

POTENTIAL AND PROSPECTS OF BUDDHIST TOURISM IN INDIA

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Abstract:

Travel is an integral part of human life. Since old times, people have been travelling from one place to another. The motives for travelling have varied from time to time. Initially the search was for food, then trade, pilgrimage, later education, exploration. Most of the travel that takes place today is for leisure, recreation of the body and the mind. Expansion of Buddhism and its introduction in this new field of tourism can take the experience of mental peace to a new level. In today's restless social life preaching's of Lord Buddha is like *sanjeevani* (life saver) for whole mankind.

In this article we have tried to find out the potentiality and opportunities of Buddhist tourism in India with special reference to its present performance. No doubt there are lots of potential but also several problems associated with this. Paper also focuses on this aspect. It is entirely based on secondary data.

Keywords: Buddhism, Buddhist Tourism, Potential, Prospects.

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Introduction

Tourism is defined as an activity in which there is a movement of people from their place of origin to a place of destination for a period of more than twenty four hours and less than a year, primarily for recreation, rejuvenation, leisure purposes and not seeking any remuneration activity at the place visited. Man is travelling ever since its inception however the motives for travelling have varied from time to time. Religious tourism is supposed to be the oldest form of travel prevailing presently in each and every religion. Buddhism is also not exception but it has multifaceted tourism approach. Through Buddhist tourism, different results can be experienced by different sections of society who have different motivations for the travel.

Architecture lovers can experience the heritage of Buddhist temples which carries with them old age uniqueness. History seekers can visit the places and recapitulate the events. People wanting to fulfill their religious or pilgrimage motive can do so by visiting entire Buddhist circuit. There is room for learning for those looking for education. Similarly there is something for everyone who has a different motive for travel. But one thing that is present only in Buddhist tourism is that apart from fulfilling all the criteria's of tourism, it gives an additional advantage as well. It gives an inward journey to know oneself. It helps to find cause of the problems of life and also the solution. The need of the hour is to make people aware about Buddhism as once when people come to know about the ideology of Buddhism, they automatically get drifted towards it due to its concreteness and simplicity. Through Buddhist tourism, the distance between people and Buddhism can be reduced. When more and more people will visit places of Buddhist importance, the closer they will move towards knowing it in a better way. If they are shown the path through Buddhism, they would not only be able to see their goal clearly but also the path leading to it. Here Buddhist tourism can play a very effective role in creating this awareness among the people.

Reviews of existing literature

Dutt (1962) has tried to bring out the potential of India in terms of richness and diversity of Buddhism in India. Also **Sudsuang, Chentanez and Veluvan (1991)** conducted an empirical study of Effect of Buddhist meditation on serum cortisol and total protein levels, blood pressure, pulse rate, lung volume and reaction time and the Results from these studies indicated that

practising Dhammakaya Buddhist meditation produces biochemical and physiological changes and reduces the reaction time. In another article, **Bagri (1995)** has talked about the potential of Buddhist tourism in India: Buddhist sites, festivals, trends of tourism traffic, handicrafts, souvenirs, thus describing the scope of Buddhist tourism in India. However, **United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (2003)** have shown the potential of Buddhist tourism in Bangladesh and the economic benefits that can be earned through this new paradigm. Moreover, **Handa (2004)** has given detailed account of the monasteries of Himachal Pradesh and has provided the readers with the beautiful and mesmerizing description of the same. In the same context, **Timothy and Olsen (2006)** have tried to bring out the Current and Potential sites of significance for pilgrims and Tourists in selected Asian countries, including India. Whereas, **Fazili and Ashraf (2006)** have emphasized on the Development of Buddhist Pilgrimage tourism with special emphasis on the Buddhist tourist centers. In another research, **Ray (2008)** has tried to study the present scenario of tourism in North-East, problems and prospects of its development.

Singh (2008) has pointed out the usefulness of promoting Buddhist Tourism in India and also has thrown some light on the Buddhist temples and Monasteries in India. Likewise, **Babu and Kala (2008)** have given a detailed account of potential of Buddhist tourism in Andhra Pradesh. Not only this, **Agrawal, Choudhary and Tripathi, (2010)** have tried to explore the key reasons of lack of promotion of Buddhist tourist sites in India and compare the awareness of foreign and Indian tourists towards India as a destination for Buddhist sites vis-à-vis other countries such as Japan, Thailand and China. Last but not least, **Batra** explains that the Buddhist Shrines of India have tremendous potential to attract large number of tourists from Buddhist Countries of the Far East and Southeast Asia. Unfortunately due to lack of proper roads, road side amenities, other infrastructural facilities and inadequate promotional efforts on the part of tourism departments of both Central and State Governments, many such places are lying into oblivion.

Objectives of the study

- ✓ To get an overview of Buddhist Destinations in India.
- ✓ To know the markets for Buddhist Tourism.

- ✓ Present scenario of Buddhist Tourism in India.

About Buddhism

Buddhism, which was founded by Gautama Buddha in the sixth century BC as a religious reform movement has turned out to be the fourth major religion in the world with a following of more than 376 million people accounting to 6% of the total world population. For all the Buddhists in the world, India is the preferred choice as a Buddhist tourist destination. The reason for this can be attributed to the fact that India is the place of its origin, early development and first dissemination. Almost all the major events such as Buddha's enlightenment at Bodhgaya, his first sermon at Sarnath, his places of stay during 45 years of sojourn, his place of mahaparinirvana etc. have taken place on this very land. Hence, it is of great significance for the Buddhists all over the world. This places India as a great potential of increasing its tourism market and increasing the number of FTA's (Foreign Tourist Arrival) and thereby increasing the FEE's (Foreign Exchange Earnings).

Buddhism is a set of principles or philosophy based on the teachings of Lord Buddha, who was born in 563 BCE at Lumbini, Nepal as Siddhartha Gautam, a Shakya prince. Basically, Buddhism preaches the path of practice and spiritual development, thus, leading an insight into the truth of life. With its realistic base, Buddhism today is one of the major religions of the countries of Central Asia, Sri Lanka, Tibet, China, Korea, Japan and Southeast Asia.

A person who has taken refuge in the three jewels is called as a Buddhist. The three jewels are:

1. The Buddha
2. The Dharma, the teachings
3. The Sangha, the community of (at least partially) enlightened beings, often approximated to community of monks and nuns (Bhikkshus and Bhikkshunis)

बुद्धं शरणं गच्छामि।

धर्मं शरणं गच्छामि।

संघं शरणं गच्छामि।

Major Branches of Buddhism

❖ Hinayana (the lesser vehicle)

- Also called as “Theravada school” meaning the Doctrine of the elders, based on Pali canon
- Consider Buddha as a teacher
- Practiced today in Sri Lanka, Burma, Laos, Thailand, Cambodia and portions of Vietnam and Malaysia

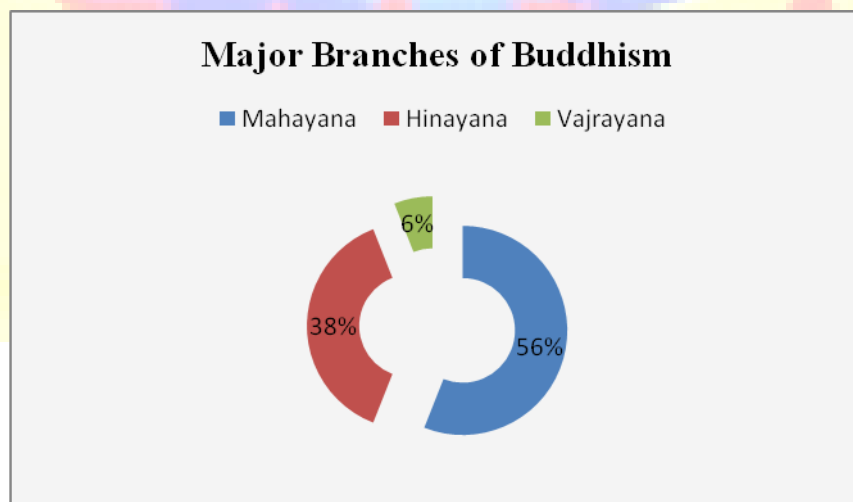
❖ Mahayana (Great Vehicle)

- Based on Sanskrit canon
- Consider Buddha as God
- Practiced today in China, Japan, Korea, and most of Vietnam

❖ Vajrayana (Diamond Vehicle)

- Also referred to as Mantrayana, Tantrayana, Tantric or esoteric Buddhism
- Practiced today in Tibet, Nepal, Bhutan, Mongolia, Areas of India, and to a limited extent in China and Japan.

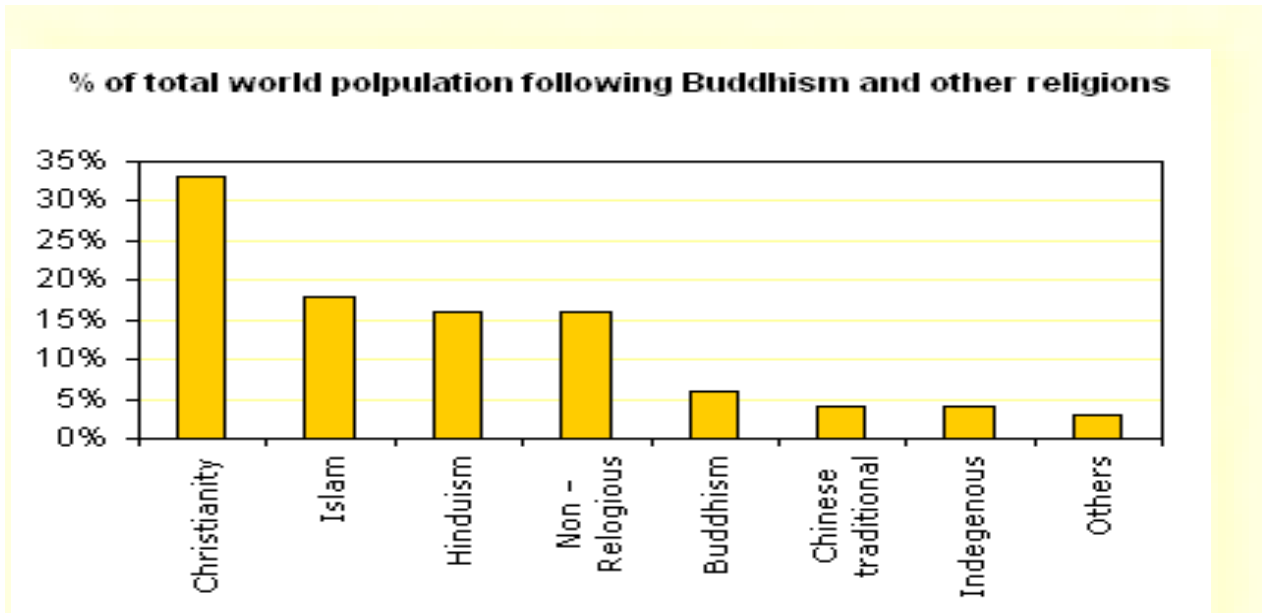
Population Percentage of major branches of Buddhism



Source- <http://www.buddhist-tourism.com/buddhism/buddhism-statistics.html>

Mahayana	:	185,000,000
Hinayana	:	124,000,000
Vajrayana	:	20,000,000

Percentage of total world population following Buddhism and other religion

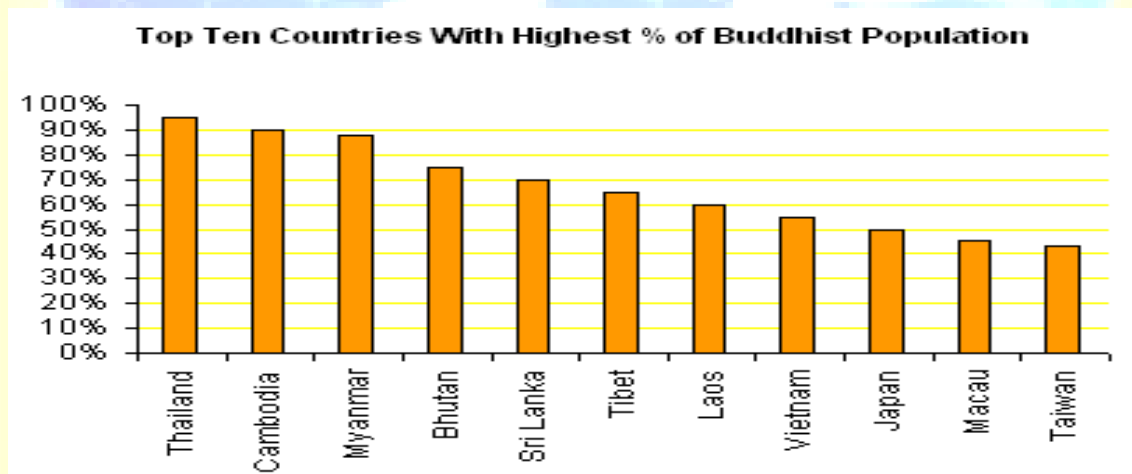


Source- <http://www.buddhist-tourism.com/buddhism/buddhism-statistics.html>

- Christianity : 2 billion
- Islam : 1.3 billion
- Hinduism : 900 million
- Non – Religious : 850 million
- Buddhism : 360 million
- Chinese traditional : 225 million
- Indigenous : 190 million
- Others : A little above 100 million

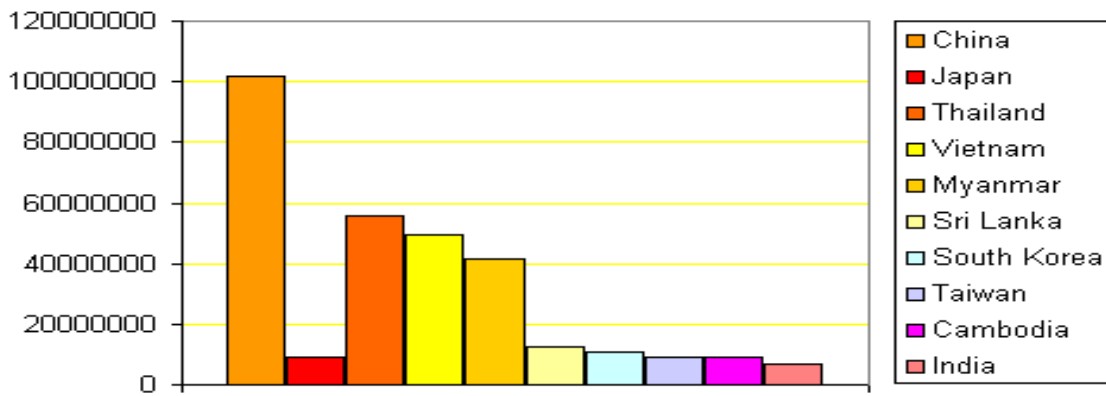
Top Ten countries with highest percentage of Buddhist population

- Thailand : 95%
- Cambodia : 90%
- Myanmar : 88%
- Bhutan : 75%
- Sri Lanka : 70%
- Tibet : 65%
- Laos : 60%
- Vietnam : 55%
- Japan : 50%
- Macau : 45%
- Taiwan : 43%



Source- <http://www.buddhist-tourism.com/buddhism/buddhism-statistics.html>

Top Ten countries with highest Buddhist population



Source- <http://www.buddhist-tourism.com/buddhism/buddhism-statistics.html>

- China : 102,000,000
- Japan : 8,965,000
- Thailand : 55,480,000
- Vietnam : 49,690,000
- Myanmar : 41,610,000
- Sri Lanka : 12,540,000
- South Korea : 10,920,000
- Taiwan : 9,150,000
- Cambodia : 9,130,000
- India : 7,000,000

Inferences from the above study

Few points which can be inferred from above are first, India has a great scope for both the domestic as well as international tourists. Second, most of the Buddhist countries are in the Asia region which is in the vicinity of India. Third, Buddhist destinations and Buddhist circuits of India not only cater to the Buddhists alone but also motivates the non- Buddhists for purposes such as recreation, rejuvenation, contact with nature, explicit architecture etc. Hence, a large unknown fraction of people can also be included in the tourism market areas. Fourth, there is a section of people who are involved with the Buddhist education and research, the number of such people is getting very significant as it is observed that there is a growing interest of the students,

scholars, writers of various countries like America, Canada, Europe etc towards exploration of the place of origin of Buddhism (which is India) which accounts to a significant figure. Fifth, India's contribution in International Tourism is less than 1% thus there is a great scope of improvement which requires new approaches and innovative ideas and here Buddhist tourism provides the answer to that.

Buddhist Tourism Destinations of India

India offers a number of destinations of Buddhist interest such as Himachal Pradesh and Jammu & Kashmir, Bihar, Uttar-Pradesh in north India, Sikkim, Arunachal Pradesh in the East, Orissa in South-east, and Madhya Pradesh in central India. The great cultural and ethnic heritage of these states is briefly discussed below:

Himachal Pradesh: Buddhism was introduced here in 3rd century BC by the great Mauryan emperor Ashoka. He built several stupas here. This place has also great significance because of His Holiness, Dalai Lama XIV, Tenzing Gyatso who took abode at Dharamshala in 1959 Lhasa. He was accompanied by approximately 80,000 Tibetan Monks during a Tibetan Uprising. The place is also called as "Little Lhasa" and holds a prominent place since all the offices of Government in Exile of Tibet are situated here. The major Buddhist places in Himachal Pradesh are:

a) **Mc. Leodganj:** This place has been abode of the exiled Dalai Lama for more than four decades now.

b) **Rewalsar:** It is said that Guru Padmasambhava started his journey to Tibet from this place, Rewalsar lake is believed to be inhabited by the spirit of Padmasambhava and it has three Tibetan monasteries: Drikung Kagyud Gompa, Tso-Pema Ogyen Heru-kai Nyingmapa Gompa and the Zigar Gompa. The gompas (monasteries) are in red, yellow and white and also have gold fringed pagodas. Other highlights of the monasteries include murals (wall paintings) depicting a wonderful amalgamation of the Indo Chinese style and a huge stucco image of Guru Padmasambhava. The Tso-Pema Ogyen Heru-kai Nyingmapa Gompa has a museum with colourful murals.

c) **Lahaul Spiti:** The monasteries of Lahaul-Spiti such as Tayul Gompa, Shahsru Monastery, Kardang Monastery, Guru Ghantal Monastery etc are rich repositories of ancient murals, Scroll paintings (thankas), wood carving and golden images of Padmasambhava.

d) **Kinnaur:** Some of the famous Buddhist places include the village of Morang with Lanin Monastery, Puh with Tashigang Monastery, Nako and Chango.

Jammu & Kashmir: The credit of spreading of Buddhism in J&K and establishing the Srinagar city goes to the Mauryan emperor Ashoka. From Srinagar, Buddhism spread to Ladakh and its capital Leh which boasts of approximately fifty percent of Buddhist population. The major attractions are discussed in brief below:

a) **Leh- Ladakh:** There are two monastery circuits in Leh. The first one covers Shey, Thiksey, Stakna, Matto, Chembray, Tak-Tok and Hemis while the second one covers Spituk, Phyang, Likir, Alchi, Ridzong and Lamayuru. The Leh monasteries represent all the four schools of Buddhism - Nyingmapa (the oldest one), Drukpa, Sakyapa and Gelugpa.

Bihar: The term Bihar is said to have been derived from “Vihara” which means abode in Buddhism, thus clearly establishing the deep relationship between Bihar and Buddhism. Buddha attained enlightenment at a place called Bodh-Gaya in Bihar. Later, He preached many of his sermons in different places of Bihar such as Vaishali, Rajgir etc after the mahaparinirvana of Buddha, many monasteries, great universities of the time such as Nalanda and Vikramshila (near Bhagalpur town) were set up in the region. Emperor Ashoka also propagated the Dhamma and religion not only in his capital Pataliputra (now Patna) but also in different parts of world. The major attractions are discussed in brief below:

a) **Bodh-Gaya:** As already said, Buddha attained enlightenment at this place which today boasts of the very famous Maha Bodhi Temple, Maha Bodhi tree and several monasteries.

b) **Nalanda:** It was a very renowned university and a very famous religious centre during 4-5 century CE. Today though the university is in ruins but still is a must watch destination for the Buddhist Tourist.

c) **Vaishali:** Several Stupas are found here, it was at this place where Buddha preached his last sermon. It is also sacred for Jains for it is the birthplace of Mahavira.

d) Rajgir: Two rock cut caves are believed to be the favourite retreats of Buddha.

Uttar-Pradesh: Buddha preached his first sermon also known as 'Pratham Dharamchakra Pravartan' at Sarnath in Uttar Pradesh. Emperor Ashoka also built several Stupas and monasteries here. The major attractions are discussed below:

a) Sarnath: Today the place has Ashoka pillar, Stupas such as Dhamekha Stupa, Chaukhandi stupa built by Ashoka for the tourists.

b) Kushinagar: Buddha attained mahaparinirvana at this place. Hence, this place is of great significance for the Buddhists. The major attractions of the place includes temples such as Mahaparinirvana Temple which has 6.10 meter long statue of reclining Buddha, Watthai temple, Chinese Temple, Japanese temple, Stupas such as Nirvana stupa, Ramabhar stupa. Other attractions include mathakuar shrine and a Buddha museum.

c) Sankasia: It is said that Buddha descended at this place after giving sermon to his mother. The site has Buddha temples and Ashoka's pillar.

d) Kaushambhi: Though most of the parts are in ruins today and under the supervision of archaeological survey of India, still an old fort, Ashokan Pillar and ghositaram monastery reminds of the golden days of Buddhism in India.

e) Sravasti: Place where Buddha preached several sermons and spent approximately 24 years of his lifetime. The attractions include Maheth, Saheth, Ananda bodhi tree, stupas, temples and ruins of kutis or huts where the Buddha lived in the Jetavana garden.

Madhya Pradesh: Buddhism propagated in the region during the time of Ashoka when he built several Stupas and monasteries throughout the region. Though Buddha never visited the place in person still this place is renowned for Buddhism in India as it is a home to all types of Buddhist Architecture – stupas, chaityas, monasteries and temples. The famous among them are the four gateways, barhut stupa, the great stupas 1, 2 and 3, ashokan pillar and temple 18.

Arunachal Pradesh: Around 13 percent of the population i.e. approximately 10 lakh people follow Buddhism. The major tourist attractions include:

a) **Tawang:** It is an important seat of Mahayana Buddhism, famous for Tawang Monastery of the Gelukpa order of Tibetan Buddhism, founded by Mera Lama Lodre Gyaltsa during the 17th century. This is the second largest Monastery in Asia and the largest one of its kind in the country which controls 17 Gompas in the region. It has temple, 28 feet golden statue of Buddha, library with ancient books and manuscripts.

b) **Bomdila:** Home to monpa and sherdukpen tribe both of them are followers of Tibetan Buddhism. It has several beautiful gompas.

c) **Others:** Include Urgelling monastery, Tatsang monastery and several nunneries of Tawang.

Orissa: The region experienced the growth of Buddhism during the Ashoka period but faced a setback with the advent of Jainism. Though the Buddhism is in minority now but still there are several places of Buddhist interest such as:

a) **Udaigiri:** Remains of two brick monasteries, brick stupa. Beautiful stepped stone well with inscriptions on it and rock cut sculptures are the main attractions.

b) **Lalitagiri:** Buddhist attractions here include ruins of a large brick monastery, the remains of the chaitya hall, a number of votive stupas and a renovated stone stupa. Additionally, there is also a museum that exhibits numerous Mahayana sculptures including colossal Buddha figures, huge Bodhisattva statues, statues of Tara, Jambhala and others. There is a figure of Standing Buddha with knee length draperies over the shoulders.

c) **Ratnagiri:** The attractions include two large monasteries, a big stupa and numerous votive stupas. Findings have also revealed that the region was an important centre of Tantric Buddhism and Vajrayana art and philosophy in the 8th and the 9th century.

d) **Dhuli:** It was here that the bloody battle of Kalinga forever changed the course of life of the Mauryan Emperor Asoka. He renounced violence in favour of peace and carved out 13 edicts in the rocks with sculpt elephant at the top (the universal symbol of Buddhism).

e) **Others:** Padmapur, Balasore district, Banpur, kuruma, biswanath hill, jaugada, sambalpur district and Naraj are some of the other Buddhist places in Orissa.

Sikkim: It is said that that Guru Padmasambhava blessed Sikkim in the 8th century, introduced Buddhism and foretold the era of monarchy in Sikkim that would arrive centuries later. In the 17th century three learned lamas met at Yuksom and decided to establish a Buddhist monarchy in the state. In 1642, Phuntsog Namgyal was crowned the first monarch of Sikkim by the three lamas giving him the title of Chogyal [Dharma Raja]. Today, Sikkim has nearly 200 monasteries, sacred lakes and stupas, images and symbols of Buddhism to offer to the tourists. A glimpse of the great heritage of Sikkim is given below:

a) **Samdruptse:** It has the tallest statue of Guru padmasambhava in the world whose height is 138 ft and is a major tourist attraction.

b) **Rumtek Dharma Chakra Centre:** Largest monastery of Sikkim and follows kagyü order of Tibetan Buddhism.

c) **Do Drul Chorten:** It is a stupa located in the campus of the Rumtek monastery comprising of a complete 'mandala' set of Dorjee Phurba(Bajra Kilaya), a set of holy books or the Kan-Gyur relics, mantras or Zung and other sacred items. The Chorten is also surrounded by 10 Mani-Lhakor or prayer wheels and two huge statues of the Guru Padmasambhava.

d) **Deer Park:** It commemorates the first sermon of the Lord Gautam Buddha at the Deer Park in Sarnath. It consists of a huge statue of the Lord Buddha with a butter lamp burning in front of it.

e) **Namgyal Research Institute of Tibetology:** It is a famous centre of learning for the Buddhists; presenting the largest collection of the books and manuscripts of the Mahayana Buddhism in the world. The institute presents around 30 thousand volumes and translations of the original teachings of the Lord Buddha along with that of the other Buddhist scholars of the world. Located in Gangtok, the place is also a home to a museum, and numerous crafted thankas.

f) **Major Monasteries of Sikkim:** Some of the major monasteries of Sikkim include:

i. **Pemayangste:** It means the perfect sublime lotus, it was built in 1705. The annual chaam or religious masked dance in Pemayangste is held on the 28th and 29th day of the 12th month of the Tibetan calendar, corresponding approximately to the month of February.

ii. **Tashiding:** It was built in 1716, located on a hill top between the rivers Ratong and Rangeet it is surrounded by deep valleys. Tashiding also has the famous chorten Thongwa Rangdol built by Lhatsun Chenpo and is considered the most holy in Sikkim. The monastery is

also the venue for the annual Bumchu festival which divines the fortune of the coming year for Sikkim.

iii. Enchey: The monastery was built in 1909 and follows the Nyingma pa order. The annual cham is performed on the 18th and 19th days of the twelfth month of the Tibetan calendar which normally corresponds to the month of January.

iv. Phensang: It was built in 1721. In 1947 it was completely destroyed by a devastating fire but rebuilt again the following year. The monastery is situated about 25 km from Gangtok, close to the North Sikkim highway. The annual cham is held on the 28th and the 29th day of the tenth month of the Tibetan calendar.

v. Phodang: It was built in the 18th century and is located around 28 kms from Gangtok towards North Sikkim. It belongs to the Kargyupa sect.

vi. Tolung: It is located in the Dzongu area of North Sikkim and is the most secluded of all the monasteries in Sikkim. It is reached after a strenuous trek through steep hillside and dense forests. It possesses a fine collection of religious art, including some of the oldest thankas in Sikkim. All the relics are kept sealed in 13 boxes and taken out every three years for public display, an occasion which sees large numbers of devotees making their way here.

Present Scenario of Buddhist Tourism in India

- ❖ 37 crores rupees were sanctioned for the development of Buddhist centers in the 11th five-year plan.
- ❖ Out of total 28 world Heritage sites, 4 sites are associated with Buddhism which are Ajanta caves, Buddhist monuments at Sanchi, Ellora caves, Mahabodhi temple complex at Bodh-Gaya
- ❖ Domestic Tourist data comparison

	2008	2009	2010
Sanchi	139603	167460	196211
Amarvati	17952	15197	18755
Guntupali	18184	20228	21901
Junagadh	56670	50467	51585

Source: India Tourism Statistics 2010 by Ministry of tourism, GOI

❖ International Tourist data comparison

	2008	2009	2010
Sanchi	12333	5409	6775
Amarvati	458	300	360
Guntupali	68	27	19
Junagadh	629	658	817

Source: India Tourism Statistics 2010 by Ministry of tourism, GOI

❖ Buddhist Circuit in Uttar Pradesh and Bihar (Mahaparinirvana Express). It has 18 berths of first AC, 92 of two-tier AC and 256 berths of three-tier AC. It is a 7 days tour and the train departs from Delhi usually once or twice in a month with a route as shown below:

Delhi - Gaya - Rajgir - Nalanda - Gaya - Varanasi - Sarnath - Varanasi - Gorakhpur - Khusinagar - Lumbini - Gorakhpur - Gonda - Sravasti - Gonda - Agra - FatehpurSikri - Agra – Delhi.

Scope of Future Prospects of Buddhist Tourism in India

Various types of Tourism that can be associated with Buddhism are:

- Adventure
- Archaeological
- Cultural
- Eco
- Education
- Health
- Heritage
- Leisure
- Religious / Pilgrimage
- Spiritual
- Sustainable

Conclusion

The above mentioned destinations are just an introduction to the huge heritage that is needed to be showcased in the tourist map of India. Apart from the destinations, there are several other things to offer to the tourists such as Buddhist Pilgrimage, temples, monuments, caves, circuits, festivals etc. Apart from the religion & Pilgrimage, these places are source of many other forms of tourism as well such as adventure, recreation, sightseeing, nature- based tourism etc. If properly planned and focussed, Buddhist Tourism in India can become the new recluse for both the Domestic and International tourists and a major part of the Incredible India.

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