

# Bamiyan Buddha

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**In news :** Recently, Bamiyan Buddhas have been brought back to life in the form of 3D projections in an event called “A Night With Buddha”.

## Background

The sandstone carvings in Afghanistan’s Bamiyan valley were once the world’s tallest Buddhas – but they were lost forever when the Taliban blew them up 20 years ago. On February 27, 2001, the Taliban declared its intention to destroy the statues, despite condemnation and protest from governments and cultural ambassadors world over. Now, two decades later, on the anniversary of the annihilation, the Bamiyan Buddhas have been brought back to life in the form of 3D projections in an event called “A Night With Buddha”

## About Bamiyan Buddhas

- **Location:** The Buddhas of Bamiyan were two 6th-century monumental statues of Gautama Buddha carved into the side of a cliff in the Bamiyan valley of central Afghanistan, 130 kilometres northwest of Kabul at an elevation of 2,500 metres. They were once the world’s largest standing Buddhas.
- **Time period:** Carbon dating of the structural components of the Buddhas has determined that the smaller 38 m (125 ft) “Eastern Buddha” was built around 570 AD, and the larger 55 m (180 ft) “Western Buddha” was built around 618 AD.
- The statues represented a later evolution of the classic blended style of Gandhara art
- In their Roman draperies and with two different mudras, the Bamiyan Buddhas were great examples of a confluence of Gupta, Sassanian and Hellenistic artistic styles.

## **The Names of the statues:**

- Salsal and Shamama, as they were called by the locals, rose to heights of 55 and 38 metres respectively, and were said to be male and female.
- Salsal means “light shines through the universe”; Shamama is “Queen Mother”.
- The statues were set in niches on either ends of a cliff side and hewn directly from the sandstone cliffs.

## **Historical value of Bamiyan Valley**

- It is situated in the high mountains of the Hindu Kush in the central highlands of Afghanistan.
- The valley, which is set along the line of the Bamiyan River, was once integral to the early days of the Silk Roads, providing passage for not just merchants, but also culture, religion and language.
- It became a crucial trade route and cultural and religious centre during Buddhist Kushan Empire.
- As China, India and Rome sought passage through Bamiyan, the Kushans were able to develop a syncretic culture.
- During peak time of Buddhism in the 1st to 5th centuries AD, Bamiyan’s landscape reflected the faith, especially its monastic qualities.
- The two colossal Buddhas were only a part of several other structures, such as stupas, smaller seated and standing Buddhas, and wall paintings in caves, spread in and around surrounding valleys.

## **UNESCO List:**

Following the fall of the Bamiyan Buddhas, UNESCO included the remains in its list of world heritage sites in 2003, with subsequent efforts made to restore and reconstruct the Buddhas in their niches with the pieces available.

## **A Night with Buddha: Resurrecting the Buddha, virtually**

It started in 2013 as a way of creating a bridge between different cultures and in memory of Afghanistan's pre-Islamic heritage. On March 9, the minifestival featured a projection of Salsal, the taller of the two Buddhas, into the niche where it once stood.