

# Uttar Pradesh's smaller pilgrim towns to grow with big investment in pipeline

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Chitrakoot is another prominent religious destination, where ₹327 crore MoUs of the tourism department will be rolled out at the groundbreaking ceremony to be held in Lucknow. (FILE PHOTO)

Varanasi and Ayodhya undoubtedly have taken centre stage in the Yogi Adityanath government's religious tourism push but smaller pilgrimage centres like Mathura, Chitrakoot, Mirzapur (Vindhyachal), Sitapur (Naimisharanya) and Sant Kabir Nagar are also attracting investment proposals from the hospitality industry. These proposals are set to be implemented when the Uttar Pradesh government holds the latest edition of the groundbreaking ceremony in Lucknow on February 19.

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Besides, these smaller towns too have religious significance in Hindu mythology. That is why the memorandums of understanding (MoUs) signed by the state tourism department with private players are not only confined to Ayodhya and Varanasi.

Varanasi, the abode of Lord Shiva, has bagged the highest investment proposals of ₹6507 crore. The pilgrim footfall in this holy city has grown manifold after inauguration of the Kashi Vishwanath Corridor by Prime Minister Narendra Modi in December 2021. Ayodhya, which has regained its glory after the consecration ceremony of Ram Lalla, is not far behind with investment proposals of ₹4233 crore.

While Varanasi is a big city, the others are small towns.

Around 530 km from Ayodhya is Mathura, also famous as the land of lord Krishna. This town in western Uttar Pradesh has bagged MoUs of over ₹3278 crore.

Mathura's proximity to Vrindavan has helped the city become an important tourist destination. Both are 15 kilometres apart. Vrindavan is part of Mathura district where Lord Krishna had spent his childhood.

Chitrakoot is another prominent religious destination, where ₹327 crore MoUs of the tourism department will be rolled out at the groundbreaking ceremony to be held in Lucknow.

The faithful believe the holy trinity in the Hindu pantheon -- Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva- took incarnations in this town.

For Sant Kabir Nagar, MoUs of ₹410 crore will be rolled out. Maghar, a nagar panchayat in Sant Kabir Nagar, is the final resting place of Sant Kabir, a revered mystic poet of the 15th century.

Memorandums of understanding of over ₹303 crore will be implemented in Sitapur district, 90 km from Lucknow, due to its proximity to Naimisharanaya, which is among the 51 Shakti Peeths across the country. This small town is linked to Lord Vishnu, Goddess Sati and Lord Shiva.

Mirzapur is another small district where MoUs of ₹175 crore will be implemented due to the presence of Vindhyachal dham, another prominent Shakti Peeth.

"Religious tourism can contribute significantly to economic growth of a place. Devotees spend more money on accommodation, transportation and local goods as compared to conventional tourists," said principal secretary, tourism, Mukesh Meshram.

The MoUs signed and to be rolled out for the spiritual centres are as follows: Varanasi ( ₹6507 crore), Ayodhya - ( ₹4233 crore), Mathura ( ₹3278 crore), Sant Kabir Nagar ( ₹410 crore), Sitapur ( ₹303 crore), Chitrakoot ( ₹327 crore) and Mirzapur ( ₹175 crore).