

The holiest city: Varanasi

My latest adventure took me through the most sacred city of India. Why is it the most sacred? It is situated on the banks of the Ganges, and the Hindus believe that if you die in Varanasi, you are eternally saved. Moreover, this city is the most sacred of the seven sacred cities of Hinduism and Jainism-Sapta Puri-and one of the most important cities for Buddhism, too.

I must confess that as interested as I was in going to Varanasi because of its history and religion importance, the main reason why I made this trip was because one of my friends from Nicaragua was going to be there on a tour. Can you imagine seeing a familiar face across the world, after almost 2 years? It was an opportunity I was not going to waste! And it was totally worth it: we had an absolutely amazing time!



But back to Varanasi, something you can't miss while here is the morning boat ride to see the sunrise from the river. Admiring the sunset and the changing colors of the water is simply spectacular!

We started with a blue tint, which revealed the end of the night and the beginning of the day:



That started transforming itself into a reddish-orange color:



Turning later a bit yellow:



Until finally, the sun decided to completely show up:



Indians believe in the sacredness of this river, and therefore, it is a must for them to come at least once in their life and bath in the Ganges. For those who live in Varanasi, it is much easier, and they come EVERY morning to the river to wash their bodies and wash their sins:



There are also those who meditate and do yoga there:

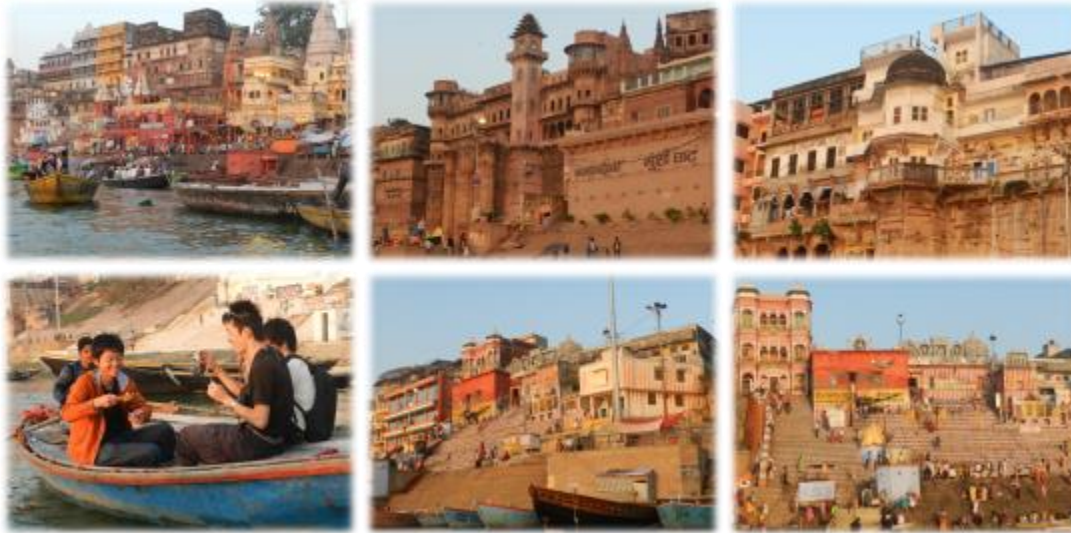


People will also wash clothes in the river:



Can you imagine what it must be like bathing in a river where there are dead dog bodies floating, and human ashes inside the water? I asked the guide if people don't get sick, and he said: "I'm 38 years old; I've been taking baths here every day of my life, and look at me. Do I look sick?" Well, he certainly looked healthier than me!

There are some other photos I took during the boat ride:



I then walked through the narrow streets, called galis, on the banks of the river; which can turn into a real maze for someone who doesn't live in Varanasi. You can get very easily lost. In addition to the homes and some small shops, you can find many temples dedicated to lord Shiva (as the legend says that Varanasi was created by this god), including the Golden Temple, where entrance to non-Hindus is forbidden.



I also went to Sarnath, the park where Buddha spoke and taught about Dharma for the first time, making this park one of the four holy places of Buddhism.

