Design Resource

Mahabodhi Temple, Bodh Gaya
The Land of Spirituality
by
Ruchi Shah
IDC, IIT Bombay

Source:
https://dsource.in/resource/mahabodhi-temple-bodh-gaya

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About Bodh Gaya

Gaya is the second-largest city on the fringes of Bihar. In the olden days, it was a part of Magadh. Since ancient times the places around Gaya like Nalanda, Rajgir, and Pataliputra have been citadels of learning, they had flourished under the Mauryan rule.

Surrounded by sparse landscapes and vegetation - a drive-by a car or bus for 12 km will take you to the small town of Bodh Gaya – The birthplace of Buddhism.

The word Bodhi is derived from the verbal root Budh (to be awakened, become aware, to notice, knowledge or understanding). Hence the name Bodh Gaya, where Buddha attained enlightenment under a Peepal tree. It is the ultimate place of worship for Buddhists across the world, which flock here to the Mahabodhi temple complex built around the site where Buddha achieved nirvana.

You can check a photo gallery on Bodh Gaya here.

The first glimpse of the tall and erect structure of the Mahabodhi temple within the complex.

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The Mahabodhi Temple

Literally, it means the temple of 'Great Awakening'. The Mahabodhi Temple remains one of the earliest Buddhist temples to have been built totally in brick dating back to the Gupta period (320 to 550 CE).

The Bodhi tree in Bodhgaya is directly linked to the life of Lord Buddha; the story behind it is - Around 530 BCE, Prince Siddhartha Gautama a young boy was exposed to the pain and suffering in the world. In search of a way to end it - he reached the banks of the River Falgu where he sat and meditated. Contemplating under a peepul tree for three days and three nights he gained enlightenment in the form of answers he had sought.

It is concluded that 250 years after this episode, Emperor Ashoka visited this same place. He is said to be the creator of the original Mahabodhi temple.

Many different myths are associated with the temple. Some people state that the navel of the earth is exactly located at this spot. Another story claims that when the earth will be destroyed this will be the last place to disappear, and the first one to reappear on re-creation. A legend states that a Bodhi tree sprang up on the day Gautama Buddha was born.

On visiting the site one can see the temple sitting in the centre. It is tall rising high above the mesh of small temples, stupas and open spaces. The Mahabodhi temple has a long intricately carved spire that ends in a miniature stupa and a Chhatravali on the base. The niches on the spire enclose carved effigies of Buddha. Geometrical recesses holding carved images of deities, with floral patterns and symbolic animals are created all over the temple. Different types of stupas can be found scattered throughout the area, with isolating spaces for contemplation and reflection.

With the decline of Buddhism in India, the temple was abandoned and forgotten. Buried under layers of soil and sand it was later restored to its former glory by Sir Alexander Cunningham.

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A contingent of monks from Japan doing a pradakshina around the temple while chanting prayers.

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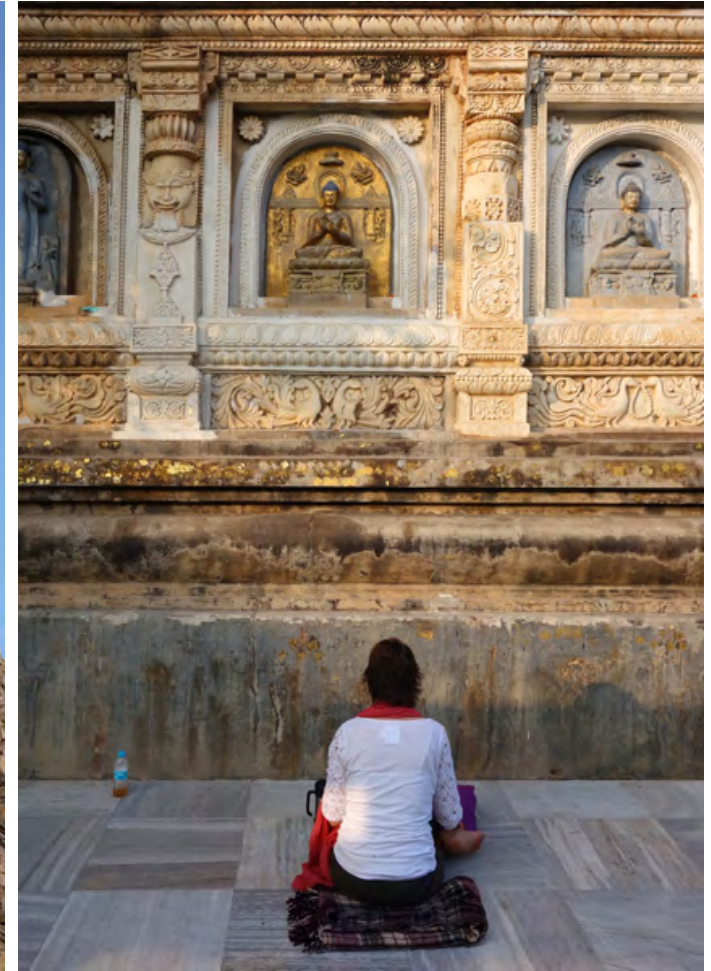https://dsource.in/resource/mahabodhi-temple-bodh-gaya/mahabodhi-temple

A close up of the temple's spire reveals geometric patterns and niches containing carved images of Lord Buddha. There are floral patterns and animals embellishing the spire.

A foreign devotee deep in meditation before one of the small statues of Lord Buddha (dharmacakrapravartana) this idol creates a gesture indicative of the teaching Buddha who preached his first sermon in Sarnath.

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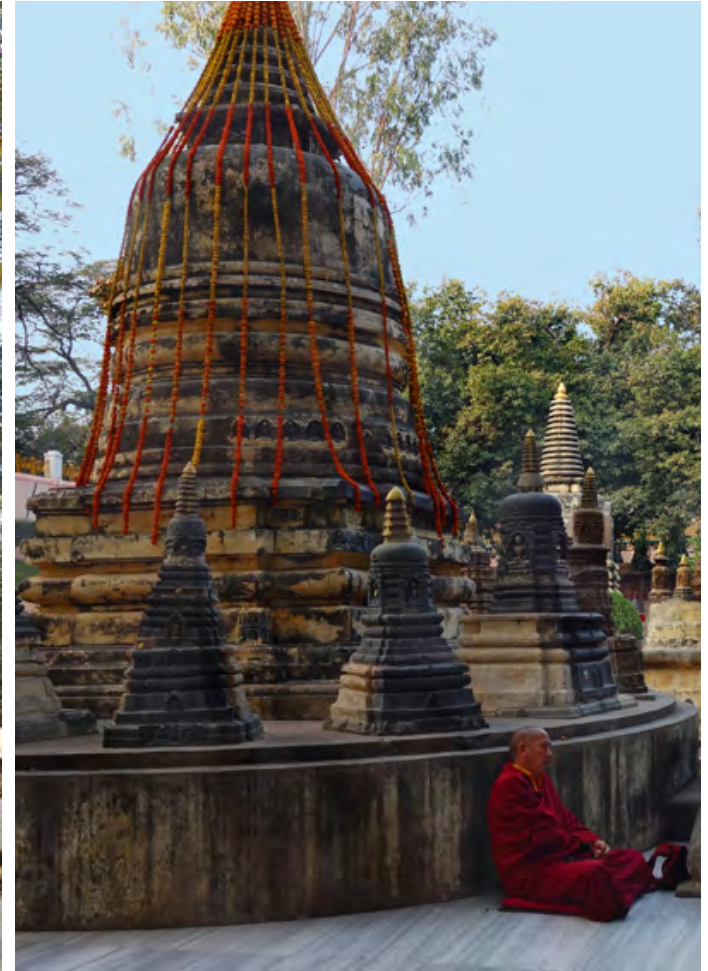The Land of Spirituality
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The Mahabodhi tree in Bodhgaya under which Lord Buddha is said to have received enlightenment, enclosed by golden gates.

Tibetan monks sitting in the temple premises.

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Tibetan monks praying within the temple complex.

A Tibetan monk and a monk from Thailand contemplating within the temple space.

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An antiquated statue of Tara (a female Bodhisattva in Mahayana Buddhism) outside the temple.

Details of a Chorten within the temple complex.

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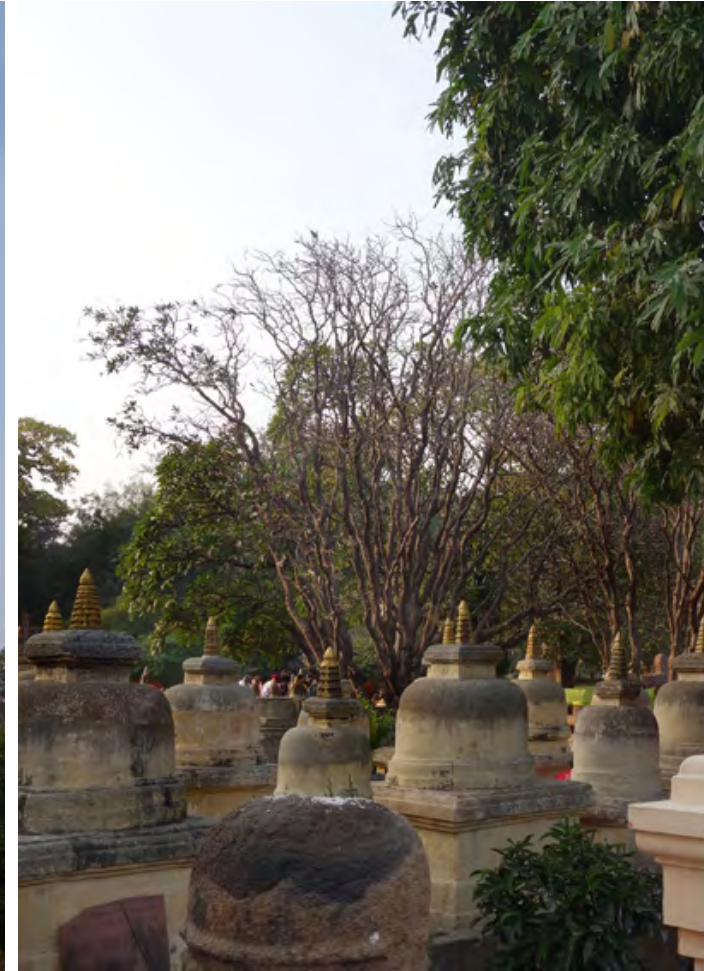https://dsource.in/resource/mahabodhi-temple-bodh-gaya/mahabodhi-temple

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The spire of the Mahabodhi temple.

Stupas scattered amidst the temple areas.

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A Malaysian Buddhist monk in meditation under a peepul tree.

Tibetan monks prostrating before the temple. These prostrations are often done either 3, 7, 21, or 108 times.

Numerous stone murals like this one - depicting devotees listening to Buddha - and more are created around the buildings within the temple complex.

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Monks turning the prayers wheels encircling the complex.

A long shot of the complex reveals the various levels and layers of the area - with different stupas, paths, empty spaces for contemplation, temple rooms and the monumental Mahabodhi temple.

The artisans at market place.

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Sanctified by the Dalai Lama, it took 7 years to complete this statute with over 1,00,000 masons working on it.

An incarnation of Buddha - creating the gesture of praying - is found amongst the other statues encircling the Great Buddha Statue. This gesture is typical to the Avalokitesvara Buddha with more than two arms.

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Contact Details

This documentation was done by Ruchi Shah at IDC, IIT Bombay.

You can get in touch with Ruchi Shah at ruchishah1982[at]gmail.com

You can write to the following address regarding suggestions and clarifications:

Helpdesk Details:
Co-ordinator
Project e-kalpa
Industrial Design Centre
IIT Bombay
Powai
Mumbai 4000 076
India

Phone: 091-22-2159 6805/ 091-22-2576 7802
Email: dsource.in[at]gmail.com