

The Seven Sacred Cities of India II

India's Pilgrimage sites are also known as **tirthas**(fords), crossings between the worldly and divine spheres. A tiratha may be a river such as, Ganges, or a mountain peak, such as mount Kailash - the mystical Himalayan retreat of Lord Shiva. Several *tirthas* are places where the Gods are believed to descended to earth, and which may then act as gateways for thr pilgrim to divine realms. There are seven sacred cities in Hindu India, which are the principal pilgrimage centers : *Varanasi* and *Hardwar* on the river Ganges, *Ayodhya*, the birthplace of Lord Rama; *Mathura*, Lord Krishna's Birthplace; *Dwarka*, where the adult Krishna ruled as a king and where the Kkrishna Vasudeva was born; *Kanchipuram*, the great Shaivite temple city of Tamil Nadu; and Ujjan, site every twelve years of Kumbha Mela.

The most holy pilgrimage for a Hindu is to make is around the four divine "**abodes**" that stand at the cardinal compass points of the mythological map of India :

Badrinath(in the north)high in the Himalayas near the source of Ganges,associated with Lord Shiva.

Puri(in the east),important to devotees of Lord Krishna. Puri holds a "Rath Yatra" every year at the end of the june month.The Jagannath Temple of Puri is one of the four most famous holy pilgrimages of the Hindus.Images of the god Jagannath(a form of Krishna) and his brother Balbhadra and sister Subhadra are placed in giant large yellow chariots or raths which are then drawn by pilgrims.

Rameshwaram(in the south), as the name suggests is related to Lord Rama;and *Dwarka* (in the west), is also associated with Lord Krishna. Rameshwaram is an island between mainland India and Sri Lanka, which Rama is said to have crossed on his journey to rescue his wife Sita from Ravana.