

Green Pilgrimage for a Clean India



C.P.R. Environmental Education Centre
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GREEN PILGRIMAGE FOR A CLEAN INDIA



The *Prithivi sukta* (Book 12) of the *Atharva Veda* devotes 63 stanzas in praise of the earth and nature, human dependence on the earth and the respect that should be given to her.

- ❖ Earth is the abode of a family of all beings – *vasudaiva kutumbakam*: “O Mother Earth. Sacred are thy hills, snowy mountains and deep forests. Be kind to us and bestow upon us happiness. May you be fertile, arable and nourisher of all. May you continue supporting all people and nations. May you protect us from your anger (natural disasters). And may no one exploit and subjugate your children” (12.1.11).
- ❖ “Environmental sustenance, agriculture, biodiversity, water, air and soil are important to all beings. The earth’s attributes are for everybody and no single group or nation has special authority over it. Therefore people on this planet should strive for the welfare of all and hatred towards none” (12.1.18).

Dharma is righteousness, incorporating duty, cosmic law and justice. It is sanatana, or eternal, and supports the whole universe. “Dharma exists for the general welfare of all living beings; hence, that by which the welfare of all living creatures is sustained, that for sure is Dharma” (*Mahabharata, Shanti parva*, 109.10). Duty towards humanity and god’s creation is an integral part of dharmic ecology in Hinduism. Dharma is a set of duties that holds the social and moral fabric together by maintaining order in society and creating an atmosphere of harmony and understanding in our relationships with all of god’s creation. Right action, or dharmic action, has beneficial results, while adharmic action results in negativity. Therefore one should ensure that one’s karma or action is good (*Mahabharata, Shanti parva*, 232.16).

Every person must act for the general welfare of the earth, all humanity and all aspects of the earth. Prakriti, cosmic matter, is central to all creation. The five elements that constitute prakriti are earth, air, fire, water and space (*prithivi, vayu, agni, apa and akasha*). The world, and everything in it, is made up of these five elements, and their proper balance and harmony are essential for the well-being of man and matter. Man is not superior to nature, nor does he have dominion over other creation.

Pollution or *pradushana* of any sort is abhorred: it is a punishable offence “Punishment...should be awarded to those who throw dust and muddy water on the roads...A person who throws inside the city the carcass of animals...must be punished” (Kautilya, *Arthashastra*, 2.145).

The ill effects of environmental pollution (vikriti) was identified several millennia ago “From pollution two types of diseases occur in human beings. The first is related to the body and the other to the mind, and both are inter-related...Cool, warm and air-these are three virtues of the body. When they are balanced in the body it is free from disease”. (*Mahabharata, Rajadharmanushasana parva*, 16.811). The great medical scientist Charaka was prescient when he said, “Due to pollution of weather, several types of diseases will come up and they will ruin the country. Therefore, collect the medicinal plants before the beginning of terrible diseases and change in the nature of the earth” (*Charaka Samhita, Vimanasthanam*, 3.2).

Water is sacred because all life depends on it: it is a medium of purification and a source of energy. “The waters in the sky (rain), the water of rivers, and water in the well whose source is the ocean, may all these sacred waters protect me” (*Rig Veda*, 7.49.2). The rivers are regarded as Goddesses, and a dip in the sacred waters destroys one’s sins. The river waters also contain medicinal properties that cure several ailments. River banks and mountains were once the abode of ancient rishis. The rivers, especially, are taboo for any degrading or despoiling activities (*Charaka Samhita, Sutrasthanam*, 27. 213-215; *Manusmriti*, 4.56).

Green pilgrimage

Usually holy pilgrimage sites are situated in places which are beautiful because of their natural settings, such as mountains, rivers and their sources, lakes or the sea; or they are secluded places where it is possible to practice penance and concentrate the mind in meditative contemplation. A mountain standing above the lonely landscape, a remote temple and the smell of incense and blue waters accentuate the feeling of ancient holiness. The unpolluted air, pesticide-free food and the rarefied air instill love, compassion and the ancient wisdom of the sages in the heart of the pilgrim. The swirling waters, the wind whistling through the trees and the tinkle of temple bells are the closest to nirvana on earth.

Yatra means a pilgrimage to holy places like mountains, the confluence of sacred rivers and seas, places associated with the Hindu epics *Ramayana and Mahabharata*, and other sacred pilgrimage sites. Tirtha yatra refers to a pilgrimage to a sacred place of pilgrimage near a river, lake or sea, since sacred waters are the most precious of all creation. Tirtha means “a ford or a body of water that may be easily crossed”, both literally and figuratively. Usually holy shrines are situated on mountains, near rivers, lakes or seas or near the sources of rivers or at secluded places where it is possible to practice meditation and contemplation. The various bathing ghats on the Rivers Ganga, Yamuna, Narmada, Kaveri and other rivers are important tirthas. All rivers are regarded as sacred, as are unusual phenomena, like the Amarnath Cave Temple in the Jammu and Kashmir Himalayas which houses an Ice Shiva Lingam form, which waxes and wanes with the moon.

A pilgrimage to holy places is considered to be a ritual to cleanse one’s inner self, wash out evil tendencies and open up the path of righteous living. “Performance of rituals is an elaborate affair involving heavy expenditure which only the rich can afford... Tirtha yatra can be accomplished by all, even the poor, and therefore excels in merit even the best of rituals” (*Mahabharata, Vanaparva*, 82. 13-17).

Water sources – whether a river or sea – are the most sacred because of their ability to clean the pilgrim physically, and because the flowing waters clean themselves. However, external cleanliness alone is ineffective without inner purity. “An evil mind is not purified even though one washes himself a hundred times in a tîrtha...One must therefore approach tîrthas only with proper faith and devotion”. “Certain places on earth are more sacred on earth – some on account of their situation, others because of their sparkling waters, and others because of the association or habitation of saintly people” (*Mahabharata, Anushasana parva*, 108. 16-18).

Kshetra is a holy precinct, where there may be a temple or where a holy person lived or a sacred event took place. Almost every temple-city is a kshetra. Kshetras like Varanasi, Kanchipuram and Haridwar are the longest continuing sacred sites in the history of the human race.

A yatra is desirable, but not obligatory. One can go on a yâtrâ for a variety of reasons - festivals, to perform rituals for one’s ancestors, or to obtain good karma. To Hindus, the journey itself is as important as the destination, and the hardships of travel serve as an act of devotion in themselves. Visiting a sacred place is believed by the pilgrim to purify the self and bring one closer to the divine.

Rules for a pilgrimage

Before starting, the pilgrim must take certain vows that are observed strictly till he returns. The success of a tirtha yatra depends on the pilgrims faith and devotion. The shastras have made suggestions:

- ❖ For a start, he must dress modestly, in clothes fit for a pilgrim, and follow certain disciplinary rules.
- ❖ He must control the hands, feet and mind, meaning one should not do or think of anything that is against Dharma or righteousness.
- ❖ His good behaviour must be above reproach.
- ❖ He must observe the vow of fasting and may eat only once a day.
- ❖ A pilgrim is supposed to do a yâtrâ with bare feet, if possible.
- ❖ A pilgrim should travel without vehicles. When one undertakes a journey to a tirtha, it is specifically recommended that one should, as far as possible, go walking. However, one who is physically unwell and undertakes a journey to a tirtha even by employing a conveyance does not lose any merit.
- ❖ He who gives a gift in a tîrtha or a kshetra, say the scriptures, shakes off his poverty, and he who accepts a gift in such places, or brings back something from there, purchases poverty for himself.
- ❖ It is also important that one leaves a sacred place as it was when one arrived there. This means no pollution, no garbage, no disturbing the environment.

The usual rule is to go to a tîrtha, fast there for 3 days and make charitable gifts to the poor. A pilgrim is expected to take his provisions (like rice and lentils) and a few utensils. He must cook his own food, but may not cut wood for that purpose. He is expected to use fallen twigs to make a fire. He may eat only once a day. No hunting or killing animals for food (or any other reason) is permitted. Nor is meat eating permitted on a pilgrimage. All the good karma is wiped out immediately. No weddings or battles may be conducted at tirthas.

REMEMBER - CLEANLINESS IS NEXT TO GODLINESS

2

PILGRIMS ON PLANET EARTH



Legends say that kings along with their queens would set out on a pilgrimage to invoke the blessings of God. They would finally enter the forest after their son or successor was crowned and lead an ascetic life till their death.

Our life is a sacred journey and we are all pilgrims on Planet Earth.

Scriptures insist that being a pilgrim does not mean wandering aimlessly, or earning karmic merit. It guides us to follow Dharma to lead a life of contentment, discipline and righteousness, without straining the Earth's resources. The doctrine of Karma cautions us that every step we take today will yield a corresponding result in the future.

Our ancient sages personified the Earth as Mother Earth and worshipped her as a Goddess. We worship trees as Vriksha Devata, forests as Vana Devata, mountains as Giri Devata, rivers as Goddesses, cattle as Gau mata ...

Kautilya's Arthashastra prescribes various punishments for destroying trees and plants. The Vedas state, "*vriksho rakshati rakshitah*", meaning "Protect trees, trees will protect you".

Hindu Dharma teaches us to love the Earth and treat her with love and respect. The sanctity of our relationship with Mother Earth is evident in the morning prayer recited before setting our right foot on the floor. We ask Devi to forgive us for trampling on her body: "Salutations to Lord Vishnu's divine wife, ocean-clad, adorned with mountains; pardon me, Mother, for setting my foot on you."



3

WHAT IS A PILGRIMAGE ?



- ❖ A pilgrimage, a yatra, is a divine experience. It is an internal journey as well as an outer journey. A true pilgrimage takes us not only to a source of the Divine in the external world but should also take us to the Divinity within ourselves.
- ❖ A pilgrimage involves giving up certain comforts and the ego. Thus pilgrimage centres are situated on hills or in remote places, involving several days of travel, physical discomfort and even travel by foot - any one or more of these.
- ❖ We are able to see the Divine in the temple, but we are not able to see the Divine in people, places, animals and ecosystems. However, rather than treating our pilgrimage areas as temples, we are actually causing harm to our towns, cities, villages and natural places as we venture on a pilgrimage.
- ❖ Our cities and towns are being destroyed through the filth and waste generated as millions of pilgrims descend on them; our natural forests are also being affected due to our religious observance.
- ❖ It is ironic and tragic that we pray to Mother Ganga and throw plastic bags and food waste into the river, polluting the water. Each step on the path of pilgrimage should be regarded as holy, not just the destination.
- ❖ Several natural parks, reserve forests and protected tiger reserves are also destroyed through religious pilgrimage. When millions of people visit holy shrines inside forest areas, animals and their natural habitat are greatly disrupted, giving way to man-animal conflict. The true spirit of pilgrimage is to honour God in all His forms.
- ❖ Every day, hundreds of thousands of people around the world are on pilgrimage irrespective of religion, caste or creed. People have deep faith and go on pilgrimage – for a few hours, days, weeks or months.

4

FAMOUS PILGRIMAGE SITES

HINDU YATRAS

1. Char Dham (four abodes/seats) Yatra

The Char Dham covers four pilgrimage places – north, south, east and west - in India and was established by Adi Shankara.

- ❖ Badrinath
- ❖ Rameshwaram
- ❖ Puri
- ❖ Dwarka

The Char Dham is often considered the most revered sites to be visited by Hindus in their lifetime. It also established the four corners of the country.



Badrinath is a holy town in the Garhwal Himalayas, on the banks of River Alakananda in the state of Uttarakhand. Badri refers to a berry that grew abundantly in the area (also a name for the Indian jujube tree), and Badrinath is “Lord of the badari tree”. It is sacred to Vishnu: “There in Badrikashrama the Supreme Being, in his incarnation as the sages Nara and Narayana, had been undergoing great penance since time immemorial for the welfare of all living beings” (*Bhagavata Purana* 3.4.22). Badrinath was established as a major pilgrimage site by Adi Shankara. In the past, pilgrims used to walk hundreds of miles to visit Badrinath temple. In recent years its popularity has increased significantly, with an estimated 600,000 pilgrims visiting the dham. Badrinath is a one day’s journey from the main embarkation point. The temple and its surrounding village are accessible by road. The pilgrimage period is between June and September.

Rameshwaram is a sacred site for all Indians. It is said that Lord Rama worshipped Lord Shiva here after his victory over evil. This holy island is a place of pilgrimage and a symbol of cultural unity of our country. It is one of the 12 jyotirlinga sites. Several sacred water bodies are located around the temple. The pilgrimage at Rameshwaram begins with a holy dip at the Agni Teertham followed by a bath at 22 other teerthams (wells) situated within the temple and concludes at Kodi teertham at Danushkodi.





Puri is the location of the temple of Lord Jagannath, dedicated to a form of Vishnu, and is located on the eastern coast at Puri, Odisha. The name Jagannath comes from the word Jagat nath, which means ‘Lord of the Universe’. The wooden forms of Jagannatha, Balabhadra and Subhadra – or Krishna, his brother Balaram and his sister Subhadra - are worshiped in this temple. Every twelve years these wooden figures are ceremoniously replaced by using sacred neem trees that have to be carved as an exact replica. The temple is an important pilgrimage destination, particularly for worshippers of Krishna and Vishnu, and part of the Char dham pilgrimages that a

Hindu is expected to make in one’s lifetime. Nearly all the great Hindu acharyas have visited this kshetra, and Adi Shankara established his matha here.

Dwarka is located in the western Indian state of Gujarat. The city derives its name from the word “dvar” meaning door or gate in Sanskrit. It is located where the Gomti River merges into the Gulf of Kutch. The legendry city of Dwarka is the ancient kingdom and home of Lord Krishna and was the first capital of Gujarat. It is one of the seven most ancient religious cities in India and the original Dwarkadish Temple was built around 200 BCE. However, due to damage and destruction by the sea, Dwaraka was submerged six times and modern Dwarka is the seventh city to be built in the area.



2. Chota Char Dham

This is a shorter circuit restricted to Uttarakhand state.

❖ Yamunotri ❖ Gangotri ❖ Badrinath ❖ Kedarnath

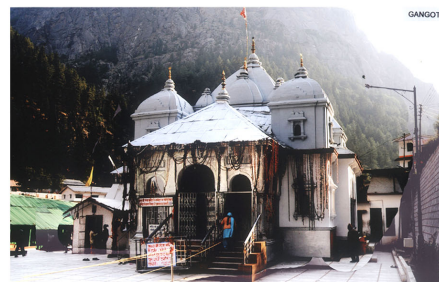


Photo : G.S. Sesharajan

Yamunotri is the source of the River Yamuna and the seat of Goddess Yamuna, situated in the Garhwal Himalaya in Uttarakhand. The actual source is a frozen lake of ice called Champasar glacier located on the Kalind Mountain at a height of 4,421 m above sea level, about 1 km away. The image of Goddess Yamuna is made of black marble. The temple of Yamuna, a divine mother like Ganga, was constructed by Maharaja Pratap Shah of Tehri Garhwal. The temple opens every year on the auspicious day of Akshaya tritiya, which falls in the April-May, and closes on Dipavali day, in October-November, with a brief ceremony.

Gangotri is situated in Uttarkashi district of Uttarakhand state on the banks of River Bhagirathi, on the Greater Himalayas, at a height of 3,100m. It is the source of River Ganga (Ganges). The source of the holy river is Gaumukh in the Gangotri glacier, a 19 km trek from Gangotri. The river is called Bhagirathi at the source and becomes Ganga at Devprayag, where it meets the Alakanand. It is believed that Goddess Ganga took the form of a river to absolve the sins of King Bhagiratha's ancestors, following his severe penance to liberate the souls of his ancestors and grant them salvation or moksha.

Badrinath - (see under **Char dham**, above)

Kedarnath is located in Rudraprayag district of Uttarakhand. The most remote of the Char Dham sites, Kedarnath is located in the Himalayas, about 3,583 m above sea level, near River Mandakini. Named after King Kedar, the temple existed during the Mahabharata period: the Pandavas did penance to Lord Shiva here. The temple opens on akshaya tritiya (April-May) and closes on bhai duj (October-November) due to heavy snowfall during winter. There are several places of pilgrimage near Kedarnath such as Rudraprayag, Gaurikund, Agastyamuni, Guptakashi, etc. Kedarnath suffered extensive destruction in June 2013 from flash floods caused by torrential rains.

3. Amarnath Yatra

The Amarnath Cave, situated in Jammu and Kashmir is dedicated to Lord Shiva. Every year, inside the Amarnath cave, an ice Shiva Lingam forms, along with two other ice formations, representing Ganesha and Mother Parvati. The main Shiva lingam waxes and wanes with the phases of the moon, reaching its height in summer. The Amarnath yatra is held every year to pay homage to Lord Shiva and Mother Parvati. The temple is a very popular yatra destination for Hindus. Over 600,000 people visit it during the season. Devotees travel by foot from Srinagar or Pahalgam in a 5-day long journey.



4. Kashi Yatra

It is the greatest of all the yatras: a dip in the Ganges. Saikatha pooja is first done at Rameshwaram. The sand collected is immersed in the Holy Ganga at Triveni Sangamam at Allahabad where the Ganga, Yamuna and Saraswati meet.

After Kashi Vishvanath darshan, Ganga water is collected to perform Ganga abhisheka to Lord Ramanathaswamy at Rameshwaram, which is a Jyothirlinga. Pilgrims also visit Gaya to perform Shraddha to their ancestors.

5. Puri Rath Yatra

The Festival of the Chariot of Lord Jagannatha is held every year at Puri, Orissa. The 10 day rath yatra commemorates Lord Jagannath's annual visit to Gundicha Mata's temple, a short distance away. Thousands of pilgrims come to Puri during the festival with a desire to help pull the Lord's chariot with ropes. This is the only day when devotees who are not allowed in the temple premises, such as non-Hindus and foreigners, can get a glimpse of the deities.



6. Deoghar Yatra

Deoghar means abode of the Gods and Goddesses. It is also known as Baidyanath Dham or Baba Dham and is situated on the eastern side of Jharkhand. It is an important Hindu pilgrimage centre as Baidyanath Temple, one of the twelve Lord Shiva Jyothirlingams in India, is located here. The pilgrims carry the holy water of the Ganga from Sultanganj and offer it to the Jyotirlingam of Lord Shiva at Deoghar. These pilgrims, called Kanwariya, walk 109 KM to the shrine. The march of the Kanwariya takes place each year during the holy month of Shravan, the wet season. Shravani Mela is the most celebrated festival in Deoghar Baidyanath Temple of Jharkhand. It lasts for 30 days.



Kanwar Yatra



7. Pandharpur Yatra

The Palkhi festival of Maharashtra is one of the most popular festivals in India. The annual Pandharpur yatra to the famous Vithoba temple at Pandharpur is held every year during the month of June and July. Thousands of pilgrims come to Pandharpur carrying palanquins (palkhis) with the images of the

saints of Maharashtra – Sant Dyaneswar from Alandi, Sant Tukaram from Dehu, Eknath from Paithan, and Nivruttinath from Trimbakeshwar. These pilgrims are referred to as Warkaris. They worship Vithoba, a form of Vishnu.

8. Sabarimala

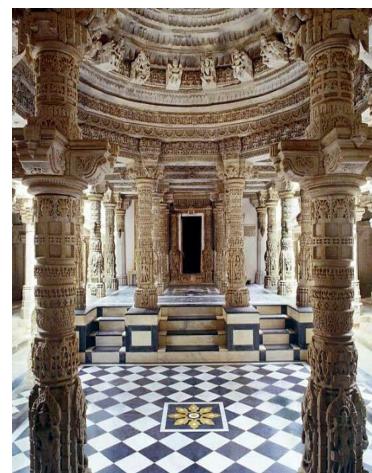
It is a Hindu pilgrimage centre located in the Western Ghat mountain ranges of Pathanamthitta District, Perunad grama panchayat in Kerala. It is the largest annual pilgrimage in the world. Sabarimala is believed to be the place where the Hindu God Ayyappan meditated after killing the powerful demoness Mahishi. Ayyappan's temple is situated here amidst 18 hills. Sabarimala is linked to Hindu pilgrimage, predominantly for men of all ages. The temple is open for worship only during the days of Mandalapooja, Makaravilakku, Makara Sankranti and Vishu and the first six days of each Malayalam month.



JAIN YATRAS

1. At **Sravanabelgola**, 62 miles from Mysore, on a hill 470 feet above the plains and reached by nearly five hundred steps, stands the colossal statue of Bahubali, 57 feet high, 26 feet wide at the shoulders, cut from solid rock around the year 980 CE., with a surrounding vihara added in 1116. It is the biggest free-standing monolithic statue in the world. Bahubali, or Gommata, was the son of Rishabha, the first Tirthankara. This is the largest statue of Bahubali and is a major center of pilgrimage for Jains. In a Jain temple the consecrated image is ritually bathed every day as part of the worship paid to it. The statue at Sravana Belgola is so huge that the ritual bath is carried out only on the feet of the image. At intervals of between twelve and fifteen years, a great structure of scaffolding is erected and the image is ceremonially showered from pots of water mixed with sandalwood, coconut and sugar. In 1981 the consecration ceremony marked the thousandth anniversary of the consecration of the statue.

2. The magnificent white marble **Dilwara** temples on Mount Abu in Rajasthan are masterpieces of Jain architecture, unrivaled for the beauty of their carving which is so delicate that it is almost translucent. There are two major temple complexes. One was built around 1030 CE by Vimala Shah, a wealthy merchant, and dedicated to the first Tirthankara: it was restored in 1322. The forty-eight pillars of the main hall are unequalled for their decoration; the dome of eleven rings are alternately decorated with human and animal figures. The later temple, dedicated to Neminatha, is larger, 155 feet long, and was founded around 1230 by Tejapala and his brother Vastupala, prime minister to the regent of Gujarat, who built more than fifty religious edifices, including foundations at Satrunjaya and Girnar. The panoramic view from 4000 feet above sea level make this site a place of deep religious significance.



3. **Girnar** in Junagarh district and **Satrunjaya** in Bhavnagar district in Gujarat are so rich in temples and shrines that they have been described as temple cities.

Girnar is celebrated as the place where the Tirthankara Neminatha achieved moksha. The temple is in a rectangular courtyard surrounded by some seventy Tirthankara images. This is the largest temple but there are many others, including one founded by Vastupala in 1231 A.D. and dedicated to the nineteenth Tirthankara Mallinatha.

Satrunjaya is an ancient Jain pilgrimage site, where the first Tirthankara Rishabha reached moksha. Many hundreds of temples and smaller shrines are contained within the nine walled enclosures. Although most of them date to the nineteenth century, traditional accounts speak of sixteen restorations going back into antiquity. A new temple of Rishabha replaced the old one in the mid-twelfth century and seven shrines were placed in front of it in 1231 by Vastupala.



Photo : S. Chinny Krishna

4. **Ranakpur** in Pali district, Rajasthan is a magnificent temple complex, dating to the fifteenth century. It covers 40,000 square feet. The main sanctuary has four six-foot white marble statues of Rsabha, the first Tirthankara, facing the four directions. Innumerable pillars, said to be 1444, richly carved and all different, hold up the twenty-nine halls, interspersed by open courts.

5. In 1300 CE the Jain king of Gujarat, Kumarapala, founded a temple at **Taranga** in Mehsana district, Gujarat. The temple was destroyed but was renovated much later during the reign of the Moghul emperor Akbar in the sixteenth century. It is picturesquely situated on the top of a hill with a difficult approach testing the endurance of pilgrims.



BUDDHIST YATRAS

There are four major sites of Buddhist pilgrimage:

1. The Buddha's birthplace at **Lumbini, Nepal**, the site where he was born.
2. The pipal tree at **Bodh Gaya**, near Benares, Uttar Pradesh, where he achieved enlightenment.
3. The deer park at **Sarnath**, outside Varanasi, Uttar Pradesh, where the Buddha delivered his first sermon.
4. **Kushinagara**, in Uttar Pradesh, where the Buddha attained parinibbana (liberation).



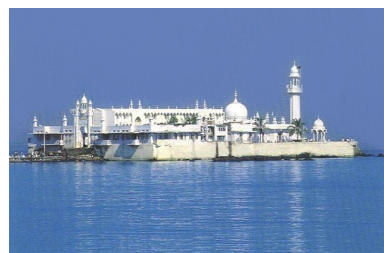
MUSLIM YATRAS



1. **Cheraman Juma Masjid, Thrissur, Kerala** is the oldest mosque in India built in 629 C.E. and reconstructed in the 11th century. The mosque has an ancient oil lamp which burns constantly and believed to be more than 1000 years old. Pilgrims take oil for the lamp as an offering.

2. **Makhdoom Ali Mahimi, Mahim, Mumbai**, celebrates the annual Urs festival of Hazrat Makhdum Ali Mahimi in the dargah of Mahimi at Mahim, Mumbai, drawing large crowds. He was a Sufi saint whose personal belongings are preserved in the masjid.

3. **Haji Ali Dargah, Worli, Mumbai**, is located off the coast of Worli, Mumbai. The Urs of Pir Haji Ali Shah Bukhari is an important event when pilgrims visit the dargah. 10,000 to 15,000 people visit the dargah daily. The figure goes to lakhs during Eid and the Urs.



4. **Ajmer sharif** is a Sufi shrine of Saint Khwaja Moinuddin Chisti, also known as Garib Nawaz, located at Ajmer in Rajasthan. The shrine contains the grave or Maqbara of the saint. The main attraction of the annual Urs are the kalanders or pilgrims from Mehrauli, called the friends of Gharib Nawaz, who walk all the way to Ajmer from Delhi and offer colourful chadders with gold and silver threads.

CHRISTIAN YATRAS

1. **Basilica of Bom Jesus, Goa**, is the location of the relics of St. Francis Xavier, a Roman Catholic Missionary and co-founder of the Society of Jesus. His body is kept in a silver casket in the Basilica of Bom Jesus in Goa and exposed every 10 years, drawing vast crowds. It is an important pilgrimage centre for Roman Catholics.



2. **Mount Mary Church, Mumbai**, is a Roman Catholic Basilica in Bandra, Mumbai. The birthday of Virgin Mary is celebrated here every September, followed by a weeklong celebration known as the Bandra Fair, which is visited by thousands of pilgrims.

3. **Niranam Church**, also known as Niranam Valiya Pally, or the mother of all churches in Kerala, is the oldest church of the Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church of Kerala, situated near Thiruvalla. It is believed that the church was founded by St. Thomas in 54 CE and that the Christian community in Niranam is the oldest in the world. The church was reconstructed several times. The two statues of St. Mary made of pure gold and marble are the major tourist attractions. The church is famous for its 8 day celebration held from September 1 to 8 every year and attended by thousands of devotees.

4. **Maramon Convention**

The Maramon Convention is the largest Christian convention in the world, held annually in February at Maramon, Pathanamthitta, in Kerala, along the Pampa river. It is organized by the Mar Thoma Evangelistic Association, the missionary wing of the Mar Thoma Church, believed to have been founded by St. Thomas. Christians come here once a year to listen to the gospel as read and expounded by Christian leaders from all over India and abroad.



*The Huge Granite Cross at Niranam Church**



*114th Maramon Convention – 2009**

* Source : <http://keralachristianpilgrimgelocations.blogspot.in/2013/07/niranam-church.html>

5

IMPORTANT PILGRIMAGE CENTRES IN TAMIL NADU



Thiruvannamalai

This hill town and district gets its name from the presiding deity Annamalaiyar. On the full moon day of every month, devotees circumnavigate the Annamalai hill and the temple base in worship. This is called girivalam (giri = hill). Almost ten lakh people perform the girivalam every year.

Another annual festival is Karthikai Deepam that is held on full moon day, in November-December. A huge beacon of light is lit atop the Annamalai hills. More than 30,00,000 people witness the festival.

Palani

This important hill is considered to be the abode of Lord Muruga. Devotees fast and carry kaavadis (two semicircular pieces of wood which are bent, decorated and balanced on the shoulders of the devotee) and walk barefoot to worship the deity during Thai poosam (January–February). Pilgrims carry different offerings – flowers, milk, sandal paste, etc. - in their kaavadis for worship. More than seventy lakh devotees visit this hill shrine every year. This is one of the Arupadai veedu of Lord Muruga. - among the six sacred abodes of Muruga in Tamil Nadu.



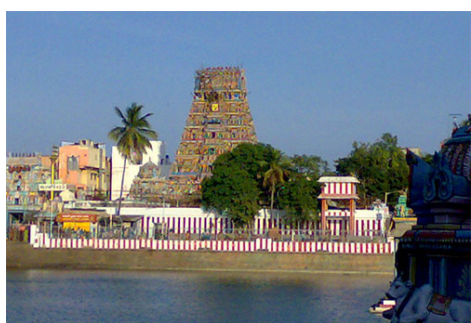
Palani hill is located on the eastern spur of the Western ghats. The Kothaimangalam wetlands are located near Palani. These huge lakes are the habitat of several migratory birds. The Kongur wetland is located 25 km from Palani.

Tiruttani

Tiruttani is one of the six abodes of Lord Subramanya and is situated in Tiruvallur district, on a hillock. 365 steps lead to the shrine, each step representing a day of the year. Lord Murugan fought fiercely with Surapadman (a demon) at Tiruchendur. After his victory, Murugan wanted to cool his anger. He reached Tiruttani hill, which is therefore known as Thanigai malai. Tiruttani is also known by many other names: Purnagiri, Kshanikachalam, Mooladri and Neelotpala.



Mylapore



The famous Kapaleeswarar temple is located in Mylapore, Chennai. The annual Brahmothsavam or the Panguni Uthiram festival is a very important festival performed in this pilgrim centre. The car festival draws lakhs of devotees. The Arubathumoovar festival during March – April in honour of the 63 Nayanmars, in which their images are taken out in a spectacular procession, draws devotees from various parts of Chennai, and other districts and States.

Nagore

The Nagore Dargah was built over the tomb of a Sufi saint Hazrat Nagoor Shahul Hamid. The saint had performed many miracles and cured the afflictions of King Achutappa Nayak, a 16th century ruler of Thanjavur, who gifted him 200 acres of land for the dargah. This dargah is a major pilgrim centre attracting lakhs of pilgrims. The annual 14 day Kanduri or Sandhana koodu festival draws lakhs of devotees.



Velankanni, Nagapattinam



Velankanni is a small coastal town situated in Nagapattinam district in Tamil Nadu. The Shrine of Our Lady of Velankanni, also known as the Lourdes of the East, is one of the pilgrim centres in India drawing lakhs and lakhs of pilgrims every year. The Chapel was dedicated on the feast of the Nativity of Mother Mary (September 8). Almost 15 lakh people participate in the annual 10 day festival during August and September.

6

TIRUMALA

A GREEN PILGRIMAGE CENTRE



The Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanams (TTD) which has been administering the affairs of the famous hill shrine of Lord Venkateswara has now become “eco-friendly” by installing a non-conventional solar energy plant in the administrative building in Tirupati. Usually the average monthly power consumption of the administrative building complex is 1.2 lakh units whereas the newly installed power plant will generate approximately 1.5 lakh units annually. This plant saves approximately 100 tonnes of carbon emission every year, and the life span of the plant is 25 years. In the canteen, free mineral water is provided through pipelines and the use of plastic bottles has been banned*.

From gardening to cooking, only non-conventional sources of energy are now used in the temples of Tirupati. The TTD relies entirely on clean energy to feed over 70,000 people every day. The temple has installed solar powered lights, solar cooking systems, windmills and a water recycling station. The windmills on the hill ensure that the temple town is able to meet some part of its power requirement by itself. That means 40-45 per cent of the energy required by TTD is from its non-conventional sources. Tirumala also has a water recycling station that purifies all waste water which is then reused in the temple city’s gardens. Even the street lamps the Tirumala hill are solar powered#.

Tirupati uses some of the largest cooking systems to feed millions of devotees every year. In Tirupati, the system has reduced carbon dioxide emissions by 1.2 tonnes per day with an additional benefit of saving Rs.17 lakhs a year.

* Source <http://tirupathinews.in/ttd-goes-eco-friendly-way-2/>

<http://ibnlive.in.com/news/tirupati-temple-uses-solar-wind-energy/122194-3.html>

7 ECO SIKH



Eco Sikh is an organization established by the Sikh community to respond to the twin threats of climate change and the deterioration of the natural environment.

Amritsar in November 2011 agreed to join cities around the world associated with the major faith traditions in the Green Pilgrim Cities program, a plan spearheaded by the Alliance of Religions and Conservation (ARC), as part of the ARC-UNDP collaboration on long term environmental plans by the faiths.

The Holy City of Nanded has recently joined the Green Pilgrim Network during July 2013 at Norway. The focus would be on sewage and waste management, saving river Godavari and water conservation, solar and bio-gas (green energy), green transport and pollution control and organic agriculture / tree plantation.



Sikh Gurudwaras all over the world feed 30 million people every day. Some Gurudwaras use bio fuel made from their compost. The Golden Temple in Amritsar has proposed to shift to solar energy in its langar (community kitchen).

The Sikhs engage themselves in sewa at the Gurudwaras and perform the humblest tasks for the visiting pilgrims. The langar provides food to all the pilgrims and the devotees serve the food. Water is distributed in steel tumblers to the devotees. Plastics are avoided.

8

RAMESHWARAM

Rameshwaram is a sacred site for all Indians. This is where Rama built the Setu or bridge with the help of the Vanaras, to cross the sea and go to Lanka to rescue his wife Sita.

The pilgrimage at Rameshwaram begins with a holy dip at the Agni Teertham, followed by a bath at 22 other teerthams (wells) situated within the temple and concludes at Kodi teertham at Danushkodi. Out of the existing water bodies, 11 ponds, 4 wells and 1 sea bathing enclosure are in a very bad shape and are in dire need of renovation.



Ecological potential of the teertha

Recharging of ground water and rainwater harvesting are essential. The revival of greenery with appropriate and specific keystone species will improve the ecology of the teertha.

ACTIVITIES OF VIVEKANANDA KENDRA (NARDEP)

Vivekananda Kendra is preserving epigraphical data, promoting knowledge of historical facts, raising awareness to conserve the significance of each teertha as well as protecting the cultural activities associated with them. Creating new livelihood possibilities for local communities is an important aspect. Better environment and additional pilgrim spots will attract more visitors. Apart from cultural and ecological benefits, direct economic benefits can also be reaped by functional groups of Rameshwaram such as pilgrim guides, hoteliers, auto drivers and temple priests.

The activities include

- ❖ A complete documentation of the teerthams: cultural, social and ecological dimensions.
- ❖ Awareness creation regarding each teertham for the local communities.
- ❖ Revival of the teerthams with community participation.
- ❖ Promotion of eco-pilgrimage of the teerthams.
- ❖ Sustainable management of teerthams by local communities.
- ❖ Cleaning the shrubs and thorny trees around the teerthams.
- ❖ Desilting.
- ❖ Maintenance of inlet and outlet of each teertham.
- ❖ Repairing the compound wall and steps.
- ❖ Laying of paving blocks as part of the beautification process.

- ❖ Electrification.
- ❖ Plantation of trees of medicinal value.
- ❖ Renovation of associated temples and installation of idols.
- ❖ Setting up information boards with name and significance of the tank including in vernacular languages.
- ❖ Bringing out an information brochure on the significance of the teerthams.

The major teerthams to be renovated are

- | | |
|--------------------------|---------------------------|
| ❖ Agni teertham | |
| ❖ Nakula teertham | |
| ❖ Sahadeva teertham | |
| ❖ Draupadi teertham | |
| ❖ Hanuman Kunda teertham | |
| ❖ Naga teertham | |
| ❖ Agastya teertham | |
| ❖ Jataayu teertham | |
| ❖ Lakshmana teertham | ❖ Rama teertham |
| ❖ Amritavapi teertham | ❖ Runa vimochana teertham |
| ❖ Mangala teertham | ❖ Sugreeva teertham |
| ❖ Angatha teertham | ❖ Jambavan teertham |



TREE PLANTATION BY C.P.R. ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION CENTRE

C.P.R. Environmental Education Centre (CPREEC) has selected 7 acres of land adjoining Mangala tirtham at Rameshwaram for developing a sacred grove. The area has been cleaned of *Prosopis juliflora*, which has overgrown most of Rameshwaram. The 7 acres are planted with indigenous coastal varieties such as Alexandrian laurel, Portia tree, Neem, Palmyra palm, Indian beech, Tamarind, Babul, Indian siris, Banyan and Pipal.

Mangala tirtham is located north of Thangachi madam and is regarded as the kingdom of Manojava, son of Anila or the Wind.

There are 64 tirthas or holy water bodies in and around Rameshwaram, of which 24 are important. 14 are in the form of tanks and wells within the temple and the remaining 10 are situated around the island. Traditionally, the tirthas were located in the middle of a sacred forest and the pilgrimage to Rameshwaram involved visiting the 22 tirthas by foot and bathing in the waters. After a dip in the sacred tirthas, the pilgrims would rest in the forest and, if necessary, help themselves to the medicinal plants situated therein.

9

MADURAI MEENAKSHI AMMAN TEMPLE RASI NAKSHATRA VANAM



The Madurai Meenakshi Amman Temple in Madurai has set aside 164 acres of forest to plant trees representing asterisms (nakshatra vanam), zodiac (rasivanam), and nine planetary positions (navagraha vanam) for pilgrims. The temple authority collects funds from the public to plant a tree for their zodiac and the same is maintained on the temple land.

C.P.R. Environmental Education Centre (CPREEC) is planting and maintaining the Rasi - Nakshatra vanam on the temple lands located at Koodalchengulam. Pilgrims give donations to the temple for the plantation and maintenance of the trees. A separate Illuppai and Kadamba grove has been developed and maintained by CPREEC. What a wonderful way of obtaining divine blessings!



10

GREEN TRANSPORT

Transport generates around three quarters of the 5% of the global total of CO₂ emissions contributed by tourism. Transportation has a high level of carbon footprint. This aspect should not be neglected. Pilgrims should be taught to minimize carbon footprint.

Jerusalem is outlawing vehicles in the old city and has opened a new light rail system to help the environment and enable a pleasant pilgrimage

Amritsar in Punjab has made the area in front of the Golden Temple accessible by foot and cycle only. The city has also introduced locally made eco-rickshaws, lighter than the existing cycle rickshaws.

In Indonesia, pilgrims leaving for Mecca should plant a tree in their own district before they leave, to reduce carbon footprint, as per the Green Guide for Hajj which was translated and adapted for use in Indonesia.

The Indian Railways operates pilgrimage tours – Kashi Yatra, visit to Navagraha temples, Shirdi, Mantralayam, Devi kshetrams, etc. at a very nominal rate. The tours have been appreciated by all because of the food and amenities, safety of passengers, transport facilities, etc. The Indian Railways has made elaborate arrangements to undertake pilgrim tours to several parts of the country.

Temple authorities can provide detailed information to pilgrims on the use of the public transport system to reach the temple by providing maps, bus and rail routes.



11

WATER AND SANITATION



Water represents birth and rebirth. It cleans the body and also purifies it to some extent. These qualities confer a sacred status on water. In certain temples, many devotees take a dip in the holy waters and leave their clothes behind (which they believe will help wash away their sins). This blocks the flow of the water and pollutes it.

In some temples, devotees are permitted to take just a holy dip with their clothes on and are not allowed to use oil or soap. This system may be practiced by all temples to prevent waste generation and water pollution.

The Amarnath shrine is one of most revered sites. But the debris left behind is anything but sacred. By the end of the 55-day pilgrimage season, rubbish, including plastic bottles and bags, as well as human waste, can be found strewn across the mountain trails that wind through the fragile Himalayan environment. “There are more than 53 glaciers. Some of the rubbish falls into melted glaciers rushing through the valleys, threatening a vital source of drinking water for thousands of people who live downstream”.*

Sacred rivers

Indian rivers are regarded as Goddess. Yet, the rivers of India are among the most polluted places on earth. The coliform pollution is among the highest in the rivers due to the dumping of untreated sewage. The organic and bacterial contamination is severe due to the discharge of untreated domestic waste water.

* source : <http://www.medindia.net/news/indian-kashmir-himalayas-getting-polluted-in-the-name-of-pilgrimage-124243-1.htm#ixzz2tHDnLpIP>

All the rivers have high levels of BOD. Yamuna, Ganga, Gomti, Ghaghra and Champal are among the most coliform polluted water bodies in India with concentration levels of about 500 mpn/100 ml.

Countless tanneries chemical plants, textile mills, distilleries, slaughterhouses and hospitals also dump their untreated waste into the river. Industrial effluents contribute to much of the pollution and are a cause for major concern because they are toxic and non-biodegradable.

400 million people live along the Ganga and an estimated 2 million persons bathe daily in the river. Some of the world's oldest inhabited cities, like Varanasi and Patna (Pataliputra), are situated along its banks. It flows through over 70 cities and towns and provides water to about 40% of India's population across 11 states, a population of about 500 million people, which is larger than any other river in the world. With fecal coliform counts up to 100,000,000 MPN (most probable number) per 100 ml, the Ganga today, is considered to be one of the most polluted rivers in the world. Even though the Government of India launched a Ganga Action Plan in 1986, spending Rs.9017 million, the pollution level merely increased. Now, a new project titled 'Namaami Ganga' has been launched in July 2014. The Yamuna contains 7500 coliform bacteria per 100 cc of water as per a 2012 estimate.



After the cremation of the deceased at Varanasi's ghats, the bones and ashes are thrown into the Ganges. However, in the past thousands of uncremated bodies were thrown into the Ganges during cholera epidemics, spreading the disease. Even today, many bodies are floated free to decompose in the waters. In addition, those who cannot afford the large amount of wood needed to incinerate the entire body, leave behind a lot of half-burned body parts. Rivers are sacred in India and every Hindu goes to the Ganga and other rivers to wash away their sins. Instead, they are absorbing new pollutants and consequent health hazards.

WATER IS LIFE



KEEP WATER CLEAN

12

POSITIVE FOOTPRINT

The pilgrim can set an example to fellow pilgrims by not littering the area, avoid buying bottled water, not eating inside temple premises and dropping the Prasad containers after emptying them in the bin.



The pilgrim can bring a metal basket or cloth bag to carry the puja materials instead of a plastic bag. The pilgrim may opt to walk or use public transport rather than driving on his own.



For centuries, several temples have the tradition of maintaining Nandavanam (flower garden) within the temple premises, around the temple pond and in temple lands. The Government of Tamilnadu distributes saplings through the Hindu Religious and Charitable Endowments Department to plant and maintain gardens in the temple lands. They use the flowers for temple worship.



With the increasing number of pilgrims every day, the temple authorities have made an enormous plantation drive to restore the biodiversity of the hill ecosystem at Tirumala, and the carbon footprint is considerably reduced. Several hill temples in Tamilnadu have also taken adequate measures for plantation.

Cherished memories of the appealing temple traditions and blessings of the Almighty eventually ensured to go back with the pilgrims.



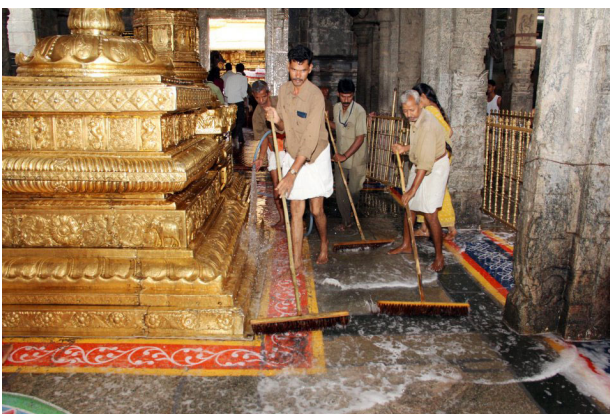
13

WASTE DISPOSAL

Enormous levels of waste are generated with the increasing number of pilgrims visiting a place each day. Pilgrims use polythene bags to buy puja materials. The waste materials generated are mostly plastic bags and bottles. They pose a threat if left untreated. Volunteers can also guide the pilgrims to drop the containers in appropriate bins.

Many temples take the help of volunteers / residents to keep the premises clean. Groups of people take turns to clean up the temple premises, wash the entire area, as well as utensils, lamps, etc. These group members also look after the temple ponds and clean up the twigs and fallen leaves. This is a service by devotees. Many residents, young and old, involve themselves in the upkeep of several old temples too. This signifies a welcome change in the attitude of the community.

In Vrindavan, cows were dying owing to the enormous accumulation of plastic bags. Hence, a law was passed to prevent shopkeepers from using plastic bags. They were made to replace them with cloth bags to be given to pilgrims. Other cities may also follow this law for the benefit of both pilgrims and livestock in that area.



14

MEASURES TO BE ADOPTED

For Pilgrims

Pilgrims must understand that the whole area-hill or forest - is a sacred place, not just the shrine within it.

- ❖ Trash disposal is a key issue. Pilgrims must keep in mind that they should not litter the forest with food leftovers, plastic bags and bottles, and other items. Pilgrims must be banned from carrying plastic bags and bottles before they start their pilgrimage.
- ❖ The pilgrims may be cautioned not to make noises or sing or use musical instruments as these may disturb wildlife.
- ❖ Adequate measures have to be taken not to infringe on the animal corridor. One should coordinate with forest officials as they are well aware of the movement of animals.
- ❖ As we regard animals as sacred, it is the prime responsibility of each and every pilgrim to safeguard the animal wealth of our country.



For the administration

- ❖ Adequate signages in English and vernacular languages are required to guide pilgrims to drop litter in the bins and keep the temple premises clean are essential.
- ❖ Composting and recycling initiatives could become an example to other places of worship.
- ❖ All polythene bags must be banned.
- ❖ Pilgrims must carry reusable water bottles for drinking water.
- ❖ Local municipalities must provide adequate toilet facilities and keep them clean.
- ❖ Pilgrims must keep the temple premises clean.
- ❖ Solar power installations to provide lighting and for cooking will cut carbon emissions as well as energy-efficient light bulbs.
- ❖ Rainwater harvesting structures would conserve water and reduce CO₂ emissions.
- ❖ Fuel-efficient cooking methods must be used during festivals.

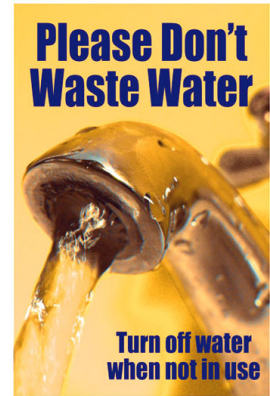


15

DO'S AND DON'TS OF A PILGRIMAGE

Reduce your carbon footprint and leave a positive footprint to the extent possible

- ❖ Protect Nature including rivers, streams, oceans and the atmosphere
- ❖ Do not waste water or electricity
- ❖ Use eco-friendly materials for pooja, to eat food and carry water
- ❖ Dispose of rubbish appropriately
- ❖ Eat natural, healthy and fresh foods
- ❖ Do not spit urinate or defecate near temple premises or in the open
- ❖ Use toilets and help to keep the surroundings clean
- ❖ Plastics are not biodegradable. Use cloth bags instead.



DO NOT LEAVE YOUR FOOTPRINT



16

A WARNING !

DEVASTATION AT KEDARNATH: A HIMALAYAN BLUNDER

The recent devastation at Kedarnath is a case of what happens when pilgrimages are no longer green and do not follow rules. Kedarnath, in the Himalayas, is open from the end of April to November, when winter begins. Only the priest and his family are permitted to stay at Kedarnath. The temple is not directly accessible by road and has to be reached by a 14 kilometre uphill trek from Gaurikund. However, ponies are available for those who are unable to walk. The pilgrim may not spend more than one night. If he is unable to walk back the same day, he may spend the night wrapped in a blanket under the stars or under a tent. Unfortunately, these rules were flouted as shops and hotels moved in to provide amenities for pilgrims. A sacred tirtha on the Mandakini river, which feeds the Ganga, became a small town. And when the river rose in anger, nearly 16,000 people died.



Yet there is magic in Kedarnath. Eyewitnesses observed that a large rock was carried up to the temple by the flood waters and settled at the rear side of the Kedarnath Temple, thus causing obstruction to the debris and diverting the flow of the river to the side of the temple to avoid any damage. Kedarnath was the worst affected area during the 2013 floods that hit North India. The surrounding areas, Kedarnath town and the temple complex suffered extensive damage, but the temple and the sacred sanctum remained unharmed.



17

WILDLIFE AND BIODIVERSITY

In India, many holy sites are associated with Nature. Indians worship Nature. Trees like banyan, neem and pipal are worshipped, hills like the Himalayas are considered sacred and all rivers from the Ganga, Yamuna, Godavari, Krishna, Narmada and Kavery are considered holy. Many animals are associated with Gods and Goddesses; they are also manifestations of the Divine.

Due to advancement in technology and increased travel facilities, millions of people have started visiting remote and fragile places on pilgrimage. This has resulted in excess pressure on India's natural landscapes and wildlife. The country's tiger reserves are found near temples. The tiger is on the verge of extinction. The Mahabharata says, "The tiger perishes without the forest and the forest perishes without its tigers".



The tiger is associated with Lord Shiva. It is the vehicle of Goddess Durga, symbolizing immortality and power. The tiger faces several hardships such as being hunted, conflict with communities, shrinking habitats and decrease in food supply. Pilgrimages add to the threat as large groups of people wander in the forests, disrupting the movement of the animal. Waste materials left by pilgrims affect the tiger's habitat and choke the rivers, posing a serious threat to the tiger population.

Previously tigers could be seen on the road to Sabarimala, but now the numbers have reduced considerably. Devotees may not intend to harm wildlife. But the sanctity of the pilgrimage is lost when hundreds of people move across the forests to reach their destination without understanding the fact that the land and the wildlife are also sacred.



18

GPN – Green Pilgrimage Network



The GPN is a global network of 28 pilgrim cities and other sites sacred to many different religious traditions around the world. They are all united in wanting to be models of green action and care. Members of the GPN share a vision of pilgrims on all continents, and the pilgrim cities that receive them, becoming models of care for the environment and leaving a positive footprint on the earth.

Who is in the Network?

There are now 28 members around the world. The GPN is hosted by the Alliance of Religions and Conservation (ARC), and works in partnership with ICLEI (Local Governments for Sustainability).

The Network will inspire Pilgrims to

- ❖ Prepare mindfully for their pilgrimage...
- ❖ Travel responsibly in the spirit of their faith...
- ❖ Choose sustainable tourist agencies...
- ❖ Eat and drink sustainably and ethically...
- ❖ Minimize their water use...
- ❖ Dispose of their rubbish... and pick up after others...
- ❖ Support a fund to green the city they are visiting...
- ❖ Bring greener ideas for living home with them...



The Network will inspire Pilgrim Cities to

- ❖ Receive and accommodate pilgrim visitors sustainably...
- ❖ Green their religious buildings, energy and infrastructure ...
- ❖ Safeguard their wildlife and parks...
- ❖ Create a green pilgrim fund...
- ❖ Create 'green maps', highlighting the environmental projects...
- ❖ Enable achievements and opportunities for volunteering in their cities...
- ❖ Bring faiths and local authorities together to create sustainable cities...
- ❖ Provide clean, accessible drinking water ...
- ❖ Improve sanitation for pilgrim routes...
- ❖ Work with tour operators, airlines and other transport providers to provide carbon neutral travel...
- ❖ Spread greener living habits among their own population...
- ❖ Publicize their status as Green Pilgrim Cities...
- ❖ Celebrate their pilgrims and green their faith festivals ...
- ❖ Work with, and support, each other in greening initiatives...

‘Be the change that you wish to see in the world’

– Mahatma Gandhi

Pilgrims leave behind millions of litres of untreated sewage and mountains of plastic and paper litter. They create pollution, deplete ground water systems and damage fragile eco-systems. The recent worldwide growth in pilgrim numbers has exacerbated this problem. This is a challenge but also an opportunity – to influence the behaviour and attitudes of millions of people to care for the environment and promote new ways of sustainable living to protect our planet.

Pilgrims come to be inspired and to go back home changed; the potential for bringing about a transformation in attitudes and actions is unsurpassed.

Source: www.arcworld.org

