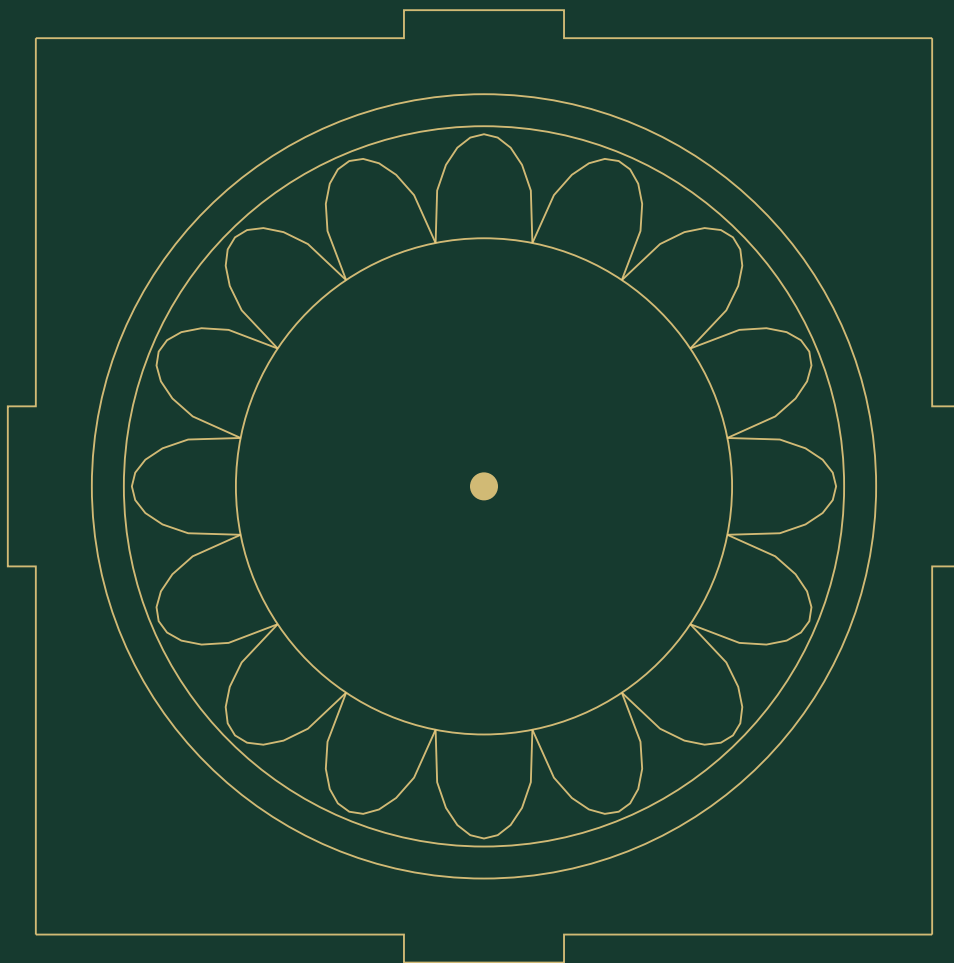


INDIA

Varanasi and Bodh Gaya: The Yogi's Guide

Kashi, the ghats, the aarti, Kashi Vishwanath, Sarnath, Bodh Gaya and Munger, with seasons, e-Visa, etiquette and itineraries, checked and dated



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teacher or medical advice. Questions: administration@lacangel.fr

Before you begin

Varanasi is a city where people come to live, to study and to die. Pilgrims bathe at dawn on its stone steps, priests raise lamps to the river at dusk, students of Sanskrit and music walk its lanes, and families carry their dead down to the fires of the cremation ghats. A few kilometres north, in the deer park of Sarnath, the Buddha is said to have taught for the first time. A day's journey east, in Bihar, stands the temple of Bodh Gaya, where he is said to have awakened; further down the Ganga lies Munger, home of the Bihar School of Yoga.

This guide is for the practitioner who wants to walk through these places with open eyes: someone who sits at dawn, wants to understand names and rites, and will not treat a funeral as a show. You will find no ranking, no review and no recommended provider in these pages, and that is deliberate. This book gives you context, practical facts and the questions that let you choose for yourself.

It rests on three promises.

First, practical facts are checked and dated. Every practical fact in this guide was checked online on **16 October 2026** against the most official source we could find, listed in the last chapter. When we found only unofficial or contradictory information, we say so and tell you where to confirm. What we could not verify, we left out.

Second, no invented experiences. No testimonials, no "when I sat on the ghats" anecdotes, no reviews of teachers, guesthouses or boatmen. A legend is called a legend, and the text it comes from is named.

Third, the sacred is treated as sacred. Kashi is one of the holiest cities of Hinduism, Sarnath and Bodh Gaya among the holiest places of Buddhism, and the cremation grounds are places of mourning. This guide explains customs so that you can take part, or stand back, without causing pain, and it writes Sanskrit and Hindi words in Devanagari with a scholarly transliteration (IAST).

This guide informs; it does not replace official advice.

Before you travel, read your government's travel advice for India, check the official Indian e-Visa website yourself and see a travel health professional. In an emergency in India, dial **112**, the national emergency number (UK FCDO, accessed 16 October 2026).

How to read Sanskrit and Hindi words

Most words appear three ways: the spelling on signs (Kashi), Devanagari (काशी) and IAST (Kāśī).

IAST	Sounds roughly like	Example
ā, ī, ū	long a, ee, oo	Kāśī
ṛ	a short "ri"	Ṛṣi
ś, ṣ	"sh" (two kinds)	Śiva, Viṣṇu

IAST	Sounds roughly like	Example
c	"ch" as in church	cakra
ṭ, ḍ, ṇ	tongue curled back	ghāṭ, Maṇikarṇikā
ṅ	"ng"	Gaṅgā
ṁ	nasal hum	oṁ

In Hindi a final short "a" is usually silent: Rāma is said "Raam".

If you are still choosing dates, start with Chapters 2 and 8. If your ticket is booked, read Chapters 11 to 13. Before your first walk along the river, read Chapters 3 and 14: they matter more than any map.

Chapter 1. Kāśī, the city of Śiva: names, legends and texts

Three names

- **Kashi** (काशी, Kāśī), the oldest and most sacred name. The Ministry of Tourism derives it from the Sanskrit root kās, "to shine", and calls Varanasi the **City of Light**: according to legend, the first ray of light touched the earth here, and the city is believed to have been founded by Śiva himself (Incredible India).
- **Varanasi** (वाराणसी, Vārāṇasī), the official name, traditionally explained by the two rivers that frame the old city: the **Varuṇā** to the north and the **Asi** (Assi) to the south (Wikipedia, Varanasi; Ganga Seva Nidhi).
- **Banaras** (बनारस), or Benares, the popular historical name of its silk, its music and its lanes.

Hindu texts add epithets: Avimukta (अविमुक्त), "never forsaken" by Śiva; Ānandakānana (आनन्दकानन), "the forest of bliss"; and Mahāśmaśāna (महाश्मशान), "the great cremation ground" (Wikipedia, Varanasi). The last is not morbid: it says that here the cycle of death and rebirth can end.

The Kāśī Khaṇḍa

The main scriptural source on the city is the **Kāśī Khaṇḍa** (काशीखण्ड), a section of the **Skanda Purāṇa** (स्कन्दपुराण) in 100 chapters, describing the sacred geography of Varanasi: shrines, bathing places, legends, the merit of living and dying here. Scholars date its present form to around the mid-thirteenth century (Wikipedia, Skanda Purana, citing J. Parry, Death in Banaras). As summarised in the encyclopedic entry on Kashi Vishwanath, it counts 1,099 temples in the city, 513 of them to Śiva. Knowing this changes how you see the ghats: almost every step and tank has a written story.

Legends you will hear

These are legends, transmitted in scripture and living tradition.

- **Liberation in Kashi.** The district administration states it plainly: Hindus believe that one who dies in Varanasi attains salvation and freedom from the cycle of birth and rebirth (District Varanasi). The same page recalls that the Ganga is said to have its origin in Śiva's tresses.
- **Maṇikarnikā, "jewel of the ear".** According to the Kāśī Khaṇḍa, as summarised in the encyclopedic entry, Viṣṇu dug a well with his discus and performed austerities beside it; when Śiva and Pārvatī came to see it, Śiva's jewelled earring fell into the water. Another version says it was Pārvatī's. The tank is still at the ghat of that name (Wikipedia, Manikarnika Ghat).
- **Ten horse sacrifices.** Daśāśvamedha (दशाश्वमेध) means "ten horse sacrifices": in Puranic tradition, Brahmā performed ten here on behalf of King Divodāsa (Wikipedia, Dashashwamedh Ghat).

- **The truthful king.** Harishchandra Ghat recalls Hariścandra (हरिश्चन्द्र), the legendary king of the Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa who, to keep his word, lost his kingdom, came to Kashi and worked at a cremation ground (Wikipedia, Harishchandra).

Many traditions

Kashi is not only Hindu. The district notes that it is a Jain pilgrimage place, as the birthplace of Pārśvanātha, the twenty-third Tīrthaṅkara, and that Sarnath lies only 10 km away. Kabir and Ravidas were born here (Chapter 7). The city has also known destruction: the encyclopedic entries record that Aurangzeb ordered the demolition of the Vishwanath temple in 1669 and that the present temple was built nearby in 1780 (Chapter 5).

The Kashi of the yogi

No single yoga institution defines Varanasi. What Kashi offers a practitioner is the setting in which yoga grew up: worship on the river, Sanskrit study, devotional song, renunciants, and the open presence of death that the Kaṭha Upaniṣad and the Bhagavad Gītā turn into teaching. Two facts link it to modern yoga. **T. Krishnamacharya** studied in Banaras from 1906 and again from 1914, and it was in Varanasi, in 1926, that the Maharaja of Mysore heard of his learning (Wikipedia, Tirumalai Krishnamacharya). And every morning at **Assi Ghat**, **Subah-e-Banaras** gathers "yoga, music and devotion" at sunrise (Incredible India).

End of the sample

Thank you for reading this far. We hope these first pages already help your practice, and that they show how the rest of the book is built: clear steps, texts quoted with their source, nothing invented.

The full book has 43 pages.

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