

Pilgrimages

by Sophia



WHAT'S COVERED

This lesson takes an in-depth look at pilgrimages. Specifically, this lesson will cover:

1. [Christian Pilgrimages](#)
2. [Hindu Pilgrimages](#)
3. [Buddhist Pilgrimages](#)

1. Christian Pilgrimages

A **pilgrimage** is a sacred journey. It may be completed by physically seeking out a particular place, such as a shrine or an important geographical location, or it could be a metaphorical journey. It is often a combination of both, as the pilgrim undergoes a symbolic identification with the place, people, and events that are associated with it.

Many places in Europe are considered holy. They are often associated with the lives and/or deaths of Christian saints. In Spain, for example, there's Camino de Santiago, or the Way of St. James. St. James was one of Christ's twelve apostles, reported to have been witness to Jesus Christ's transformation, the moment when his divinity as the Son of God was revealed.

The remains of Saint James are believed to be buried in Santiago de Compostela in Galicia, in northwestern Spain. It's therefore a very special destination for many people, and the journey marks the historical event in which the body of Saint James was carried from Jerusalem to Galicia.



TERM TO KNOW

Pilgrimage

A sacred journey that may be completed by physically seeking out a particular place, such as a shrine or an important geographical location, or taking a metaphorical journey.

2. Hindu Pilgrimages

Looking to the East, India has a distinct spiritual geography and a very long history of pilgrimages. These journeys to holy cities are part of the lives of most Hindus. The Kumbh Mela pilgrimage is usually larger than the Hajj, which is the great Muslim pilgrimage to Mecca. The Kumbh Mela of 2016 was attended by more than 80 million people. It's considered to be the largest pilgrimage on the planet.

It's traditional to dip your body in the Ganges River, or the Ganga, to honor the goddess Ganges. This ritual is believed to expedite one's release from suffering, from the karmic wheel or suffering, and therefore be closer to nirvana. On the banks of the Ganges is Varanasi, also called Benares, which is considered to be the holiest of Hinduism's holy cities, and it is the destination of many, many pilgrims.

Hinduism calls it the city of Shiva, because, according to tradition, it was this god, Shiva, who founded the city. Varanasi is one of the seven cities that offer release from suffering, or moksha, and many Hindu pilgrims travel from one city to the next for this reason.

There's also the famous Char Dham, the four dwelling places or thrones of the gods. There is one site in each of the four compass points of India: north, south, east, and west. Many people consider a pilgrimage to all four of these sites as among the most significant spiritual acts of devotion and love for the gods that one can perform.

3. Buddhist Pilgrimages

For Buddhists in India, there are four sites in the northeast that are associated with Buddha's birth, enlightenment, first sermon, and parinirvana. Parinirvana is the final nirvana that an enlightened being undergoes, and this occurs with the death of the body. Kushinagar is the city associated with this event.

Japan is another country that is interlaced with pilgrimage sites. Many of the sites are holy mountains associated with the life-giving spirits of Japan's ancient Shinto religion. Pilgrims of certain schools of Buddhism also travel to these sites, often following spiritual mandala patterns through the land that symbolize and represent the life of the Buddha.



DID YOU KNOW

Buddhism spread to Japan around the fifth century.



SUMMARY

A pilgrimage is a sacred journey that one can take physically by visiting geographical locations that hold some spiritual significance. It's also a metaphorical journey, as the pilgrim undergoes some kind of a spiritual transformation and identification with different gods, saints, or different spirits that are associated with the religion and the pilgrimage site(s) itself. A famous **Christian pilgrimage** is the Way of St. James, or the Camino de Santiago. There are many **Hindu pilgrimages**, and the largest is the Kumbh Mela. You also looked at some **Buddhist pilgrimages** in India and Japan.



TERMS TO KNOW

Pilgrimage

A sacred journey that may be completed physically seeking out a particular place, such as a shrine or important geographical location, or it could be a metaphorical journey.