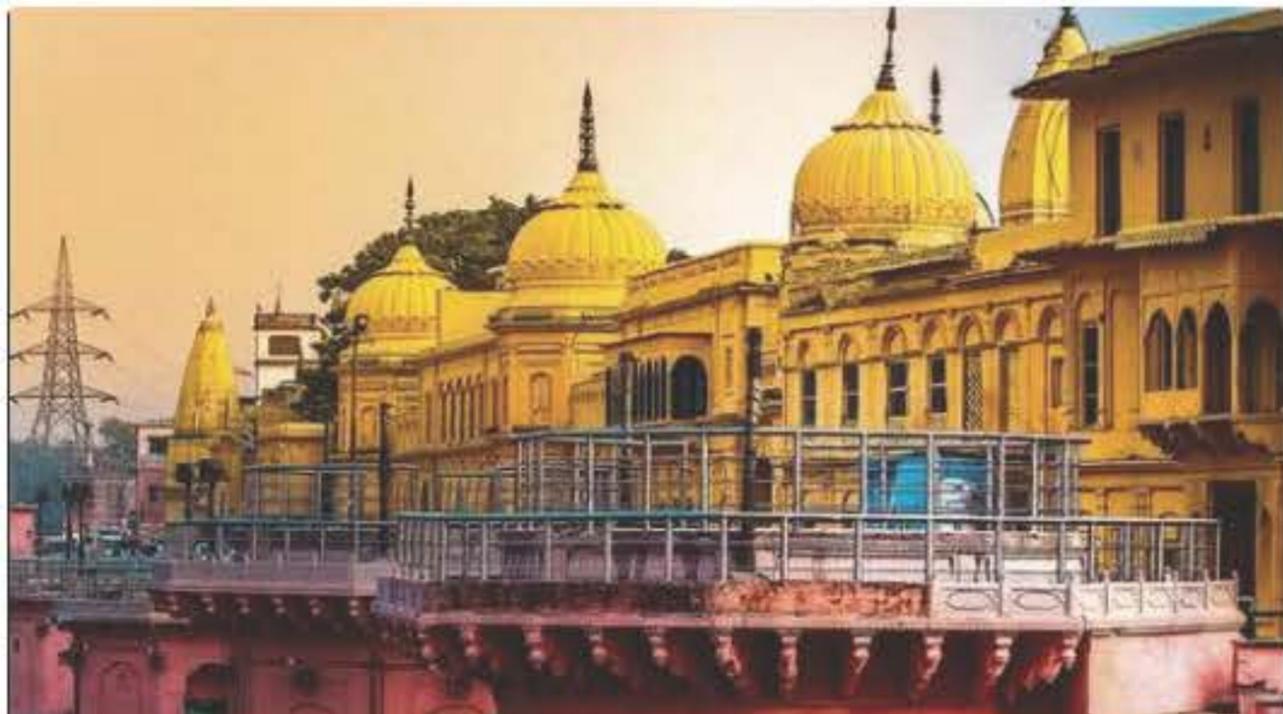


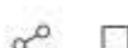
Charming, beautiful and mesmerising: Ayodhya Wali Diwali

Celebrate the festival of lights in this Holy city and soak in the grand and mesmerising aerial drone shows set on the banks of Sarayu this year



Ayodhya Wali Diwali

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By Swati Chaturvedi

Set on the bank of the Sarayu river, Ayodhya — the land of tranquillity and purity — will witness the most enchanting Diwali celebration this year, drawing devotees from across the country. Believed to be the kingdom of Lord Rama and founded by the Rishi Manu himself, Ayodhya is among the seven holiest cities of India.

“Ayodhya’s Diwali is different from the rest of the country as this is the birthplace of Lord Ram. In fact, Diwali celebrations start from Ayodhya,” says Acharya Satyendra Das, 81, head priest, Ram Janmabhoomi, Ayodhya. Das was a former Sanskrit lecturer and has been performing puja of Ram Lalla at the makeshift Ram Janmabhoomi temple in Ayodhya for the past 27 years.

Lined with countless temples, ghats and beautiful structures, Ayodhya is a must-visit destination, especially during festivals. “Ram Janmabhoomi temple, Hanuman Garhi temple, Kanak Bhawan temple, temple of Nageshwarnath, Treta ke Thakur temple along the ghat, Madhuri Kunja mandir are a must-visit. Not to forget Gulab Bari — the garden of roses,” says Kathak exponent Shovana Narayan .

Talking about the Diwali celebrations, she shares, “It is the Sarayu river that is a major centre of activity where the river bank is lit up on Diwali. Several priests come together to perform the puja and aarti after which the river is afloat and lit up with thousands and thousands of floating diyas. It’s a beautiful sight. Chants of Jai Siya Ram fill the air. The river’s panoramic puja-aarti makes it different from all other cities.”

“Diwali is the most important festival among all the festivals, celebrated in the country. In Ayodhya, Maa Maha Kali is embellished with new clothes and new ornaments . More than 6000 big and small temples of Ayodhya are decorated with colourful lights, flowers and the entire city of Ayodhya is illuminated with lights,” says Dr. Aarti Dahiya, Astrologer and Vastu Expert.

This year, about 500 drones will fly and light up the night sky in Ayodhya on the eve of Diwali on November 3 as part of a unique Aerial Drone Show being organised by the authorities for the very first time during the Deepotsav.

The government is all set to create a world record of illuminating more than five lakh diyas this time. “Diwali is a major festival across the country but what makes Diwali special in Ayodhya is that a major celebration is being planned in the Ram Janmabhoomi temple complex. The temporary temples in Ayodhya will be illuminated with numerous lamps,” shares Sumit Israni, MD of a leading salon chain, which has recently launched an outlet in Ayodhya.

Other places to visit in Ayodhya are Lakshman Ghat, Kala Ram temple and the Kanak Bhavan Temple, which were built in the 19th century. “As a kid, I loved the food preparations at Kanak Rasoi in Kanak Temple. I still go there to eat authentic vegetarian food. The food is divine at the Rasoi,” says designer Manish Tripathi recalling his favourite memories of the city.

Ayodhya has stood the test of time and multiple invasions and is fast becoming a centre of cultural diversity, community assimilation and a vital destination for tourism.



A view of the Naya Ghat and Sarayu River