

In 2001, more than 60 million Hindu pilgrims attended the Maha Kumbh Mela, a festival held every 144 years in Prayag, Allahabad. This was the largest human gathering in recorded history. Even on any ordinary day of the year, hundreds of thousands of people around the world are on pilgrimage. Every year at least 100 million people become pilgrims, whether for a few hours, days, weeks or even months. Each is undergoing this journey to experience something sacred. It is as if whole cities are on the move, waiting to be transformed.



Imagine what could be achieved if pilgrims and pilgrim cities were to become models of care and respect for the environment, reflecting the deep values of the world's faith traditions.

Imagine the good that could be done for the people and places on pilgrimage routes, and in the cities and sacred places at the end of the journeys.

Imagine a network of Green Pilgrim Cities, inspiring environmental care all along the great pilgrimage routes, and encouraging all pilgrims to leave a 'positive footprint' on their journeys and in their destinations.

What is a "positive footprint"?

A positive footprint requires pilgrims to leave every place more beautiful than it was when they arrived. That can involve taking away your own litter and other people's; not buying bottled water; choosing tourist agencies with a sustainable ethos; eating food that is local, organic and free-range; buying only sustainably sourced souvenirs; walking rather than driving.

On a more ambitious level it can involve: engaging with social and ecological programmes as a volunteer during your pilgrimage; financially supporting programmes to improve the city environment and biodiversity; sharing ideas and inspiration with other pilgrims and city residents; returning home with a greater sense of awe and wonder at the natural environment; and breathing life into that feeling by doing something active to protect your hometown.

How do we get involved?

If you would like more information, would like to sponsor this initiative, or would like to have your city join in, please contact ARC.

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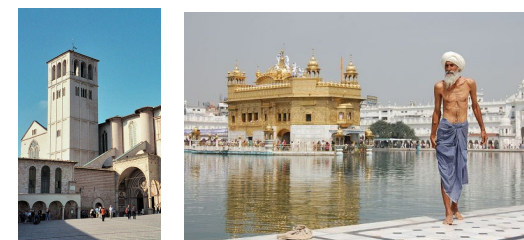
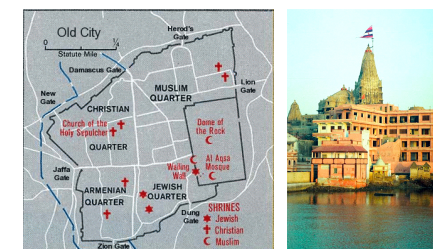
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GREEN PILGRIM CITIES NETWORK

Leaving a positive footprint on the Earth



Clockwise from top left: Jerusalem Old City, Dwarka, Amritsar
Trondheim, Etchmiadzin, Assisi

A new global network of green pilgrim cities of all faiths

What will the network do?

The network will inspire pilgrims to:

- 足 prepare mindfully for their pilgrimage
- 足 travel responsibly in the spirit of their faith
- 足 choose sustainable tourist agencies
- 足 eat and drink sustainably and ethically
- 足 minimise waste and water use
- 足 dispose of their rubbish and pick up after others
- 足 support a fund to green the city they are visiting
- 足 help local people in eco-sensitive activities
- 足 bring home greener ideas for living
- 足 share the art of green pilgrimage with the people they meet on the way

The network will inspire pilgrim cities to:

- 足 receive and accommodate pilgrim visitors sustainably
- 足 green their religious buildings, energy, infrastructure and open spaces
- 足 celebrate pilgrims and green their faith festivals
- 足 work with each other in greening initiatives
- 足 safeguard and celebrate wildlife and parks
- 足 create a green pilgrim fund
- 足 provide clean, accessible drinking water
- 足 create 'green maps' highlighting eco projects, achievements and volunteering opportunities
- 足 bring faiths and local authorities together to create sustainable cities
- 足 improve sanitation for pilgrim routes and destinations
- 足 work with tour operators, airlines and other transport providers to be more sustainable
- 足 spread greener living habits among their own people
- 足 be proud of their status as Green Pilgrim Cities, and publicise it

How will it work?

Several cities have come forward as pilot Green Pilgrim Cities, including: Amritsar for Sikhs; Assisi for Catholics; Dwarka and cities in Braj for Hindus; Etchmiadzin for Armenian Orthodox Christians; Jerusalem for Jews, Christians and Muslims; Trondheim for Norwegian Lutherans and other Christians.

Plans to green these cities will be drawn up by each local faith community, in cooperation with the local authority, mayor or city council, starting with the question: **“What would your city be like if it were a sustainable green city?”**

Seeking partnerships

Faith leaders will commit to work with their own cities and will join a network to share information, support and technical knowledge.

The network will engage secular as well as faith partnerships – academic institutions, NGOs, entrepreneurs, local authorities and others. It is particularly important for the Mayor and City Council to commit to the goals of the network.



When will it happen?

The network, and a website guidebook on how to be a green city and a green pilgrim, will be launched at a meeting in Xi'an, China in late 2011, hosted by the China Daoist Association, the Chinese Government and the Alliance of Religions and Conservation (ARC), and supported by the Norwegian Government.

Xi'an was the traditional gateway for Buddhist pilgrims travelling to India in the past, and is still the starting place for many Daoist pilgrimages to sacred mountains in Central China.



A vision of pilgrims on all continents and the pilgrim cities which receive them leaving a positive footprint on the Earth.

PHOTO CREDITS: Bird, Richard Fisher; Trees, Tib Chris; Chinese vegetarian dishes, CA Lee.