

Design Resource

Kumbh Mela - Ujjain

Spiritual and Cultural Integration of India
by

Prof. Bibhudutta Baral and Hariharasudan T.
NID, Bengaluru

Source:

<https://dsource.in/resource/kumbh-mela-ujjain>



1. Introduction
2. Legend
3. History
4. Geographical Significance
5. Rituals at Kumbh Mela
6. Ujjain - A City
7. Video
8. Contact Details

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introduction](https://dsource.in/resource/kumbh-mela-ujjain/introduction)

Introduction

Kumbhamela is one of the great living ancient traditions on the planet. It is one of a kind of gathering where no one is invited, but all will arrive on time when the planets align themselves. What makes them come here is a mystery. Seeking, Devotion, Faith and Belief - If one wants to know the real meaning of these words then a visit to Kumbhamela is a must. To experience the spiritual and cultural integration of India one must visit the Kumbha Mela. It has something for everyone who visits to take home.

Word Kumbhamela is formed by two words, KUMBH in its literal English translation means POT or PITCHER, which emerged after the gods and demons, churned the milky ocean, and the term MELA means FAIR. Kumbhamela meant distribution-not hoarding- of nectar. Kumbhamela far transcends the literal translation. Also, full Kumbha signifies knowledge, so the essence of Kumbha Mela manifests in the form of knowledge, which liberates us while we are still living. Kumbh Mela is one of the largest spiritual gatherings on the planet. People come to Kumbha Mela with tremendous faith and in overwhelming numbers. They come by all means by bus, cars, ox-drawn carts, horseback, camels and even elephants, some come by planes, and the less affluent comes by walking carrying their belonging on their heads. Not only from India but travellers from around the world also come here to Kumbha Mela. People believe that simply by taking bath in the holy river one is freed from their past sins and attains liberation from cycles of birth and death. The people come from all walks of life travelling long distances and tolerating many discomforts just to take a dip in the holy waters.

To accommodate date such a large number of people visiting and taking baths on daily basis, enormous preparation needs to be done to successfully host the event without any disasters. A complete city will be raised with all the temporary facilities like internal roads, Electricity, Water supply, drainage line, security arrangements, PDS (public distribution system) shops, media centre, hospital, toilet, bathrooms & parking arrangements will be set up. This is a city, which just pops up within no time and it will be completely brought down after the event. There are places where the authorities get as little as just eight weeks to set up the whole thing because they have to wait for the water at river basins to recede completely to start any construction. The entire city rise, flourishes, fade and disappear in just less than five months. Creating such a huge encampment requires multiple aspects of planning, management, engineering, electricity grids, waterlines and sanitation systems etc. Universities like Harvard, Design schools, and medical institutions are coming to Kumbha Mela to study the Logistics, and economics making behind it.

1. Introduction

2. Legend

3. History

4. Geographical Significance

5. Rituals at Kumbh Mela

6. Ujjain - A City

7. Video

8. Contact Details

Design Resource

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1. Introduction
2. Legend
3. History
4. Geographical Significance
5. Rituals at Kumbh Mela
6. Ujjain - A City
7. Video
8. Contact Details



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Legend

According to the legend at the beginning of the creation when the gods and demons were residing on the earth, the gods were under a curse by Saint Dhurvasa, which made them weak. So the gods decided to meet the creator, and ask for his advice. Brahma the god of creation advised them to retrieve the Kumbha containing the nectar of immortality, by churning the milky ocean. Since the task was too sturdy for them alone, the gods decided to make an agreement with the demons that half the nectar will be given to them. During the churning, lots of celestial beings came and at last appeared the nectar of immortality. After churning the ocean for 1000 years finally Dhanavantri a divine physician appeared with the Kumbha full of nectar of immortality. The gods, being fearful of the demons' ill intention, forcibly seized the pot, with its safety entrusted to the four Gods - Brahaspati, Surya, Shani, and Chandra. Demons upon knowing that the gods didn't keep their promise went after the gods for 12 days and 12 nights (equivalent to 12 human years) chasing them. During the chase a few drops of nectar fell at four different places on earth, they are Allahabad, Haridwar, Ujjain and Nasik. These four places are believed to be having some mystical powers. Since then, when the planets align in the same position as during the churning, pilgrims and devotees converge to commemorate this divine event and reap the benefits of the event at those places.



1. Introduction
2. Legend
3. History
4. Geographical Significance
5. Rituals at Kumbh Mela
6. Ujjain - A City
7. Video
8. Contact Details

Design Resource

Kumbh Mela - Ujjain

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History

In History, there are several references to riverside festivals in ancient Indian texts, but the exact age of the Kumbha Mela is uncertain. According to a few scholars, this fair started in 3464 BC i.e. it is a tradition existing 1000 years before Harappa and Mohenjo-Daro culture. In 2382 BC, Vishwamitra stated the importance of having a holy bath on 'Magh Pournima'. In 1302 BC, Maharshi Jyotish impressed upon people the importance of a holy bath on 'Magh Pournima'. Megasthenes the Greek ambassador to the court of King Chandra Gupta visited Kumbha Mela for 75 days in the 4th century BC. The Chinese traveller Xuanzang (Hiuen Tsang) describes a ritual organized by Emperor Shiladitya (identified with Harsha) at the confluence of two rivers, in the kingdom of Po-lo-ye-Kia (identified with Prayaga). He also mentions that many hundreds took a bath at the confluence, to wash away their sins. According to some scholars, this is the earliest surviving historical account of the Kumbh Mela, which took place in present-day Allahabad in 644 CE. In the 8th century Adi Shankara an Indian saint popularized the Kumbha Mela among common people.

The Kumbh Mela at Ujjain began in the 18th century when the Maratha ruler Ranoji Shinde invited ascetics from Nashik to Ujjain for a local festival. Like the priests at Allahabad, the Pandits of Nashik and Ujjain, competing with other places for a sacred status, may have adopted the Kumbh tradition for their pre-existing Melas.



1. Introduction
2. Legend
3. History
4. Geographical Significance
5. Rituals at Kumbh Mela
6. Ujjain - A City
7. Video
8. Contact Details

Design Resource

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Geographical Significance

Jupiter takes eleven years, ten months and fourteen days to complete its revolution around the sun, so approximately once in twelve years the sun earth and Jupiter align the same way as they were during the great churning. This astronomical alignment in the space causes the water at the four places where the nectar fell on earth to get energized. When one takes a dip in the holy waters during this period of Kumbh it is believed that energies in water can affect a positive change in the mind, body and spirit of human beings, in other words, cleanses the life free of the sins. In Hindu culture, the sun and the moon represent the human rational mind and intellect, Jupiter known, as guru is the spiritual master. Philosophically when the human mind and intellect are aligned with the guru, the result is the realization of immortality.

Places, where the nectar fell on earth, happen to be Prayag (Allahabad), Haridwar, Trimbakeshwar-Nashik and Ujjain. Priests at other places have also attempted to boost the status of their tirtha by adapting the Kumbh legends. The places, whose festivals have been claimed as Kumbh Mela, include Varanasi, Vrindavan, Tirumakudal Narsipur Kumbhakonam (Mahamaham) and Rajim (Rajim Kumbh).

The position of the Sun, Moon and Jupiter in different zodiac signs determines the location of the Kumbh in each of the four places.

- Kumbh in Haridwar: When the Sun is in the zodiac sign Aries and Jupiter is in Aquarius it is held in Haridwar. River flowing at Haridwar is Ganga.
- Kumbh in Prayag: When the Sun is in Capricorn and Jupiter is in Taurus, it is held in Allahabad (Prayag). The river flowing at Prayag is Triveni Sangam (junctions of Ganga, Yamuna, Saraswati).
- Kumbh in Nasik: When Jupiter enters the zodiac sign Leo it is held in Nasik. It is also held in Nasik, when Jupiter, Sun and Moon enter the zodiac sign Cancer on Amavasya. River flowing at Nasik in the Godavari.
- Kumbh in Ujjain: Ujjain, one of the most sacred places in India, is located on the banks of the sacred river Kshipra in the western region of Madhya Pradesh. Kumbh in Ujjain is held when a rare configuration of planets takes place, which happens once in 12 years. When the Sun is in the zodiac sign Aries and Jupiter in the zodiac sign Leo, it is held in Ujjain. Considering its relevance to the zodiac 'Leo' meaning 'Simha' in Sanskrit, the Kumbh is also referred to as 'Simhasth Kumbh'.

1. Introduction

2. Legend

3. History

4. Geographical Significance

5. Rituals at Kumbh Mela

6. Ujjain - A City

7. Video

8. Contact Details

Design Resource

Kumbh Mela - Ujjain

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NID, Bengaluru

Source:

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1. Introduction
2. Legend
3. History
4. Geographical Significance
5. Rituals at Kumbh Mela
6. Ujjain - A City
7. Video
8. Contact Details



Design Resource

Kumbh Mela - Ujjain

Spiritual and Cultural Integration of India
byProf. Bibhudutta Baral and Hariharasudan T.
NID, Bengaluru

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rituals-kumbh-mela](https://dsource.in/resource/kumbh-mela-ujjain/rituals-kumbh-mela)

1. Introduction
2. Legend
3. History
4. Geographical Significance
5. Rituals at Kumbh Mela
6. Ujjain - A City
7. Video
8. Contact Details

Rituals at Kumbh Mela

The major event of the festival is ritual bathing at the banks of the river in whichever town Kumbh Mela is being held. Another major event of the Kumbh Mela is the Peshwai Procession, which marks the arrival of the members of an akhara or sect of sadhus at the Kumbh Mela. The sadhus are seen clad in saffron sheets with Vibhuti ashes dabbed on their skin as per the requirements of ancient traditions. Some, called Naga sanyasis (saints), may not wear any clothes even in severe winter. The right to be naga, or naked, is considered a sign of separation from the material world. There are other sadhus like Urdhwavahurs, who believe in putting the body through severe austerities, Parivrajakas, who have taken a vow of silence, and Shirshasins, who stand 24 hours and meditate for hours standing on their heads, Kalpvasis, who bathe thrice a day. Apart from sadhus, various akharas made it to the river for the great bath on Kumbh days. It is an organization of the different sects of saints, Vairagis, and yogis who have renounced the world. Akharas are divided into different camps according to the concept of God they worship. Shaiva Akharas are for followers of Lord Shiva, Vaishnava or Vairagi Akhara are for followers of Lord Vishnu and Kalpwasis are for followers of Lord Brahma. Apart from them, one can also see sadhus performing impossible acts of penance on the tree, lifting a hand in the air for 20 years continuously, lifting a leg for years, folding a leg for years, burying ahead in the ground etc.

Darshana, or auspicious sight, is an important part of the Kumbh Mela. People make the pilgrimage to the Kumbh Mela specifically to see and experience both the religious and secular aspects of the event. Two major groups that participate in the Kumbh Mela include the Sadhus (Hindu holy men) and pilgrims. Through their continual yogic practices, the Sadhus articulate the transitory aspect of life. Sadhus travel to the Kumbh Mela to make themselves available to much of the public. This allows members of the public to interact with the Sadhus and to take "Darshana." They are able to "seek instruction or advice in their spiritual lives." The Kumbh Mela is arranged in camps that give worshipers access to the Sadhus. The Darshana is important to the experience of the Kumbh Mela. After taking the dip people to visit the temples situated on the banks of the river or nearby places.



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Ujjain - A City

Ujjain is the largest city in the Ujjain district of the Indian state of Madhya Pradesh. It was the most prominent city on the Malwa plateau of central India for much of its history. It emerged as the political centre of central India around 600 BCE. According to Puranas Ujjain was called as Avantika and was famous for its beauty and its devotional epicenter where students went to study Holy Scriptures.

As per legend a King called Chandrasena, who was a pious devotee of Lord Shiva, ruled Ujjain. His Kingdom was attacked by neighbouring Kings Ripudamana and Singhaditya to take over the treasures and they were successful. The king Chandrasena prayed to Lord Shiva for the dismissal of his enemies, upon hearing the pleas of his Devote Lord Shiva appeared in Mahakala form and destroyed the enemies of the King. Ujjain is situated on the eastern bank of the Kshipra River, which is a perennial river. It rises in Ujjain and flows north towards the Malwa plateau to join the Chambal River. Legend says that once Lord Shiva went begging for alms using the skull of Lord Brahma as the begging bowl. Nowhere does he manages to get any alms. Finally, he went to Vaikuntha and asked Lord Vishnu for alms, in return Lord Vishnu showed his index finger, which enraged Lord Shiva. Lord Shiva took his trident and cut off Lord Vishnu's finger, it started bleeding profusely. The flow of blood became a stream and finally a river Shipra. Ancient Hindu texts suggest that the Shipra originated from the heart of Varaha, Lord Vishnu's incarnation of Boar.

In Ujjain, the Mahakaleshwar Jyotirlinga is one of the most famous Hindu temples dedicated to Lord Shiva and is one of the twelve Jyotirlingams, which are supposed to be the most sacred abodes of Lord Shiva. It is located on the side of Rudra Saga Lake. The Presiding deity Lord Shiva is in the Lingam form and is believed to be Swayambhu. (Deriving currents of power from within itself). The Mahakaleshwar is known to be Dakshinamurthi, which means the idol is facing south.

Sultan Shas-Ud-Din Iltumish destroyed the temple complex during the raid in 1234-1235. The present structure was built by General of Srimant Peshwa Baji Rao and Chhatrapati Shahu Maharaja of the Hindu Pad Padshahi---Srimant Raanojirao Shinde Maharaja (Scindia) in 1736 AD.

Kumbhamela can't be experienced with the words. It is an event that has no comparison; there is nothing in the world anything like it. Trying to understand it is difficult, one has to witness it to believe in it. It is a varied experience for each individual.

In 1895 Mark Twain attended the Kumbhamela and wrote about his experience- "It is wonderful, the power of a faith like that, that can make multitudes upon multitudes of the old and weak and the young and frail enter without hesitation or complaint upon such incredible journeys and endure the resultant miseries without repining. It is done in love, or it is done in fear; I do not know which it is. No matter what the impulse is, the act born of it is beyond imagination, marvellous to our kind of people, the cold whites".

1. Introduction

2. Legend

3. History

4. Geographical Significance

5. Rituals at Kumbh Mela

6. Ujjain - A City

6a. About

6b. Ram Ghat

6c. Streets

6d. Raja Vikramaditya

6e. Procession

6f. Yagna Salah

6g. Naga Sadhu

6h. Sandhya Aarti

7. Video

8. Contact Details

Design Resource

Kumbh Mela - Ujjain

Spiritual and Cultural Integration of India

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Prof. Bibhudutta Baral and Hariharasudan T.

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About



Ram Ghat



Streets



Raja Vikramaditya



Procession



Yagna Salah



Naga Sadhu



Sandhya Aarti

1. Introduction
2. Legend
3. History
4. Geographical Significance
5. Rituals at Kumbh Mela
6. Ujjain - A City
 - 6a. About
 - 6b. Ram Ghat
 - 6c. Streets
 - 6d. Raja Vikramaditya
 - 6e. Procession
 - 6f. Yagna Salah
 - 6g. Naga Sadhu
 - 6h. Sandhya Aarti
7. Video
8. Contact Details

Design Resource

Kumbh Mela - Ujjain

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About



Kshipra river is one of the sacred rivers in Hinduism.



Aerial view of Kumbh Mela crowds.

1. Introduction
2. Legend
3. History
4. Geographical Significance
5. Rituals at Kumbh Mela
6. Ujjain - A City
 - 6a. About
 - 6b. Ram Ghat
 - 6c. Streets
 - 6d. Raja Vikramaditya
 - 6e. Procession
 - 6f. Yagna Salah
 - 6g. Naga Sadhu
 - 6h. Sandhya Aarti
7. Video
8. Contact Details

Design Resource

Kumbh Mela - Ujjain

Spiritual and Cultural Integration of India

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NID, Bengaluru

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Ram Ghat



Ram Ghat is one of the most crowded ghat during the Kumbh Mela.



Devotees taking holy bath in Kshipra River during the Simhastha Kumbha Mela.



Hindu pilgrims bathing in the Kshipra River.



Thousands of Hindu devotees gather at the banks of Kshipra river to take bath during Hindu religion's 'Shahi Snan'.

1. Introduction
2. Legend
3. History
4. Geographical Significance
5. Rituals at Kumbh Mela
6. Ujjain - A City
 - 6a. About
 - 6b. Ram Ghat
 - 6c. Streets
 - 6d. Raja Vikramaditya
 - 6e. Procession
 - 6f. Yagna Salah
 - 6g. Naga Sadhu
 - 6h. Sandhya Aarti
7. Video
8. Contact Details

Design Resource

Kumbh Mela - Ujjain

Spiritual and Cultural Integration of India

by

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NID, Bengaluru

Source:

<https://dsource.in/resource/kumbh-mela-ujjain/ujjain-city/ram-ghat>



Devotees take holy dip in the Kshipra River during month long Simhastha Kumbh Mela.



Largest congregation of Hindus began here early today with the arrival of Juna Akhara for the royal bath on the Kshipra river.



Pilgrim offering a lamp to Kshipra river at the Kumbha Mela.



Diyas Floating in Kshipra River.

1. Introduction
2. Legend
3. History
4. Geographical Significance
5. Rituals at Kumbh Mela
6. Ujjain - A City
 - 6a. About
 - 6b. Ram Ghat
 - 6c. Streets
 - 6d. Raja Vikramaditya
 - 6e. Procession
 - 6f. Yagna Salah
 - 6g. Naga Sadhu
 - 6h. Sandhya Aarti
7. Video
8. Contact Details

Design Resource

Kumbh Mela - Ujjain

Spiritual and Cultural Integration of India

by

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NID, Bengaluru

Source:

<https://dsource.in/resource/kumbh-mela-ujjain/ujjain-city/ram-ghat>



Ram Ghat dazzles with colorful lights at midnight.



Devotees pray while taking a dip at the Kumbh Mela.



Hindu devotees perform rituals at Kshipra river.



Dressed as goddesses as wait for handouts from Hindu pilgrims near the ritual.

1. Introduction
2. Legend
3. History
4. Geographical Significance
5. Rituals at Kumbh Mela
6. Ujjain - A City
 - 6a. About
 - 6b. Ram Ghat
 - 6c. Streets
 - 6d. Raja Vikramaditya
 - 6e. Procession
 - 6f. Yagna Salah
 - 6g. Naga Sadhu
 - 6h. Sandhya Aarti
7. Video
8. Contact Details

Design Resource

Kumbh Mela - Ujjain

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by

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NID, Bengaluru

Source:

<https://dsource.in/resource/kumbh-mela-ujjain/ujjain-city/ram-ghat>



Ram Ghat dazzles with colorful lights at midnight.



Pilgrims take their turn to bath in the Kshira River during the Kumbh Mela festival.



A bridge over the Kshira River which flows through the holy city of Ujjain.



Hundreds of Pilgrims take part in a procession prior to ritual bathing in the Kshira river in Ujjain.

1. Introduction
2. Legend
3. History
4. Geographical Significance
5. Rituals at Kumbh Mela
6. Ujjain - A City
 - 6a. About
 - 6b. Ram Ghat
 - 6c. Streets
 - 6d. Raja Vikramaditya
 - 6e. Procession
 - 6f. Yagna Salah
 - 6g. Naga Sadhu
 - 6h. Sandhya Aarti
7. Video
8. Contact Details

Design Resource

Kumbh Mela - Ujjain

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<https://dsource.in/resource/kumbh-mela-ujjain/ujjain-city/ram-ghat>



Devotees take a holy dip in River Kshipra during the Simhastha Kumbh Mela in Ujjain.



Hindu devotees take holy dip in the River Kshipra on the first official day of bathing as part of Kumbh Mela.



Hindu devotees immerse themselves in Kshipra river.



Volunteers cleaning the Kshipra river which is filled with discarded plastic bottles and other garbage.

1. Introduction
2. Legend
3. History
4. Geographical Significance
5. Rituals at Kumbh Mela
6. Ujjain - A City
 - 6a. About
 - 6b. Ram Ghat
 - 6c. Streets
 - 6d. Raja Vikramaditya
 - 6e. Procession
 - 6f. Yagna Salah
 - 6g. Naga Sadhu
 - 6h. Sandhya Aarti
7. Video
8. Contact Details

Design Resource

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Source:

<https://dsource.in/resource/kumbh-mela-ujjain/ujjain-city/streets>

Streets



Market on the street just before Mahakalavana temple.

1. Introduction
2. Legend
3. History
4. Geographical Significance
5. Rituals at Kumbh Mela
6. Ujjain - A City
 - 6a. About
 - 6b. Ram Ghat
 - 6c. Streets
 - 6d. Raja Vikramaditya
 - 6e. Procession
 - 6f. Yagna Salah
 - 6g. Naga Sadhu
 - 6h. Sandhya Aarti
7. Video
8. Contact Details

Design Resource

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<https://dsource.in/resource/kumbh-mela-ujjain/ujjain-city/streets>



Street view with people.



People walking in the street of Ujjain.



A sadhu applying a Shiva tika on his forehead after his Holy bath.



Crowds of people at the Kumbh Mela.

1. Introduction
2. Legend
3. History
4. Geographical Significance
5. Rituals at Kumbh Mela
6. Ujjain - A City
 - 6a. About
 - 6b. Ram Ghat
 - 6c. Streets
 - 6d. Raja Vikramaditya
 - 6e. Procession
 - 6f. Yagna Salah
 - 6g. Naga Sadhu
 - 6h. Sandhya Aarti
7. Video
8. Contact Details

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Source:

<https://dsource.in/resource/kumbh-mela-ujjain/ujjain-city/streets>



A crowd of people choke the streets on the day before the Royal Bath.



Hindu holy man begging for money.



Pilgrim holds a name card at entrance of Mahakalavana temple.

1. Introduction
2. Legend
3. History
4. Geographical Significance
5. Rituals at Kumbh Mela
6. Ujjain - A City
 - 6a. About
 - 6b. Ram Ghat
 - 6c. Streets
 - 6d. Raja Vikramaditya
 - 6e. Procession
 - 6f. Yagna Salah
 - 6g. Naga Sadhu
 - 6h. Sandhya Aarti
7. Video
8. Contact Details

Design Resource

Kumbh Mela - Ujjain

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Source:

<https://dsource.in/resource/kumbh-mela-ujjain/ujjain-city/streets>



Sadhus begging food in the street of the Ujjain.



Hindu holy men walk during a procession.



Footwear on sale on the streets.



Roadside stalls at Ujjain.

1. Introduction
2. Legend
3. History
4. Geographical Significance
5. Rituals at Kumbh Mela
6. Ujjain - A City
 - 6a. About
 - 6b. Ram Ghat
 - 6c. Streets
 - 6d. Raja Vikramaditya
 - 6e. Procession
 - 6f. Yagna Salah
 - 6g. Naga Sadhu
 - 6h. Sandhya Aarti
7. Video
8. Contact Details

Design Resource

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Source:

<https://dsource.in/resource/kumbh-mela-ujjain/ujjain-city/streets>

1. Introduction
2. Legend
3. History
4. Geographical Significance
5. Rituals at Kumbh Mela
6. Ujjain - A City
 - 6a. About
 - 6b. Ram Ghat
 - 6c. Streets
 - 6d. Raja Vikramaditya
 - 6e. Procession
 - 6f. Yagna Salah
 - 6g. Naga Sadhu
 - 6h. Sandhya Aarti
7. Video
8. Contact Details



A street vendor selling fabric and clothes during Kumbh Mela.



Temple Street Night Market.



Commercial shop for Shimhast.

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Vendor shops selling the flowers.



Fresh lime lemon juice vendor on the streets.



The Hermit saint's Kumbha stalls.



A man sells flowers to devotees performing rituals.

1. Introduction
2. Legend
3. History
4. Geographical Significance
5. Rituals at Kumbh Mela
6. Ujjain - A City
 - 6a. About
 - 6b. Ram Ghat
 - 6c. Streets
 - 6d. Raja Vikramaditya
 - 6e. Procession
 - 6f. Yagna Salah
 - 6g. Naga Sadhu
 - 6h. Sandhya Aarti
7. Video
8. Contact Details

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On a hot summer day, a man drinks water stored in clay pots on the streets of Ujjain.



Young Indian man selling bangles in the street of Ujjain.



Devotees stand in a queue as they wait to enter a temple near the Shipra River.

1. Introduction
2. Legend
3. History
4. Geographical Significance
5. Rituals at Kumbh Mela
6. Ujjain - A City
 - 6a. About
 - 6b. Ram Ghat
 - 6c. Streets
 - 6d. Raja Vikramaditya
 - 6e. Procession
 - 6f. Yagna Salah
 - 6g. Naga Sadhu
 - 6h. Sandhya Aarti
7. Video
8. Contact Details

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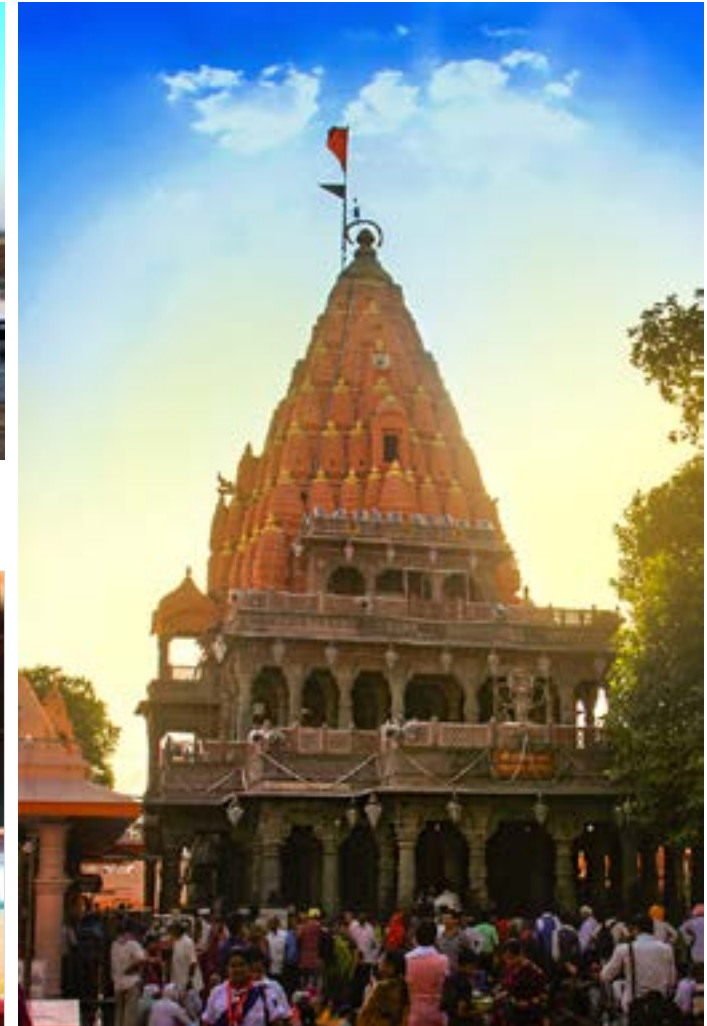
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Tents at Simhastha Kumbh, Ujjain.



Chaubis Khamba constituted the majestic entrance gate of Mahakalavana.



The reconstructed dome of the Mahakal Temple.

1. Introduction
2. Legend
3. History
4. Geographical Significance
5. Rituals at Kumbh Mela
6. Ujjain - A City
 - 6a. About
 - 6b. Ram Ghat
 - 6c. Streets
 - 6d. Raja Vikramaditya
 - 6e. Procession
 - 6f. Yagna Salah
 - 6g. Naga Sadhu
 - 6h. Sandhya Aarti
7. Video
8. Contact Details

Design Resource

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Paramilitary soldiers at the Mahakalavana temple.

1. Introduction
2. Legend
3. History
4. Geographical Significance
5. Rituals at Kumbh Mela
6. Ujjain - A City
 - 6a. About
 - 6b. Ram Ghat
 - 6c. Streets
 - 6d. Raja Vikramaditya
 - 6e. Procession
 - 6f. Yagna Salah
 - 6g. Naga Sadhu
 - 6h. Sandhya Aarti
7. Video
8. Contact Details

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Raja Vikramaditya



Crowd of pilgrims fill a busy king Vikramaditya entrance gate.



Statue of King Vikramaditya.



Beautiful Statues of women (Lavanyavati).

1. Introduction
2. Legend
3. History
4. Geographical Significance
5. Rituals at Kumbh Mela
6. Ujjain - A City
 - 6a. About
 - 6b. Ram Ghat
 - 6c. Streets
 - 6d. Raja Vikramaditya
 - 6e. Procession
 - 6f. Yagna Salah
 - 6g. Naga Sadhu
 - 6h. Sandhya Aarti
7. Video
8. Contact Details

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Procession



Man acting as the Hindu God Ganesh during the Kumbh Mela festival.

1. Introduction
2. Legend
3. History
4. Geographical Significance
5. Rituals at Kumbh Mela
6. Ujjain - A City
 - 6a. About
 - 6b. Ram Ghat
 - 6c. Streets
 - 6d. Raja Vikramaditya
 - 6e. Procession
 - 6f. Yagna Salah
 - 6g. Naga Sadhu
 - 6h. Sandhya Aarti
7. Video
8. Contact Details

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Indian man acting as Lord Ganesh on chariot.



Band playing in a procession.



Indian band members perform during a religious procession.



Sadhu procession in the streets of Ujjain during Kumbh Mela.

1. Introduction
2. Legend
3. History
4. Geographical Significance
5. Rituals at Kumbh Mela
6. Ujjain - A City
 - 6a. About
 - 6b. Ram Ghat
 - 6c. Streets
 - 6d. Raja Vikramaditya
 - 6e. Procession
 - 6f. Yagna Salah
 - 6g. Naga Sadhu
 - 6h. Sandhya Aarti
7. Video
8. Contact Details

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Hindu gurus on their floats.



Naga Sadhu riding on the horse during Ujjain Kumbh Mela.



Public crowd in a religious procession in the streets of Ujjain.



Decorated elephants in a religious procession in the streets.

1. Introduction
2. Legend
3. History
4. Geographical Significance
5. Rituals at Kumbh Mela
6. Ujjain - A City
 - 6a. About
 - 6b. Ram Ghat
 - 6c. Streets
 - 6d. Raja Vikramaditya
 - 6e. Procession
 - 6f. Yagna Salah
 - 6g. Naga Sadhu
 - 6h. Sandhya Aarti
7. Video
8. Contact Details

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The monks to join the Kumbha Mela, Saints came riding on chariots and elephants.



Krishna and Radha, during Kumbh Mela procession.



Boys and girls in a parade in Kumbh Mela.



Boys and girls in a parade in Kumbh Mela.

1. Introduction
2. Legend
3. History
4. Geographical Significance
5. Rituals at Kumbh Mela
6. Ujjain - A City
 - 6a. About
 - 6b. Ram Ghat
 - 6c. Streets
 - 6d. Raja Vikramaditya
 - 6e. Procession
 - 6f. Yagna Salah
 - 6g. Naga Sadhu
 - 6h. Sandhya Aarti
7. Video
8. Contact Details

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Yagna Salah



Yagna Salah.

1. Introduction
2. Legend
3. History
4. Geographical Significance
5. Rituals at Kumbh Mela
6. Ujjain - A City
 - 6a. About
 - 6b. Ram Ghat
 - 6c. Streets
 - 6d. Raja Vikramaditya
 - 6e. Procession
 - 6f. Yagna Salah
 - 6g. Naga Sadhu
 - 6h. Sandhya Aarti
7. Video
8. Contact Details

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Flag with the sign Swastika is a sacred, mystical syllable in the Dharma or Indian religion.



Motivational speaker speaking during the Spiritual Discussion.



The members of Gayatri Parivar performing Yagna during the ongoing Simhastha Kumbh Mela.

1. Introduction
2. Legend
3. History
4. Geographical Significance
5. Rituals at Kumbh Mela
6. Ujjain - A City
 - 6a. About
 - 6b. Ram Ghat
 - 6c. Streets
 - 6d. Raja Vikramaditya
 - 6e. Procession
 - 6f. Yagna Salah
 - 6g. Naga Sadhu
 - 6h. Sandhya Aarti
7. Video
8. Contact Details

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The burning of holy fire chanting Vedic mantras by the priests.



Priest performing Yagna during Gayatri pooja.



Worship of a Kalasha.

1. Introduction
2. Legend
3. History
4. Geographical Significance
5. Rituals at Kumbh Mela
6. Ujjain - A City
 - 6a. About
 - 6b. Ram Ghat
 - 6c. Streets
 - 6d. Raja Vikramaditya
 - 6e. Procession
 - 6f. Yagna Salah
 - 6g. Naga Sadhu
 - 6h. Sandhya Aarti
7. Video
8. Contact Details

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Naga Sadhu



Hindu Sadhu at the Ram Ghat of Ujjain.



Naga baba, smoking marijuana in the Juna akhara before the last royal bath of Kumbh Mela.



A Naga Sadhu pauses inside a tent during the Kumbh Mela.

1. Introduction
2. Legend
3. History
4. Geographical Significance
5. Rituals at Kumbh Mela
6. Ujjain - A City
 - 6a. About
 - 6b. Ram Ghat
 - 6c. Streets
 - 6d. Raja Vikramaditya
 - 6e. Procession
 - 6f. Yagna Salah
 - 6g. Naga Sadhu
 - 6h. Sandhya Aarti
7. Video
8. Contact Details

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Indian Naga Sadhu with long hair 'Jatas'.

1. Introduction
2. Legend
3. History
4. Geographical Significance
5. Rituals at Kumbh Mela
6. Ujjain - A City
 - 6a. About
 - 6b. Ram Ghat
 - 6c. Streets
 - 6d. Raja Vikramaditya
 - 6e. Procession
 - 6f. Yagna Salah
 - 6g. Naga Sadhu
 - 6h. Sandhya Aarti
7. Video
8. Contact Details

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An Aghori Sadhu attends the Kumbh Mela Festival.



Naga Sadhu during the first royal bath procession in Kumbh Mela festival.



Sadhu with rudraksha mala at Kumbh Mela.

1. Introduction
2. Legend
3. History
4. Geographical Significance
5. Rituals at Kumbh Mela
6. Ujjain - A City
 - 6a. About
 - 6b. Ram Ghat
 - 6c. Streets
 - 6d. Raja Vikramaditya
 - 6e. Procession
 - 6f. Yagna Salah
 - 6g. Naga Sadhu
 - 6h. Sandhya Aarti
7. Video
8. Contact Details

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Close-up of a Naga Sadhu at Maha Kumbh Mela.



Sadhu with Shiva trident attending Ujjain Kumbh Mela.

1. Introduction
2. Legend
3. History
4. Geographical Significance
5. Rituals at Kumbh Mela
6. Ujjain - A City
 - 6a. About
 - 6b. Ram Ghat
 - 6c. Streets
 - 6d. Raja Vikramaditya
 - 6e. Procession
 - 6f. Yagna Salah
 - 6g. Naga Sadhu
 - 6h. Sandhya Aarti
7. Video
8. Contact Details

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Shiva Lingam made of cement and flowers, during Kumbha Mela.



Naga sadhus in their Akhara at the Kumbh Mela.



Naga Sadhu inside Akhara, Ujjain Kumbh Mela 2016.

1. Introduction
2. Legend
3. History
4. Geographical Significance
5. Rituals at Kumbh Mela
6. Ujjain - A City
 - 6a. About
 - 6b. Ram Ghat
 - 6c. Streets
 - 6d. Raja Vikramaditya
 - 6e. Procession
 - 6f. Yagna Salah
 - 6g. Naga Sadhu
 - 6h. Sandhya Aarti
7. Video
8. Contact Details

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Naga Sadhus of the Kumbh Mela.



Naga baba sits in a tent during the Kumbh Mela.



A Sadhu, or a Hindu holy man, smokes marijuana on a chillum.

1. Introduction
2. Legend
3. History
4. Geographical Significance
5. Rituals at Kumbh Mela
6. Ujjain - A City
 - 6a. About
 - 6b. Ram Ghat
 - 6c. Streets
 - 6d. Raja Vikramaditya
 - 6e. Procession
 - 6f. Yagna Salah
 - 6g. Naga Sadhu
 - 6h. Sandhya Aarti
7. Video
8. Contact Details

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A Sadhu, or a Hindu holy man, smokes marijuana on a chillum.



Naga Sadhu displaying the human elements and tricks of yoga at the Kumbh Mela.



Naga Sadhu displaying the human elements and tricks of yoga at the Kumbh Mela.

1. Introduction
2. Legend
3. History
4. Geographical Significance
5. Rituals at Kumbh Mela
6. Ujjain - A City
 - 6a. About
 - 6b. Ram Ghat
 - 6c. Streets
 - 6d. Raja Vikramaditya
 - 6e. Procession
 - 6f. Yagna Salah
 - 6g. Naga Sadhu
 - 6h. Sandhya Aarti
7. Video
8. Contact Details

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Holy man giving blessing.



Hindu monks perform rituals inside a tent during the Kumbh Mela.



Naga Sadhu at Kumbh Mela.

1. Introduction
2. Legend
3. History
4. Geographical Significance
5. Rituals at Kumbh Mela
6. Ujjain - A City
 - 6a. About
 - 6b. Ram Ghat
 - 6c. Streets
 - 6d. Raja Vikramaditya
 - 6e. Procession
 - 6f. Yagna Salah
 - 6g. Naga Sadhu
 - 6h. Sandhya Aarti
7. Video
8. Contact Details

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Sadhu sitting in a tent with money in front of him at Maha Kumbh.



Naga monk in tent at kumbh mela.



Portrait of a Naga sadhu sitting in lotus position at Kumbh mela.

1. Introduction
2. Legend
3. History
4. Geographical Significance
5. Rituals at Kumbh Mela
6. Ujjain - A City
 - 6a. About
 - 6b. Ram Ghat
 - 6c. Streets
 - 6d. Raja Vikramaditya
 - 6e. Procession
 - 6f. Yagna Salah
 - 6g. Naga Sadhu
 - 6h. Sandhya Aarti
7. Video
8. Contact Details

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Source:

<https://dsource.in/resource/kumbh-mela-ujjain/ujjain-city/naga-sadhu>

1. Introduction
2. Legend
3. History
4. Geographical Significance
5. Rituals at Kumbh Mela
6. Ujjain - A City
 - 6a. About
 - 6b. Ram Ghat
 - 6c. Streets
 - 6d. Raja Vikramaditya
 - 6e. Procession
 - 6f. Yagna Salah
 - 6g. Naga Sadhu
 - 6h. Sandhya Aarti
7. Video
8. Contact Details



A Naga Sadhu blessing pilgrims.



Sadhus talk to other sadhus during the Kumbh Mela.

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1. Introduction
2. Legend
3. History
4. Geographical Significance
5. Rituals at Kumbh Mela
6. Ujjain - A City
 - 6a. About
 - 6b. Ram Ghat
 - 6c. Streets
 - 6d. Raja Vikramaditya
 - 6e. Procession
 - 6f. Yagna Salah
 - 6g. Naga Sadhu
 - 6h. Sandhya Aarti
7. Video
8. Contact Details



Naga Baba standing on one leg.



A Naga sadhu swinging and giving a blessing to pilgrims.

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An Indian Hindu Naga Sadhu gives blessings to pilgrims.



Naga Sadhu sleeps while standing during Kumbh Mela.



Portrait of a Naga Sadhu.

1. Introduction
2. Legend
3. History
4. Geographical Significance
5. Rituals at Kumbh Mela
6. Ujjain - A City
 - 6a. About
 - 6b. Ram Ghat
 - 6c. Streets
 - 6d. Raja Vikramaditya
 - 6e. Procession
 - 6f. Yagna Salah
 - 6g. Naga Sadhu
 - 6h. Sandhya Aarti
7. Video
8. Contact Details

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Source:

<https://dsource.in/resource/kumbh-mela-ujjain/ujjain-city/naga-sadhu>

1. Introduction
2. Legend
3. History
4. Geographical Significance
5. Rituals at Kumbh Mela
6. Ujjain - A City
 - 6a. About
 - 6b. Ram Ghat
 - 6c. Streets
 - 6d. Raja Vikramaditya
 - 6e. Procession
 - 6f. Yagna Salah
 - 6g. Naga Sadhu
 - 6h. Sandhya Aarti
7. Video
8. Contact Details



Naga Sadhus, Hath yogis go to extreme lengths to test their self-control over their bodies.



Naga Sadhu at Kumbh Mela.

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Sandhya Aarti



Hindu devotee doing Sandhya Aarti in the evening on the bank of the Kshipra river.



In the late evening pandits and pilgrims perform river aarti on the bank of Kshipra river during Simhasth.



Pandits performing Sandhya Aarti of river Kshipra at the Simhasth.



Hindu pilgrims prayers to Lord Shiva during the Kumbha Mela festival.

1. Introduction
2. Legend
3. History
4. Geographical Significance
5. Rituals at Kumbh Mela
6. Ujjain - A City
 - 6a. About
 - 6b. Ram Ghat
 - 6c. Streets
 - 6d. Raja Vikramaditya
 - 6e. Procession
 - 6f. Yagna Salah
 - 6g. Naga Sadhu
 - 6h. Sandhya Aarti
7. Video
8. Contact Details

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Sadhu perform "Sandhya Aarti" during Kumbha Mela.



Indian Hindu devotees during Aarti.



Aarti at Holy Kshipra River.



Priest Performing evening Aarti on Kshipra River Ghats, Ujjain Kumbh Mela 2016.

1. Introduction
2. Legend
3. History
4. Geographical Significance
5. Rituals at Kumbh Mela
6. Ujjain - A City
 - 6a. About
 - 6b. Ram Ghat
 - 6c. Streets
 - 6d. Raja Vikramaditya
 - 6e. Procession
 - 6f. Yagna Salah
 - 6g. Naga Sadhu
 - 6h. Sandhya Aarti
7. Video
8. Contact Details

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1. Introduction
2. Legend
3. History
4. Geographical Significance
5. Rituals at Kumbh Mela
6. Ujjain - A City
7. Video
8. Contact Details

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1. Introduction

2. Legend

3. History

4. Geographical Significance

5. Rituals at Kumbh Mela

6. Ujjain - A City

7. Video

8. Contact Details