heritage

MDPI

Article

Regional Diversity of Buddhist Heritage Tourism in South Asia and Southeast Asia

Kiran Shinde

School of Humanities and Social Sciences, La Trobe University, Melbourne 3086, Australia; k.shinde@latrobe.edu.au

Abstract: This paper examines the regional diversity in Buddhist heritage and its use for tourism in Asia, more specifically, South Asia and Southeast Asia. Based on an analysis of secondary sources and data from national tourism organisations, it illustrates inter-regional and intra-regional aspects of tourism related to Buddhist heritage. It is found that in spite of their archaeological nature, Buddhist sites in South Asia are converging points for Buddhist tourism, as these are directly related to the Buddha, and many international Buddhist monasteries enliven them with transnational Buddhist practice. Whereas in Southeast Asia, Buddhism is more of a cultural landscape that pervades from the village-level practice of Buddhism to monumental places dedicated to Buddha, which collectively form a major resource for cultural tourism. This paper argues that regional connections and religious and cultural similarities of Buddhist heritage in countries of Southeast Asia contribute to the cultural distinctiveness in the Asian paradigm that can foster sustainable development of tourism in the region.

Keywords: Buddhist heritage; Buddhist tourism; South Asia; Southeast Asia; pilgrimage; monasteries; Asian paradigm; Asia

1. Introduction

In recent years, scholarship around Buddhist tourism has grown, recognising the increasing travel to Buddhist sacred sites, most of which are located in Asia [1–4]. Buddhism was born in the Asian subcontinent around the sixth century BCE and has since spread over all of Asia over two millenniums through patronage accorded by different rulers in the region. Over its history, comprising of periodic waves, enormous religious heritage was generated that was both universal (as in the appeal of Buddhist teaching and philosophy) and localised in terms of its material culture (architecture, artefacts, and buildings). Academics and policymakers indicate a growing interest in understating how Buddhist heritage and its diversity is generating tourism mobilities in the region [5,6].

Exploring Buddhist heritage and Buddhist tourism in Asia is worthy on at least three accounts. Asia is home to more than 90% of the world's Buddhist population. It is well known that in developing countries, travel for religious purposes contributes the most to domestic tourism flows [7,8]. Since many countries in Asia are considered to be in the developing phase, an understanding of Buddhist heritage can help in realising its economic potential for domestic tourism. While few iconic Buddhist sites are designated as UNESCO world heritage sites, a vast amount of Buddhist heritage that developed over the course of two millenniums remains untapped. Finally, Buddhist teachings, philosophy, and practices are increasingly followed by non-Buddhists also in pursuing holistic living [5,9].

check for updates

Academic Editor: María Cristina Fernández Laso

Received: 5 March 2025
Revised: 23 March 2025
Accepted: 29 March 2025
Published: 30 March 2025

Citation: Shinde, K. Regional Diversity of Buddhist Heritage Tourism in South Asia and Southeast Asia. *Heritage* **2025**, *8*, 121. https://doi.org/10.3390/heritage8040121

Copyright: © 2025 by the author. Licensee MDPI, Basel, Switzerland. This article is an open access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY) license (https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/).

Certain peculiarities of Buddhist heritage can be observed in Asia. Although Buddhism spread across different parts of Asia, its manifestations show considerable variation because of the historical trajectory of the spread of Buddhism and other factors, including its intersections with specific cultural landscapes in which it thrived. The regional diversity can be examined by using the basis of categorisation of Asia by the UN into different regions, including South Asia, Southeast Asia, North Asia, and East Asia. Although these may be geo-political blocs, they also exhibit a certain kind of socio-culture within themselves and can be fruitfully used to contextualise certain kinds of Buddhist heritages with the regions where it flourished. For instance, South Asia, where Buddha was born and preached, has the largest concentration of Buddhists from that period but a very small proportion of the population that follows Buddhism at present [10]. Thus, most of that heritage is in ruins and conserved for its archaeological value. When one comes to Southeast Asia, Buddhism is actively practiced by a large majority in Thailand, Myanmar, Cambodia, and Laos, making Buddhism a lived religion and generating a dynamic culture. In places with considerable Buddhist followership, cultural experiences through festivals, events, performances, and arts form the major resource for Buddhist tourism. The diversity of Buddhist cultural landscape is phenomenal, ranging from village-level everyday practices to high-tech mixed-media live-stage performances and theme-parks. Other countries in the region, such as Malaysia, Indonesia, Vietnam, have a mix of archaeological and cultural sites, which adds to the cultural capital that drives tourism and provides it with a distinct Asian flavour [11]. While there is considerable scholarship examining various aspects of Buddhist heritage and tourism in China [12–16], Japan [17–19], and the Republic of Korea [20,21], knowledge about Southeast Asia is only emerging now.

The purpose of this paper is to offer a detailed understanding of regional variations in Buddhist heritage and how they are employed in Buddhist heritage tourism. It also aims to identify and highlight inter-regional and intra-regional tourism mobilities and how they can be harnessed for a more holistic development of Buddhist tourism in Asia that is aligned with what Chon et al. (2020) refer to as the Asian paradigm where the countries in Asia leverage their social and cultural capital for economic upliftment [11]. Thus, it has both theoretical and empirical implications. On the one hand, it aims to contribute to the growing scholarship that expresses a more regional perspective of Buddhist tourism, particularly in an under-researched area. By providing a comparative analysis of South Asia and Southeast Asia, this paper suggests strategic thinking of utilising regional diversity for sustainable tourism in the region.

2. Methodology

To explain the regional diversity in Buddhist heritage and tourism in Asia, this paper employs a comparative analysis of two sub-regions: South Asia and Southeast Asia. It is based on an analysis of secondary sources, a literature review, and a statistical analysis of tourism data. The first major source is a study that the author conducted for UN Tourism (formerly UNWTO) in 2019, titled as "Buddhist Tourism in Asia: Towards Sustainable Development. This report was published by UNWTO with the same name and can be accessed at https://www.e-unwto.org/doi/abs/10.18111/9789284421619 (accessed on 10 January 2025) [22]. The purpose of that study was to examine the state of Buddhist heritage and how it could be used for sustainable tourism in 16 countries of Asia. This involved desk-based research and analysis of data collected from national tourism organisations via an online questionnaire survey. It is possible that such data, as reported by government officials, may have some biases and may not necessarily reflect views of other stakeholders. The second one is a dataset sourced from the ASEAN Visitor Arrivals Dashboard (https://data.aseanstats.org/dashboard/tourism accessed on 10 January 2025) for understanding

the inter-regional and intra-regional flow of tourists. This dataset is independent of the UN Tourism study but coincided with the similar time frame and offered more granular data for some robust analyses of tourism flows. In this paper, observations from the UN Tourism study (mainly about Buddhist heritage, as all this is available in one report) are analysed and supported with data from ASEAN's reporting on tourism using a tourism lens. The findings from the two datasets are used to explain the variations in Buddhist heritage and how it influences regional dependencies in tourism flows across two significant sub-regions in Asia: South Asia (where most historical and archaeological sites are concentrated) and Southeast Asia (the region with highest concentration of Buddhist populations). An analytical discussion of the history and geography of the spread of Buddhism and Buddhist heritage is central in building these narratives in the two sub-regions. Such an analysis can be conducted by a comprehensive review of secondary material and by identifying significant relationships from that content.

It must be noted that the data from 2017–2019 presented here are still relevant for at least two reasons. First, the tourist numbers have only started to return to pre-COVID-19 levels around the end of 2024, as reported by UN Tourism (please refer to https://www.unwto.org/news/international-tourism-recovers-pre-pandemic-levels-in-2024 accessed on 15 February 2025). So, in terms of volume, one can still rely on pre-COVID-19 data. Second, this paper is more concerned about relational aspects of the data. For example, how is the scale different in different countries where more dependencies are seen in understanding patterns of inter- and intra-regional mobilities. Now, such patterns develop over time and inform future growth. Using more recent data may only influence these patterns to some extent and thus may not be detrimental to the arguments presented in this paper. Since the primary focus is on presenting patterns and connections with Buddhist heritage, use of 2017–2019 data is acceptable.

The remainder of this paper is organized as follows: First, an overview of the spread of Buddhism in Asia is discussed so as to contextualise the generation of Buddhist heritage and its regional diversity. After that, highlights about touristic mobilities are discussed for South Asia and Southeast Asia. Then, key similarities and differences related to the diversity of Buddhist heritage tourism are discussed before offering some recommendations and concluding remarks.

3. Buddhism in Asia: History and Background

In this section, the intention is to provide a very brief summary of the spread of Buddhism in Asia to contextualise and understand the diversity of Buddhist heritage in the region. Buddhism originated, flourished, and spread throughout the Asian subcontinent over two millenniums, and in this process, varied heritages were generated due to certain geographical, political, and socio-cultural factors prevalent in the region (for a fuller history, please refer to [23–25]).

The history of Buddhism begins with the birth of Buddha (as Prince Siddartha Gautam) between the 6th and 5th century BCE in Lumbini (in present day Nepal) [25][1]. He left his dissatisfied and disillusioned royal life in search of truth and spirituality and finally found enlightenment under a Bodhi tree at Bodhgaya (in the present state of Bihar, India). The enlightened Buddha delivered his first sermon about "Turning the Wheel of the Truth" at Sarnath (near present day Varanasi, India). He then wandered throughout the subcontinent, spreading the faith, and with his disciples, he founded a community of ordained monks and nuns (*sangha*). After the Buddha's death at Kushinagar (in India), his teachings (*Dharma*) and philosophy came to be known as Buddhism. The monks, while spreading the Buddhist principles of wisdom and compassion, assimilated easily into the local customs and culture of the place [5]. Buddhism intersected with native faiths, existing cultural practices, and

local patronages in many ways, and this led to the emergence of many variations to Buddhist practice in different regions across the region.

Particularly in the Indian subcontinent, Buddhism followed cycles of boom and bust over two millenniums. Although Buddhism received royal patronage as an organised religion, its first wave of geographical expansion is attributed to Emperor Ashoka (around 260 BCE–230 BCE): he declared Buddhism as the state religion and publicised his endorsement of the religion with engraved pillars and rock edicts to mark the significant sites associated with the life of Gautama Buddha. He convened the Third Buddhist Council of Buddhist monks and sent emissaries across the subcontinent. The other significant contributor to the geographical spread of Buddhism was King Kanishka (78–101 CE), whose empire extended from the northern part of the Indian subcontinent, including Gandhara (present day Afghanistan and Pakistan), to areas of Central Asia, north of the Kashmir region to the city-states of Khotan, Kashgar, and Yarkand (now in the Xinjiang Autonomous Region of China) of the Tarim Basin. Using the Silk Road that connected China, Central Asia, the Middle East, and Europe, Buddhist monks, merchants, and emissaries would bring the religion with them to the different regions. He organised the Fourth Buddhist council in Kashmir and was also responsible for the creation of the first anthropomorphic representation of the Buddha as an image through the Gandhara school of Greco-Buddhist Art. In early Buddhism, the symbolic representation of the Buddha and his enlightenment was his footprint, the Bodhi tree, the Dharma wheel, and the lotus flower. Buddhist monks from the Gandhara region played a crucial role in the development and transmission of Buddhist ideas.

Buddhist councils played a significant role in the evolution and spread of Buddhism. At these councils emerged the two main divisions of Theravada and Mahayana traditions and other Buddhist schools of thought. Theravada, in simple terms, means "doctrine of elder monks," referring to senior Buddhist monks. It originated during the Second Buddhist Council under the leadership of a small group of elderly members that upheld the view that Buddha is not a god but an authoritative enlightened teacher. The *Dharma* is the teachings of Buddha that leads to the attainment of *Nirvana*—the apex of Buddhist achievement and enlightenment. It uses the Pali language to preserve the Buddha's teachings. The sangha (the Buddhist community at large) consists of the lay followers and the monastic followers of Buddha. Monastic followers hold firm to the *Vinaya* code of conduct and seek to emulate Buddha's disciplined life. Mahayana, on the other hand, refers to the bodhisattva path, seeking complete enlightenment to benefit and lead all sentient beings out of suffering. The concept of a bodhisattva means, "being of wisdom." These beings are highly regarded as selfless individuals who stand at the threshold of Nirvana but out of great compassion, postpone the attainment of final enlightenment to help save beings still suffering from the cycle of rebirths. Hence, bodhisattvas are recognised in the Mahayana tradition as earthly saviours, apart from the Buddha himself. Mahayana Buddhism is sometimes interpreted as a more devotional form of Buddhism, since Buddha and bodhisattvas are much respected and worshipped. Other schools of Buddhism also developed over time, but these two are the ones in wide practice across Asia.

Buddhism declined since the 12th century in the Indian subcontinent. This was due to a number of factors, including the Islamic invasion and subsequent warfare in the region (for more on this history, refer to [25,26]). Buddhist monks carried Buddhism towards more favourable kingdoms in the southeast part of the subcontinent and then onwards, to the east, where it has survived over centuries (see the next section). In the nineteenth century, British colonial administrators, who were more interested in archaeological expeditions, uncovered several Buddhist monuments, including the most significant Bodhi temple at Bodhgaya. Such discoveries attracted Buddhist followers from neighbouring countries

(mainly, Sri Lanka and Myanmar) to visit the ruins and subsequently build monasteries there. Since colonial times, most sites related to Buddha have been found in ruins and are treated as archaeological relics in India (and in other South Asian countries). Moreover, less than 2% of India's population follows Buddhism (ref) which has limited the patronage and support required for reviving the archaeological heritage. Since the 1960s, the Indian government has pursued cultural diplomacy and has invited monks and sanghas from neighbouring Buddhist countries to build monasteries in many Buddhist sites to re-enliven Buddhism (for more details see [26,27]).

Meanwhile, Buddhism continued to flourish across both Mahayana and Theravada traditions in Southeast Asia since its introduction. The history of Theravada Buddhism in Southeast Asia is closely tied with the introduction and development of Buddhism in Sri Lanka since the third century BCE. It passed through Myanmar before arriving in Thailand, Cambodia, Laos PDR, and beyond. The Southeast Asian countries of Vietnam, Cambodia, Malaysia, and Indonesia (Sumatra and Java) received Mahayana Buddhism from India during the 2nd century CE along the sea trade route. Central Asia was the main route for the transmission of Buddhism to China around the 1st century CE. From China, Buddhism spread to Korea, Japan, and Vietnam.

How this geographical spread has generated diversity in Buddhist heritage and how that is proving to be a great resource for tourism is discussed in the next section.

4. Buddhist Heritage as Resource for Tourism

During its historical spread, Buddhism reached different parts of the regions at different times, but its key tenets and philosophies were followed religiously by monks. And yet, as they garnered royal patronage from rulers of those times, their practice intersected in a syncretic manner with local cultures. Followers embraced several Buddhist practices, and this led to the generation of rich, tangible and intangible heritage. The most notable ones that are related to tourism mobilities are discussed below.

4.1. Pilgrimage Circuits

Buddhist followers believe in pilgrimage, because they believe that Buddha himself propagated the idea of a pilgrimage to four places: Lumbini, where the Buddha was born; Bodhgaya (or Buddhgaya), where he attained enlightenment under the Bodhi tree; Sarnath, where he delivered his first sermon and set in motion the Wheel of Dhamma; and Kusinara (or Kushinagar), the place of his Parinibbana (Parinirvana). They believe that a pilgrimage to these sites would inspire faith and a sense of religious purpose. These four popular sites frame what is now known as a Buddhist pilgrimage circuit in India and Nepal (more about this in the next section).

4.2. Buddhist Sites—Monumental Heritage

The prominence of Buddhism as state religion in many ancient kingdoms of Asia has created a large number of monuments. The mention of the Angkor Wat (Cambodia), Borobudur (Indonesia), Luang Prabang (Laos), Larung Gar (Tibetan Autonomous Region of China), etc., conveys an image of grandeur of Buddhist settlements. In Asia, about 55 sites related to Buddhism are listed as World Heritage sites (for details see https://whc.unesco.org/en/list/ accessed on 30 January 2025). Around these sites, large archaeological parks have been set up that attract a high volume of international visitors for the exceptional archaeological experience they offer. In many cases, they also continue to support active religious and cultural practices and, therefore, are destinations for both domestic and international visitors.

4.3. Living Practice of Buddhism

Buddhism intersected with native religions and faiths in many ways, generating syncretic religious practices and rituals. For instance, in the Himalayan region of South Asia, (mainly, India, Nepal, and Bhutan), the monks and monasteries anchor the religious–cultural lives of people in those settlements. In other places, large temple complexes are at the centre of village-level Buddhist practice that also doubles up as cultural resources in countries such as Thailand, Laos, Cambodia, and Myanmar. Cultural aspects and the way of life of each different ethnic group are reflected in the way they perform their religious obligations. The representation of each Buddhist denomination is reflected by their communal devotees, so Thai Theravada Buddhism is associated with local Siamese, Sinhala Theravada Buddhism is associated with local Sinhalese, and Mahayana Buddhism is associated with local Chinese communities. This is vividly demonstrated when attending puja (chanting sessions). In a Thai wat, chanting in the traditional Pali language follows the Siamese-stylized versions, whereas in Sinhalese temples, the same chant is carried out in Sinhala tone and rhythm. Similar cultural nuances are also exhibited in different types of cuisines served to members of the *sangha* during dana (food offerings) [5]. In this sense, then, the sites of active practice of Buddhism provide the religious–cultural basis for a diverse and often exotic visitor experience.

4.4. Buddhist Festivals and Events

The most iconic Buddhist festivals are those that mark events related to Buddha's life. For example, the Buddha Poornima (full-moon day) commemorates the day of birth, enlightenment, and death of Buddha and is celebrated globally by Buddhist followers. Similarly, Vesak (or Vessa), marking the start of retreats of the rainy season, is also celebrated with pomp. These festivals are celebrated on a grand scale in most Buddhist sites. There are many unique cultural and artistic activities, such as folk-song performances, Buddhist songs, and Buddhist dances. New festivals and cultural performances are also being invented to cater to growing demands. More contemporary events, such as Peace marathons, conferences, and local pageants, are also being packaged with Buddhist festivals, making them very attractive for tourism.

4.5. Spiritual Tourism Products: Healing, Meditation, Yoga, and Music

The teachings of Buddhism are closely associated with the process of self-enlightenment and to overall spiritual well-being. Experiential aspects, such as meditation, yoga practices, healing, chanting, music, and other forms, are offered as tourism products [9]. In many Buddhist sites, monasteries package such experiences into short- or long-term retreats, while spas and hotels also customise packages with the involvement of local practitioners and traditional institutions [5]. This segment of Buddhist heritage is increasingly becoming popular and provides tremendous potential for Buddhist tourism.

5. Buddhist Heritage and Tourism in South Asia—India and Nepal

This section focuses on India and Nepal within South Asia, because Buddhism has generated enormous resources in these places, and it is here that Buddhist followers from all over the world converge—both for religious and spiritual reasons. As mentioned earlier, pilgrimage to places directly related to the historical Buddha—Lumbini, Bodhgaya, Sarnath, and Kushinagar (in Nepal and India)—form the most venerated and popular pilgrimage circuit. Many also include other four sites in their itinerary. These are Rajgir, Shravasti, Vaishali, and Sansakia. While the idea of the circuit continues to provide a powerful imagination of Buddhist cultural landscape and India as the heartland of Buddhism, this idea of a Buddhist circuit is questioned for its practicality and relevance for tourism

promotion by the Indian government and tourist industry based on the differences in visitation patterns in these sites [27,28].

Figure 1 indicates how central Buddhist heritage is in India to the region by mapping the flow of international visitors from neighbouring Southeast Asian countries to India. It is believed that most of them undertake the circuitous journey to at least the four key sites mentioned above. This representation is based on the 2017 statistics published by the Ministry of Tourism, Government of India, respective state governments where these sites are located, and the Lumbini Development Trust in Lumbini. A clear correspondence is observed between the number of visitors coming from a country and its Buddhist population.

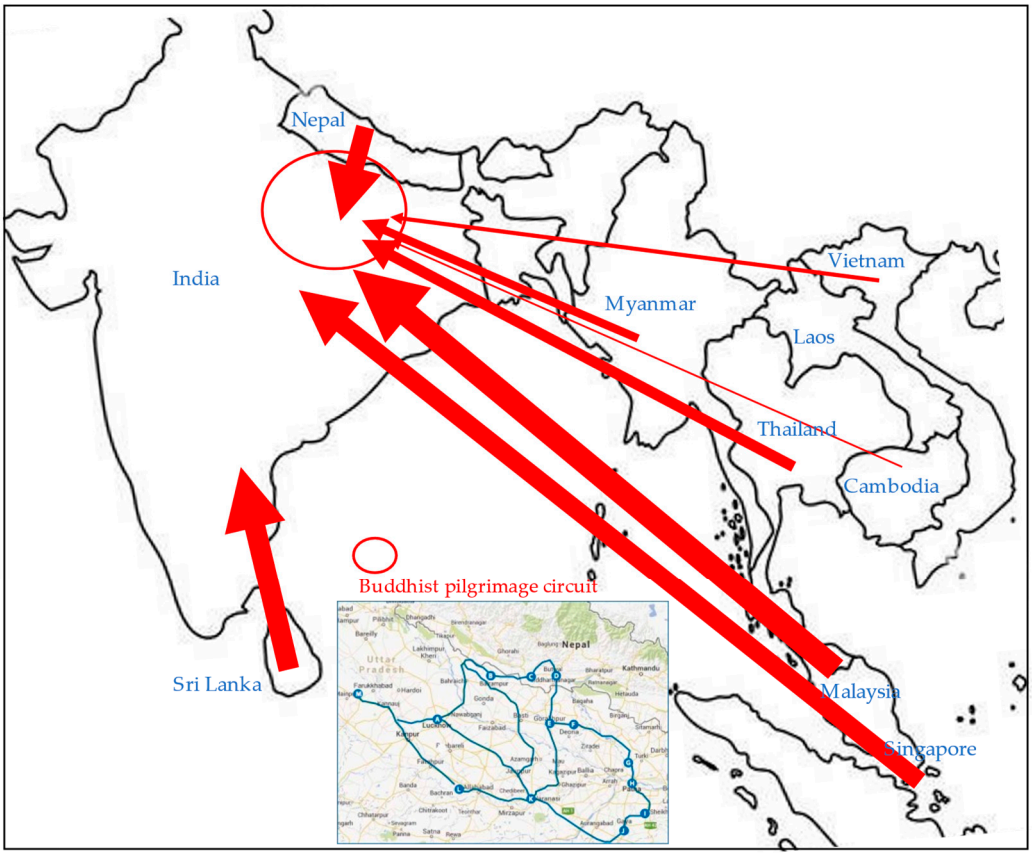


Figure 1. Visitors from the region to India. Created by author using data as mentioned from UNWTO, 2020; ASEAN Visitor Arrivals Dashboard at https://data.aseanstats.org/dashboard/tourism accessed on 30 January 2025 Source for map: https://www.alamy.com/vector-illustration-asia.html accessed on 30 January 2025.

It is clear that the journeys to Buddhist sites in India as the Buddhist heartland anchor most of the international Buddhist tourism in the region[2]. While some features remain similar, the ways in which the followers from different countries perform their pilgrimage travel differs significantly. This was most vividly demonstrated in Lumbini, where the author had conducted fieldwork in 2020 and where he found that Sri Lankan followers tend to stay in the monasteries managed by their monks and are often low-cost travellers, whereas Vietnamese followers are often accompanied by their own guides and cook their meals in hotels where they stay [29]. Such a nuanced understanding of visitor behaviour is required for better management of Buddhist tourism, which is highly differentiated. These patterns, however, are differently manifest in Southeast Asia, as shown in the next section.

6. Buddhist Heritage and Tourism in Southeast Asia

Buddhist heritage in Southeast Asia differs from South Asia in a few distinct ways. First, unlike South Asia, there is no concept of one national or even regional/sub-regional pilgrimage circuit. However, there are the iconic sites related to bodhisattvas, learned gurus, and elder monks that attract a considerable influx of visitors throughout the region. Second, since Buddhism is a lived practiced in most countries, past and present practices and performances give rise to a more active and living religious and cultural heritage. Much of the region has shared cultural and historical traditions, and this means that the lived practice of Buddhism permeates through the cultural landscape around the sangha of Buddhist monks and wats (temples).

In this section, an overview of Buddhist heritage and tourism in key Buddhist countries of Southeast Asia that belong to ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations) is discussed. ASEAN provides better statistical data on tourism in the region.

6.1. Cambodia

At present, 95% of Cambodians consider themselves Buddhists [30]. Virtually all ethnic Khmers, who constitute about 90% or more of the Cambodian population, profess Buddhism as their religion. The Buddhism of Cambodia is a fusion of Theravada Buddhism; Hinduism (water blessing ceremony, talisman in the wallet, etc.); and Animism (Neak Ta, red bracelet etc.).

As per the 2017 report on heritage inventory by the Ministry of Fine Arts, Cambodia has 4000 temples and ancient sites. Of these, 2603 temples and sites in 18 provinces and towns have been regularly visited since 2005. These include 766 temples, 996 ancient tombs, 487 ancient pagodas, 89 ancient bridges, and 265 ancient walls and ancient sites (Ministry of Culture and Fine Arts: www.mcfa.gov.kh/ accessed on 11 February 2025). At present, only about 10% of these historical heritage sites have served as tourism destinations, while the other 90% remain secluded and isolated and hence, under-developed. The most iconic sites are the Angkor Wat, the Angkor Wat World Heritage Site, Phnom Bakheng, Banteay Kdei, Bat Chum, Bayon, Krol Ko, Neak Pean, Preah Khan, Preah Palilay, Ta Prohm, and Ta Som.

The practice of Theravada Buddhism is pervasive across the country. It is reflected in the structure of the sangha (order of monks), where the sight of orange-robed monks is common. Monks provide a living model of the most meritorious behaviour a Buddhist could follow. This symbiosis between monks and the laity provides opportunities for the lay community to gain merit, and most of this is around the institution of wat (described earlier). Monks play multiple roles: spiritual teachers, secular teachers, temple servants, novices, and ordained monks. Until the 1970s, most literate Cambodian males gained literacy solely through the instruction of the sangha [31]. Monks participate in formal social activities, such as village festivals, ceremonies, marriages, and funerals. The symbiosis between monks and lay people is apparent in the act of food offerings (*dana*) before noon and during the morning *pindapat*. They might also be seen participating in ceremonies to name infants and in other minor ceremonies or rites of passage. Monks generally do not lead these ceremonies, because this role is usually given to the *achar* (master of ceremonies). The monk's major function is mainly to say prayers of blessing. They may also engage in dispensing prayers of blessing and astrology and function as psychological healers. This organizational system of sangha and wat provides the basis for cultural life in most villages and can provide a good resource for Buddhist cultural tourism.

The tourism statistics plotted in Figure 2 show that of the 5.6 million international arrivals, almost 60% come through Siem Reap to the Angkor Wat [22]. The top five source

markets are the adjoining Asian countries of China, Vietnam, Laos, Thailand, and the Republic of Korea.

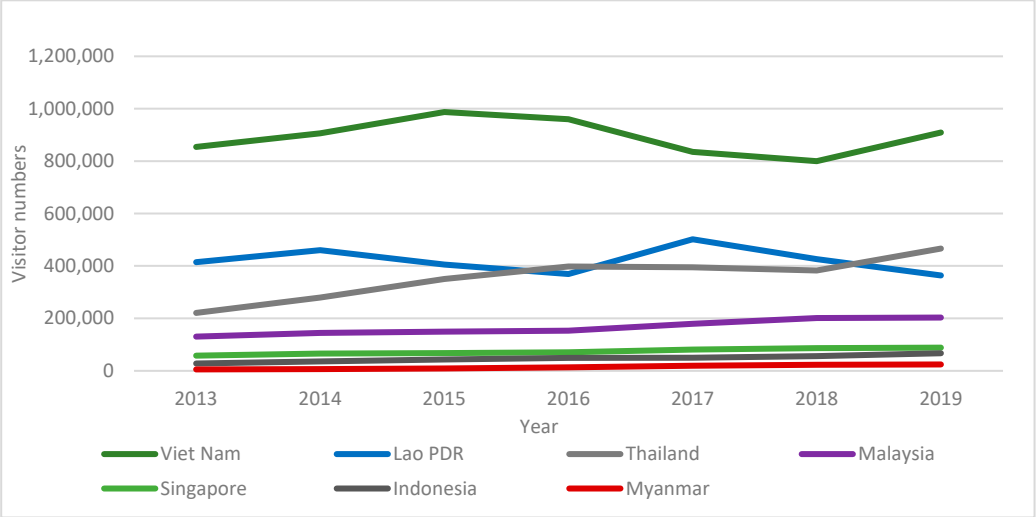


Figure 2. Tourist arrivals in Cambodia. Graph created by author based on data from ASEAN dashboard.

When visitor data from ASEAN are plotted, Thailand singularly dominates. It is quite likely that visitors from the other neighbouring countries of Laos and Vietnam may not necessarily be coming for tourism but for other purposes.

6.2. Indonesia

Buddhism flourished in Indonesia over three waves, as it received royal patronage from ruling kingdoms: c. mid-eighth to mid-ninth century, seventh to thirteenth centuries, and thirteenth to fifteenth centuries [32]. Islam began to penetrate the archipelago around the thirteenth century onwards and since then, has become a state religion. At present, less than 1% of country's population practices Buddhism [30]. Like South Asia, Buddhist heritage is made of archaeological relics and monuments that are concentrated around Central Java and Yogyakarta, with the most notable being the 9th century Borobudur Temple complex. Located in the town of in Magelang, Central Java, this Mahayana temple is also known as the world's largest Buddhist temple. This temple follows Javanese Buddhist architecture, which blends the Indonesian indigenous cult of ancestor worship and the Buddhist teachings of attaining Nirvana. It is both a temple and a complete exposition of the Buddha Dharma (doctrine) (for details on this temple, see [33]). The other significant tangible heritage is a complex of Buddhist temples that includes Kalasan, Sari, Sewu, and Plaosan in Prambanan Plain. These are in close vicinity to the Hindu temple complex of Prambanan Temple. Collectively, these sites are popularly known as the Prambanan Temple Compounds (https://whc.unesco.org/en/list/642/ accessed on 30 January 2025).

Both Borobudur and Prambanan are popular destinations: Borobudur is famous due to its WHS status and attracts a large number of tourists; visitation to Prambanan has grown dramatically from a lower base, mostly because of domestic tourists [22]. As shown in Figure 3, tourist flow is mainly from the neighbouring countries of Malaysia and Singapore. This implies patterns similar to Buddhist sites in South Asia, where archaeological parks serve as recreational tourist destinations.

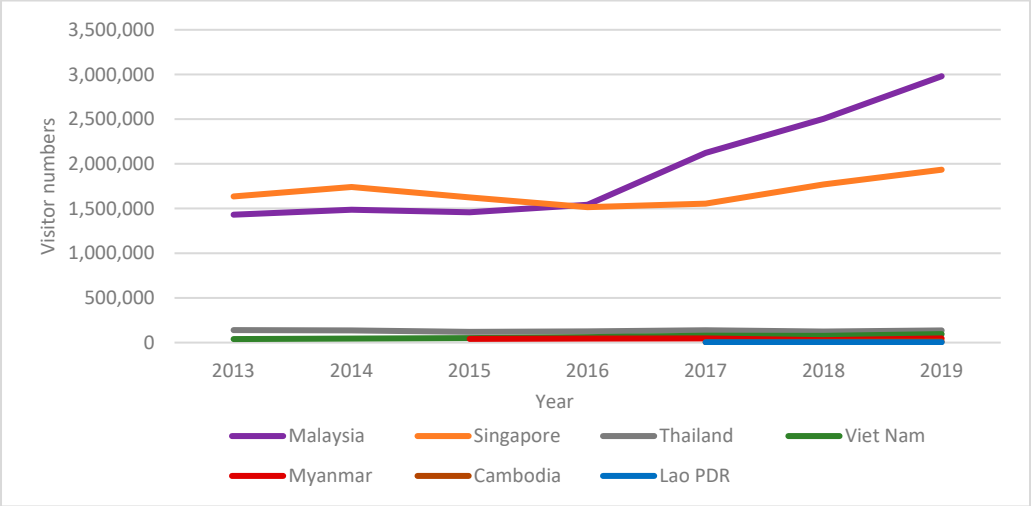


Figure 3. Visitor arrivals in Indonesia. Graph created by author based on data from ASEAN dashboard.

6.3. Laos PDR

Although Laos is a landlocked country with the smallest population in the region, it boasts of being one of the largest repositories of Buddhist heritage. Since the 7th–8th century, Theravada Buddhism was patronised by ruling kingdoms of the region and continues to be practiced by the majority. At present, about 65% of the 7 million people follow Theravada Buddhism, but their practice is closely tied to animist beliefs and belief in ancestral spirits, particularly in rural areas similar to the remaining population that practices Satsana Phi, a religion that celebrates ancestral and earthly spirits and that often includes shamanic roles. More than 4000 temples are spread across the country—the most prominent clusters being around Luang Prabang (the old capital of the powerful kingdom of Lan Xang, recognised by UNESCO in 1995 as a WHS), Champasak, and Savannakhet.

The historic town of Luang Prabang embodies the Buddhist culture to its fullest. Here, everyday life is dictated through Buddhist celebrations around local neighbourhood temples (wats) and monasteries managed by monks. The practices and processions of monks are integral to the social fabric. For instance, the sight of "a thousand monks in this small town of only 20,000 people" provides a spectacle for tourists [22]. The wat provides a symbol of village identity and a place to conduct ceremonies and festivals. At its minimum, a wat has a residence building for the monks and novices and a main building which houses the Buddha image. This building is used for secular village meetings as well as for religious sessions, such as chanting and blessing ceremonies. Thus, the wat assumes the role of a guesthouse, monastery, and school. A committee made up of respected elderly (mostly males) from the village manages the financial and organizational affairs of the wat.

In terms of tourist numbers, visitors from ASEAN countries account for 71% of the total, followed by Asia Pacific at 23%. Not surprising, as shown in Figure 4, the two highest contributors are Thailand and Vietnam. The other international tourists are less than 10% of the total. Champasak, Luang Prabang, and Savannakhet are the most frequently visited sites by foreigners. In Luang Prabang, the peak season spans from December to February. Almost all key sites and experiences occur within a 20 km-to-30 km radius of the UNESCO site. In general, the high season is from February to June, while the low season is around September, and there is less seasonality among visitors from the ASEAN dataset. However, a considerable increase in visitors from Vietnam is seen during holidays such as Tet and from China during the Chinese New Year. According to a survey in 2017, about half of the international visitors combined their visit to Laos with a trip to Thailand, and about 42%

had China/Cambodia/Vietnam as another destination alongside this visit. Only about 25% had visited Laos PDR as a single destination. The average length of stay was 8.4 days.

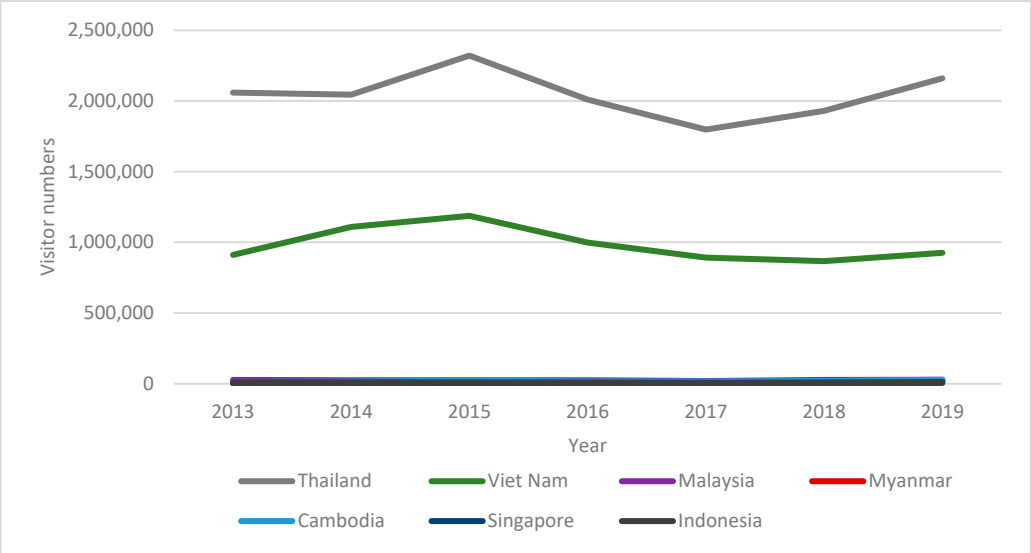


Figure 4. Visitor arrivals in Laos PDR. Graph created by author based on data from ASEAN dashboard.

6.4. Myanmar

Buddhism has existed in Myanmar (Burma) over a millennium, and its Buddhist heritage is captured in its popular image as the "the land of pagodas [34]. Almost 90% of the population practices the Theravada tradition and often in conjunction with nat (indigenous) worship. Monks, collectively known as the sangha, are venerated members of Burmese society. Most temples and stupas in Myanmar contain statues and images of Buddha and his disciples. Some may house Buddha's relics or personal effects of Him and His disciples.

The most well-known Buddhist site is Bagan—the former capital of Myanmar (1044–1287 CE). At its prime, this capital had over 10,000 Buddhist temples, pagodas, and monasteries. However, around 2200 temples and pagodas have survived, and these are covered under the Bagan Archaeological Zone. This archaeological park is a major destination in Myanmar's tourism industry and is viewed as equal in attraction to the Angkor Wat in Cambodia or Borobudur in Indonesia. The other most popular Buddhist temple in Myanmar is the Shwedagon Pagoda in the present-day capital of Yangon. Several Buddhist festivals serve as attractions for tourists.

In recent times, Vipassana (an old form of Insight meditation) has regained popularity, and many meditation centres have emerged. Myanmar's tradition of Vipassana meditation has long attracted practitioners from Asia and beyond. Yogis (lay meditators) usually prepare themselves to stay in a centre or temple from 10 days to 3 months to be engaged in deep practice. This involves long periods of silence and undertaking nothing but observations of one's mind and body. In terms of visitor attraction, this may be regarded as a form of Buddhist pilgrimage where visitors not only bring in donations for the upkeep of the centres but also support local sacral industries, such as incense, oil lamps, candles, fruits, food offerings, rosary beads, flowers, yogi attires (usually all white and made of cotton), and the printing of suttas.

In terms of visitor flows, the top five source countries are Thailand (20.2%), China (15.6%), Japan (7.45%), Korea (4.83%), and Singapore (4.54%) (see Figure 5).

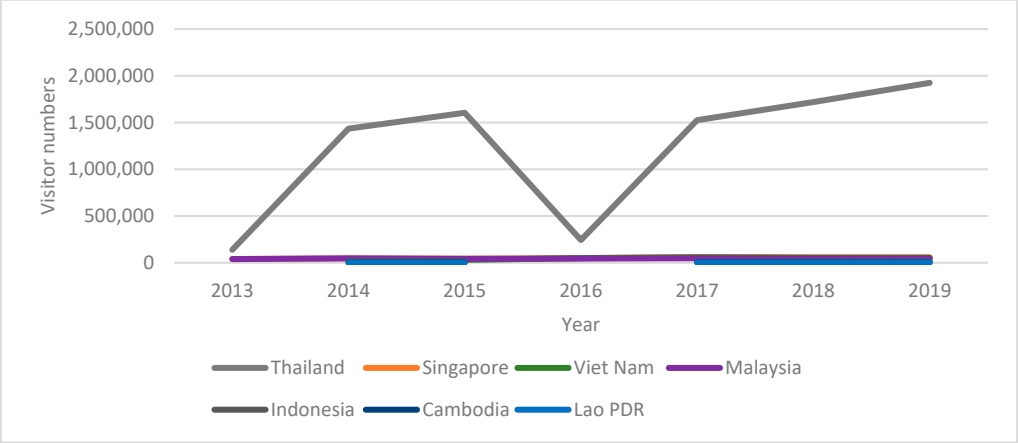


Figure 5. Arrivals in Myanmar. Graph created by author based on data from ASEAN dashboard.

An interesting point is that the regional tourist places of Nay Pyi Taw, Mandalay, Myawaddy, Tachileik, Hteekhee, Kawthang, Tamue, Muse, and Myeik report a larger proportion of tourists (56% of total visitors come through these entry points).

6.5. Thailand

Buddhism has a long history in Thailand since the reign of Ashoka (c. 268 to 232 BCE) who had sent monks to spread Buddhism to what was then known as Suvannabhumi. Over centuries, Buddhism persisted in waves, with support from ruling kingdoms, including the Mon Lavo kingdom and the Khmer empire, but it was the Sukhothai dynasty (13th–15th century) that established the first ethnic Thai kingdom where Theravada Buddhism became a state religion (for a fuller history, see [35]). Subsequent rulers established capitals, including Sukhothai and Ayuthaya, which became high repositories of Buddhist heritage. During the Ayutthaya period (33 kings ruling over 417), Buddhism reached its zenith in popularity. Wats (temples) and stupas (pagodas) were built in great numbers. Wats were not just places for monks but also served as places for education, hospitals, and community meeting places. Wats became an important symbol of Thai identity. Religious literature, in both Pali and Thai, abounded in Ayutthaya. Unfortunately, most of it was destroyed in 1767 AD with invasions from neighbouring kingdoms [35]. At present, almost 95% of the population of 70 million follows Buddhism, which is integrated with folk beliefs, such as ancestor worship, as well as Chinese religions from the large Thai–Chinese population. The Buddhist sangha continues to be influential today, although some reforms were introduced since the turn of the 20th century [35].

The village-level practice of Buddhism is anchored around wats (Buddhist temples). A typical wat is characterized by tall golden stupas and shares architectural features similar to that of structures in other Southeast Asian countries, particularly Cambodia and Laos. The general layout and components of a typical wat is made up of the following: an ordination hall; boundary stones; a lecture hall; a study hall; the stupa (chedi containing four parts, i.e., a plinth, a bell- or dome-shaped structure, and a platform above the dome and spire); a tower (prang); a scripture house; a belfry; and monastic residences. The living temple culture that permeates in wats and their surrounding communities not only illustrates the symbiotic relationship between members of the monastic orders and lay people, but its varied forms and functions reach out to teach Buddha Dhamma (teachings of the Buddha) just by its existence. Most temples also act as repositories for Thai art that includes Buddha images, murals, paintings, carvings of stories from the Jatakas, and the various ornate designs and patterns. Temples (monumental and local) play a significant role in preserving and promoting traditional arts and crafts [36].

The Buddhist rites and rituals followed by Thai people include merit making by offering dana to temples and monks, supporting the sangha, and building and maintaining temples and Buddha images. Among the rites often seen in temples are Buddhist chanting, sprinkling of holy water by monks, lighting incense and oil lamps, offering flowers (usually lotus flowers), pasting gold papers onto Buddha images, and offering alms food to monks. These common Buddhist rituals add to the colour and vibrancy of Buddhist festivals. These have become cultural attractions for tourists.

The monumental Buddhist heritage includes iconic destinations, such as Sukhothai (declared a Historical National Park in 1978 and a UNESCO World Heritage site in 1991), Ayuthaya (declared a UNESCO World Heritage site in 1991), and Chiang Mai.

The 2017 data suggest that a bulk of international tourists (73%) stayed in the Central and Southern regions (i.e., Bangkok and the beaches). The top five countries of origin were China, Japan, France, Germany, and England [22]. In general, visitor numbers are consistently higher during the more pleasant climate, which spans over two quarters, including October–December and January–March. When ASEAN visitors are plotted (see Figure 6), clearly, the high-spending Malaysians dominate, whereas the relatively less-developed country of Myanmar has the lowest numbers.

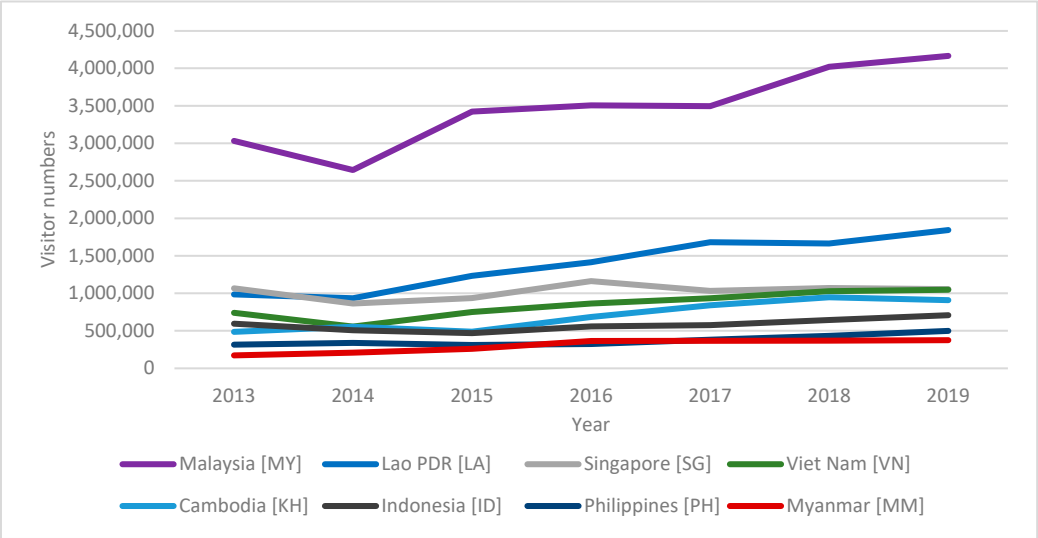


Figure 6. Visitor arrivals in Thailand. Graph created by author based on data from ASEAN dashboard.

Most tourism places have Buddhist temples, which are generally included in tourist itineraries. The concentration of Buddhist sites is in the Northern region, which includes Chiang Mai and Sukhothai. This region, however, attracts a fairly limited share of the tourist volume (about 6.2%). Ayuthaya is ranked fourth in the country in terms of tourist volume (dominated by domestic Thai visitors comprising 74% of the visitors) [22].

6.6. Vietnam

Like its peers in Southeast Asia, Buddhism arrived in Vietnam from India and over time, was localized to a Vietnamese strain. Vietnam, the furthest in terms of geographical distance from the heartland of Buddhism, offers more unique expressions of Buddhism. Vietnamese Buddhism has had a syncretic relationship with certain elements of Taoism, Chinese spirituality, and the Vietnamese folk religion [37]. Through such cross cultural–religious blending over the millennium, Vietnamese Buddhism has characteristics which are different from Buddhism practiced in other countries in Southeast Asia. Both Mahayana and Theravada Buddhism are followed.

The political developments in the last two centuries have had significant influences on Buddhism, which eventually led to the institutionalization of Buddhism practices and philosophy [38]. In the southern part of the country, some of the milestones in the process were as follows: the establishment of the Buddhist Studies College (in 1964), which confers educational degrees in Buddhism; the formation of the Unified Buddhist Sangha of Vietnam (by 11 Buddhist groups and Buddhist associations); and the establishment of the Vietnam Zen Sangha and the Vietnam General Buddhist Sangha. All the organized sanghas are required to function alongside the State. In 2007, Pure Land Buddhism, the most widespread type of Buddhism practiced in Vietnam, was officially recognized as a religion by the government. A total of 92% Vietnamese follow Buddhism [30]. However, the actual number of practicing Buddhists, meaning those who frequently visit Buddhist temples and participate in Buddhist ceremonies, is only about thirty million [22].

About 465 pagodas (Buddhist temple complexes) are located all across Vietnam. The most popular ones include the following: the Thay Pagoda (Ca and Thien Phuc Tu Pagoda), situated at the foot of Sai Son Mountain (30 kms from Hanoi); the Perfume Pagoda, which is a group of caves in limestone rocks of Huong Son Mountain (about 70 km from Hanoi) and covers an area of a thousand hectares and includes a complex of mountains, rivers and streams, villages, pagodas, and grottoes surrounded by the Huong Tich Mountain Range; the Long Son Pagoda at the foot of Mount Trai Thuy; the Chua Phap Bao Pagoda (outside the UNESCO World Heritage town of Hoi An); and Huế. In addition, there are 529 Theravada temples [22].

Tourism flows in Vietnam have increased considerably: the numbers doubled from 2013 to 2017: international arrivals increased from 7.5 million to 12.9 million, while domestic tourists, from 35 million to 73.2 million [22]. The unique geography of the country (land covers no more than 20%, whereas mountains account for 40% of the land area) has endowed it with an abundance of natural heritage sites, which are main tourist attractions. In terms of visitor flows from the ASEAN dataset, Thailand and Malaysia are top markets (Figure 7).

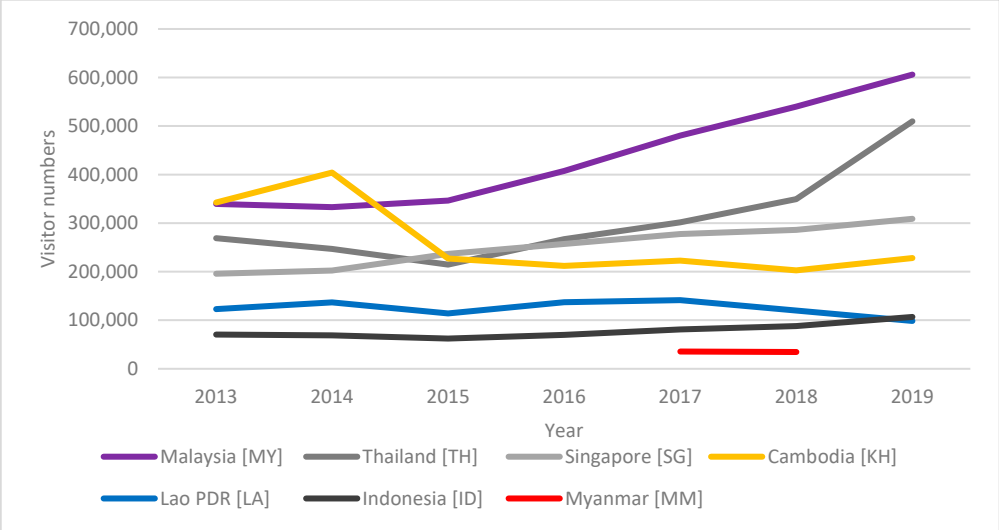


Figure 7. Arrivals in Vietnam. Graph created by author based on data from ASEAN dashboard.

7. Discussion: Inter-Regional and Intra-Regional Flows

The data presented in the previous sections pertain to overall visitor arrivals and, therefore, should be used only as a context to understand wider tourism mobility patterns. It is a challenge to isolate these data in relation to tourism around Buddhist heritage. Nonetheless, when juxtaposed with other socio-cultural and religious aspects, it is clear

that a good proportion of such travel would be for cultural and religious reasons related to Buddhist heritage. As such, the following points of discussion are relevant for a high-level understanding of the diversity of Buddhist heritage tourism and should be customised to include more nuanced and specific data as necessary.

7.1. Buddhist Tourism Resources: What Works?

For Buddhist tourism, the main attraction continues to be the iconic Buddhist sites, as they are relevant for both archaeological reasons and for active living practice (many are UNESCO World Heritage sites). It is clear that being a World Heritage site definitely attracts more tourist activities. However, it should be noted that most visits to iconic sites are single destination visits and not a part of circuitous journey or pilgrim route. In other sites, a large proportion of the tourist traffic is due to day trips; Ayuthaya, Bodhgaya, and Lumbini are notable examples.

The village-level practice of Buddhism provides a major cultural tourism resource in places such as Laos, Cambodia, Bhutan, Myanmar, and others, where Buddhism pervades throughout the landscape. Here, smaller numbers of tourists are seen in villages, but these are often add-ons to a visit to an iconic site. For example, in the case of the Angkor Wat, many tours include a visit to surrounding villages. A similar type of activity is promoted alongside a visit to Luang Prabang in Laos or Lumbini in Nepal.

The idea of pilgrimage circuits is inherent to Buddhism. It is mainly the devout followers that undertake travel to Buddhist sites as part of pilgrimage circuits, the most notable being the "footsteps of Buddha" route across India and Nepal (inter-regional). Some routes within countries are also promoted as circuits, but their scale of operations is small and needs better integration and development as a package tour (intra-regional).

Buddhist festivals are a major cultural and religious draw for tourism. While it is mostly domestic tourists that attend festivals as part of their religious practices, it is often the cultural aspects of festivals that motivate large numbers of tourists. The importance and potential of Buddhist art for tourism does not feature prominently in current visitations. It is mainly in places where there is an active and living practice of Buddhism that Buddhist art is the subject for touristic activity. Notable examples include Myanmar, Laos, etc., where art is presented in many diverse forms.

7.2. Volume of Domestic Tourists Is Higher at Buddhist Sites but There Are Varying Exceptions

It has been found that the proportion of domestic tourists in the total volume of visitors is much higher. Across the region, Buddhist sites are being managed as archaeological parks and thus provide a more recreational resource for tourism for people from heaving urbanised centres in these countries. Where Buddhism is practiced as a lived religion, it attracts the follower to perform their religion. In either case, Buddhist heritage is more likely to attract more domestic tourism.

However, there are exceptions. In some countries, such as Cambodia, Laos, and Sri Lanka, at monumental sites (mainly WHS sites), one can find a higher share of international visitors. In Cambodia and Laos, domestic tourism is only in its developing stages due to political and socio-economic reasons. And as such, the numbers of international visitors seem to be relatively high. It is important to recognise that future growth will be in domestic tourism, and the industry needs to gear up for that.

7.3. Travelling Neighbours: Regional Tourism Holds the Key for Inbound Tourism

A cursory glance at the data highlights the significance of intra-regional tourism. It is evident that those countries that share boundaries with more numbers of neighbours, such as Laos and Cambodia in Southeast Asia and India and Nepal in South Asia, have a

considerable regional flow of visitors. The heavy cross-border flow in these countries is also due to the shared religious and cultural heritage of Buddhism (Figure 8).

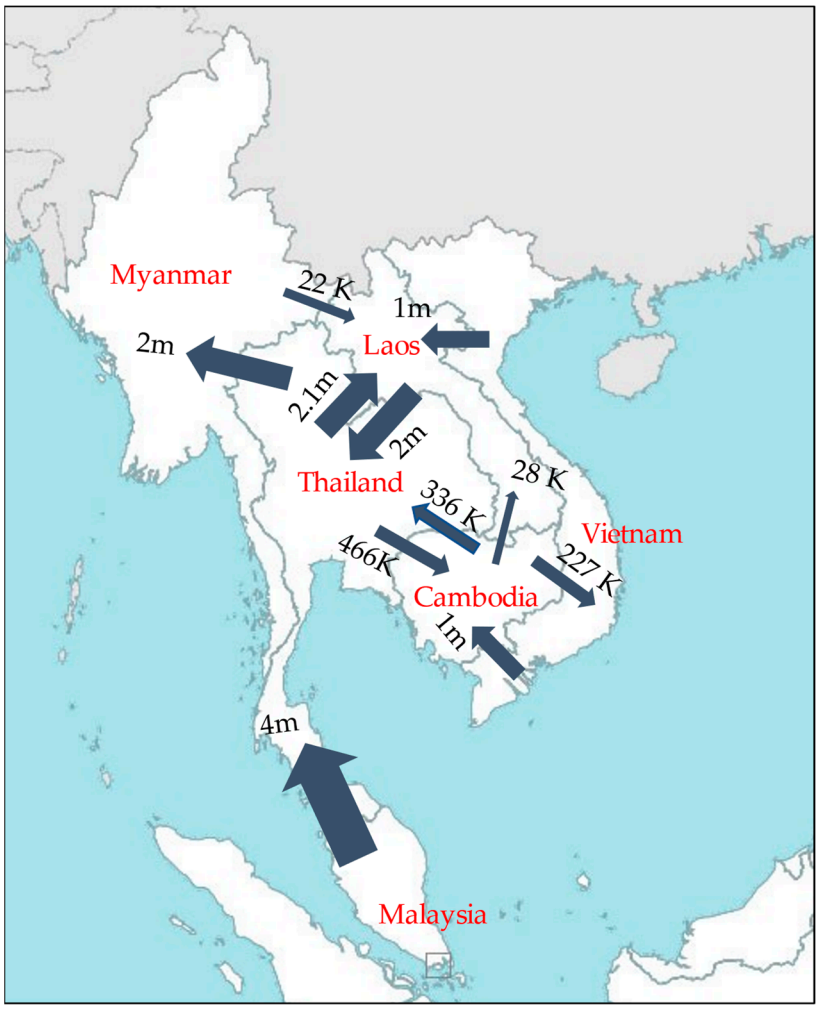


Figure 8. Cross-border flow of visitors. Mapped by the author on a map from http:aseanup.com accessed on 30 October 2024.

For instance, in Laos, "regional tourists" (from Thailand, China, Myanmar, Vietnam, and Cambodia) accounted for about 70% of visitor flows (Figure 9).

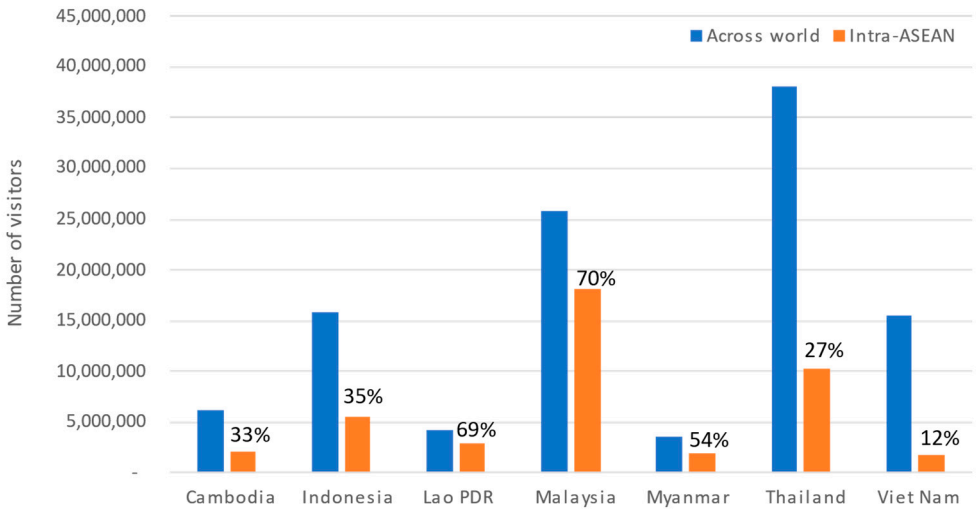


Figure 9. Visitor arrivals in ASEAN. Graph created by author based on data from ASEAN dashboard.

7.4. Differential Stages of Development of the Tourism Industry in the Region

From the available data, it is clear that tourism flows vary considerably across countries. While demographics and geography play the most significant roles in the development of the tourism industry, the concerted efforts of the government to promote and manage tourism are also equally important. Across the region, there are different types of institutions that are engaged in Buddhist tourism. Significant state institutions include national- and state-level tourism organisations. In most countries, strategic plans for tourism development are in place and are at various stages of development. However, Buddhist tourism features in the state agenda at different levels of priorities. For instance, in India, both the centre and provincial states are turning their focus on Buddhist tourism and the planned development of sites and circuits.

The above discussion illustrates several commonalities in Buddhist heritage as is shared in the contagious regions within Asia. The key difference between the two sub-regions is the abundance of archaeological landscape related to Buddhism in South Asia, which needs to be revitalized with transnational Buddhist followership, whereas Southeast Asia has the living practices that can be easily included into a wide array of cultural tourism products in that region. Most notably, India has been attempting to revive Buddhism by allowing for the construction of Buddhist monasteries in its Buddhist sites. It has been successful in promoting inter-regional tourism to ASEAN countries. However, other countries in the region consider Buddhist tourism in a fairly sporadic manner. As found in the UNWTO report, for countries where the Buddhist population is in the minority, there is hardly any reporting about the potential of Buddhist heritage in tourism.

It is also clear that countries in both the sub-regions have taken different approaches to the promotion and management of Buddhist heritage tourism. Some have employed cultural diplomacy involving strategic "bi-lateral agreements", using Buddhist philosophy to promote a more cultural exchange and management of Buddhist heritage and tourism (for example, Borobudur Declaration, 2008). In general, Buddhist tourism has flourished, with an active role of state institutions. For instance, Thailand is the frontrunner when it comes to tourism with its aggressive marketing and promotions through the Tourism Authority of Thailand (the Amazing Thailand Campaign of 1990s was very effective). This is mainly due to consistent developments of tourism attractions by identifying new products and using various combinations of nature–culture–economic permutations [39]. Whereas in Laos, the scale and intensity of tourism development is relatively small compared to its peers in ASEAN. It occupies a strategic location (in the centre of Indochina and Southeast Asia) and hence has developed so far as an "add-on destination". As such, tourism in Laos is likely to be influenced by several factors at the regional level. And, therefore, Laos is promoting combining visits to Buddhist sites alongside tours to natural attractions, such as dolphin watching in the Mekong River and the megalithic archaeological landscape of the Plain of Jars region. Thus, it is important to include Buddhist heritage in a wider network of tourist attractions, should the countries want to capitalise on it.

This discussion has also highlighted regional flows of tourism in countries with the shared heritage of Buddhism. The economics of such tourism may attract government interest and action, but these aspects remain under-researched in scholarly publications [5,40,41]. It could be argued that such regional mobilities across Europe and the EU are commonly seen in tourists who visit many EU countries in a trip, and this often includes visiting the cultural heritage of churches and cathedrals [42,43]. However, there is little evidence about the combination of archaeological landscapes and active religious practice in those settings. And this is what makes this study of South Asia and Southeast Asia more relevant. This paper argues for expanding the potential for heritage

tourism beyond more localized and specific geographical contexts, which occupies a much larger discussion in the international scholarship on heritage and tourism [44,45].

8. Conclusions

This paper examined inter-regional tourism flows and highlighted regional variations in the way Buddhist heritage is used for tourism in Asia, an aspect that has not been extensively addressed in previous research. It attempted to articulate the diversity using historical, geographical, religious, and cultural factors in the region—something that has not been included in heritage tourism scholarship. This inquiry has become more significant, because scholars have written about Buddhist sites and Buddhist heritage in specific countries [46,47], and very little is known about Buddhist heritage as a regional resource and how this is employed for tourism purposes across the region and what are the variations in there. Similar to others, the author, in earlier works, examined Buddhist heritage tourism at the level of a site [29,48] and at the level of a circuit [27,49]. Those works from South Asia provided a solid basis for comparing and contrasting the diversity in Buddhist heritage in Southeast Asia and how the lively and active religious practice of Buddhist followership in the region inspires and features in tourism patterns that are demonstrated in this paper. Thus, this paper offers more of a bird's eye view about the variations (prominent and subtle) within the Southeast region that influence inter-regional and intra-regional mobilities. It has been argued that Buddhist heritage can be presented in many different combinations to both followers and non-followers because of the multiple resources it offers. However, it is up to the individual countries to realise the value of the resources in their tourism policies and how this can be leveraged for regional cooperation and regional benefits.

Realizing the potential of Buddhist tourism is no easy feat due to a number of challenges. The most vital is the recognition of its potential by national governments and incorporating Buddhist tourism as a priority area in their policies and institutional structures. A few countries in Asia have accorded Buddhist tourism a national priority sector, but its widespread implementation is wanting. But in countries where Buddhist followership is in the minority, there is a fairly limited recognition of Buddhist resources and their use for tourism. There is a felt need for a more active role of the government in marketing and promotion campaigns to support and encourage Buddhist tourism. The involvement of the private sector, which plays a more central role in tourism, has only recently begun. It is necessary to be able to develop a resource value of Buddhist heritage products for tourism. At the core of any religious tourism enterprise are religious institutions, and this is no different in the case of Buddhism. The significant role of Buddhist monks, institutions, monasteries, sangha, and other national and international Buddhist associations needs to be examined and recognised and their engagement be sought for promoting Buddhist tourism. They contribute to the "unique traditions and norms at the heart of Asian identities [that] act as a form of "cultural capital" and will continue to drive "the Asian paradigm in the hospitality and tourism industries" [11].

Buddhism, with its inherent tolerant views, historical and archaeological grounding, and exotic sites and offerings of spirituality and holistic well-being, provides worthwhile tourism experiences for tourists in Asia. The "same–same" of Buddhist heritage shared by Asian countries can become the mainstay and a major resource for the socio-economic upliftment of communities across the region. Using their unique contexts, they can build and strengthen intra-regional connections for benefitting from Buddhist tourism and in a particular Asian way that the Asian paradigm aims to promote.

Funding: This research received no external funding.

Data Availability Statement: Tourism related data can be found at the ASEAN Visitor Arrivals Dashboard at https://data.aseanstats.org/dashboard/tourism accessed on 30 October 2024.

Acknowledgments: The author is grateful to Omar Nawaz and Hyeon-Jin Lee who were instrumental in initiating the UNWTO project titled "Buddhist Heritage f. Buddhist tourism in Asia: Towards sustainable development", which was published by UNWTO and can be found at https://www.e-unwto.org/doi/epdf/10.18111/9789284421619 accessed on 28 March 2024.

Conflicts of Interest: The author declare no conflicts of interest.

Notes

[1] The dates for the birth and death of Gautama Buddha are uncertain, but historians in the early 20th century dated his lifetime as 563 to 483 BCE and his death between 411 and 400 BCE (Deeg, M. 2014).

[2] Within South Asia, Sri Lanka is another country that attracts good numbers of Buddhist followers, but these numbers are comparatively less than the numbers of India and Nepal.

References

1. Schedneck, B. *Religious Tourism in Northern Thailand: Encounters with Buddhist Monks*; University of Washington Press: Seattle, DC, USA, 2021.
2. Rieder, L.G. Developing and Marketing Sustainable and Inclusive Cross-Border Buddhist Circuits and Routes. In *International Conference on "Developing Sustainable and Inclusive Buddhist Heritage and Pilgrimage Circuit in South Asia's Buddhist Heartland"*; Bangabandhu International Convention Center (BICC): Dhaka, Bangladesh, 2015.
3. Huber, T. *The Holy Land Reborn: Pilgrimage and the Tibetan Reinvention of Buddhist India*; University of Chicago Press: Chicago, IL, USA, 2008.
4. Cook, J. Remaking Thai Buddhism through International Pilgrimage to South Asia. In *Religious Journeys in India: Pilgrims, Tourists, and Travelers*; Pinkney, A.M., Whalen-Bridge, J., Eds.; SUNY Press: Albany, NY, USA, 2018; pp. 37–64.
5. Bruntz, C.; Schedneck, B. *Buddhist Tourism in Asia*; University of Hawaii Press: Honolulu, HI, USA, 2020.
6. Chen, L.I.-L.; Scott, N.; Benckendorff, P. Mindful tourist experiences: A Buddhist perspective. *Ann. Tour. Res.* **2017**, *64*, 1–12.
7. Shinde, K.A. The spatial practice of religious tourism in India: A destinations perspective. *Tour. Geogr.* **2020**, *24*, 901–922. [CrossRef]
8. World Tourism Organization. *Domestic Tourism in Asia and the Pacific*; UNWTO (United Nations World Tourism Organisation): Madrid, Spain, 2013.
9. Ashton, A.S. Spiritual retreat tourism development in the Asia Pacific region: Investigating the impact of tourist satisfaction and intention to revisit: A Chiang Mai, Thailand case study. *Asia Pac. J. Tour. Res.* **2018**, *23*, 1098–1114. [CrossRef]
10. Singh, U. Exile and return: The reinvention of buddhism and buddhist sites in modern India. *South Asian Stud.* **2010**, *26*, 193–217.
11. Chon, K.; Park, E.; Zoltan, J. The Asian paradigm in hospitality and tourism. *J. Hosp. Tour. Res.* **2020**, *44*, 1183–1202.
12. Wong, C.U.I.; McIntosh, A.; Ryan, C. Buddhism and tourism: Perceptions of the monastic community at Pu-Tuo-Shan, China. *Ann. Tour. Res.* **2013**, *40*, 213–234.
13. Wong, C.U.I.; McIntosh, A.; Ryan, C. Visitor management at a Buddhist sacred site. *J. Travel Res.* **2016**, *55*, 675–687.
14. Hung, K.; Yang, X.; Wassler, P.; Wang, D.; Lin, P.; Liu, Z. Contesting the commercialization and sanctity of religious tourism in the Shaolin Monastery, China. *Int. J. Tour. Res.* **2017**, *19*, 145–159.
15. Wang, W.; Chen, J.S.; Huang, K. Religious tourist motivation in Buddhist Mountain: The case from China. *Asia Pac. J. Tour. Res.* **2016**, *21*, 57–72.
16. Hung, K. Experiencing buddhism in chinese hotels: Toward the construction of a religious lodging experience. *J. Travel Tour. Mark.* **2015**, *32*, 1081–1098.
17. Jimura, T. World heritage site management: A case study of sacred sites and pilgrimage routes in the Kii mountain range, Japan. *J. Herit. Tour.* **2016**, *11*, 382–394. [CrossRef]
18. Guichard-Anguis, S. Walking through world heritage forest in Japan: The Kumano pilgrimage. *J. Herit. Tour.* **2011**, *6*, 285–295. [CrossRef]
19. Reader, I. *Pilgrimage: A Very Short Introduction*; OUP: Oxford, UK, 2015.
20. Mason, D.; Chung, M.-H. The Burgeoning of the Baekdu-daegan Trail into a New Religious-Pilgrimage Tourism Asset of South Korea. *J. Tour. Leis. Res.* **2018**, *20*, 425–441.
21. Park, E.S.; Son, J.J. Religious tourism in the Republic of Korea. In *Religious Tourism in Asia and the Pacific*; United Nations World Tourism Organisation: Madrid, Spain, 2011.

22. UNWTO [United Nations World Tourism Organisation]. *Buddhist Tourism in Asia: Towards Sustainable Development*; UNWTO [United Nations World Tourism Organisation]: Madrid, Spain, 2020. [CrossRef]
23. Germano, D.; Trainor, K. *Embodying the Dharma: Buddhist Relic Veneration in Asia*; SUNY Press: Albany, NY, USA, 2012.
24. Maud, J. Buddhist relics and pilgrimage. In *The Oxford Handbook of Contemporary Buddhism*; Jerryson, M., Ed.; Oxford University Press: Oxford, UK, 2017; pp. 421–435.
25. Deeg, M. Buddhist Pilgrimage—An Introduction. In *Searching for the Dharma, Finding Salvation—Buddhist Pilgrimage in Time and Space*; Cueppers, C., Deeg, M., Eds.; Lumbini International Research Institute: Lumbini Sanskritik, Nepal, 2014; pp. 1–21.
26. Geary, D. Rebuilding the Navel of the Earth: Buddhist pilgrimage and transnational religious networks. *Mod. Asian Stud.* **2014**, *48*, 645–692. [CrossRef]
27. Shinde, K.A. How Effective Is a Buddhist Pilgrimage Circuit as a Product and Strategy for Heritage Tourism in India? *Heritage* **2022**, *5*, 3846–3863. [CrossRef]
28. YES Bank. *Towards Sustainable Spiritualism: Buddhist Tourism—Linking Cultures, Creating Livelihoods*; YES Bank Ltd. and ASSOCHAM: New Delhi, India, 2014.
29. Shinde, K.A. "Imported Buddhism" or "Co-Creation"? Buddhist Cultural Heritage and Sustainability of Tourism at the World Heritage Site of Lumbini, Nepal. *Sustainability* **2021**, *13*, 5820. [CrossRef]
30. Pew Research Centre. *The Future of World Religions: Population Growth Projections, 2010–2050*; Pew Research Centre: Washington, DC, USA, 2015.
31. Harris, I. Cambodian Buddhism: History and practice. In *Cambodian Buddhism*; University of Hawaii Press: Honolulu, HI, USA, 2008.
32. Brown, I. The revival of Buddhism in modern Indonesia. In *Hinduism in Modern Indonesia*; Ramstedt, M., Ed.; Routledge: London, UK, 2005; pp. 45–55.
33. Miksic, J. *Borobudur: Golden Tales of the Buddhas*; Tuttle Publishing: Tokyo, Japan, 2012.
34. Hazra, K.L. *The Buddhist Annals and Chronicles of South-East Asia*; Munshiram Manoharlal: New Delhi, India, 1986.
35. Wyatt, D.K. *Thailand: A Short History*; Yale University Press: New Haven, CT, USA, 2003.
36. Cummings, J.; White, D. *Buddhist Temples of Thailand: A Visual Journey Through Thailand's 42 Most Historic Wats*; Marshall Cavendish Editions: Singapore, 2014.
37. Anh, N.T. Buddhism and Vietnamese society throughout history. *South East Asia Res.* **1993**, *1*, 98–114. [CrossRef]
38. Soucy, A. Nationalism, Globalism and the Re-establishment of the Trúc Lâm Thiền Buddhist Sect in Northern Vietnam. In *Modernity and Re-enchantment: Religion in Post-revolutionary Vietnam*; Taylor, P., Ed.; ISEAS Publishing: Singapore, 2007; pp. 342–370. [CrossRef]
39. McDowall, S.; Wang, Y. An analysis of international tourism development in Thailand: 1994–2007. *Asia Pac. J. Tour. Res.* **2009**, *14*, 351–370. [CrossRef]
40. IFC World Bank Group. *Investing in The Buddhist Circuit. Enhancing the Spiritual, Environmental, Social and Economic Value of the Places Visited by the Buddha in Bihar and Uttar Pradesh, India. 2014–2018*; IFC World Bank Group: New Delhi, India, 2014.
41. World Tourism Organization. *UNWTO/GTERC Asia Tourism Trends—2018 Edition*; UNWTO: Madrid, Spain, 2018.
42. Nolan, M.L.; Nolan, S. Religious Sites as Tourism Attractions in Europe. *Ann. Tour. Res.* **1992**, *19*, 68–78. [CrossRef]
43. Olsen, D.H.; Trono, A. *Religious Pilgrimage Routes and Trails: Sustainable Development and Management*; CABI: Wallingford, UK, 2018.
44. Timothy, D.J. *Cultural Heritage and Tourism: An Introduction*; Channel View Publications: Bristol, UK, 2011.
45. Timothy, D.J.; Boyd, S.W. *Heritage Tourism*; Prentice Hall: London, UK, 2003.
46. Geary, D. *The Rebirth of Bodh Gaya: Buddhism and the Making of a World Heritage Site*; University of Washington Press: Seattle, DC, USA, 2017.
47. Schedneck, B. Religious Others, Tourism, and Missionization: Buddhist 'Monk Chats' in Northern Thailand. *Mod. Asian Stud.* **2018**, *52*, 1888–1916. [CrossRef]
48. Shinde, K.; Singh, R.P. Still on UNESCO's "Tentative List of World Heritage"? Heritage, Tourism, and Stunted Growth in Sarnath (Varanasi), India. *Heritage* **2023**, *6*, 5051–5065. [CrossRef]
49. Geary, D.; Shinde, K. Buddhist Pilgrimage and the Ritual Ecology of Sacred Sites in the Indo-Gangetic Region. *Religions* **2021**, *12*, 385. [CrossRef]

Disclaimer/Publisher's Note: The statements, opinions and data contained in all publications are solely those of the individual author(s) and contributor(s) and not of MDPI and/or the editor(s). MDPI and/or the editor(s) disclaim responsibility for any injury to people or property resulting from any ideas, methods, instructions or products referred to in the content.