

## **Varanasi:**

Varanasi, also known as Kashi or Banaras, is a city that stands as a testament to India's rich cultural and spiritual heritage. Nestled on the banks of the sacred River Ganges in the northern state of Uttar Pradesh, Varanasi is one of the oldest continuously inhabited cities in the world and also the cultural capital of India with the rich cultural heritage and history dating back thousands of years.

### **Spiritual Hub:**

Varanasi is renowned as a spiritual and religious center for Hindus. The city is home to numerous ghats, which steps are leading down to the Ganges. The Ghats (steps leading to and from the river) used to be crowded with priests, wrestlers, astrologers, devotees, bathers, morning walkers and saffron clad mendicants or sadhus, where they gather for ritual baths and ceremonies. The ringing of temple bells and the heady, heavy smell of incense permeate everywhere. In Varanasi, even a short walk or a simple boat-ride is an unforgettable adventure.

The Ganga Aarti, a mesmerizing evening prayer ritual held at the Dashashwamedh Ghat, is a spectacle that attracts visitors from all over the world. The spiritual ambiance, the sound of bells and chanting, and the flickering lamps create an atmosphere that is both mystical and enchanting.

### **Cultural Tapestry:**



Varanasi is a city with a rich cultural and historical heritage, and it is known by various names that highlight different aspects of its significance. Here are some different names associated with Varanasi:

1. **Varanasi:** The most commonly used and official name of the city.
2. **Kashi:** A name with deep spiritual and religious significance often used to refer to Varanasi. Kashi is believed to be the city of Lord Shiva.
3. **Banaras:** An alternative name often used interchangeably with Varanasi.
4. **Avimukta:** This name means "never forsaken" or "never abandoned," emphasizing the city's continuous habitation.
5. **Anandavana:** Meaning the "forest of bliss," highlighting the serene and spiritual atmosphere of the city.
6. **Rudravasa:** Signifying the abode of Lord Rudra (Shiva), emphasizing Varanasi's association with the deity.
7. **Mahamasana:** Translating to the "great cremation ground," reflecting the spiritual importance of Varanasi as a place for Hindus to attain salvation.
8. **Benaras:** An anglicized version of the name Varanasi, commonly used in historical and colonial contexts.
9. **Kashi Vishwanath Nagar:** Referring to the city as the "Abode of Lord Kashi Vishwanath," highlighting the significance of the Kashi Vishwanath Temple.
10. **Shiv ki Nagri:** Meaning the "City of Shiva," emphasizing the city's association with Lord Shiva.

These names collectively capture the diverse cultural, spiritual, and historical dimensions of Varanasi, showcasing its multifaceted identity and significance.

Varanasi, one of the oldest continuously inhabited cities in the world, has a rich and diverse history that spans several millennia. The city's history is deeply intertwined with Hinduism, Buddhism, and Jainism, making it a significant cultural and spiritual center. Here is an overview of the history of Varanasi:



### **Varanasi in the time line of History:**

#### **1. Ancient Roots:**

- Varanasi's history dates back over 3,000 years, making it one of the oldest cities in the world.
- According to Hindu mythology, the city was founded by Lord Shiva and is considered the abode of the deity.

#### **2. Buddhist Connection:**

- During the 6th century BCE, Varanasi became an important center for Buddhism. It is said that Lord Buddha delivered his first sermon at Sarnath, located near Varanasi.
- Sarnath, just a few kilometers from Varanasi, became a significant Buddhist pilgrimage site with stupas, monasteries, and the famous Ashoka Pillar.

#### **3. Maurya and Gupta Periods:**

- Varanasi flourished under the Mauryan and Gupta empires (4th to 6th centuries CE).
- During the Gupta period, the city became a center for learning, philosophy, and the arts.

#### **4. Islamic Rule:**

- With the arrival of Islamic rulers in the Indian subcontinent, Varanasi witnessed a period of change.
- The city faced invasions and destruction during the medieval period, but it continued to be a center of Hindu culture and spirituality.

#### **5. Mughal Era:**



- The Mughal emperors, especially Akbar, showed tolerance towards Hindu traditions and allowed the city to thrive culturally.
  - The construction of the Vishwanath Temple during Akbar's rule is a testament to this period.
6. **Maratha Influence:**
- The Marathas also played a role in the history of Varanasi, contributing to the city's cultural and religious developments.
7. **Colonial Period:**
- Varanasi came under British control during the 18th century, and it became an important administrative and commercial center under British rule.
  - The city played a significant role in the Indian independence movement.
8. **Post-Independence:**
- After India gained independence in 1947, Varanasi continued to be a center of culture, spirituality, and education.
  - The city has witnessed modernization and development while preserving its ancient heritage.
9. **Religious Significance:**
- Varanasi is revered by Hindus as a sacred city where the Ganges River is believed to purify the soul.
  - The Kashi Vishwanath Temple, dedicated to Lord Shiva, is a major pilgrimage site.

Varanasi's history is a fascinating tapestry of religious, cultural, and historical influences, and its significance continues to resonate in the 21st century. The city remains a timeless symbol of India's rich heritage.



### Places to Visit in Varanasi:

### Temples of Varanasi (Kashi):

- Shree Kashi Vishwanath (Golden) Temple
- Shree Annapurna Temple
- Shree Kashi Vishalakshi Shaktipeeth Temple
- Shree Kal Bhairav (Kashi ke - Kotwal / Bhairav) Temple
- Dashashwamedh Ghat, Manikarnika, Harishchandra Ghat & Kedar Ghat
- Birla (New Kashi Vishwanath) Temple
- Bharat Kala Bhawan Museum (subject to Availably)
- Tridev Temple
- Manas Temple
- Durga Temple
- Sankat Mochan Temple
- Bharat Mata Temple

### **Ghats of Varanasi (Kashi)**

- Manikarnika Ghar
- Harishchandra Ghat
- Lalita Ghat
- Kedar Ghat

### **Forts, Museums & Heritage of Varanasi (Kashi)**

- Ramnagar Fort
- Jantar Mantar
- Alamgir Mosque
- Sarnath
- Chunar Fort
- Bharat Kala Bhavan

### **Regular Events to Participate: Varanasi**



- Witness Evening Ganga Aarti
- Subah E Banaras

#### **Activities / Things to do: Varanasi**

- Boat Ride
- Offer Morning Ganga Prayer
- Offer Pinda Dan / Ancestral Puja
- Enjoy Street Food & Cuisine
  - Banarasi Paan
  - Choori Matar
  - Malaiyyo
  - Tamatar Chaat
  - Baati Chokha
  - Thandai & Lassi
  - Kachori Sabzi & Jalebi





### **Special Events to Participate: Varanasi**

- Yatras / Parikramas
  - Panchkoshi Parikrama
- Fairs & Festivals
  - Ramlila at Ramnagar
  - Nakkatiya & Bharat Milap at Chetganj
  - Maha Shivratri & Shiv Barat
  - Nag Nathaiya at Tulsi Ghat
  - Holi
  - Durga Puja
  - Buddha Purnima
  - Dev Deepawali
  - Lota-Bhanta mela

### **Personality Associated with Varanasi**

- Saints of Varanasi



- Tulasi Das
  - Sant Ravidas
  - Kabir Das
- Freedom Fighters
  - Pt. Madan Mohan Malaviya
- Musicians
  - Pt. Ravi Shankar
  - Pandit Chhannulal Mishra
  - Rajan Sajan Mishra
  - Girija Devi
  - Pandit Krishna Maharaj
  - Ustad Bismillah Khan

## **Shopping & Handicrafts**

- Silks
- Sarees

