

VIJAYAWADA

"Monks' visit to Amaravathi will boost heritage tourism"

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They follow Heritage Walk and visit the Stupa

A day after over 1,000 Buddhist monks descended on the ancient Amaravathi town in Guntur district and offered prayers at the Maha Stupa, the most sacred place for Buddhism in **Andhra Pradesh**, members of the local organisations engaged in projects aimed at preserving and conserving the heritage of the soil reviewed the situation.

The residents were taken by surprise at the sight of the monks collectively heading to the Stupa where they sat on the floor meditating and praying for a while. His Holiness the Dalai Lama had in fact asked the monks in a video message to try and visit places of sacred and heritage value in Andhra Pradesh.

The residents felt happy mainly because the monks walked, for the first time, along the Heritage Walk, being developed under the Centrally-sponsored HRIDAY (National Heritage City Development and Augmentation Yojana)

From the Bodhi Tree, which has grown from the sacred sapling in the Amaravathi Heritage Centre and Museum, the monks were taken along the main temple road to the Maha Stupa via the ASI Museum. They then headed to the mammoth Buddha statue.

"The visit is a blessing in disguise for us who are involved in conservation and development work in progress since last two years. Their stay in Vijayawada followed by their visits to Amaravathi, Bhattiprolu and Ghantasala will prove to be a shot in the arm for heritage tourism," said Prof. Amareswar Galla, chief curator of the Amaravathi Museum and Heritage Centre.

Pointing to the fact that there were no immediate 'footsteps' of the Buddha in Andhra and that after displacement, most Tibetan settlements developed in the neighbouring States and not in Andhra, he said the presence of the monks representing

the Tibetan, along with Theravad and Mahayana rafts, added a lot of value to this place.

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