

Lumbini (Nepal): Abode of Sagarmatha and Native Land of Buddhism

Nepal is a landlocked sovereign nation located in South Asia. The mountainous north of Nepal has eight of the world's ten tallest mountains, including the highest point on Earth, *Mount Everest*, called Sagarmatha in Nepali. It contains more than 240 peaks over 20,000 ft (6,096 m) above sea level. Lumbini in Nepal is the hallowed cradle of Buddhism and birthplace of Siddhartha Gautama. Siddhartha Gautama lived roughly between 623-543 BCE and he founded *Buddhism* as Gautama Buddha.

Lumbini is one of four magnets for pilgrimage that sprang up in places pivotal to the life of the Buddha, the others being at Kushinagar, Bodh Gaya and Sarnath. Lumbini is one of the holiest places of one of the world's great religions, and its remains contain important evidence about the nature of Buddhist pilgrimage centres from as early as the 3rd century BC. There are also evidences of many royal visits to this sacred place. One such royal visitor was Emperor Ashoka Mauraya of India in 249 BC. To commemorate his visit, he erected a grand stone monolith which stands till today. Nearby is the shrine of Maya Devi, Buddha's mother. It contains a stone relief depicting Buddha's native scene. In the area are also modern Buddhist shrines and an older Lamaist gumpa. East of Lumbini lays Chitwan national park. One of the Best Park's on this side of the World. It is a home to the rhinoceroses, royal bengal tiger, gangetic dolphin and crocodiles. There are also over 50 species of large mammals and over 400 species of birds.

Lumbini, as of 1997, is a UNESCO World Heritage Site specifically nominated for the International World Heritage Program. Lumbini in Nepal is finicky and Nepal in general can leave an enchanting experience making the destination an interesting memoir.

The Venue: Hotel Nirvana

The hotel is located in Bhairahawa, a town which is 20 kms away from Lumbini. Close to the airport, in the city center, this hotel is in the same region as Ashoka Column and Mayadevi Temple.

How to get to Lumbini, Nepal

Nepal, being a friendly nation, does not create fuss over the entries. One can even get the VISA on arrival, though this will be only for 15 days. Citizens of SAARC countries do not need to pay for the VISA as it is free for them. **Indians do not need VISA for Nepal.** There are multiple routes to enter Nepal, though the mediums are quite restricted.

By Air

The closest airport to the conference venue is at Bhairahawa (also known as Sidhartha Nagar), where there are flights to and from Kathmandu. Other airports serving more destinations include Gorakhpur and Faizabad in India. The only international airport in Nepal is Kathmandu's Tribhuvan International Airport. There are approximately fifteen international flights plying to and fro Kathmandu. Some of the regular private air carriers are Gulf Airways, Druk Air, Biman Bangladesh Airlines, Aeroflot, China South West Airlines, Singapore Airlines, Lufthansa, Air India, Air Sahara, Royal Nepal Airlines and Aurtiair. There are many domestic air services plying within Nepal. Most of the important tourist spots are connected by air ways. Kathmandu has direct or indirect flights from nearly all major cities in Eurasia and Americas. There are direct flights to Asian cities like Delhi, Mumbai, Dhaka, Karachi, Islamabad, Sanghai, Singapore, Tokyo, Dubai, Doha and Abu Dhabi. Among the European cities, flights are available from Paris, London, Berlin, Berne, Frankfurt, Vienna, Munich, Moscow and Amsterdam. Apart from that, regular flights are available from New York, Los Angeles and Tel Aviv. If you want to fly from India, Delhi to Kathmandu is the least expensive route by air to Nepal. Otherwise, you can fly from Delhi to Gorakhpur within India and then a bus or taxi for 90 km travel to reach Lumbini. The least expensive option is to take a train and then a bus from Gorakhpur.

By Train

Nepal Janakpur Jayanagar Railways operate passenger coaches to eastern Terai. You can also try reaching Indo-Nepal border by train, cross the border (by a riksha or auto) and then take the bus to your destination.

By Road

A popular way of entering Nepal is at the border with India. There are entry points at Kakkarbhitta (West Bengal), Biratnagar (Bihar), Birgunj (Bihar), Sunauli, Nepalgunj, Dhanagadi and Mahendranagar (all across the border from Uttar Pradesh). The towns are listed here as they lie from east to west. Buses enter at these points and of course you could drive in as well. The crossing at Sunauli is by far the most popular route between India and Nepal. It's

also the easiest route from Gorakhpur, India and very near to the conference venue (just 2 km from Sunauli). There are direct buses from Delhi to Sunauli but many people prefer to do as much of the journey as possible by train - several trains run daily from Delhi to Gorakhpur, where you can pick up a bus to the city of the conference venue.



To know more and to familiarize with Lumbini (Nepal), please visit the following links:

- <http://wikitravel.org/en/Lumbini>
- http://www.nepal-tourism.net/Lumbini_Nepal.htm
- <http://www.nepalphotogallery.com/lumbini.htm>
- <http://www.sacred-destinations.com/nepal/lumbini>
- <http://www.lonelyplanet.com/nepal/the-terai-and-mahabharat-range/lumbini>
- <http://www.tourism.gov.np/index.php>
- <http://nepal.saarctourism.org/lumbini.html>