



## [Glory of Bharath](#) » Bharath Darshan

Dear Sai Brothers and Sisters,  
Our journey this month is to one of the sacred places associated with Buddhism also listed among UNESCO's World Heritage Sites in India

### Sanchi



Buddhist Monuments at Sanchi

Sanchi, variously known as Kakanaya, Kakanava, Kakanadabota and Bota-Sriparvata in ancient times, has a singular distinction of having remarkable specimen of Buddhist art and architecture right from the early Mauryan period (c. third century BC to twelfth century AD). Sanchi is famous in the world for stupas, monolithic Asokan pillar, temples, monasteries and sculptural wealth.

Sanchi is a small village in Raisen District of the state of Madhya Pradesh, India, it is located 46 km north east of Bhopal, and 10 km from Besnagar and Vidisha in the central part of the state of Madhya Pradesh. It is the location of several Buddhist monuments dating from the 3<sup>rd</sup> century BCE to the 12<sup>th</sup> century CE and is one of the important places of Buddhist pilgrimage. It is a nagar panchayat in Raisen district in the Indian state of Madhya Pradesh. Toranas surround the Stupa and they each represent love, peace, trust, and courage.

The 'Great Stupa' at Sanchi was originally commissioned by the emperor Ashoka the Great in the 3<sup>rd</sup> century BCE. Its nucleus was a simple hemispherical brick structure built over the relics of the Buddha. It was crowned by the chatra, a parasol-like structure symbolising high rank, which was intended to honour and shelter the relics.

It was Emperor Asoka who laid the foundations of a religious centre at Sanchi fascinated probably by the location of the hill or because of his Queen Devi, who was the daughter of a merchant of Vidisha. He erected the Great Stupa (Stupa 1) here after redistribution of mortal remains of Lord Buddha for erecting several stupas all over the country in order to spread Buddhism. This stupa was originally a low structure of brick, half the diameter of the present edifice hemispherical in shape with raised terraces at the base. It was enclosed by a wooden railing and a stone umbrella at the top. This Great Stupa served as a nucleus to the large Buddhist establishment during the later period.



During Sunga times, several edifices were raised at Sanchi and its surrounding hills. The Asokan stupa was enlarged and faced with stones and decorated with balustrades, staircases and a harmika on the top. In the first century BC the Andhra-Satavahanas, who had extended their sway over the eastern Malwa, caused the elaborately carved gateways to Stupa 1. The Great Stupa of Sanchi displays an austere grandeur and the exquisite carvings of the doorway depict in detail the significant episodes and miracles from Lord Buddha's

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Although made of stone, they were carved and constructed in the manner of wood and the gateways were covered with narrative sculptures. They showed scenes from the life of the Buddha integrated with everyday events that would be familiar to the onlookers and so make it easier for them to understand the Buddhist creed as relevant to their lives. At Sanchi and most other stupas the local population donated money for the embellishment of the stupa to attain spiritual merit. There was no direct royal patronage. Devotees, both men and women, who donated money towards a sculpture, would often choose their favourite scene from the life of the Buddha and then have their names inscribed on it. This accounts for the random repetition of particular episodes on the stupa. On these stone carvings the Buddha was never depicted as a human figure. Instead the artists chose to represent him by certain attributes, such as the horse on which he left his father's home, his footprints, or a canopy under the bodhi tree at the point of his enlightenment. The human body was thought to be too confining for the Buddha.

From the second to fourth century AD Sanchi and Vidisha came under the Kushanas and Kshatrapas and subsequently passed on to the hands of the Guptas. During the Gupta period some temples were also built and sculptures were added displaying the classical grace and simplicity of the era. Further, statues of Lord Buddha seated in the canopies facing the four entrances of the Great Stupa were also added. Sanchi also flourished during the 7<sup>th</sup> - 12<sup>th</sup> centuries A.D. when shrines and monasteries were continued to be added. Thus Sanchi displays harmonious co-existence of Hindu and Buddhist faiths.

Since the fourteenth century Sanchi remained deserted and uncared for till 1818 when General Taylor rediscovered the site. Sir John Marshall established an archaeological museum in 1919, which was later transformed into the present site museum at Sanchi. Presently under an UNESCO project Sanchi and Satdhara, a Buddhist site, 10 km south-east of Sanchi, is being further excavated, conserved and environmentally developed.