

VARANASI

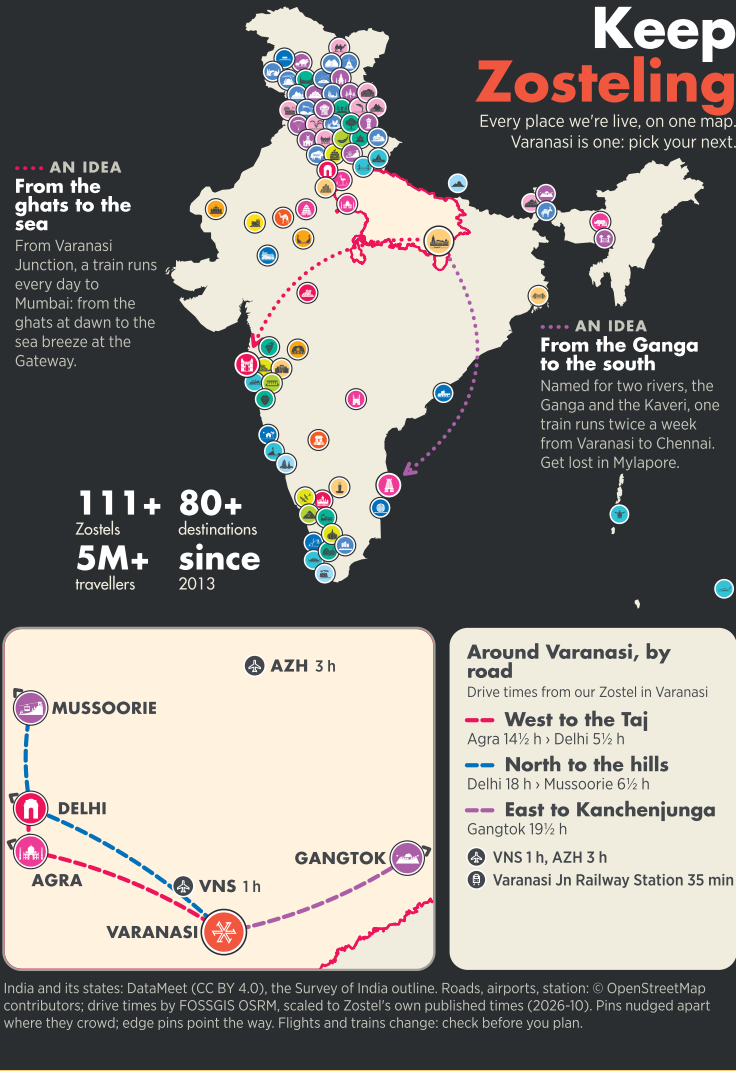
a map made by Zostel
for young travellers

FREE MAP · UTTAR PRADESH



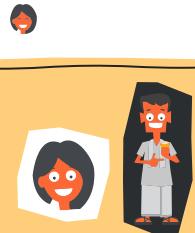
LIVE IT. NOW

ZOSTEL



Ka ho guru, Banaras!

Ka ho guru! We're Banaras's Zobus, and our city runs along one bend of the Ganga: more than eighty ghats of stone steps from Assi in the south to Raj Ghat in the north, palaces and temples stacked on top, and behind them a maze of gals too narrow for a car. Mornings start on the water, in a rowing boat at first light; evenings end with the aarti's lamps at Dashashwamedh. In between: kachori-sabzi for breakfast, lassi in a kulhad, a silk sari growing on a handloom, a tabla somewhere upstairs. Walk slowly, bargain kindly, keep back at the burning ghats, and come home to our rooftop in Bengali Tola.



Stay with us in Varanasi

One Zostel, in Bengali Tola, a short walk up from Pandey Ghat and five minutes from Dashashwamedh.

Zostel Varanasi

Five minutes from the Dashashwamedh aarti and 100 m up from Pandey Ghat: a common room for aarti plans and board games, a breezy rooftop for morning chai and evening sunsets, dorms and private rooms.

Maps: © OpenStreetMap contributors (ODbL), data fetched 2026-10-13 (UTC) - Terrain: Terrain Tiles on AWS (Mapzen/Tilezen), from SRTM courtesy of NASA and the U.S. Geological Survey, Walk lines routed by FOSSGIS OSRM on OpenStreetMap. Drawings: the Zostel brand's own. Things change: check the day's timings at the gate.

Practical tips

Getting in

Trains stop at Varanasi Junction (Cantt, about 10 km from us), Banaras station at Manduajodi (about 7 km) and Pt. Deen Dayal Upadhyaya Junction (about 22 km); the airport is some 26 to 28 km out. An auto or cab takes you to Sonarpura crossing; walk about a kilometre from there, or take a rickshaw to Bengali Tola Inter College and walk the last 400 m. By boat, step off at Pandey Ghat: we're 100 m up.



Monkeys

Rhesus macaques own the rooftops and the ghats' upper steps. Rooftop cafes put up cages to keep them out: take the hint, keep food and anything shiny in your bag, and never feed them.

After dark in the galis

The lanes are safe and busy, but dark and confusing at night: carry a torch or use your phone's, and save the map before you go. Stray dogs, calm by day, can gather in packs after dark: give them room. We take cards and UPI at the desk.

5 minutes of history

c. 528 BCE

From Samarth, the first sermon

Kashi is already an old kingdom's city when, in the Deer Park at Samarth just north-east of it, the Buddha gives his first teaching to five companions: the first turning of the wheel of the dharma.

15th century

Kabir, a weaver's son

Brought up in a Muslim weaver's home in Banaras, Kabir sings short two-line dohas in the people's own speech. Hindus and Muslims both claimed him, and his verses sit in the Guru Granth Sahib.

15th-16th century

Ravidas dreams of Begumpura

Born at Seer Goverdhanpur by the city, a leather worker by trade, the poet-saint Ravidas sings of Begumpura, a land without sorrow. Forty-one of his poems are in the Guru Granth Sahib; his birthplace fills with pilgrims every Magh Purnima.

16th century

Tulsidas at Assi

By the river at Assi, Tulsidas retells the Ramayana in Awadhi, the Ramcharitmanas. Tradition credits him with the Sankat Mochan temple and the Ramilla plays; the ghat where he lived bears his name.

18th century

The ghats rebuilt in stone

Most of the ghats you walk today are rebuilt in this century, under Maratha patrons, with the Scindias, Holkars, Bhonsles, Peshwas and the Maharajas of Benares: a crescent of steps and palaces on the river.

1750

A fort on the other bank

Maharaja Balwant Singh of Benares builds Ramnagar Fort in pale Chunar sandstone on the east bank, opposite Tulsi Ghat (the date usually given; inscriptions on its ramparts may be older). His family still lives there.

1780

Ahiyabai's temple

Ahiyabai Holkar, the Maratha queen of Indore, builds the present Kashi Vishwanath temple. In 1835 Maharaja Ranjit Singh gives gold to plate its dome.



1781

Hastings slips away

Raja Chet Singh of Benares refuses the East India Company's demands; his men rise at Shivala, and Governor-General Warren Hastings leaves the city in disguise. The raja loses his throne; the ghat keeps his name.

c. 1830

Ramnagar's month of Ramilla

Maharaja Udit Narayan Singh begins the Ramilla of Ramnagar: 31 evenings of the epic, played across a whole town turned into an open-air stage. UNESCO lists the Ramilla as intangible heritage in 2008.

1916

A university of its own

Madan Mohan Malaviya, with Annie Besant and others, founds Banaras Hindu University on a wide green campus to the south. Its museum, Bharat Kala Bhavan, opens in 1920.

1947

A shehnai at the Red Fort

Bismillah Khan, who learnt his shehnai on the banks of the Ganga in Banaras, plays at the Red Fort on India's first Independence Day. He receives the Bharat Ratna in 2001.

2015

A City of Music

UNESCO names Varanasi a City of Music in its Creative Cities Network, for centuries of teachers and pupils, from the Banaras tabla to the shehnai.



Talk like a local

Ka ho guru

Hey, how's it going? (Banaras's own hello, over a kulhad of chai)

Har Har Mahadev

The city's everyday greeting, to Shiva

Pranam

Hello, the respectful one (to elders)

pruh-naam

Ghat

Steps down to the river

Gali

Lane; Banaras is the city of galis

guli-ee

Naav

Boat

naav

Mallah

Boatman

mul-laah

Kulhad

The clay cup your chai or lassi comes in

kool-hud

Malaiyo

Winter's frothy milk sweet, made in the cold

muh-lie-yo

Akhara

Wrestling ground

uh-khaa-raa



Banaras eats by the season

Winter: malaiyo. Saffron milk churned to a froth, made only in the months; eat it early.

19 Winter: choora matar. Flattened rice in ghee with fresh green peas: best when the peas are new.

Winter: palang tod. A milk sweet slow-cooked for hours until dense; the 'bed breaker', for how full it leaves you.

Srip: launglata and thandai. Launglata, the syrup sweet with a clove in it, and thandai, chilled milk with almonds and saffron.

11 Summer: lassi and langda aam. Lassi under malai in a clay cup, and Banaras's own GI-tagged mango when it's in.

Every morning: kachori-jalebi. All year, mornings only. Kachori Gali is the clue.

35 Ramnagar Fort. A short boat ride across: the Maharaja's cream sandstone fort, its museum of cars, palanquins and clocks, and the widest view back at the ghats.

Chunar Fort. Upriver towards Mirzapur, a fort on a rock over the Ganga, held by Sher Shah, then Akbar, then the British. The hills around it gave the stone for Ashoka's pillars, the story goes.

Vindhyachal. About 65 km, on the Ganga: the Vindhyavasini temple, and a three-temple circuit with a cave and a hilltop shrine. Packed in the two Navratris.

Rajdari and Devdari falls. About 70 km away, in the Chandraprabha sanctuary: water stepping down layered rock in green forest.

Festivals worth timing a trip for

7 Dev Deepawali (November).

Fifteen days after Diwali, on Kartik Purnima, more than a million earthen lamps line every ghat from Ravidas to Raj Ghat, and more float down the river. In 2026: 24 November.

Ganga Mahotsav (November). Five days of music and dance on the ghats in the days up to Dev Deepawali, with a country-boat race and a crafts fair.



35 Ramnagar's Ramilla (autumn). The whole epic over 31 evenings, played across Ramnagar town, the audience walking from set to set behind the actors.

24 Nag Nathalya (Kartik). At Tulsi Ghat, a boy playing the Krishna leaps from a kadamba branch into the Ganga and comes up dancing on the serpent Kaliya.

Bharat Milap (the day after Dussehra). Rama's homecoming and his meeting with his brother Bharata, played on the day after Vijayadashami.

Khichdi (mid-January). Makar Sankranti, called Khichdi in this part of the country: khichdi on the stove and kites fighting over the rooftops.

Mahashivratri (February-March). Shiva's great night: the temples are packed, and the Dhruwad Mela's concerts end.

Ravidas Jayanti (Magh Purnima). Large crowds fill Seer Goverdhanpur, the poet-saint's birthplace, for his birthday.

City of Music

Banaras tabla. The Banaras gharana, founded by Ram Sahai two centuries ago: a big, powerful sound that can also whisper. Kishan Maharaj and Santa Prasad played it.

The shehnai. Bismillah Khan practised on the Ganga's banks and played it at the Red Fort in 1947.



Sankat Mochan Sangeet Samaroh (April). Since 1923, classical musicians and dancers play the Sankat Mochan temple for six nights around Hanuman Jayanti, for free, late into the night.

Dhruwad Mela (February-March). Five days of dhruwad, the old classical singing of temples and courts, on the steps of Tulsi Ghat.

Subah-e-Banaras. Every morning at Assi: music and chants as the sun comes up over the river.

Made in Banaras

Banaras silk. Fine silk woven by hand with gold and silver zari: creepers, paisleys and a border of upright leaves. A sari takes weeks, the grandest ones months. GI-protected since 2009.

Lacquered wooden toys. Spinning tops, dolls and tiny kitchens, turned on a lathe and lacquered bright in Khojwa and Kashmirigani, with a GI of their own.

Brass and copper. Brassware and copperware: the old bazaars' other shine, in Thatheri Bazar.

Gulabi meenakar. Pink enamel work, set into jewellery.

Ghat paintings. The riverfront painted small, to carry home.



The ghats, from Assi to Panchganga

3.5 km - about 4 hours with stops - 12 stops

From Assi north along the steps: Tulsi Ghat's akhara, Chet Singh's fort, Kedar's stripes, Darbhanga's palace, Dashashwamedh, Man Mandir's observatory, the Nepali temple, Scindia's sunken temple and Panchganga under the Alamgir mosque.



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Stay with us

Zostel Varanasi
Rickshaw to Bengali Tola Intercollege, then 400 m; by boat, Pandey Ghat and 100 m.

The stops

- 23 **Assi Ghat**
Look for chai stalls up the steps
- 24 **Tulsi Ghat**
Look for the house of Tulsidas above
- 15 **Chet Singh Ghat**
Look for fort walls rising from the river
- 16 **Shivala and Hanuman ghats**
Look for boatmen mending their oars
- 18 **Kedar Ghat**
Look for steps striped red and white
- 6 **Chausatti Ghat**
Look for the steep stair up
- 5 **Darbhangha, Munshi and Ahiyabai ghats**
Look for a sandstone palace with towers
- 7 **Dashashwamedh Ghat**
Look for priests under bamboo umbrellas
- 3 **Man Mandir Ghat and its observatory**
Look for two great stone sundials
- 4 **The Nepali temple, Lalita Ghat**
Look for carved wooden struts
- 14 **Scindia Ghat**
Look for the temple sunk at the edge
- 13 **Panchganga Ghat and the Alamgir mosque**
Look for the mosque crowning the steps

Mooh mein gholna

Let it melt in your mouth (how you eat a paan)

mooh main ghol-naa

Maui

Delight, the good life

mawj

Eat like a Banarasi

Banaras eats breakfast standing: kachori-sabzi and a hot jalebi in the galis, then chai from a clay cup. Afternoons are tamar chat and lassi under a lid of malai; winters bring malaiyo; every day ends with a paan. The old counters first, then the dishes to hunt down.

The Ram Bhandar.

Sabzi kachori fried in pure desi ghee in Thatheri Bazar; hot jalebis on the side; breakfast only, and gone early.

"Kachori first, conversation after. That's a Banaras morning."

27 Chachi ki Dukan.

Kachoris served blurtly and nobody minds: the flavour won, and the attitude became the charm.

"Sweet talk is for the sweet shop. Here you get kachori."

11 Blue Lassi Shop.

Thick lassi under malai in a clay cup, in dozens of flavours, made to order by the third generation. Expect to wait.

"Lassi here is made, not poured. Sit, wait, look at the photos on the wall."

26 Pahalwan Lassi.

Lassi under malai, rabri and almonds, more pudding than drink; malaiyo in winter.

"A lassi you eat with a spoon. In Banaras, that's still a drink."

Shiv Prasad Lassi Bhandar.

Lassi in an earthen cup under thick malai and rabri, Ramnagar Fort in view.

"Cross the river for the fort. Stay for the lassi."

19 Deena Chat Bhandar.

Banaras's own tamar chat, still served in a kulhad as its creator did, for over fifty years.

"Tomato, potato, a sweet-hot syrup, a clay cup. Nobody else makes chaat like this."

20 Kashi Chat Bhandar.

Tamar chat and chhena dahi vada on Dashashwamedh Ghat Road, kulfi faluda to finish.

"Aarti at the ghat, chaat on the way back. Every evening, the same order."

Dwarikapuri Milk Bazar.

At Godowlia Chowk, lassi under pistachio, malai and saffron, and malaiyo when it's cold.

"Malaiyo waits for winter, and it won't wait for you. Come early."

Shreeji Sweets and Milk.

A frothy winter sweet, saffron milk beneath a light foam, the moment it touches your tongue.

"Banaras makes a sweet out of winter air. Eat it before it's gone."

Lakshmi Chai.

Spiced chai and malai toast, bread flipped over a flame under fresh cream; best at odd hours.

"Every argument in this city starts over chai. Most of them end there too."

Rasvanti Sweets.

Malai paan gilori: a triangle of milk sweet folded like a paan, under silver leaf.

"Even the sweets here fold like paan."

Shri Rajbandhu.

Launglata, the syrup-coated sweet with a clove in it, eaten at Holi and sold all year; rasmalai too.

"One close, a lot of syrup. Holi or not, we eat it all year."

32 Popular Baati Chokha.

Sattu-stuffed baati dipped in ghee, roasted brinjal-tomato-potato chokha, kheer after.

"Baati, chokha, ghee. Our side of the country doesn't need a menu."

25 Pizzeria Vaatika.

Thin-crust wood-fired pizza and a T apple pie with ice cream, looking over the river near Assi.

"Three days of kachori? The river forgives a pizza."

Dishes to hunt down

Kachori-sabzi and jalebi.

The Banaras breakfast: small kachoris out of hot oil, spiced potato sabzi, natural oils, home-made incense. Mind the lookalike shop on the corner.

19 Tamar chat.

Banaras's own: tomatoes and potatoes cooked down, a spicy-sweet syrup, sev and coriander, served in a kulhad.

Malaiyo.

Winter's sweet: milk left out overnight in the cold, by the old way to catch the dew, then churned with saffron into a froth. Eat it early, before the sun gets to it.

11 Lassi in a kulhad.

Thick curd, a lid of malai, rabri or paan, under silver leaf. You finish and give back to the earth.

20 Chhena dahi vada.

Soft fried dumplings of chhena under sweet thick curd, samarind and green chutneys and roasted cumin.

19 Chooru matar.

Flattened rice cooked in ghee with green peas: a winter dish, though frozen peas now keep it going all year. Deena Chat Bhandar makes it.

Launglata.

A crisp envelope of flour with cardamom inside and a clove pressed in, coated in sugar syrup. Eaten mostly at Holi, sold all year.

32 Baati chokha.

The Bhojpuri meal: sattu-stuffed wheat balls baked and dipped in ghee, with mashed roasted brinjal, tomato and potato.

Thandai.

Chilled milk with almonds, fennel, rose, pepper, cardamom and saffron: Holi's drink, and Banaras thandai now carries its own GI tag.

Banaras paan.

A betel leaf folded round gulikand and fillings. Let it melt slowly: Banaras's own leaf has carried a GI tag since 2023. The paan shop is where the city talks.

Chai in a kulhad.

Sip it at a chai ki

★

QUESTS

Dares for the brave and the curious. The map marks each with a star; tick them off as you go.

★

1

Drift past the ghats at first light. Book a rowing boat the evening before, be on the steps before sunrise, and watch the city wake up from the water: bells, boatmen, the first chai stalls, the light on the palaces. Agree the price first.

★

2

Find a step for the evening aarti. Get there early, sit on the steps or take a boat on the water, and watch the priests' lamps, conch shells and bells move in time. Five minutes from our door.

★

23

Wake up for Subah-e-Banaras. Assi's morning: music, chants and the sun coming up over the far bank. Go once, even if you swore you're not a morning person.

★

8

Eat kachori-sabzi for breakfast. There's a whole lane named after it, Crisp kachori, spicy potato sabzi, then a hot jalebi if you're doing it properly. The best stalls sell out early.

★

8

Catch malaiyo before the sun melts it. Winter only. Milk and cream are boiled, left out in the cold, and the dew turns them into a light foam over saffron milk. Find a sweet shop with a big tray of it, early in the day, and eat it before it sinks.

★

9

Let a Banarasi paan melt. Pick a paan shop, stand around and listen to the pollics, cricket and cinema. Ask for a sweet one, then don't chew it: mooch mein ghohna, let it melt.

★

19

Try tamatar chaat. Banaras's own chaat: tomatoes and potatoes cooked down, a spicy-sweet syrup, sev and coriander on top. Eat it hot.

★

23

Join an argument at a chai stall. Banarasis love proving a point. Find a chai ki adi, order a kulhad, sit on the bench and say one thing about cricket. Then just listen.

★

24

Watch the wrestlers at Tulsī Ghat. The akhara on the river at Tulsī Ghat has trained wrestlers in its pit of earth for centuries, and since 2017 women too. Go early, stand at the edge, ask before you take a photo.

★

28

Hear a tabla play in the City of Music. Banaras has its own school of tabla, loud and versatile. Ask at the desk where there's a concert this week; in April, Sankat Mochan's festival plays for six nights, free.

★

33

Read one of Kabir's dohas aloud. Kabir grew up here, in a weaver's home. Find one of his two-line dohas, read it out on the steps, and ask a Banarasi to say it better.

★

35

Cross the river to Ramnagar Fort. Take the boat across, climb up into the cream sandstone fort and find the vintage cars, the old arms and an astronomical clock made in 1852 that tracks the sun, moon and planets.

★

34

Stand where the first sermon was given. Samath, about 10 km north-east: walk the Deer Park to the Dhamek Stupa, then meet the four lions of Ashoka's capital in the museum. A World Heritage Site since July 2026.

★

7

See a million lamps from a boat. On Dev Deepawali the steps from Ravidas Ghat to Raj Ghat are lined with earthen lamps and more float on the river. Get on the water early: every boat in town is out.

★

9

Get lost in the galis, on purpose. Turn off the main lane, then turn again. Old houses, small temples, a cow in the way, sweet shops. When you're properly lost, say 'ghat?' to anyone at all and follow the pointing finger.

★

3

Measure the stars from a palace roof
Man Mandir Ghat and its observatory. On the palace terrace: an observatory of Jai Singh II of Jaipur, finished by 1737, stone instruments to follow the sun, moon and stars by eye, among them two great sundials. The palace below is now a museum.

★

4

A piece of Kathmandu above the steps
The Nepali temple, Lalita Ghat. A wooden pagoda from Kathmandu above Lalita Ghat: a copy of Pashupatinath, begun by Nepal's exiled King Rana Bahadur Shah in the early 1800s and finished around 1843. Termite-proof wood, carved struts: 'Mini Khajuraho'.

★

5

A palace with the best sunset seat
Darbhanga, Munshi and Ahilyabai ghat. The tall sandstone palace of the royal family of Darbhanga, Bihar, now a heritage hotel, its steps one of the finest sunset spots. Then Munshi Ghat and Ahilyabai Ghat, built for the Maratha queen of Indore.

★

6

Sixty-four goddesses, one staircase
Chausatti Ghat. Chausatti means sixty-four: the ghat takes its name from the Chausatti Yogni temple at the top of its steep stairs, now given to Kalki. A short climb into the lanes of Bengali Tola, home of Zostel Varanasi.

★

7

The main stage of the river
Dashashwamedh Ghat. The main ghat, five minutes from Zostel Varanasi: legend says Brahma performed ten horse sacrifices here. By day boatmen, flower sellers and priests under bamboo umbrellas; at dusk the Ganga Aarti. Boats leave both ways.

★

10

The golden spire at the city's heart
Kashi Vishwanath temple. One of the twelve jyotirlingas: the present temple was built in 1780 by Ahilyabai Holkar, its spire plated with gold from Ranjit Singh in 1835. Since 2021 a stone corridor runs to the river. Lock up phone and bag.

★

12

The city's main burning ghat
Manikarnika Ghat. Banaras's main cremation ground, fires burning day and night, believed to free the soul from rebirth. A place of mourning: keep your distance, no photos, and say no to 'guides' asking for wood money. A boat passes without stopping.

★

13

Five rivers below, a mosque above
Panchganga Ghat and the Alamgir mosque. Said to be where five rivers meet. Its high steps are crowned by the Alamgir mosque, built in the 1670s under Aurangzeb, its two minarets long gone. One of the best views down the crescent from the top.

★

14

The temple that sank into the river
Scindia Ghat. Built by the Scindias of Gwalior in the early 1800s; its Shiva temple sank under the weight of the new construction and stands partly under water. Tradition says Agni was born here. Best seen from a boat.

★

15

A fort, a revolt, a rope of turbans
Chet Singh Ghat. Fort walls straight out of the river, built by Raja Chet Singh, who ruled from 1770. In 1781 the East India Company tried to arrest him here; he escaped to the river, by one account on a rope of turbans.

★

16

The quiet middle, where South India settled
Shivala and Hanuman ghats. Quieter steps: Shivala, built by Raja Balwant Singh of Ramnagar, and Hanuman Ghat, once Rameswaram Ghat, home to many South Indian families. Sit, watch the boatmen mend their oars, take a breather from the crowds.

★

17

One of the two burning ghats
Harishchandra Ghat. One of the two ghats where Banaras cremates its dead, named after the legendary truthful king. A place of grief for families, not a sight: pass quietly, keep your distance, take no photos, ignore anyone asking money to explain it.

★

18

Stripes on the steps, a temple on top
Kedar Ghat. Bold red and white stripes on the steps, the Kedareswar temple above them, a favourite with South Indian pilgrims. Busy and very photogenic; sit on the stripes at dusk and watch the boats come home.

★

21

Trains below, traffic above, since 1887
Raj Ghat and Malviya bridge. The north end of the ghats, with a Ravidas temple, under Malviya bridge: finished in 1887 as the Dufferin Bridge, about a kilometre of steel, trains below and road above. Namo Ghat's new promenade is beside it.

★

20

Chaat on the way to the aarti
Kashi Chat Bhandar. On the road down to the evening aarti at Godowlia, Tamatar chaat, or chhena dahi vada in sweet curd under tamarind and coriander chutneys, then kulfi faluda. Packed in the evenings; that's the fun.

★

25

Wood-fired pizza and apple pie by Assi
Pizzeria Vastika. Near Assi, about 2 km from Zostel Varanasi: thin-crust wood-fired pizza, fresh bakes, and the apple pie with ice cream our guide insists on. It looks over the river: sit long, do nothing.

★

26

Lassi with a lid of malai and rabri
Pahalwan Lassi. At Lanka, by Ravidas Gate, a family shop for decades. Lassi topped with malai, rabri and almonds, more pudding than drink. Malaiyo in winter, rabri all year. Come hungry: a full cup is a meal.

★

27

Blunt service, brilliant kachori
Chachi ki Dukan. Famous for its kachoris and for a blunt way of serving them. Nobody minds: the flavour wins, and the attitude is now part of the charm. Ask for kachori-sabzi, take what you're handed, say thank you.

★

23

Where the ghats begin and students linger
Assi Ghat. The southern end of the crescent, where the Assi stream meets the Ganga. Easy-going. Full of students, pilgrims and long-stay travellers: Subah-e-Banaras at dawn, its own aarti at dusk, chai up the steps. Walk north from here.

★

24

Where the Ramcharitmanas was finished
Tulsī Ghat. Tulsidas is said to have written much of the Ramcharitmanas here. In Kartik a boy playing Krishna leaps from a kadamb branch into the river and rises on the serpent Kalya: Nag Nathaiya. Wrestlers train behind the steps.

★

28

Hanuman's temple, and the monkeys' too
Sankat Mochan temple. Banaras's best-loved Hanuman temple, founded by Tulsidas, in a shady grove of about eight acres full of monkeys: hide food and glasses. Buy the besan laddoos from the shops inside. Every April, a great music festival.

★

29

A whole epic written on the walls
Tulsī Manas temple. White marble, 1964, built where Tulsidas is said to have written the Ramcharitmanas. The whole epic is inscribed on the walls of two floors, verse after verse, with painted scenes. Calm and cool after Durga Kund.

★

30

Red as the goddess, beside its tank
Durga temple and Durga Kund. Built in the eighteenth century by Rani Bhambani, a Bengali queen: a cluster of Nagara spires painted ochre red, the goddess's colour, beside a stepped tank. Busiest at Navratri. Do it with Tulsī Manas and Sankat Mochan.

★

34

Where the Buddha first taught
Samath. About 10 km north-east: the deer park where the Buddha gave his first sermon. The Dhamek stupa marks it, among monastery ruins and Ashoka's broken pillar; its Lion Capital, India's national emblem, is in the museum next door.

★

35

The Maharaja's fort across the water
Ramnagar Fort and museum. Built around 1750 by Maharaja Balwant Singh in creamy Chunar sandstone, opposite Tulsī Ghat, half an hour by boat. A museum of vintage cars, silver palanquins, old arms and an astronomical clock. Its month-long Ramfela in autumn.

★

36

A green half-moon of a campus
BHU and the New Vishwanath temple. Founded in 1916 by Madan Mohan Malviya: some 1300 acres of avenues in a half-moon. The Vishwanath temple's tower rises about 77 m, open to all. Bharat Kala Bhavan holds over a hundred thousand miniatures, brocades and sculptures.

★

22

For the poet-saint who was a cobbler
Ravidas Ghat and Sant Ravidas park. A riverside park and gateway for Ravidas, Banaras's fifteenth-century poet-saint, whose verses are in the Guru Granth Sahib. His golden temple, the Janam Asthan, stands inland by BHU and fills with devotees on his February birthday.

★

33

The weaver-poet's own neighbourhood
Kabir Chaura, Kabir. The fifteenth-century weaver-poet who mocked priests and mullahs alike, lived in Banaras; the Kabir Chaura math keeps his memory: a quiet garden, the Bijak temple and the graves of the couple said to have raised him.

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QUESTS

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A piece of Kathmandu above the steps
The Nepali temple, Lalita Ghat. A wooden pagoda from Kathmandu above Lalita Ghat: a copy of Pashupatinath, begun by Nepal's exiled King Rana Bahadur Shah in the early 1800s and finished around 1843. Termite-proof wood, carved struts: 'Mini Khajuraho'.

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A palace with the best sunset seat
Darbhanga, Munshi and Ahilyabai ghat. The tall sandstone palace of the royal family of Darbhanga, Bihar, now a heritage hotel, its steps one of the finest sunset spots. Then Munshi Ghat and Ahilyabai Ghat, built for the Maratha queen of Indore.

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Five rivers below, a mosque above
Panchganga Ghat and the Alamgir mosque. Said to be where five rivers meet. Its high steps are crowned by the Alamgir mosque, built in the 1670s under Aurangzeb, its two minarets long gone. One of the best views down the crescent from the top.

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The temple that sank into the river
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Wood-fired pizza and apple pie by Assi
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