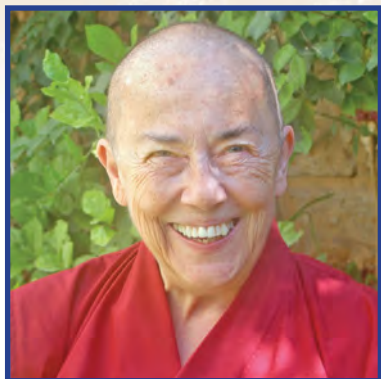


Our Annual Pilgrimage in **Nepal & India** with **Venerable Robina Courtin**



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*.

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.

We meet in Kathmandu, Nepal, on October 24, 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 very 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.

Rinpoche has also advised that when we see the Great Stupa in Boudhanath for the very first time, even from the airplane, we should make special strong prayers. "This stupa is so powerful that anybody who makes prayers to it has their wishes fulfilled. Whatever you pray for, it will succeed. So do your best prayer!"

"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., Pilgrim, Switzerland



A tip from Amber Tamang, your Nepal guide:

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 I will find you and make sure you and your luggage are safely transported to the hotel. I will have a sign with your name on it.

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 \$1, or 100 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

Amrit Marg, Thamel (next to Bhagwan, Bahal Temple)

Kathmandu, Nepal

Office Tel: +977 (1) 443-7785

Cell Tel: +977 98510-84961

amber@hightreks.com

Your 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 Thursday, October 24, 2019. (Travelers from the Americas 'lose' one day crossing the international date line.) If you arrive early, we can arrange transfers and additional accommodations on request (additional cost).

Day 1 (October 24, 2019)

Everyone meets in Kathmandu. Our local staff will pick you up at the airport and transfer you to the Hyatt Regency near Boudhanath Stupa (about 20–30 minutes). First, you will go through immigration (obtain visa), 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 with your name on it, 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 most holy of Buddhist shrines. Overnight at Hyatt Regency, Kathmandu. (Dinner)

Hyatt Regency Kathmandu, Boudha

Tel: +977 (1) 449-1234

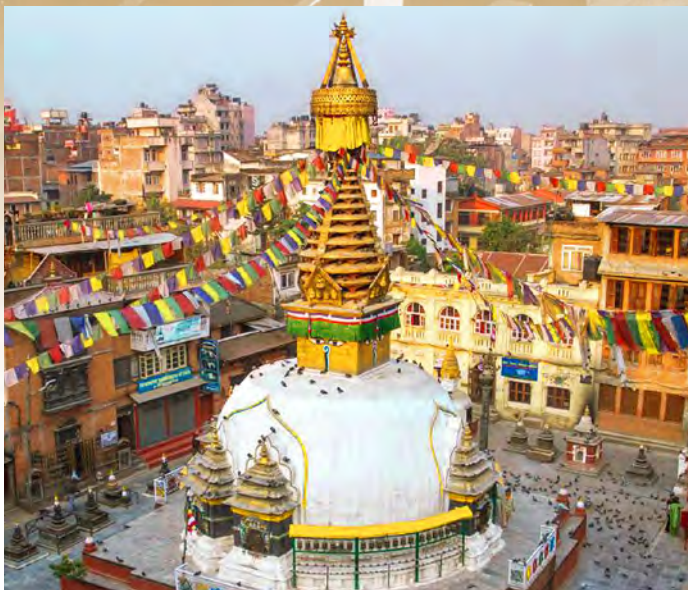
Fax: +977 (1) 449-0033

www.kathmandu.hyatt.regency.com



Amber Tamang is from a small village in the Solu Khumbu region of Nepal — a hamlet not on most maps! Amber became a porter in 1992, to put himself through high school and college. He is an advocate of 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 Philosophy. Amber has worked as the local guide for many pilgrimages. An independent researcher in 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 for Nepal. Those who've traveled with him praise his patience and kindness. His English is articulate as he enthusiastically describes the local customs of the Himalaya and its people. Amber and his family live in Kathmandu, Nepal.





Day 2 (October, 25, 2019)

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 sight-seeing of Kathmandu will be offered. Cost per person is US \$30 (assuming a minimum group size of six), payable directly to Amber. This cost includes vehicle, driver and guide. but not entrance fees or lunch. Overnight at Hyatt Regency, Kathmandu. (Breakfast)



Day 3-4 (October 26-27, 2019)

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 retreat 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](#)

[Budhanilkantha Municipality, Nepal](#)

+977 (1) 482-1268

info@kopenmonastery.org

www.kopanmonastery.com



Day 7 (October 30, 2019)

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](#)

[Baharaich Highway, Sravasti](#)

[+91 \(5252\) 265-2 91](#)

info@lotusnikkohotels.com



Day 5 (October 28, 2019)

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. In the afternoon, Overnight Kopan Monastery. (Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner)

Day 6 (October 29, 2019)

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 to Hotel Lumbini Garden New Crystal. After lunch, visit the birth place 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 Heritage Site](#)

[Lumbini, Nepal](#)

[+977 \(71\) 580145](#)

www.newcrystalhotels.com



Day 8 (October 31, 2019)

After breakfast, we visit Jetavana Grove, in Sravasti, 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 (November 1, 2019)

All-day (eight hour) drive from Balarampur to Kushinagar, stopping for a light lunch en route. 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." Hotel Lotus Nikko, Kushinagar. (Breakfast, Light Lunch, Dinner)

Hotel Lotus Nikko

Buddha Marg, Kushinagar

+91 (5564) 273-026

lotusniko_kushinagar@yahoo.com

Day 10 (November 2, 2019)

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 (November 3, 2019)

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)

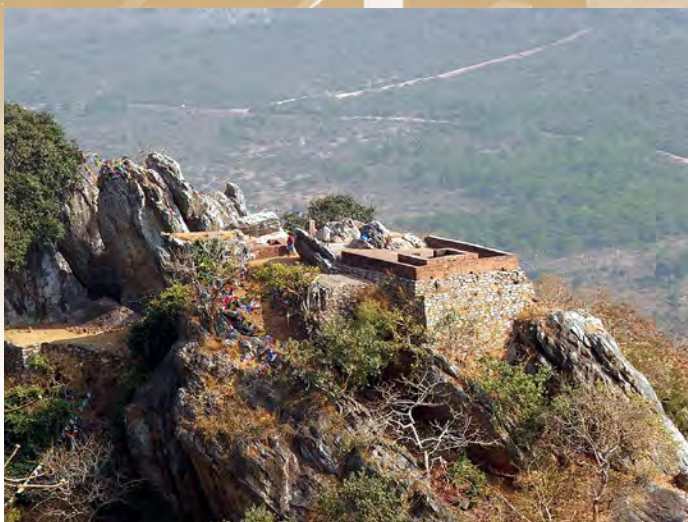
Hotel Rajgir Residency

Rajgir, Dist - Nalanda - 803116

+91 (6112) 255-404

therajgirresidency@gmail.com





Day 12 (November 4, 2019)

In the morning visit 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 go to 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. Then we drive to Bodhgaya and overnight at FPMT's Root Institute. (Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner)

Root Institute for Wisdom Culture

Bodhgaya, Gaya District

Bihar, 824 231 INDIA

+91 (631) 220-0714

www.rootinstitute.com



Day 13 (November 5, 2019)

From Root Institute, an FPMT meditation and retreat center set in tranquil gardens, it's a short walk into town; rickshaws are also available. We will visit Mahabodi Stupa, the site of Buddha's enlightenment, for teachings and meditation. Bodhgaya also has shops and restaurants to explore. 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 16 (November 8, 2019)

Free day in Kathmandu. Meet in the lobby at 5 PM to go for a final puja and dinner at Boudhanath. Overnight at Hyatt Regency, Kathmandu. (Breakfast, Dinner)

Hyatt Regency Kathmandu, Boudha

Tel: +977(1) 449-1234

Fax: +977(1) 449-0033

www.kathmandu.hyatt.regency.com

Day 17 (November 9, 2019)

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

Day 14 (November 6, 2019)

Varanasi. We'll get an early start for the drive to Varanasi and have a simple breakfast en route then lunch at the hotel. After lunch we drive a few more miles to Saranath Deer Park where Lord Buddha turned the wheel of Dharma for the first time, teaching on the four noble truths and the eightfold path to the five ascetics who were his first disciples. 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, Lunch)

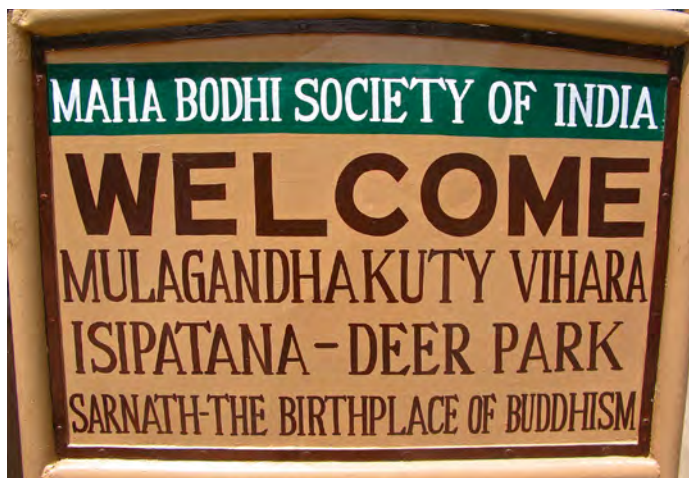
Radisson Hotel, RH Tower, Cantonment Road

The Mall Rd, Varanasi, Uttar Pradesh

+91 (542) 250-1515

Day 15 (November 7, 2019)

Travel to Kathmandu. Early check-out from the hotel and transfer to the airport for Buddha Air's 8:30 a.m. flight to Kathmandu. Transfer to the hotel and check-in then some free time and overnight at the lovely Hyatt Regency in Kathmandu. (Light Breakfast)





Pilgrimage Cost

- Total program cost of US\$4980 includes land cost and in-trip air cost.
- Land cost (as itinerary has described): US \$4,600.
- In-trip airfare estimate (air during itinerary program): US \$380.
- If you prefer a private room, you'll be charged a single supplement of US \$900.
- Pilgrimage costs are based on a typical group size of at least 20 participants.
- A minimum of 10 participants is necessary to operate the pilgrimage and it is limited to 30 participants.
- The deadline for sign-up is July 25, 2019.
- Late sign-ups may be accepted if there is space available, with a service charge of US \$100.
- Should this trip be undersubscribed, a surcharge of US\$200 per person will apply (added upon registration and removed once/if the threshold of 20 participants is reached).
- A deposit of US \$500 holds your place.

Other Cost & Need Considerations

Passport; Visa(s); Physicians Visit; Emergency Medical & Evacuation Insurance; Travel to Nepal; Meals beyond 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.

Notes

- 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 as well as posted when possible in the hotel reception areas. These changes will be based on local conditions, health and hotel availability.
- Times mentioned are all approximate and rounded off.
- Sturdy vehicles with air-conditioning will be provided.
- Airport transfers included on Day 1 and Day 17. 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.
- Contact information is current and 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.

— Effie Fletcher, September 2019 | Himalayan High Treks, CST 2085690-40

