



PRESS INFORMATION BUREAU
 (Research Unit)
 Ministry of Information and Broadcasting
 Government of India



Kushinagar International Airport

Boost to tourism in Buddhist circuit

Date: October 26, 2021

On October 21, 2021, Prime Minister Narendra Modi inaugurated the Kushinagar International Airport, which is the 3rd international airport in Uttar Pradesh, as part of UDAN Day celebrations. Launched on October 21, 2016, UDAN (*Ude Desh ka Aam Naagrik*) is a Regional Connectivity Scheme under the National Aviation Policy of 2016.

Kushinagar is a town and a historical place located in the north-eastern area of Uttar Pradesh. This is a Buddhist pilgrimage where Gautam Buddha had *Mahaparinirvana* (death) and is one of the main four sites of Buddhist pilgrimage circuit i.e., places where Lord Buddha lived, others being – Bodh Gaya, Lumbini and Sarnath. For this reason, it is also an international tourist destination where Buddhist pilgrims from all over the world come for excursions.

The inauguration of the Kushinagar International Airport was marked by the landing of the inaugural flight at the airport from Colombo, Sri Lanka, carrying Sri Lankan delegation of over hundred Buddhist Monks and dignitaries including the 12-member Holy Relic entourage bringing the Holy Buddha relics for exposition. The delegation also included Anunayakas (deputy heads) of all four Nikatas (orders) of Buddhism in Sri Lanka i.e. Asgiriya, Amarapura, Ramanya, Malwatta as well as five ministers of the Government of Sri Lanka led by Cabinet Minister Namal Rajapakshe.

The Kushinagar International Airport has been built at an estimated cost of Rs. 260 crore. It has a land area of 589 acres and a single runway having dimensions of 3200 m by 45 m with an apron having four parking stands for A-321 type of aircraft. The terminal building is having an area of 3600 sqm to handle 300 peak hour passengers.

It will facilitate domestic and international pilgrims to visit the *Mahaparinirvana Sthal* of Lord Buddha and is an endeavour in connecting the Buddhist pilgrimage holy sites around the world.

Boost to Infrastructure Development & Employment Generation

The airport will serve nearby districts of Uttar Pradesh and Bihar and is an important step in boosting the investment and employment opportunities in the region. The airport would

enhance the infrastructure of the Buddhist circuit at world class level and augment development of the eastern part of Uttar Pradesh.

- With the Ministry of Tourism's Incredible India Tourist Facilitator Program, a large high-quality workforce is also being getting trained to help tourists to enhance their travel experience.
- These collective efforts are expected to culminate in a major fillip to the tourism sector in the region and will generate direct and indirect employment at large scale.
- In its continued efforts to undertake various promotional activities, the Ministry of Tourism has recently organised Buddhist Circuit Train FAM Tour and conference from October 04-08, 2021 which was attended by the tourism industry stakeholders across India and by media.
- The Ministry of Tourism is also working on capacity building which includes Linguistic Tourist Facilitator training in Thai, Japanese, Vietnamese, and Chinese languages. While 525 people have already been trained in these languages between 2018 and 2020, 600 more shall be trained between 2020 and 2023. This would help in building the linguistic connect with the tourists, especially Buddhist tourists from key source markets.

Some of the places of interest at Kushinagar include

1. **Nirvana Stupa:** This huge brickwork stupa, discovered in excavations in 1876, stands on a 2.74 metres high plinth. Its top is 19.81m above the ground level. At this site, a copper vessel was discovered that bears an inscription in ancient Brahmi, which stated that Lord Buddha's remains had been deposited here. Along with this, silver coins of 5th century A.D. were also unearthed at this site.
2. **Mahaparinirvana Temple:** This houses a 6.10 meter-long statue of the Buddha in a reclining position. The image was unearthed during the excavations of 1876. Carved from Chunar sandstone, this statue represents the dying Buddha reclining on his right side. An inscription below dates the statue to the fifth century.
3. **Mathakuar Shrine:** This shrine is about 400 yards from the Nirvana Stupa. A stone image of Lord Buddha in the '*Bhumi Sparsha Mudra*' (earth touching posture) under the Bodhi tree was excavated here. The inscription at the base of the statue dates it to 10th -11th century. Adjacent to this shrine, ruins of a monastery have also been discovered.
4. **Ramabhar Stupa:** About 1.5 km away from Mahaparinirvana Temple, this large Stupa rises to a height of 15 meters. It marks the site where the Lord Buddha was cremated. In ancient Buddhist texts, this Stupa has been referred to as '*Mukut-Bandhan Chaitya*'.
5. **Watt Thai Temple:** This is a huge temple complex built in the typical Thai Buddhist architectural style.
6. **Chinese Temple:** Here, the special attraction is a beautiful statue of Lord Buddha.
7. **Japanese Temple:** A beautiful Ashta Dhatu (eight metal) statue of Lord Buddha, which was brought from Japan, can be seen here.
8. **Buddha Museum:** The Buddha Museum contains findings from the site excavations at Kushinagar.

9. **Other places of interest** include Indo-Japanese- Sri Lankan Temples, Burmese Temple, Birla Hindu Buddha Temple, Korean Temple, Shiva Temple, Ram-Janki Temple and Meditation Park.

For domestic travellers, apart from the air route, Kushinagar can be accessed by rail and road too.

- **By Rail:** Just 51 kilometers from Kushinagar is Gorakhpur Railway Junction. The railhead is connected directly to stations like Mumbai, Delhi, Cochin, Barauni, Kolkata, Lucknow, Agra and Jaipur
- **By Road:** Kushinagar is located on the National Highways 28 which connects the city with the other parts of the state. The city is connected to Varanasi, Lucknow, Kanpur, Patna, Jhansi and Gorakhpur and other places in Uttar Pradesh via Uttar Pradesh State Road Transport Corporation buses as well as the other buses.

Development of Buddhist Structure

The Ministry of Tourism in collaboration with various Central Ministries and State Governments of Bihar and Uttar Pradesh is developing Buddhist circuit across the Buddhist destinations in these two states. The major verticals of developments under the Buddhist circuit are:

- Connectivity
- Infrastructure and logistics
- Cultural research, heritage & education
- Public awareness
- Communication & outreach

The Ministry undertakes development of infrastructure at tourist destinations across the country under its infrastructure development schemes viz. **Swadesh Darshan (SD)** and **PRASHAD (National Mission on Pilgrimage Rejuvenation and Spiritual, Heritage Augmentation Drive)**. Under both the schemes various projects in Buddhism related sites / destination across India has been sanctioned.

Ministry has taken a four-fold development strategy that focuses on:

- Improving the connectivity via air, rail, and roads
- Enhancing the tourism infrastructure and dependent services
- Streamlining branding and promotion
- Showcasing culture and heritage

Under Swadesh Darshan Scheme, five projects worth Rs 325.53 Crore have been sanctioned for Buddhist circuit development in the states of Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Gujarat and Andhra Pradesh which are under different stages of implementation. While works of Rs 44.19 crore on three projects have been sanctioned under PRASHAD Scheme; in Varanasi, two projects including a sound and light show at Dhamek Stupa and a Buddha Theme Park, Sarnath, costing Rs 9.50 Crore for the development of Buddhist structures have been completed.

Global outreach by the Ministry of Tourism

- Emphasis on promoting the various Buddhist Sites within India and overseas markets.
- India Tourism Offices in overseas markets regularly participate in a number of travel and tourism fairs as well as exhibitions wherein India's Buddhist Sites are promoted.
- Ministry of Tourism organises Buddhist Conclave every alternate year with the objective of promoting India as a Buddhist Destination and major markets around the globe. The upcoming International Buddhist Conclave is scheduled from November 17-21, 2021.
- Ministry has undertaken multiple projects under branding and promotion that are currently in the pipeline including a live virtual exhibition at national museum, web portal, annual events calendar, social media marketing, campaigns in key source markets like Vietnam, Thailand, Japan, South Korea, Sri Lanka, etc.
- Ministry of Tourism has showcased the Buddhist Sites on the Incredible India Website and has also developed a dedicated website www.indiathelandofbuddha.in. This website aims to promote and showcase the rich Buddhist heritage in India and highlight the major destinations visited by Buddha personally across the country besides showcasing the Buddhist Heritage left behind by his disciples including the modern monasteries.

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