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Nalanda
Bihar, India

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Background Note about Nalanda & Its Heritage

➤ **About**

Nalanda was a significant center of learning in the ancient world, often considered the world's first residential university. It was founded in Nalanda in the 5th century CE by Kumaragupta-I of the Gupta Dynasty around 427 CE. The University flourished under the patronage of the Gupta emperors in the 5th and 6th centuries, and later under the Pushyabhuti dynasty and the Pala rulers. It attracted scholars and students from across Asia, including China, Korea, Japan, Tibet, and Central Asia. In 2016, the Archaeological Site of Nalanda Mahavihara was inscribed as a World Heritage Site by UNESCO.

Nalanda was not just a university; it was also a Buddhist monastery. The famous Chinese traveler Hiuen Tsang (also known as Xuanzang) wrote about it in his travelogs. It is believed, there were 10,000 monks and 2,000 teachers at Nalanda. The famous mathematician and astronomer Aryabhata was associated with the Nalanda Mahavihara. Some notable students included Nagarjuna and Vasubandhu were revered scholars associated with the mahavihara. Harshavardhana was an important patron of the mahavihara in the 7th century CE and hosted Xuanzang. Nalanda was an active center of learning for about 700 years, from the 5th century CE until its destruction around 12th century CE.

The name Nalanda was made up by three Sanskrit words with different combined meanings which is 'Na-alam-daa' means "Unstoppable flow of knowledge" or "where the gift of knowledge never ceases."

"Nalanda received support from many patrons, both Buddhist and non-Buddhist, from India and Java. Nalanda was attacked by Huns under Mihirakula in the 5th century and the Gauda king of Bengal in the 8th century, but the university was rebuilt and expanded after these attacks. The final major destruction is attributed to Muhammad Bakhtiyar Khilji around 1200 CE. Despite this attack, Nalanda continued to function for decades, potentially even centuries, after the raid, with monks being supported by local patrons, such as the Pithipatis of Magadha.

Over 750 years, Nalanda's faculty included some of the most respected scholars of Mahayana Buddhism. Historian William Dalrymple said that "at its peak, it was the undisputed scholarly center of the Mahayana Buddhist world." The monastery's faculty, students and influential figures (whose works were studied there) included notable personalities like Dharmapala, Nagarjuna, Dharmakirti, Asanga, Vasubandhu, Chandrakirti, Xuanzang, Śīlabhadra, and Vajrabodhi. There is a saying that the Nalanda university is more than 500 years older than both Oxford and Bologna universities of Europe.

Nalanda's curriculum included Buddhist philosophies and a wide range of other subjects. In addition to Buddhist philosophies, the curriculum covers Madhyamaka, Yogachara, Sarvastivada and Mahayana and Hinayana texts. It also included other subjects like the vedas, grammar, medicine (Chikitsavidya), logic (hetuvidya), mathematics, astronomy, and alchemy. The mahavihara (great monastery) had a renowned library that was an important source of Sanskrit texts, which were taken to East Asia by pilgrims like Xuanzang and Yijing. The text describes the university's library as a monumental and renowned repository of knowledge called Dharmaganja (Mart of Religion). It was composed of three main buildings, whose names are Ratnodadhi (Sea of Jewels), Ratnasagar (Ocean of Jewels) and Ratnaranjaka (Jewel-adorned).

Structure of Nalanda

Nalanda is located about 16 kilometers north of Rajgir and about 90 kilometers southeast of Patna. It is connected to India's highway network via NH 31, 20, and 120. Nalanda is also about 80 kilometers northeast of Bodh Gaya, another important Buddhist site in Bihar.

The Nalanda archaeological site covers a large area to the northwest of Bargaon (Nalanda) village and is situated between three historical man-made lakes: Gidhi, Panashokar, and Indrapuskarani. On the south bank of Indrapushkarani lake is the Nava Nalanda Mahavihara, a university founded in memory of Nalanda. On the southwest bank of the same lake is Nalanda Open University, the state university named after the ancient Nalanda University.

Modern Nalanda University

1. Revival of Nalanda University

The Indian government made a big effort to bring back Nalanda's legacy by creating the **modern Nalanda University**. The project officially started in 2010, but by **2014**, the university began to make significant progress. Here's why it's important:

- **International Collaboration:** The new Nalanda University is not just an Indian institution. It's supported by several countries, including **China, Japan, South Korea, and Singapore**. This makes it an international center of learning, much like the ancient Nalanda was, where scholars from all over the world can exchange ideas.
- **Focus on Many Subjects:** The modern university doesn't just focus on **Buddhist studies**, but also includes areas like **environmental studies, economics, history, and political science**. This helps the university stay relevant and become a leading center for various academic fields and global development.

2. Cultural and Academic Interest

Nalanda's ancient history and reputation as one of the oldest and most respected universities in the world have sparked renewed global interest.

- **Global Awareness:** Scholars from all over the world—especially in fields like **history, Buddhism, and philosophy**—look to Nalanda as a source of inspiration. Its historical role as a meeting point for scholars from **China, Tibet, and Southeast Asia** is fascinating for people interested in global learning.
- **UNESCO World Heritage Status:** In **2016**, the ruins of ancient Nalanda were recognized as a **UNESCO World Heritage Site**, which attracted more attention to the site. It became a symbol of India's intellectual history and attracted tourists and researchers alike.

3. India's Cultural Diplomacy and 'Look East' Policy

India's government has been strengthening ties with **East Asia** through its '**Look East**' (now **Act East**) policy. Nalanda plays a key role in this diplomatic effort.

- **Cultural Diplomacy:** By reviving Nalanda University, India is using it to strengthen connections with countries like **China, Japan, and South Korea**. The university helps promote cultural exchange and intellectual collaboration, boosting India's global influence and relationships with East Asian countries.

4. Historical and Archaeological Interest

The ruins of Nalanda are rich in history and have drawn attention from archaeologists and historians around the world.

- **Excavations and Findings:** Ongoing archaeological work at the Nalanda ruins continues to uncover valuable information about ancient India, especially about the **Buddhist monastic system** and early academic institutions. Scholars are studying ancient **artifacts, inscriptions, manuscripts, and the architecture** of the site.

5. Popularity of Buddhist Studies and Mindfulness Movement

There has been a surge in global interest in Buddhism, Buddhist philosophy, and mindfulness practices in the 21st century. Nalanda's historical significance as a Buddhist learning center has made it central to this renewed interest.

- **Buddhism's Global Influence:** Many people, including **Buddhist scholars and practitioners**, are rediscovering Nalanda's role in spreading Buddhist teachings. The ancient university's importance in Buddhist studies has attracted more attention as Buddhism becomes more influential globally.

6. Educational Innovation and Legacy

The ancient Nalanda University was one of the first to promote **global learning** by bringing together scholars from different parts of Asia. This legacy is still relevant today.

- **Modern Education Models:** Nalanda's focus on a wide range of academic disciplines and **cross-cultural learning** makes it a model for modern educational systems. It is seen as an early example of what we now call a **globalized education system**, where people from all over the world come together to study and share knowledge.

7. Digital and Media Attention

In the age of **social media** and **online publications**, Nalanda's story has spread far and wide.

- **Documentaries and Articles:** The history of Nalanda has been featured in documentaries, news articles, and on social media platforms, making it accessible to more people. It's been discussed in **international academic conferences** and featured in online content, helping to highlight the university's historical and cultural significance.

Conclusion:

In the 21st century, India has made significant efforts to revive Nalanda's legacy through the establishment of the modern Nalanda University. This new institution aims to promote global learning and interdisciplinary studies, continuing Nalanda's tradition of fostering intellectual exchange. It is supported by several countries, which helps strengthen international ties and cultural diplomacy.

The global recognition of the Nalanda ruins as a UNESCO World Heritage Site has increased interest in the university's historical and cultural importance. Archaeological excavations continue to provide valuable insights into ancient Indian history and Buddhist monastic practices. Furthermore, the growing interest in Buddhism and mindfulness in modern times has led many people to rediscover Nalanda's role in shaping Buddhist thought. The university's influence is still felt today, as its legacy continues to inspire educational reform and interdisciplinary learning worldwide. Overall, the story of Nalanda University is one of intellectual greatness, cultural exchange, and tragic loss. Its revival and continued relevance highlight the importance of preserving our shared history and fostering global collaboration in education.

Important Places to visit in and around Rajgir, Nalanda:

Swarn Bhandar (4 km)

The caves at SwarnBhandar, located in Rajgir, are a pair of rock-cut caverns linked to Jain history and a popular treasure legend. Also known as Son Bhandar, or "store of gold," these ancient caves feature early Indian rock-cutting techniques and intriguing inscriptions. The caves have Maurya-era architectural resemblances while the inscriptions date them more specifically to the Gupta period. The site draws archaeology enthusiasts interested in ancient Indian craftsmanship and Buddhist heritage. It remains a key stop for visitors exploring the historical and spiritual landscape of Bihar. The caves and surrounding area are kept clean and well-preserved, making it a pleasant place to visit.

Rajgir Wildlife Safari (10 km)

Rajgir Wildlife Safari is a modern wildlife sanctuary nestled among the hills of Rajgir, offering visitors a blend of nature, adventure, and education. It provides opportunities to spot native species such as deer, bears, leopards, tigers, and lions in their natural habitat and enjoy family-friendly activities amidst scenic landscapes. The park emphasizes wildlife conservation and environmental awareness through guided tours and safaris. It is an ideal destination for nature lovers and those seeking a break from urban life. Visitors can engage with diverse flora and fauna, enhancing their appreciation of the region's natural heritage. Perfect for families and nature buffs, this modern wildlife and safari park in Rajgir combines picnicking, animal sightings, and adventure activities in a lush setting. The facility is clean, well-maintained, and

equipped with accessible drinking water.

Heritage of Nalanda Mahavihara (20 km)

The Heritage of Nalanda Mahavihara represent one of the world's earliest residential universities, established around the 5th century CE by the Gupta Empire. Spanning about 23 hectares, the site includes Buddhist temples, stupas, monastic complexes, classrooms, and libraries that highlight the academic and religious pursuits of ancient India. For nearly a millennium, it flourished as a great centre for Buddhist learning and attracted scholars from across Asia. The complex was destroyed and rebuilt multiple times, most notably after an attack by Bakhtiyar Khalji in the early 13th century. Today, it stands as a UNESCO World Heritage Site and a symbol of India's rich intellectual and cultural heritage.

Mahabodhi Temple (71 km)

The Mahabodhi Temple marks the sacred location where Lord Buddha attained enlightenment under the Bodhi tree around the 6th century BCE. This ancient temple complex features fine examples of Buddhist architecture and has been a major pilgrimage site for Buddhists worldwide. Its central shrine is surrounded by stupas, shrines, and monasteries, contributing to a vibrant spiritual atmosphere. The temple's UNESCO World Heritage status underscores its global cultural and religious significance. Millions of pilgrims and tourists visit annually to experience its profound historical legacy. Visitors frequently mention the tranquil and serene environment, ideal for meditation and reflection.

The Great Buddha Statue (71 km)

Rising 25 meters tall, the Great Buddha Statue in Bodh Gaya is an impressive symbol of peace and compassion. Crafted from stone and standing near the Mahabodhi Temple, it enables visitors to connect with Buddhist philosophy in a powerful visual form. The statue is surrounded by smaller stone sculptures that depict various aspects of Buddha's life. It serves as both a contemplative spot and a prominent landmark for spiritual pilgrims. The statue enhances Bodh Gaya's status as a centre of Buddhist worship and meditation.

Bodhgaya Bodhi Tree (71 km)

The Bodhgaya Bodhi Tree is believed to be a direct descendant of the original tree under which Gautama Buddha meditated and attained enlightenment. Located within the Mahabodhi Temple precinct, it serves as a living spiritual symbol for devotees. This sacred fig tree attracts pilgrims who come to meditate and perform rituals in its presence. The site forms a focal point for Buddhist festivals and ceremonies. It continues to inspire peace, reflection, and religious devotion throughout the year.

Wat Thai Buddhagaya Temple (71 km)

The Wat Thai Buddhagaya Temple is a beautifully ornate Thai monastery situated in Bodh Gaya, showcasing striking Thai architectural motifs, adding cultural diversity to Bodh Gaya's Buddhist landscape. It functions as a centre for Buddhist meditation, teaching, and cultural exchange. The temple enriches Bodh Gaya's religious diversity and offers peaceful spaces for spiritual retreat. Visitors can experience authentic Thai Buddhist traditions and hospitality. This temple is also a cultural landmark representing international Buddhist ties.

Gaya Ji (75 km)

Gaya Ji is a revered Hindu pilgrimage site in Gaya, closely tied to ancestral rites and spiritual ceremonies and offers systematic and sect-specific Hindu rituals performed by trained priests. Devotees come here to perform rituals honouring their forefathers, especially during specific religious festivals. The site blends religious devotion with cultural traditions that have been preserved over centuries. Its tranquil setting offers pilgrims a place for introspection and spiritual renewal.

ISKCON Gaya (75 km)

ISKCON GAYA is a well-maintained temple belonging to the International Society for Krishna Consciousness, welcoming visitors for worship and cultural activities. It serves as a centre for learning about the teachings of Lord Krishna and promotes devotional practices. The temple hosts vibrant festivals, kirtans, and community events that foster spiritual growth and cultural exchange. Its tranquil atmosphere invites meditation and reflection amid devotional art and architecture. ISKCON GAYA strengthens the spiritual fabric of the local community and visitors alike.

Bihar Museum (90 km)

The Bihar Museum in Patna is a state-of-the-art cultural institution that narrates the rich history and art of Bihar through its extensive collections which are well organized and displayed. Its modern architectural design complements exhibits ranging from ancient pottery and sculptures to manuscripts and paintings. The museum serves as an educational hub, providing context on Bihar's contribution to Indian civilization. It hosts events and workshops to engage the community in preserving cultural heritage. Showcasing Bihar's art, history, and archaeology in a contemporary architectural marvel, this museum appeals to culture seekers who want to understand the region's legacy. This museum invites visitors to explore the diverse cultural fabric and archaeological wealth of Bihar.

Sanjay Gandhi Biological Park (90 km)

Also known as Patna Zoo, is large, which may require significant time to explore fully, and offers a blend of zoological and botanical experiences in a sprawling green environment. It houses a wide variety of animals, birds, and reptiles alongside lush botanical gardens and playgrounds. The park includes recreational facilities such as a mini-train and picnic spots, making it popular among families. It focuses on wildlife conservation and education through interactive exhibits and animal awareness programs. Sanjay Gandhi Biological Park is a relaxing retreat that connects urban dwellers with nature.

Buddha Smriti Park (90 km)

Buddha Smriti Park is a tranquil oasis in downtown Patna, this park is known for its stupa, modern Buddhist Museum, and peaceful gardens, ideal for reflection and urban greenery. The serene urban park with well-kept gardens, soft chanting, and serene music cantered around a large stupa and a modern Buddhist Museum. It commemorates the teachings and life of Buddha and provides a tranquil environment for meditation and reflection. The park's landscaped gardens, water bodies, and walking paths offer a peaceful escape in the city. Its museum features interactive exhibits about Buddhism that narrates the life of Buddha through various media, blending modern and traditional art forms and its relevance today. This park promotes cultural education, spiritual contemplation, and community engagement in Patna.

Rajdhani Vatika (90 km)

Rajdhani Vatika, praised for its cleanliness and well-kept landscape, is an expansive city park in Patna, offering lakes, picnic spots, and green spaces for recreation and relaxation. It is popular among families and fitness enthusiasts for walking trails, open-air activities, and peaceful natural surroundings. The park often hosts cultural events and outdoor gatherings, serving as a social hub. Well-maintained gardens and water features enhance the park's aesthetic appeal. Rajdhani Vatika provides an accessible urban oasis for residents and tourists seeking respite from city life.

Takhat Shri Harimandir Ji Patna Sahib (95 km)

This historic Sikh gurudwara marks the birthplace of Guru Gobind Singh, the tenth Sikh Guru, making it an immensely holy site for Sikhs worldwide. Architecturally, it features traditional Sikh design with intricate carvings and domes, attracting both pilgrims and tourists. The Gurudwara offers a peaceful and spiritual environment with live chanting and soulful keertan. The gurudwara

hosts religious ceremonies, prayers, and community kitchens (langars) fostering communal harmony. It stands as a symbol of spiritual resilience and Sikh heritage in Bihar. Visitors experience deep religious significance and vibrant cultural rituals here.

HOW TO REACH RAJGIR, NALANDA, BIHAR, INDIA

| From City | Mode | Details | Duration (Approx.) | Remarks |
|-----------|---|--|--|------------------------------|
| DELHI |  Flight | Multiple daily flights to Patna : IndiGo 6E-2482, 6E-6351; Air India AI-409, AI-2937; SpiceJet SG-8489 | 1.5 hrs + 2.5 hrs (road/train to Rajgir) | Frequent & economical |
| |  Train | 12392 Shramjeevi Exp (13:10–10:25); 12368 Vikramshila Exp; 12398 Mahabodhi Exp; 12802 Purushottam Exp; 15484 Mahananda Exp | 13–21 hrs | Daily direct/indirect trains |
| KOLKATA |  Flight | Flights to Gaya : IndiGo 6E-6916 (1 daily); Alternate: Fly to Patna (IndiGo, GoAir) | 1 hr + 1.5 hrs road | Limited direct to Gaya |
| |  Train | Howrah–Rajgir Fast Passenger; Howrah–Gaya Express; 13021 Mithila Exp (via Barauni); Sealdah–Gaya Exp | 9–12 hrs | Direct/with transfers |
| MUMBAI |  Flight | Flights to Patna : IndiGo 6E-6282, 6E-5385; GoAir G8-366; Vistara UK-717 | 2.5 hrs + 3 hrs road/train | Daily direct flights |
| |  Train | 12141 LTT–Patliputra Exp; 12336 Mumbai–Gaya Exp; 11061 LTT–Jaynagar Exp | 28–32 hrs | Connect via Patna |
| CHANNAI |  Flight | Flights to Patna : IndiGo 6E-6601 (1 stop), 6E-2954, Air India AI-438 | 3 hrs + 3 hrs road/train | One-stop flights mostly |
| |  Train | 12669 Ganga Kaveri Exp (via Gaya), 12578 Bagmati Exp, 12551 Smvdkt Exp | 36–38 hrs | Long but scenic route |
| BENGALURU |  Flight | Flights to Patna : IndiGo 6E-332, 6E-6949; Vistara UK-861 | 3 hrs + 3 hrs road/train | Best option |
| |  Train | 12295 Sanghamitra Exp; 12510 Guwahati Exp | 42–44 hrs | Few direct, mostly via Patna |
| PATNA |  Train | 13233 Rajgir Intercity (Dep 16:00 – Arr 18:30); 53229 Passenger | 2.5–3 hrs | Multiple local options |
| |  Taxi | Direct road to Rajgir (~90 km) | 2.5–3 hrs | ₹1500–2500 approx. |
| GAYA JI |  Taxi | Gaya–Rajgir by road (via Bihar Sharif) | 1.5–2 hrs | Good road connectivity |

HOTEL DETAILS OF RAJGIR, NALANDA, BIHAR, INDIA

| Hotel Name | Category | Location | Contact Number(s) |
|------------------------------------|-----------|---|--|
| Hotel Bodhi Retreat by Basotel | 4★ Resort | Ordinance Factory Road, near Smart Point Mall, Rajgir hills, Near Nalanda | +91 90310 08011, +91 90310 08012, Landline: 06112 356568 (Pinterest , Hotel Bodhi Retreat) |
| Hotel Tathagat Ashok | Mid-range | Virayatan Road, Rajgir | +91 99717 53615, +91 80845 23231 (Instagram , Instagram) |
| R D Heritage | Mid-range | Opp. Gargee Gautam Vihar, Main Road, Rajgir | +91 99346 41555 (MapQuest) |
| Hotel Devdoot | Budget | NH-82, near Rajgir Bus Stand, Bangali Para | +91 98352 99401 (Mappls , MakeMyTrip) |
| Pandu Pokhar Eco Adventure Resort | Resort | Virayatan Road area, Rajgir | +91 92644 96719, +91 77669 16983 (Instagram , Facebook) |
| The Rajgir Residency Hotel (Inpac) | Mid-range | Virayatan Road, Rajgir | +91 99053 63402, +91 61122 55404 (Mappls) |
| Hotel Buddha Vihar International | Mid-range | Silao Bypass Road, Rajgir | +91 91423 42152 (Instagram , goibibo.com) |

IMPORTANT CONTACT DETAILS OF RAJGIR, NALANDA

| Service / Official | Phone Number(s) |
|--|---|
| District Magistrate, Nalanda | 06112 235203 / 235204 / 235205 (nalanda.nic.in) |
| Superintendent of Police, Nalanda | 06112 235207 / 94318 22972 (nalanda.nic.in) |
| Sub-Divisional Magistrate, Rajgir | 06112 255052 / 94731 91217 (nalanda.nic.in) |
| SP-Office, Rajgir (SDPO) | 94318 00111 (nalanda.nic.in) |
| Rajgir General Tourist Info | 06112 255404 (Tel) / Fax 06112 255405 (rajgir.biharonline.in) |
| Toll-Free Tourist Helpline (Bihar Tourism) | 1800 123 6787 |



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