

## Foreword

### Why a “visual” guide?

Because the starting point of this book is the pictures: it is simply designed to make visiting temples or museums more enjoyable to those who may not have the background to understand what they are looking at.

I have often seen groups of tourists going round the umpteenth pagoda or yet another gallery in an Asian Arts museum, eyes glazed, as they are faced with what seems an endless number of statues that all look more or less alike and my heart goes out to them because I know what it feels like.

Many Westerners are not familiar with the context of the objects or sites they are looking at, which is why it is difficult to appreciate what they are seeing. Some objects may have artistic merit, which is particularly true of exhibits in museums, usually chosen for that very reason. Others, in modern temples, may appeal less, as they tend to be garish and portray events that sometimes look totally baffling, but they are important to the local people nowadays and, as such, deserve respect.

This why I have devised this book: Using the life of the historical Buddha as a theme, I have tried to give information that hangs together and will provide a basis for understanding what is on display.

I have had to learn from scratch myself as our family moved to Southeast Asia in the 1980s when my husband was posted to Singapore: until then I had been a language teacher and suddenly found myself in a very different situation as work permits were not usually available for spouses. But thanks to organisations like “Friends of the Museum” and “Museum Volunteers”, I was able to study the culture of the different countries we lived in, Singapore, Thailand, the Philippines and Indonesia. I became a docent, guiding tourists in museums, ran training courses for docents, and eventually created a guiding programme in the Philippines. This led to lecturing on cruise ships which I started doing in the mid-90s while we lived in Indonesia and have been doing ever since.

Over the years, I have taken thousands of photos during my extensive travels, always thinking “Maybe, I could use this to illustrate ...whatever”. In reality, when you prepare a lecture, you have to respect a time constraint and you can only use a finite number of pictures!

This is why I have started devising several booklets, focussing on a particular aspect of what I lecture about. I can digress if there is some point I find interesting and I can bring in other points which, in a lecture, would disrupt the flow of information. The page overleaf explains how this booklet is organized. I have tended to focus on the Theravada\* tradition as it is the school of Buddhism mostly practised in Southeast Asia, but I have also included elements of Mahayana\* Buddhism when I felt it was relevant.

Guiding and lecturing were really a follow-up on teaching, my original calling, and I have loved explaining, synthesizing and hopefully entertaining as well. A passenger once told me “You’ve helped me join the dots”. This has always stayed with me, as it sums up exactly what I am trying to achieve.

I hope this visual guide will be useful on your next trip or visit to an Asian museum or temple.

Anne-Marie Harrison  
November 2020

\* see *Index*

### How this booklet is organised

First, there is an **introduction** to some of the general concepts of Indian religions.

This is followed by the **narrative of the life of the Buddha**, divided into 14 chapters.

- ◆ Chapter 1                      A miraculous conception
- ◆ Chapter 2                      A miraculous birth
- ◆ Chapter 3                      Childhood and youth
- ◆ Chapter 4                      Marriage
- ◆ Chapter 5                      The Four Encounters
- ◆ Chapter 6                      The Great Departure
- ◆ Chapter 7                      The Quest for Enlightenment
- ◆ Chapter 8                      Reaching Enlightenment
- ◆ Chapter 9                      The weeks after Enlightenment
- ◆ Chapter 10                    The First Sermon
- ◆ Chapter 11                    The Spreading of the Word
- ◆ Chapter 12                    The Return to Kapilavastu
- ◆ Chapter 13                    Transmitting the Dhamma
- ◆ Chapter 14                    The Last Days of the Buddha

**There are also, throughout the book, pages that give background information.** These have a grey background. If you just want to go through the narrative first, you can skip them and return to them later.

At the end of the book, you will find **several indexes**, covering:

- ◆ Glossary
- ◆ Characters appearing in the narrative
- ◆ Deities and supernatural beings
- ◆ Museums and sites mentioned
- ◆ Some historical and geographical information
- ◆ Sources