



DHARMA JOURNEYS PILGRIMAGE

TO NEPAL & INDIA

WITH VEN. ROBINA COURTIN

FEB. 5-22, 2023





Dharma Journeys Pilgrimage

to Nepal & India

with Ven. Robina Courtin Feb. 5-22, 2023

Venerable Robina Courtin was ordained as a Tibetan Buddhist nun at Kopan Monastery, Nepal in 1978. She has worked since then for Lama Thubten Yeshe and Lama Zopa Rinpoche's Foundation for the Preservation of the Mahayana Tradition; as editorial director of Wisdom Publications, editor of the FPMT magazine Mandala and, until 2009, executive director of Liberation Prison Project. Since 1987 Ven. Robina has taught Buddhist courses and retreats at FPMT centers worldwide. An award-winning film by her nephew Amiel Courtin-Wilson, *Chasing Buddha* documents her life as well as her work with prisoners. She is one of the subjects of Vicki Mackenzie's book *Why Buddhism?* and a film by Christine Lundberg, *On the Road Home*.

"Ven. Robina's teachings at the Deer Park and the magical energy of this place, as well as the overwhelming power, which I could feel pervading me in Shravasti, changed the way I perceive the study and practice of Dharma and motivated me to keep going forward." — Nina H.



The pilgrimage is organized by Effie Fletcher of Himalayan High Treks, CST 2085690-40. Proceeds from the pilgrimage go to Liberation Prison Project, which offers spiritual support including books and teachings, to people in prison in the United States, Australia, and other countries.

PILGRIMAGE OVERVIEW

We meet in Kathmandu, Nepal, on February 5, then enjoy a two-day meditation retreat led by Ven. Robina, at Kopan Monastery, the monastery of her lamas. We then visit the holy sites of Kathmandu Valley — Boudhanath and Swayambhunath — before continuing to India. Ven. Robina will give Dharma teachings and lead pujas and meditation sessions at each pilgrimage place, based on the advice of Lama Zopa Rinpoche.





ADVICE FROM LAMA ZOPA RINPOCHE ABOUT BEING ON PILGRIMAGE

Rinpoche has told us that it is good to do different practices on pilgrimage, to make people's lives very meaningful and productive.

"Normally when people go on pilgrimage, they are just like tourists; maybe they take some pictures, and that's it. They don't use the places to collect merit or to meditate or to get some benefit for their minds. If it's just like sightseeing, then it won't be that much benefit."

Rinpoche says that by doing pilgrimage, we receive blessings from the holy places where enlightened beings, great yogis, and bodhisattvas have practiced. With the blessing entering our hearts, we are able to soften; our mind becomes subdued; and we are able to decrease the delusions. We are then able to develop compassion for others and to strengthen our devotion, renunciation, and wisdom. Our mental continuum becomes Dharma. This is what pilgrimage does. As we've done in past years, we can dedicate all our efforts during the pilgrimage to world peace.



AMBER TAMANG, YOUR LOCAL GUIDE

Amber Tamang is from a small village in the Solu Khumbu region of Nepal. Amber became a porter in 1992, to put himself through high school and college. He is an advocate for better working conditions for trekking staff. For his undergraduate law degree, his thesis was on legal protection for workers in tourism. He achieved a Master's Degree in Nepali Culture, Religion, and Archaeology. Amber has worked as the local guide for many pilgrimages.

As an independent researcher on the culture and religion of the Himalayas, Amber has published several articles in Nepali and English, including one for Mandala magazine. Amber became a guide with Himalayan High Treks in 1995 and has introduced many travelers to the wonders of Nepal, Tibet, and India. He now is a group leader as well as our Regional Manager. Those who've traveled with him praise his patience and kindness. Amber and his family live in Kathmandu.



ADVICE FROM AMBER TAMANG

Many of you will be coming in on the same flights. According to airport rules, only one person per agency can receive a group (no matter if it's a big group or one person), so be patient and we will find you and make sure you and your luggage are safely transported to the hotel. There will be people at the airport asking for money to help you with your luggage. Either use a free luggage cart or have a small bill (USD or AUD \$2, or 200 rupees per bag) handy in your pocket to give them. Keep your wallet well hidden as you exit the airport.

— Amber Tamang, Three Jewels Adventures, Kathmandu
+977 98510-84961 amber@hightreks.com





DAY BY DAY

ITINERARY IN DETAIL

Pre-Trip Arrival: Fly to our meeting point in Kathmandu, Nepal. You must arrive in Kathmandu no later than Sunday, February 5, 2023. (Travelers from the Americas 'lose' one day crossing the international dateline.) If you arrive early, we can arrange transfers and additional accommodations on request (additional cost).

DAY 1 (FEBRUARY 5, 2023)

Everyone meets in Kathmandu. Our local staff will pick you up at the airport and transfer you to the lovely Hyatt Regency near Boudhanath Stupa (about 20–30 minutes). First, you will go through immigration, and then go upstairs to claim your luggage (take a cart for this), and finally, go through customs and proceed to exit the airport. As you go outside, look for a sign that says "Dharma Journeys", as advised above.

Meet in the hotel lobby for dinner at 6 PM with the entire group, including Ven. Robina and our local guide Amber Tamang. The hotel is less than a 10-minute walk from Boudhanath Stupa, one of the holiest of Buddhist shrines.



Overnight at Hyatt Regency, Kathmandu. (Dinner)
Hyatt Regency Kathmandu, Bough
www.kathmandu.hyatt.regency.com
+977 (1) 517-1234



DAY 2 (FEBRUARY 6, 2023)

Kathmandu. Our first day is free to relax or to explore the city. Nepal's capital is a delight to the senses, the imagination, and the heart. For centuries, Kathmandu was forbidden to outsiders. Since it opened to the world in the early 1950s, it has been one of the most eagerly sought travel destinations. Durbar Square is at the heart of this historic city. There are options to have lunch on your own in the city or at the hotel.

An optional half-day sightseeing of Kathmandu will be offered. The cost per person is US \$40 (assuming a minimum group size of six), payable directly to Amber. This cost includes the vehicle, driver, and guide. but not entrance fees or lunch. Overnight at Hyatt Regency, Kathmandu. (Breakfast)



DAY 3–4 (FEBRUARY 7–8, 2023)

Meditation retreat at Kopan Monastery with Ven. Robina. Meet in the hotel lobby at 8 AM for the short drive to Kopan. Established in 1970 as a place of Buddhist teachings for Westerners and eventually a monastery for the monks of Solu Khumbu (where Lama Zopa Rinpoche is from), Kopan is beautifully situated on a hill above the Kathmandu Valley. One of the best Gelug monasteries in Nepal, it is home to 400 monks and, at Kachoe Ghakyil down the road, 400 nuns.

People come from all over the world to attend retreats and courses at Kopan, especially the famous November course. The accommodation is comfortable and the food very satisfactory. There has even been a cookbook published with favorite recipes from Kopan. Note that single rooms are not available and also that men and women room separately.

A typical day on retreat starts early with meditation, followed by breakfast. Then there will be teachings and discussion until lunch, with a tea break. After lunch, there will be a two-hour break during which you can take a short



easy walk, rest, or study quietly in the excellent library or on your own. During the afternoon, there are more teachings and discussion; and after dinner, a final session of teachings and meditation. Often a group in retreat will opt to maintain silence for all or part of the time (for example, before breakfast, and after dinner) as this adds to the contemplative quality of the experience. Overnight Kopan Monastery. (Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner)

Kopan Monastery
www.kopanmonastery.com
+977 (1) 482-1268
info@kopanmonastery.org



DAY 5 (FEBRUARY 9, 2023)

In the morning, we visit Swayambhunath stupa. According to legend, Kathmandu Valley was filled with a great lake, at the center of which a lotus flower grew. With the slash of the sword of the Buddha of Wisdom, Manjushri, the lake was drained and the lotus settled on top of the hill and transformed into the stupa. There is evidence that the great Indian Buddhist Emperor Ashoka visited the site 2,000 years ago.



In the afternoon visit Boudhanath stupa and temples, monasteries, and the village. Boudhanath is the religious center for Tibetans living in Nepal and is especially beloved by them. Lama Zopa Rinpoche says that upon first sight of the stupa, all one's prayers will be fulfilled. Overnight Kopan Monastery. (Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner)

DAY 6 (FEBRUARY 10, 2023)

Lumbini. Meet in the lobby at 7 AM (after tea) for transfer to the airport for our 30-minute flight to Bhairahawa airport on Buddha Air. It's an hour's drive to Lumbini and Hotel Lumbini Garden New Crystal. After lunch, visit the birthplace of the Buddha, a 15-minute walk from the hotel. Here there is an Ashokan Pillar with an inscription of King Ashoka from 250 BC, a sacred pond, ruins of the ancient monasteries, stupas, and the temple of Mayadevi, the Buddha's mother. Overnight at Hotel Lumbini Garden New Crystal. (Tea, Lunch, Dinner)

Hotel Lumbini Garden New Crystal, Lumbini
www.newcrystalhotels.com
+977 (71) 580145





DAY 7 (FEBRUARY 11, 2023)

Lumbini to Sravasti. After breakfast, we will drive to Sanauli, the Nepal–India border, an hour away. We stop for passport control and continue on an all-day drive to Sravasti, with a light lunch en route. Overnight at Hotel Lotus Nikko, Sravasti. (Breakfast, Light Lunch, Dinner)

Hotel Lotus Nikko, Sravasti
+91 (5252) 265-2 91
info@lotusnikkohotels.com



DAY 8 (FEBRUARY 12, 2023)

After breakfast, we visit Jetavana Grove, in Sravasti, the capital of the ancient Kosala kingdom, where Buddha and his disciples retreated every rainy season for twenty-five years and where he gave many of his teachings. According to Lama Zopa Rinpoche, it is easy to meditate here, so blessed is it. Relax in the afternoon, or visit the cave of the former bandit, Angulimala. After meeting Lord Buddha, the bandit calmed down and embraced Buddhism. Overnight Hotel Lotus Nikko, Sravasti. (Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner)



DAY 9 (FEBRUARY 13, 2023)

Drive from Balarampur to Kushinagar, stopping for a light lunch en route. In the afternoon enjoy a couple of hours of free time before dinner. Kushinagar is the place where Buddha passed away. His last words were said to be, "Decay is inherent in all component things. Be diligent in your practice." Overnight Hotel Lotus Nikko, Kushinagar. (Breakfast, Light Lunch, Dinner)

Hotel Lotus Nikko, Kushinagar
+91 (5564) 273 026
info@lotusnikkohotels.com



DAY 10 (FEBRUARY 14, 2023)

In Kushinagar. After breakfast, we visit Mahaparinirvana Temple where there is the statue of Buddha passing away in meditation. In the afternoon, we visit the unadorned but very holy Rambhar Stupa, where Buddha was cremated. "Do not be sad," he told his disciples. "Let the Dharma I have taught you be your teacher after my passing." Overnight Hotel Lotus Nikko, Kushinagar. (Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner)



DAY 11 (FEBRUARY 15, 2023)

An all-day drive from Kushinagar to Rajgir via Patna, in the state of Bihar. Light lunch en route. Overnight Hotel Rajgir Residency. (Breakfast, Light Lunch, Dinner)

Hotel Rajgir Residency, Rajgir
+91 (6112) 255-404
therajgirresidency@gmail.com



DAY 12 (FEBRUARY 16, 2023)

Enjoy a morning visit to the ruins of Nalanda Monastery. From the 5th to the 12th centuries, Nalanda was a major Buddhist university with 10,000 monks and students in residence. After lunch at the hotel, we'll visit Vulture Peak, where Buddha gave many teachings, including The Heart Sutra. We will take a leisurely walk up to the top for meditation and teachings. Later in the afternoon, we drive to Bodhgaya and overnight at FPMT's Root Institute. (Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner)

Root Institute for Wisdom Culture, Bodhgaya
www.rootinstitute.com
+91 (631) 220-0714





DAY 13 (FEBRUARY 17, 2023)

From Root Institute, an FPMT meditation and retreat center set in tranquil gardens we will visit Mahabodhi Stupa, the site of Buddha's enlightenment, for teachings and meditation. In the afternoon, visit other FPMT centers to learn about charitable activities such as the Maitreya School and Tara's Children Project. This evening, we can enjoy another visit to Mahabodhi Stupa. Overnight at Root Institute. (Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner)

DAY 14 (FEBRUARY 18, 2023)

Bodhgaya to Varanasi. We'll get an early start for the drive to Varanasi and have a simple breakfast en route then a late lunch/early dinner at the hotel.

In the early evening, we can pay an optional visit to the banks of the famous River Ganges, one of the holiest Hindu sites. Overnight Radisson Hotel, Varanasi. (Light Breakfast, Early Dinner)

Radisson Hotel, Varanasi
www.radissonhotels.com/en-us/hotels/radisson-varanasi
+91 542 250 1515





DAY 15 (FEBRUARY 19, 2023)

Visit Deer Park at Saranath where Lord Buddha turned the wheel of Dharma for the first time, teaching the four noble truths and the eightfold path to the five ascetics who were his first disciples. (Breakfast, Lunch)

DAY 16 (FEBRUARY 20, 2023)

Travel to Kathmandu. Early check-out from the hotel and transfer to the airport. Transfer to the hotel and check in then some free time and overnight at the Hyatt Regency in Kathmandu. (Light Breakfast)

DAY 17 (FEBRUARY 21, 2023)

Tibetan New Year (Losar) in Kathmandu. The final group activities a late-afternoon puja at Boudha Stupa, followed by dinner at the hotel. Overnight at Hyatt Regency, Kathmandu. (Breakfast, Dinner)

Hyatt Regency Kathmandu, Boudha
www.kathmandu.hyatt.regency.com
+977 (1) 449-1234





DAY 18 (FEBRUARY 22, 2023)

Transfer to the airport to depart Kathmandu or continue exploring the region. (Breakfast)

OTHER COST AND CONSIDERATIONS

Passport; Visa(s); Physicians Visit; Immunizations and medications as needed; Emergency Medical & Evacuation Insurance; Travel to Nepal; Meals beyond what is listed in the above itinerary; Beverages; Spending/Personal Money.

TRIP ACTIVITY LEVEL

Mild: Accommodations are most often in comfortable four or five- star hotels. Activities are usually mild and can include day hikes of less than four hours in length. Vehicle time can include fatigue with long travel along rough roads.

PILGRIMAGE COST

The total program cost of US\$5960 includes land cost and the estimated in-trip air cost.



Land cost (as itinerary has described): US \$5520. In-trip
airfare estimate (air during the itinerary program): US \$440.
If you prefer a private room, you'll be charged a single
supplement of US \$1200. Pilgrimage costs are based on
a typical group size of at least 20 participants. Should this
trip be undersubscribed, a surcharge of US\$300 per per-
son will apply. This surcharge will be added upon registra-
tion and will be removed/reduced as possible. A minimum
of 10 participants are necessary to operate this pilgrimage.

The deadline for sign-up is Nov. 5, 2022. Late sign-ups
may be accepted if there is space available, with a service
charge of US \$100.

A deposit of US \$500 holds your place:
www.hightreks.com/apply.html





PLEASE NOTE:

- This is meant only as a guide to what our days will be like. Changes may be made as we go along and will be announced and posted in the hotel reception areas. These changes will be based on local conditions, health, and hotel availability.
- The times mentioned are all approximate and rounded off.
- Sturdy vehicles with air-conditioning will be provided.
- Airport transfers are included on Day 1 and Day 18. We can arrange optional transfers and services at a modest cost should you arrive early or depart late from the program.
- Included meals for each day have been shown at the end of each daily description.
- Hotel contact information is subject to change.



- The format for the phone numbers is country code, city code, then the local number in parentheses. Nepal's country code is 977 and India's country code is 91. For mobile phones in Nepal, you don't need to put the city code 1 after the country code as you do for other local numbers. You will find more information about international calling in our trip notes, provided after registration.



Himalayan High Treks, CST 2085690-40
— Effie Fletcher, August 2022

Phone/WhatsApp +1 415 551-1005

Hightreks.com

Dharma Journeys Pilgrimage