

Bihar



The golden age of Indian history was heralded by the Gupta dynasty of Bihar; the first Parliament in India was in the kingdom of Vaishali, the world renowned residential university of Nalanda, the seat of the mighty Magadh empire, and home to exotic Madhubani art. It is the land where the Buddha lived and attained salvation centuries ago...Bihar is full of legends. Let us discover some of them.

PATNA

Eastern India's important business centre, and the gateway to the Buddhist and Jain pilgrim centres of Vaishali, Rajgir, Nalanda, Bodhgaya and Pawapuri, Patna's charm is multiplied with the holy Ganges flanking the city. A cultural metropolis, Patna is a great tourist centre too. The capital city is witnessing changes as infrastructural development advances rapidly. New shopping complexes are a prominent feature here.

City Lights

Remains of the ancient city of Pataliputra including wooden ramparts and parts of the Mauryan palace were found at **Kumrahar**, 7 km from Patna. For viewing the city in its entirety, climb to the top of **Golghar**, a beehive-shaped structure in the centre of the city. The secular nature of the city peeps through various ashrams, gurudwaras and mosques. **Sadaquat Ashram**, by the Ganges, is the headquarters of Bihar Vidyapeeth. India's first President, Dr. Rajendra Prasad frequented this place and eventually lived here after retirement. The tenth and last guru of the Sikhs, Guru Govind Singh was born here in 1666. Hence **Takht Harmandirji**, at the Gurudwara **Shri Patna Sahib**, is a major pilgrimage site for Sikhs.

BIHAR



Shri Patna Sahib

Parwez Shah, Jahangir's son, constructed **Pathar Ki Masjid** in 1621 near Harmandirji.

City Culture

The Patna Museum has vast treasures of early sculptures. Also the **Jalan**



Patna Museum

Museum, boasting a vast collection of Chinese paintings, jade, Mughal glass and filigree artefacts. The **Sonepur Cattle Fair**, believed to be the largest in the world, recreates the mythical encounter between the honest *gaja* (elephant) and the shrewd *graha* (crocodile). Besides **Buddha** and **Mahavir Jayanti** and the **Chaath** festival that honours the Sun God. A unique fair is **Saurath Sabha**, which is a massive marriage market, held in Mithila.

Gourmet's Delights

Not known for any specific culinary style, one can sample a mix of all prevalent cuisines in Patna. Visitors can go to **Gokul Mini Restaurant**, at East Gandhi Maidan, **Navneet Restaurant**, Fraser Road for *Marwari bhoj*, North Indian *thali* and Rajasthani cuisine, **Silver Oak Restaurant and Bar**, **Shree Basant Vihar Restaurant**, for North Indian and Chinese cuisine. **Mamta Restaurant and Bar** on Fraser Road has reasonable prices. Check out the roadside market adjacent to Hanuman Mandir for a taste of *dahi chiwra*, *litti*, *khaja*, *khowa ka layee*, *chane ka sattu*, *adori*, *tilori* and other items, prepared in Bihari style.

Shopper's Paradise

Local handicrafts from all over Bihar, decorative pieces made of stone and lac and beaded jewellery are popular souvenirs to buy here. The main shopping centres are located at **Maurya Lok Complex**, **Hathua Market**, **Patna Market**, **Khadi Gramodyog** and **Bihar Handloom & Handicrafts Emporium**.

Facts at a Glance

Access: **By Air:** Indian Airlines/ Alliance Air and Air Sahara have daily flights between Patna, Delhi, Kolkata and Ranchi. The Patna airport is located 6 km from the main city. **By Rail:** There are trains connecting Patna to almost all the major metros like Delhi, Kolkata, Mumbai and Chennai. Several trains like Shramjivi Express, Magadh-Assam, Rajdhani, Delhi-Howrah Express, Brahmaputra Mail have daily services from Delhi and Kolkata respectively. Besides the main station of Patna Junction, there are some smaller stations too, like **Gulzarbagh**, **Patna Sahib**, **Danapur** and **Phoolwaari** within the city. **By Road:** Patna is connected with Kathmandu, Gaya, Bodhgaya (125 km), Rajgir (102 km) and Nalanda (90 km) via road. Bus services are also available for places within the state as well as to other states. Bihar State Road Transport Corporation buses going to many places within the state use the Gandhi Maidan Bus Stand. Private buses and taxis are also available. **Bus Stand:** The main bus terminal is at Harding Park, west of Patna Junction Railway Station. **Getting Around:** Tourist taxis are available from the airport, railway

station and some hotels. Autos are more commonly used; rates negotiable. **Temperatures:** Maximum 45°C during summer and minimum 6°C during winter. **Best time to visit:** October to March, preferably the festive occasion of Chaath (a week after Diwali) or during the cattle fair at Sonapur.

City Code: 0612
Indian Airlines: 2222554, 2223199;
Air Sahara: 2232722/2211988
Railways: 2222197
Bus Stand: 2671682
BSTDC: 2225441
India Tourism: 2345776
Banks: Allahabad Bank: 224222,
 Canara Bank: 660156, SBI: 235483
General Post Office: 224400,
 Bankipore GPO : 672364.
Hospitals/Chemists: Patna Medical
 College Hospital, Nalanda Medical
 College Hospital.

Home Away From Home

Maurya Patna: 2203040, Pataliputra
 Ashok: 2226270, Chanakya:
 2220590, Samrat International:
 2220560.

NALANDA

Known as the oldest seat of learning, Nalanda, 5th century BC, was one of the world's great universities and an important Buddhist centre. Its ruins point to the fact that tens of thousands of students resided and studied here. Thanks to the curators, the site is peaceful, clean and well maintained. The ruins, 90 km away from Patna, are extensive.

The remains include the **Great Stupa**, with the steps, terraces and a few votive stupas still intact, as also the

monk's cells. An **Archaeological Museum** houses the seal, sculptures and other remains of the university.



Nalanda

The Chinese traveller Hieun Tsang came here as a student in 7th century BC. The **Xuan Zang Memorial Hall**, built by the Chinese as a peace pagoda, is worth seeing. There is also an international centre for Buddhist studies here.

Facts at a Glance

Access: Shared jeeps cost Rs. 8 from Rajgir to Nalanda village, from where it is another Rs. 8 for the 10-minute ride on a shared horse cart to the university site. One can go to **Bihar Sherif** too from Nalanda village, which was an important centre for Islamic studies. Most people stay in Rajgir and visit Nalanda on day trips, but one can also stay at the Burmese, Japanese or Jain Dharamsalas at Nalanda.

BODHGAYA

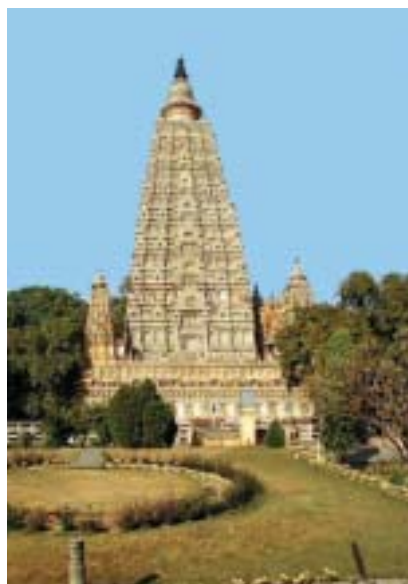
Centuries ago, Siddhartha came to the serene environment of this village as he was wandering in search of a solution to human miseries. It was here that the young prince received divine knowledge and spiritual enlightenment under a peepul (ficus) tree and became the Buddha – heralding the birth of

Bihar

Buddhism, in 6th century BC. Today, this town is called Bodhgaya and is the foremost pilgrim centre for Buddhists, the world over. Devotees from Buddhist countries like Japan, China, Tibet and Thailand have built temples and monasteries here.

City Culture

There are many sites connected with Buddha, the most important being the Mahabodhi Temple Complex. It includes the **Mahabodhi Temple**, an ancient stone railing, the Bodhi tree, numerous stupas and shrines and other monuments replete with art and architecture. The temple is enclosed on three sides by the ancient stone railing that dates back to 100 BC, built during the reign of the Sunga dynasty. The ficus tree behind the main temple was planted in the 19th century and is believed to be a descendent of the original tree under which Buddha



The Mahabodhi Temple

attained enlightenment. It is also called the *Bo* or tree of knowledge. **Vajrasana** is a large rectangular slab of polished red sandstone, with a gold canopy, where the Buddha was supposed to be seated. **Animeshlochana Chaitya** is a



Vajrasana

miniature of the Mahabodhi temple and is said to mark the spot where Buddha spent a week gazing at the Bodhi tree in gratitude after attaining enlightenment. Apart from the many stupas, there are **Ashoka's Pillar** and a row of Hindu shrines. **Sujata's Stupa** marks the spot where a woman named Sujata had discovered an ailing prince, after practising severe penance. She offered him *kheer* (rice pudding) which helped him to recover, miraculously. The **Archaeological Museum** has a collection of Buddhist and Hindu relics along with terracotta seals, scriptures and artefacts from the Sunga period (1 BC to 1 AD).

Gourmet's Delights

There are many restaurants serving Thai, Japanese and Tibetan food to cater to the variety of tourists who flock here. Some of them are **Ginza**, **Fujiya Green**, **Pole-Pole** and **New Pole**. For North Indian food, go to **Siddhartha**.

Shopper's Paradise

All kinds of Buddhist kitsch can be bought here from a market thriving near the temple complex. Choose from a choice of Buddha statuettes, dry Bodhi tree leaves, Buddha's footprints on cloth, bronze Buddha miniatures, paintings in Tibetan style on paper and silk, sandalwood rosaries and junk jewellery.

Facts at a Glance

Access: **By Air:** The nearest airport is Gaya, 12 km away, that has been put on the international map now. There are flights connecting Bangkok and Colombo to the town. **By Rail:** Gaya, the main railhead is about 12 km away. Gaya is well connected by train to Delhi, Kolkata, Varanasi and Mumbai. **By Road:** It is advisable to travel to and from Bodhgaya during the day. To reach Bodhgaya from Gaya, one can take a bus or a shared auto-rickshaw (Rs 7-10 per person). These operate from the Kacheri Bus Stand from morning to late evening and take about a half hour to reach to Bodhgaya. Bihar State Tourism Development Corporation (BSTDC) runs a bus service (ordinary and deluxe) from Patna to Bodhgaya three times a day, departing from the Tourist Bhavan at Kautilya Vihar. **Distances:** Patna 112 km, Ranchi 220 km, Rajgir 65 km and Nalanda 79 km. **Getting Around:** Though taxis can be hired after negotiating rates, cycle-rickshaws are the most popular mode of transport within the city. **Temperatures:** The daytime temperature is normally pleasant, falls between 14° to 18°C; in the night it drops to 4°C. June is the hottest month, the temperature can

soar to a searing 47°C; in the night it drops to a still warm, 28°C. June-end to September is a period of monsoon. **Best time to visit:** November to February. April is when Buddha Jayanti is celebrated and a large number of devotees flock here.

City Code: 0631

BSTDC Information Centre: 2400672.

Banks/Post Office: SBI is next to Mahayana Guest House. Post Office: 2400472.

Hospitals: Sadar Hospital, G B Road, Gaya.

Home Away From Home

Lotus Nikko Hotel Bodhgaya (200700/200789), The Royal Residency (2200124), Buddha International, Shashi International, BSTDC Tourist Bungalow (2400445), Hotel Embassy, Niranjana Hotel, Bhutanese Monastery, Burmese Vihara.

RAJGIR

The ancient capital of Magadh, the Buddha is said to have spent 12 years here. He also converted the Magadh King Bimbisara to Buddhism. The **Vishwa Shanti Stupa/ Peace Pagoda**



Rajgir



Vishwa Shanti Stupa

is the main focus of Buddhist attention in Rajgir. Four gold statues recall the Buddha's birth, enlightenment, teachings and death. It was built by Bimbisar's son Ajatshatru. **Gridhrakuta/Vulture's Peak** is where the Buddha set in motion his Second Wheel of Law. Rajgir is also an important place for Jains as Lord Mahavira spent some time in Rajgir and the hills are topped with **Digambara** shrines.



Vulture's Peak

Ajatshatru Fort and **Bimbisar's Jail**, where Bimbisar was imprisoned and eventually executed by his son and successor, are the other attractions of Rajgir. Another eminent place worth a visit is the **Saptaparni Cave** where the first Buddhist Council gathered shortly after the Buddha's death, to compile his teachings in writing.

Gourmet's Delights

Hotel Anand and **Green** are good vegetarian restaurants while **Centaur Hokke** serves more expensive Japanese and Indian food.

Facts at a Glance

Access: By Air: The nearest airport is at Patna (101 km), which is connected to Kolkata, Mumbai, Delhi, Ranchi and Lucknow. **By Rail:** Though Rajgir itself has a railway station, it is more convenient to take a train to Patna and change there for a train to Rajgir. Alternatively, there is a direct train from Howrah (Kolkata). **By Road:** Rajgir is connected by road to Patna, Nalanda (12 km), Gaya (34 km), Bodhgaya, Pawapuri (38 km) and Bihar Sharif (25 km). **Temperatures:** Summer: Min 20°C, Max 45°C; Winter: Min 6°C, Max 28°C. **Rainfall:** Mid-June to mid-September. **Best time to visit:** October to March.

City Code: 06119

Home Away From Home

Centaur Hokke, Ajatashatru, Gautam Vihar (BSTDC) and Hotel Rajgir.



Gautam Buddha