

RAMAGRAMA

Significance of Ramagrama

Enlisted as a UNESCO Tentative List of World Heritage Property in 1996, the site of Ramagrama is of immense archaeological and pilgrimage significance. This stupa is believed to be the only structure left untouched by the great Emperor Asoka in the 3rd century BCE, and thus it still contains the bodily relics of Lord Sakyamuni Buddha.

Among the eight stupas housing the revered remains of the Buddha, Ramagrama's stupa is the sole one that has retained its original form. This distinction makes it one of the holiest pilgrimage destinations for Buddhists, who often aspire to visit this sacred site at least once in their lifetimes.

Following the Mahaparinirvana, the mortal remains of Lord Sakyamuni Buddha were cremated by the Mallas of Kushinagar, and the ashes were divided among eight claimants, including the Koliyas of Ramagrama. The Koliya King, with profound devotion and reverence, enshrined these sacred relics and erected the stupa.

According to the accounts of the renowned Chinese traveler Hiuen Tsang, miraculous occurrences were witnessed at this hallowed site. Onlookers have occasionally observed divine light flashing around the stupa, and the sick have been cured after offering prayers here. Even the mighty Emperor Asoka himself is said to have witnessed a Nag (snake god) and elephants worshipping this Astudhatu (relic) stupa.

In 249 BCE, the Emperor Asoka visited Ramagrama, intending to open the stupa and redistribute the sacred relics among 84,000 smaller stupas throughout his vast empire. However, according to legend, he was astonished to behold a dragon king guarding the shrine, as well as a herd of wild elephants worshipping it by offering flowers and sprinkling water.

Another legend recounts that the local people, possibly the Naga tribe, who were deeply devoted to this shrine, pleaded with the Emperor to leave it intact. Respecting the sentiments of the local populace, Asoka chose not to open the stupa, but instead worshipped and paid homage to Lord Sakyamuni Buddha's shrine before returning home, leaving it untouched.

Thus, Ramagrama's stupa remains the sole structure in the world that still contains the mortal remains of the Enlightened One, untouched by the grand plans of the great Emperor Asoka.

Important Sites in and around Ramagrama

Ramagrama Stupa

Located about 50km east of Lumbini and 29km east of Bhairahawa, the Ramagrama Stupa is one of the eight original relic stupas containing the corporeal remains of Lord Sakyamuni Buddha. The 7m high brick mound was first discovered in 1899 and later confirmed to be a stupa through excavations by the Department of Archaeology (DoA) of Nepal in 1997.

The stupa has undergone four distinct phases of construction, dating back to the Sakya era and later periods including the Mauryan, Sunga, Kushan and Gupta dynasties. Artifacts like grey ware, Painted Grey Ware, and Northern Black Polished ware have been uncovered at the site. The core of the stupa was left untouched out of respect for its sanctity.

Panditpur

Recent excavations carried out by the Department of Archaeology (DoA) in the Panditpur area of Nawalparasi district, located 13.5km west from Ramagrama and 11.69km south from Bhawanipur, have identified this as another important archaeological site. Considering the vast expanse covered by the ruins. Some archaeologists have claimed that Panditpur may have been the palace site of the ancient Koliya Kingdom.

Triveni Dham

Situated in the southern part of Nawalparasi district, on the western border of Chitwan National Park, Triveni Dham is the confluence of three rivers - Sona, Tamasa and Sapta Gandaki. Legends link this site to the Balmiki Ashram, where Sita, the consort of Lord Rama, lived with her two sons Lava and Kush during her exile.

Located in a lush, natural setting amidst hills and rivers, Triveni Dham is a sacred site for the Hindus. In addition to its religious significance, this place has potential to be developed as a recreational destination, offering opportunities for hiking and water-based activities.

Recommended Tour Itineraries and Activities

- Engage in a profound spiritual experience at the Ramagrama Stupa, the only stupa in the world that still contains the sacred relics of Lord Sakyamuni Buddha.
- Visit the nearby Japanese temple and marvel at the serene, standing image of the Buddha.
- Partake in a spiritual and religious cleansing at the holy Jharahi River.
- Participate in meditative sessions imbued with profound spiritual vibes at the Ramagrama Stupa.
- Explore other religious, cultural and natural sites in the area, such as Triveni Dham, Madarbaba Ashram, Daunne Hill, and the Gandak Irrigation Canal.
- Immerse yourself in the vibrant local culture by visiting nearby Tharu and mixed cultural villages.

Accessing Ramagrama:

- Ramagrama is connected to the nearby towns of Bhairahawa (28.5km), Sunwal (13.5km), Bhumahi (11km), and Triveni (23km) via road networks.
- Public bus services are available on routes connecting Bhairahawa to Parasi Bazaar, Sunwal to Parasi Bazaar, and Bhumahi to Parasi Bazaar.
- Visitors can hire e-rickshaws in Parasi Bazaar, Bhumahi, or Sunwal to explore the major sites in Ramagrama.
- Taxis and private cars can also be hired from the larger hubs of Bhairahawa or Butwal to reach Ramagrama.