcomers or natives all take a plunge into the slow sea of life vibrating within the city.

Doing nothing concrete is also on the calendar, generally a city prepares us on being be busy all the time - but this city teaches us how not do anything.

Boats have the job of bobbing softly on the River Ganges, while a boatman unties the ropes, lets out the nets and cries out to passing travellers. Clothes lay stretched out on the Ghats, while the sun does its duty, virtuously.

People become mere props, that are stationary in their places with nothing to do, but be hypnotized by the depths of the dull gray Ganga. In the absence of tourists the boatmen busy themselves with mundane activities of cleaning, building boats and having conversations.

Sages, men and dogs alike sit on the same Ghats, sharing the same view. Young men have casual conversations about ideologies and utopias on the steps outside their houses. Priests prepare for the Ganga aarti in the evening, while astrologers advise worried women, locals take a nap under the characteristic cloth umbrella's, while some folks interact more easily with animals. A sadhu is stoned under the effect of charas, while the temple drummers remain euphoric while becoming one with the drum beats. Seagulls fly over the surface just enough to skim across it, creating ripples, while the dead bodies wait patiently for their turn on the Ghats used for cremation, where the fire never dies. Smoke slogs its way into the evening sky, adding to the mysterious charm that hangs in the air. Rubbish floats through the river creating disturbances in the otherwise smooth surface, while boatmen and hawkers compare their earnings for the day.



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Constant death is compensated by creation. Children can be found celebrating the birth of newly born puppies. And sometimes lone walkers walk, ignoring everything around, aimlessly. Ghosts also play their part to perfection within abandoned monuments, keeping away the locals and befriending the junkies. In action or non action every being is performing its intended role.



Boats tethered on the Ghats make a pretty picture, whilst a tiny boatman untangles the net within the boat.

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2. **Daily Activities**
3. Contact Details



A Ghat-side stall, where a woman sells beedi's, cigarettes, packs of chips and an odd assortment of products. Just behind her is a group of foreigners interacting with local children.



Elderly local's who live on the Ghats enjoy a leisurely conversation.



A boatman enjoying his peace.



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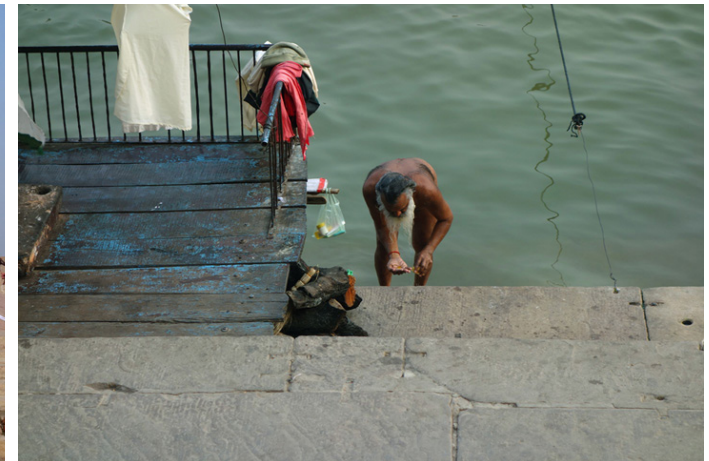
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Washed, starched and stretched perfectly over the slopes of the Ghats, these clothes wait passively to be dried under the afternoon sun.



An old man taking his ritualistic early morning dip in the River Ganga.

1. About Varanasi
2. **Daily Activities**
3. Contact Details



Makeshift clotheslines are used by the locals who live and work on the riverside.



A boatman gets busy making a boat. Here he is firing the wood in order to make it bend and fit around the boat's shape perfectly before securing it with nails.



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2. **Daily Activities**
3. Contact Details



A boatman for each boat. Sitting on the Ghats the boatmen await the stream of tourists to begin their day with a boat ride on the Ganga.



Devotees sitting outside the Sri Ram Krupeshwar Mahadev Mandir after their morning prayers.



Young men in their early twenties dressed typically in jeans, kurta's, sweaters and two - patti slippers, sitting on the steps brooding over a deep conversation on a light hearted morning by the Ganges.



The man in this picture runs the guest house on Pandey Ghat, nicknamed as the Korean Ghat owing to the number of Korean tourists living here. He was invited to Korea to learn the language, which he did. Fluently. Sipping Chai, playing with the stray's, flying a kite, chewing paan, and conversing in Korean he remains an dynamic example of crossed cultures.

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Sailing across the River Ganges from one end to the other.



Boatmen get busy lining up the boats, and call encouragingly to the travellers to hire one for the spectacular Ganga Aarti in the evening.



Screeching, flying, distracting, diving, and grabbing a quick bite of 'sev', are flocks of Seagulls flying over the Ganga.



Quiet, mournful, chatty and wise - crowds descend upon the Harishchandra Ghat for the continuous cremation of the dead bodies. Logs of wood, stray cattle, and ash-en faced structures dominate the grim but well accepted reality of life.

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'Bank of Commerce' sponsored boats ironically are overfilled with wood used on the pyre.



While some people sleep their 'Final Sleep', others choose to grab a quick nap under the shady cloth umbrella's characteristic of the Ghats in Varanasi.

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2. **Daily Activities**
3. Contact Details



On the Ghats you will meet extraordinary and eccentric folks. This vagrant is totally in love with every creation of god, animals are intuitively drawn towards him.



Sadhu's, sages Shiv - bhakts and spiritual seekers remain meditative with a makeshift abode by the river front.



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This man will make you smile with his oddly combined lungi, sneakers and boldly striped jacket. Moreover it is his confident pose that had to be captured as a photo.



A elderly man expertly tying his pagdi at the tea stall.



This is the only official, government recognized Beedi shop in Varansi at Bengali Tola. This man makes traditional beedi's in various varieties with and without filters, along with chillums, hookahs and so on.



Lethargy, afternoon siesta's and gossiping of the Ghats prevails on the he Dashaswamedh Ghat before the Ganga Aarti begins, transforming the entire space.

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An old pundit making the preparations of the serpentine lamps, oil, camphor etc. for the Ganga aarti.



Young pundits skilfully twirl in perfect harmony the traditional serpentine diya, while onlookers remain enthralled during the chanting of the Ganga aarti.

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The drummer looks euphoric and seems to be in another world of his own, while the onlookers remain in raptures over the performance of the puja.



A Sadhu lost in thought, or stoned after a few puffs of charas.



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A smoke filled evening sky hangs low over the burning remains over the last few bodies, that eventually burn alone into the night.



Offerings, ashes and rubbish get washed ashore on the banks of the River Ganga.



Little boys selling flower bowls and candles, animatedly compare their earnings for the day.



A new day begins at dawn with young boys waiting to fly kites over the Ghats.

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Another five creations rest peacefully while their mother looks on unperturbed.



The most beautiful journeys are made alone.



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## Contact Details

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