



## Unveiling the Splendor of BAPS Swaminarayan Akshardham – A Hidden Gem in New Jersey

### Description

**A wonder of the east in the west. The second largest Hindu Mandir in the world is right here in the USA**

Look to this day, for it is life, the very breath of life.  
In its brief course lie all the realities of your existence;  
the bliss of growth, the glory of action, the splendor of beauty.  
For yesterday is only a dream, and tomorrow is but a vision.  
But today, well lived, makes every yesterday a dream of happiness,  
and every tomorrow a vision of hope.  
Look well, therefore, to this day.  
*Ancient Sanskrit*



There are so many magnificent places to visit in this incredible world. We had hoped to see India one day, but that was many years away. During our week in New Jersey, we learned about the BAPS Swaminarayan Akshardham, a Hindu Temple in Robbinsville, NJ. It was close to the family we were visiting with, but they had never heard of it. Maybe we could capture a tiny bit of India close to home. We didn't have any expectations, making what we experienced more remarkable.



In the quiet rural area of NJ, on a massive 183-acre site, the world's second-largest Hindu Mandir (Temple) has a home. Our visit was a breathtaking and surreal experience. For a moment, you question whether you were transported to India, for upon laying your eyes on the Grand Centerpiece 213 feet above the ground, you have a hard time believing you are in the United States or, even more so, New Jersey. How did we not know about this? Over the next 2 hours, we had one jaw-dropping moment after another. Join us as we explore the magnificent BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Akshardham in humble Robbinsville, New Jersey.

## **A bit about Hinduism**

Hinduism is believed to be the oldest religion on earth. In the Hindu culture, a Mandir is very important as it is the shrine where Hindus pray. In Sanskrit, the classic language of India and Hinduism, Mandir means a place where the mind becomes still and experiences inner peace. The Hindu population around the world as of 2020 is about 1.2 billion, making it the world's third-largest religion after Christianity and Islam, of which nearly 1.1 billion Hindus live in India out of an overall 1.4 billion.



A Hindu views the entire universe as God's and everything in it as God. Hindus believe that each person is intrinsically divine and that the purpose of life is to seek and realize the divinity within all of us. The Hindu belief is non-exclusive and accepts all other faiths and religious paths.

As with any religion or belief system, Hinduism also has a darker side. In the current situation in India, it is very much a political movement that seeks to promote Hindu identity and values, often at the expense of religious minorities and other marginalized groups. Hindu nationalism has been associated with violence and discrimination against Muslims, Christians, and other non-Hindu groups in India. It has been a source of tension and conflict in the country. We wish to acknowledge that but are not here to discuss that; it is about an impressive architectural feat of the human soul, where man's faith creates fantastic artistry.

## **The Building of the BAPS Swaminarayan Akshardham**

The BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir in Robbinsville, New Jersey, was first proposed and envisioned by Pramukh Swami Maharaj in 1997, the president of the Bochasanwasi Akshar Purushottam Swaminarayan Sanstha (BAPS), a major branch of the Swaminarayan Sampradaya, a Hindu denomination. He is the fifth spiritual leader in the line of Pramukhs. His vision was to create a place of worship in North America for followers to allow visitors of different backgrounds and faiths to experience Hindu spirituality, architecture, and peace. Eight of these sites are in the United States and Canada, though this location is the grandest.



The construction of the BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir in Robbinsville, NJ, began in early 2010. It was constructed according to guidelines outlined in ancient Vedas, or Hindu scriptures. The Mandir is built of hand-carved Italian Carrara marble, Indian pink stone, and limestone. There were 68,000 cubic feet of Italian marble used to construct the 12,000 sq. ft. Mandir, only the third Mandir of its kind. Hundreds of artisans hand-carved the marble and assembled all the pieces in India to ensure they fit perfectly. The pieces were then disassembled, numbered, and shipped to America, where they were carefully reassembled.

A mind-boggling 4.7 million person-hours by artisans and volunteers were needed to complete the Mandir. The intricate details, symmetry, and overall design blend ancient tradition and modern

technology. A decorative enclosure was built around the Mandir to shield it from harsh weather and facilitate its year-round use. The entrance to the mandap called the Mayur Dwar, contains carvings depicting peacocks, elephants, and celebrated Hindu devotees of past eras.

## Opening

The Mandir was officially opened to the public on August 10, 2014, after the murtis were consecrated in the presence of Pramukh Swami Maharaj and senior swamis of BAPS. Several dignitaries, including New Jersey Senator Cory Booker, were present during the opening ceremony. The opening was part of a three-day celebration, which included participants praying for world peace and a women's cultural program focused on interfaith harmony. The Mandir is a testament to the phenomenal dedication and craftsmanship poured into its creation.

## Where is BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir

- [BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir](#)

Address: 112 N. Main Street Robbinsville, NJ 08561

Phone: 609-918-1212

Email: [info.akshardham@usa.baps.org](mailto:info.akshardham@usa.baps.org)

This link will give you an aerial view of the [BAPS Swaminarayan Akshardham campus](#). It also includes diagrams and a guide to the key features of the campus.

## How to get there

BAPS Swaminarayan Akshardham is close to Interstate 95, the main north/south highway in New Jersey. It is 25 minutes from Princeton, 45 minutes from Newark Airport, and 50 minutes from Philadelphia.

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## What to see during your visit



Please note: Any content in quotations below is from the official website of BAPS Swaminarayan Akshardham

## 1. Nilkanth Plaza

A place for reflection. This will be the first thing you see after parking your car. It is only a tiny element

of what is to come. “At the heart of the area is the 49-foot golden image of Bhagwan Swaminarayan, portrayed as a youthful yogi. Known as Nilkanth Varni during his teenage years, he founded the Swaminarayan Hindu tradition. His calm and undisturbed pose, engaged in deep yogic prayer, symbolizes spiritual focus and discipline, echoing his journey, where he fostered compassion, empathy, and service in the hearts of all. The legacy of his reforms in the late 18th century that addressed the oppression of women, young children, and marginalized castes stands the test of time.”

The area is open and a ways before you enter security. Look beyond the pond to the grand Mandir. Interestingly, we missed it as we were more entranced by the Plaza itself. In the evening, a prayer service was occurring here.



## 2. Brahm Kund: A traditional stepped pond.

The pond is next to the Plaza before entering the Welcome Center. “The pond is filled with water from India’s 108 holy rivers and those flowing through the fifty states in the U.S. Here, they pay homage to a life-giving elixir and honor the precious waters of our planet. Just as our civilization reveres rivers for



their ability to cleanse and nourish, this step-well invites you to pause, reflect, and embark on a journey of self-discovery.”

There are various spots to admire the area’s intricate carvings and water features. The peacefulness here starts your journey in the right state of mind.

### **3. Welcome Center**

A place of warmth and hospitality. “In Hindu traditions, the art of welcoming guests transcends hospitality; it is considered a sacred practice. As ancient sacred texts proclaim, “Atithi devo bhava”—a host must see the divine in every guest. Within the hallways of warmth and inclusivity, people from diverse communities, irrespective of religion, ethnicity, or cultural heritage, are welcomed and introduced to the essence of Hinduism and Swaminarayan Akshardham.”

This is where security will inspect your bags. The line moves quickly. You are welcomed by a deity when you first enter. The decorative woodwork is gorgeous.

The welcome center has several theaters where you can watch an introductory 10-minute video. It is not mandated, but it is worth watching. With several theaters running one after the other, there is just a couple of minutes wait at any time.

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#### 4. Traditional Hindu Mandir

A space of serenity. Once you leave the Welcome Center, the smaller traditional Mandir will be your

first stop. It is stunning and not to be missed. “The Mandir, a place of Hindu worship, holds the essence of tranquility, where the mind finds stillness, and the soul discovers inner peace. In this Mandir, meticulously carved from stone, worshippers gather to seek blessings from the sacred images, the murtis.”

Within this smaller Mandir, we saw much more personal prayer from Hindus. There is also an area where you can pour holy water over a diety. All are welcome to do so. Shoes must come off, and appropriate dress is required (see below for details.) No photos are allowed except in a side area of the Mandir. The intricacy of the marble work is remarkable.

## **5. Reflecting Pools and Courtyard**

Though the main Mandir will pull you in, take the time to explore the courtyard and reflect. The detailed artistry, especially in the covered walkway, is not to be missed. Many people are focused on taking images of the grand centerpiece but wander beyond that.

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## 6. Akshardham Mahamandir: THE GRAND CENTERPIECE

“At the center point of the campus stands the Akshardham Mahamandir. Regardless of one’s beliefs and background, Akshardham will inspire all to connect with each other and with the Divine. HH Pramukh Swami Maharaj, the fifth spiritual successor of Bhagwan Swaminarayan, envisioned a majestic spiritual campus in the United States that would consolidate thousands of years of inspiring

Hindu art, architecture, and culture.”

This breathtaking masterpiece is almost surreal. In those first moments, you feel like you are on the other side of the world, not the USA. It honestly crosses your mind as if it was some illusion. After passing the reflecting pools and courtyard, enter on the left. Shoes must come off, and appropriate dress is required (see below for details.) No photos are allowed except in a side area of the Mandir. The intricacy of the marble work is remarkable.

## 7. Shayona Cafe



A Fusion of Indian Flavors. Shayona Café is where you can enjoy an ensemble of vegetarian Indian and Western cuisines. “Here, culinary artistry melds with spiritual principles, creating a menu that not only tantalizes the taste buds but also resonates with the core ideas of non-violence. Each dish is made with mindfulness, aiming to nurture the mind, body, and soul. Before serving, food is offered to the Divine, transforming it into prasād, or blessed food. Shayona Café provides an opportunity to experience a fusion of flavors, appreciate diverse dishes, and nourish your palate and soul.”

It was a busy place, and we did not have time to try the food—next visit.

## 8. Indian Speciality Grocery Store

This is across from the Cafe and has lots of fresh products. It was very popular, with long lines. The spices were plentiful. Many of the pastries are made fresh daily. We purchased a few items, and they were excellent.

## 9. Hindu Learning Center Coming Soon

*\*Though it is open to all, please do not forget that it is a place of worship and prayer. Be respectful of those there for that purpose. Be a considerate and kind guest.\**

## Know before you go

### Visiting Hours

The BAPS Swaminarayan Akshardham campus in Robbinsville, NJ, is open to all visitors. Entry is free. A visit should take about two hours.

\*\*As of 2024, you must be registered to visit on weekends and holidays. The tickets are still free, but you must go online to reserve a time. You are allowed up to 10 tickets. The process was quick and easy, and we completed it the day before with no issues. We visited in June on a Sunday, and the lines were minimal, and it was not too crowded. They did check that you had reservations, but we did notice people getting registered onsite. \*\* [Go to this link to register.](#)

It is open every day from 9 a.m. to 7:30 p.m. except Tuesday when the entire campus is closed. There is lots of free parking. Weekends get very busy, so plan extra time to park and visit the campus.

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## Important Visitor Information



There is a strict dress code when entering either Mandir. Specifically, for the upper body, you must cover the shoulders, back, chest, and upper arms. Legwear must be at below the knee. Visitors not having the appropriate dress code are given to wear sarongs provided at the Mandir at no charge. You must also remove your shoes to enter the mandirs.

Security at the entrance of the Welcome Center will check bags. Be prepared by following their guidelines:

- No sharp, dangerous objects.
- No inflammable objects.
- No large bags.
- No smoking, including e-cigarettes.
- No food or drinks.

## Photography





We strongly suggest bringing a camera, but photography is prohibited inside the Mandirs. This is a holy place, and they take that rule seriously. In the larger mandir, they make you put away your phones. As you can see in our photos, there is still a lot of photography to be done.

## Accessibility

All facilities and areas of the complex are wheelchair accessible. Subject to availability, wheelchairs can be provided. Parking spaces for physically challenged drivers are located in the parking lot closest to and directly opposite the Mandir entrance.

Within the complex, volunteers are on hand if any assistance is required. They will be happy to help and guide you. If you or your group require special assistance, please inform us in advance by emailing [tours.akshardham@usa.baps.org](mailto:tours.akshardham@usa.baps.org) or calling (609) 918-1212 and ask for the booking office.

You can request a campus tour if you want to organize a group visit with 10 or more people. Please submit your request at least 15 days before arrival.



## Architectural tours

We saw a sign offering architectural tours several days a week during our visit. You can find that in the images. Call ahead in case the times and days change.

*Are you traveling overseas soon? Check out our blog post on the [Top 25 Tips for Successful Travel Abroad](#).*

## BAPS Swaminarayan Akshardham App

They even have an app!! Download the app before you arrive to help plan your visit to BAPS Swaminarayan Akshardham.





## TIPS to enhance your visit



1. Though there was a large presence of Indians during our time there, the population was a mix of people of all nationalities, races, and ethnicities. Everyone was welcome, and everyone we engaged with was kind and friendly.
2. An enormous group of volunteers are working here; they are a wealth of information. While in the Akshardham Mahamandi, we had a lovely conversation with a volunteer who shared some of the story behind this holy site.
3. The site is still under construction, so seeing their progress will be worth a return visit. The two Mandirs are complete, but much groundwork is still being done.
4. Our first attempt was on a Sunday just after the noon hour. The traffic getting into the parking lot was at least a mile back. We decided to do the nearby Garden of Sculptures and return later in the afternoon. There was less traffic, and we could park close to the front.
5. We visited during the golden hour. The main Mandir against the dusk skies only added to its majestic presence. As we left, it was dark, and the whole site was illuminated, which was magical.

Check out our collection of [Wanderers Compass Travel Videos](#)



## Where to stay when visiting BAPS Swaminarayan Akshardham in Robbinsville, NJ

The area near the campus has several hotels, inns, and motels to choose from. Hamilton, Robbinsville, Windsor, Cranbury, Hightstown, and Princeton are the closest towns. Philadelphia is around 45 minutes away. We suggest putting BAPS Swaminarayan Akshardham or one of those towns in the two options below. You should be able to find reasonably priced accommodations and even higher-end ones if you wish.

## While in the area

There is lots to do in this area of NJ. Check out the [Grounds for Sculpture](#), [Princeton University](#), [Cranbury's historic downtown](#), and [Six Flags Great Adventure](#), to name a few options.

## Final thoughts



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BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Akshardham was an exceptional experience. The grandeur of the architecture alone will leave you in awe. It is a masterpiece not to be missed. The pictures do not begin to do justice, and that is only on the outside. You can't even imagine what the inside of these Mandirs are like. The marble artistry is beyond comprehension and is simply perfect in every way. We have traveled to over 50 countries and have seen some incredible places. This is rated one of the most beautiful architectural wonders we have seen. It may be time to plan a trip to India.

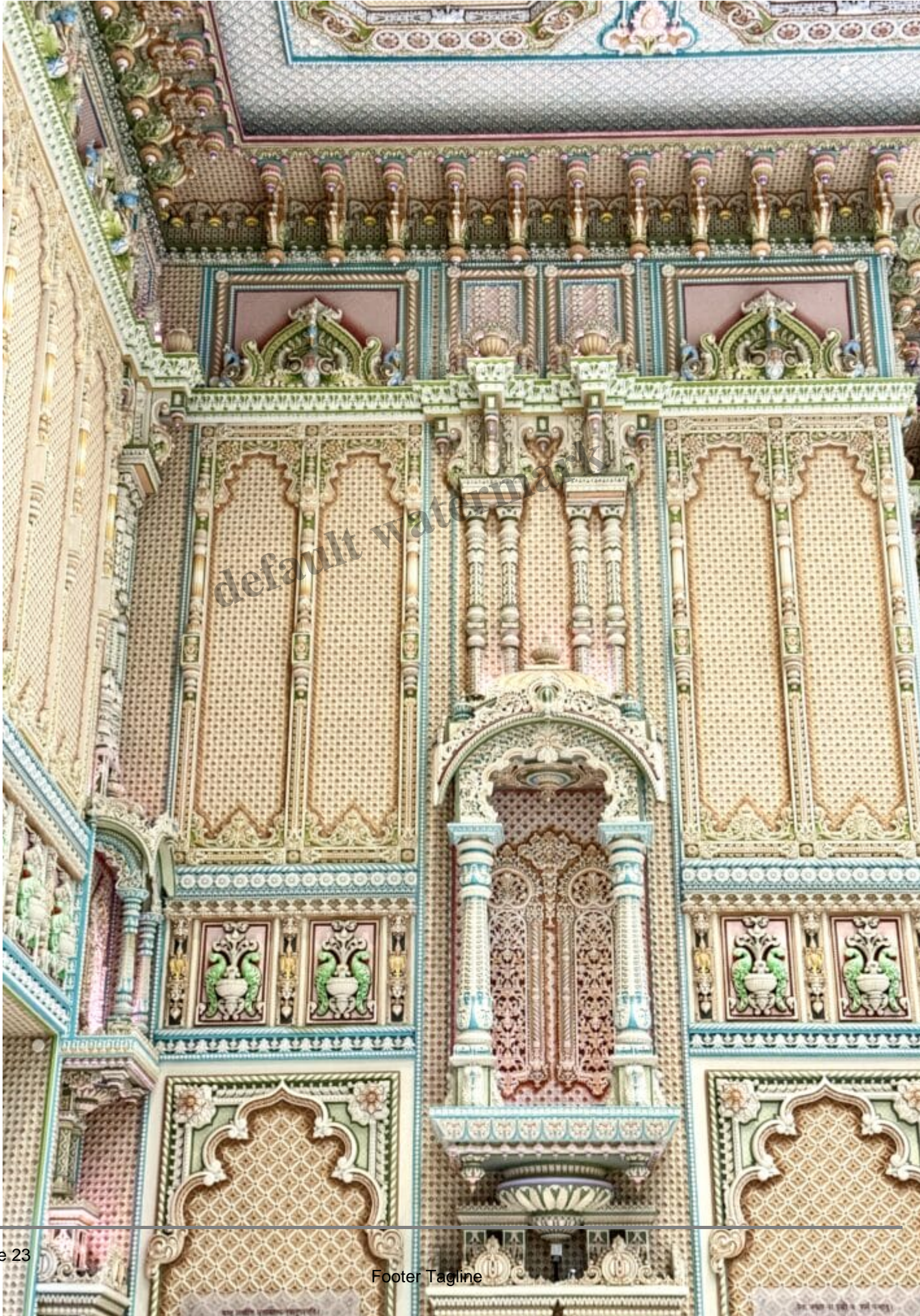
BAPS Swaminarayan Akshardham has captured thousands of years of inspiration, core values, magnificent architecture, and culture. One of the most moving elements of our visit was the tranquility inside the Mandir; the serenity surrounding you is genuine. It is still hard to wrap our heads around the experience. Heck, we were in Jersey, not India. If you can visit BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Akshardham in Robbinsville, NJ, you will be glad you did.

**Check out the official website of [BAPS Swaminarayan Akshardham](#)**

## **BAPS Swaminarayan Akshardham Photo Gallery**

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*In Akshardham's embrace,  
art breathes with life.  
Each sculpture is a whisper,  
amid the gleaming light.  
Where values stand,  
as pillars tall and true.  
Compassion and culture,  
in vibrant hues.  
Each and every stone,  
a sight to behold,  
whisper stories of faith,  
beautifully told.*

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BAPS SWAMINARAYAN  
**Akshardham**  
NORTH AMERICA

# The journey of a stone...

*Each stone travels over 21,500-miles, before being placed on the mahamandir.*



## 1. THE BIRTH OF A STONE

The story of a stone begins at a quarry, where machines, drills, and saws meticulously carve deep into the face of a mountain, shaping massive blocks in the process. These carefully crafted blocks are then transported and deposited at the bottom of the quarry, where they undergo thorough assessments based on their size, color, strength, and integrity.

## 2. HANDLE WITH CARE

The stones embark on a journey across the ocean, loaded into trucks using telehandlers, ready for their voyage on a cargo ship from Europe to India. Upon arrival in India they undergo the initial process of being cut into rectangular blocks.



3

4

## 3. A STONE CANVAS

Skilled artisans apply their expertise, transforming these raw blocks into magnificent, intricately carved, and awe-inspiring works of art. Each stone is assigned a unique code, meticulously arranged and pre-fitted to ensure flawless reassembly upon its arrival in Robbinsville.

## 4. VEDIC BEGINNINGS

Before the stones embark on their final journey, a sacred puja vidhi is conducted, sanctifying each one. On October 25, 2020, a momentous event occurred when Mahant Swami Maharaj personally performed the puja vidhi for the Amalak, the top-most stone of the Maha-Shikhar.

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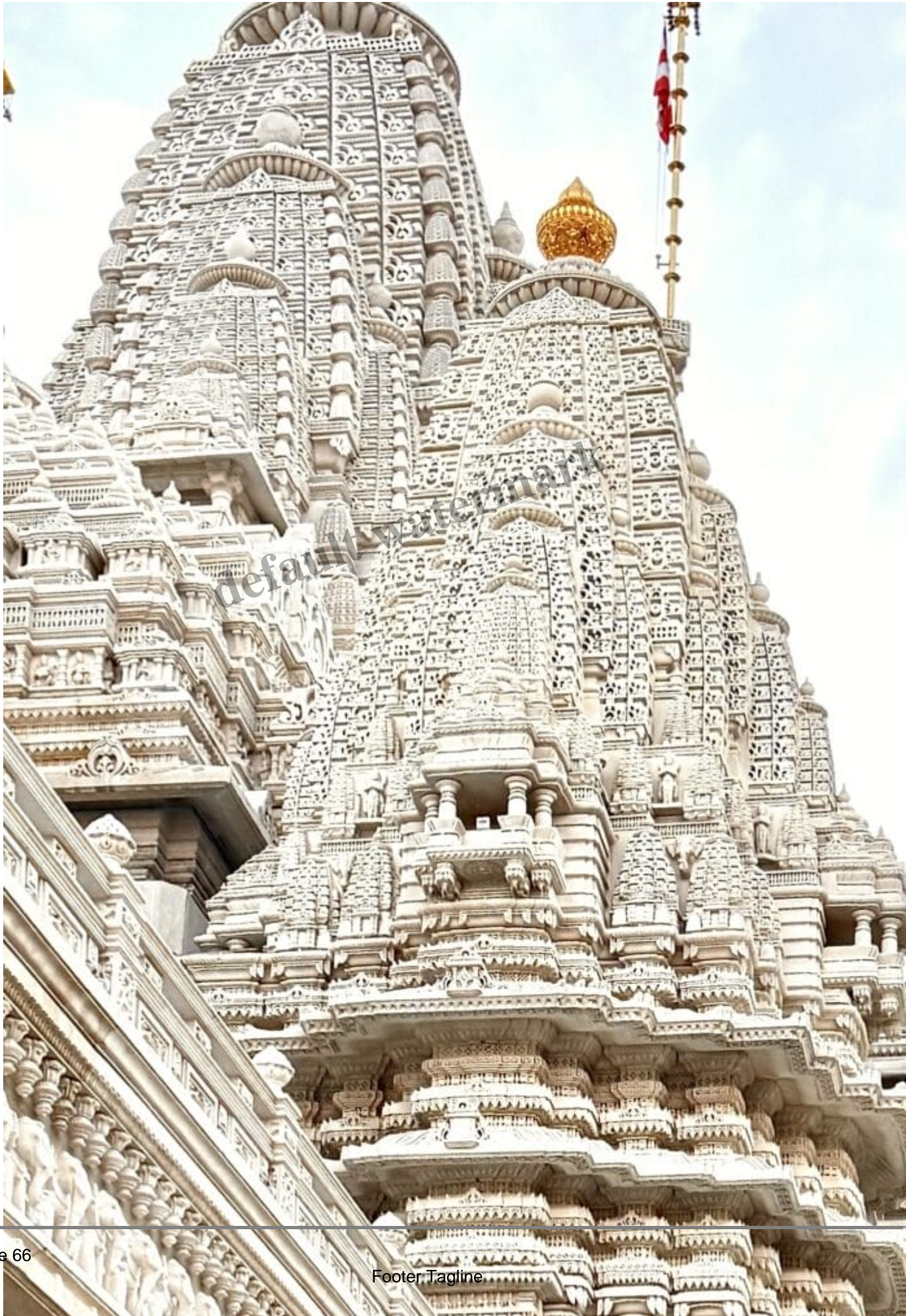


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## AKSHARDHAM VISIT AND DARSHAN GUIDELINES

### DRESS CODE

TOPS MUST COVER THE SHOULDERS, BACK, CHEST, NAVEL, AND UPPER ARMS. LEG WEAR MUST BE AT LEAST BELOW THE KNEES. IF NEEDED, SHAWLS AND SARONGS ARE AVAILABLE IN THE SHOE ROOM.

### FOOTWEAR

PLEASE PLACE ALL FOOTWEAR IN THE SHOE ROOM LOCATED WITHIN THE GROUND FLOOR ENTRANCE OF AKSHARDHAM.

### PHOTOGRAPHY OR VIDEOGRAPHY

NO PHOTOGRAPHY OR VIDEOGRAPHY ALLOWED WITHIN THE PLACES OF WORSHIP INCLUDING AKSHARDHAM AND MANDIR. PHOTOGRAPHY IS ALLOWED IN THE COURTYARD AND EXTERIOR PARTS OF AKSHARDHAM AND MANDIR.

### CELL PHONES

PLEASE SILENCE YOUR CELLPHONES AND REFRAIN FROM TAKING CALLS INSIDE AKSHARDHAM OR MANDIR.

### CONDUCT

PLEASE REFRAIN FROM TOUCHING THE DELICATE CARVINGS AND BEHAVE IN A MANNER TO RESPECT THE SPIRITUAL NATURE OF THE CAMPUS.

SCAN FOR MOBILE APP  
AND CAMPUS MAP



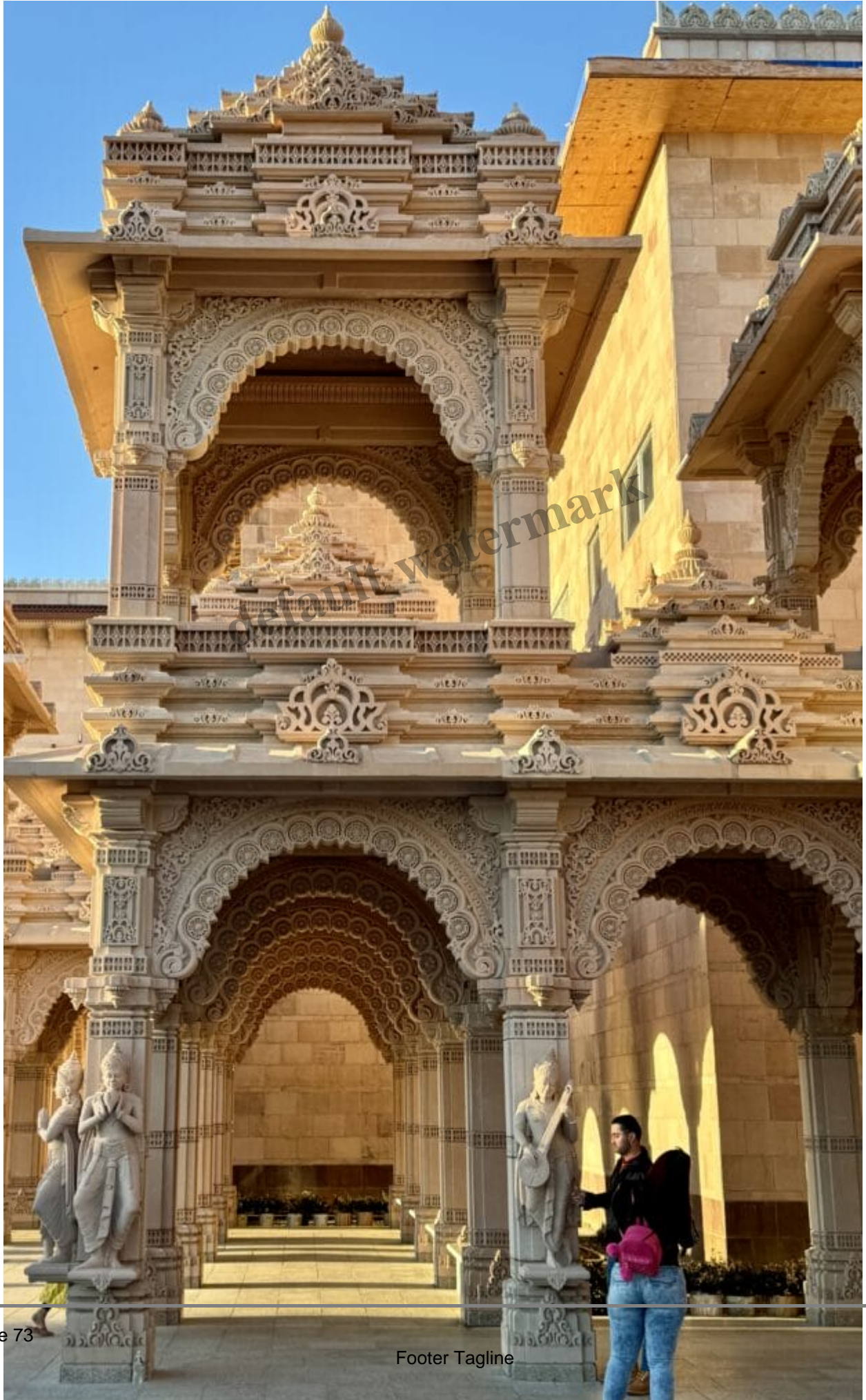
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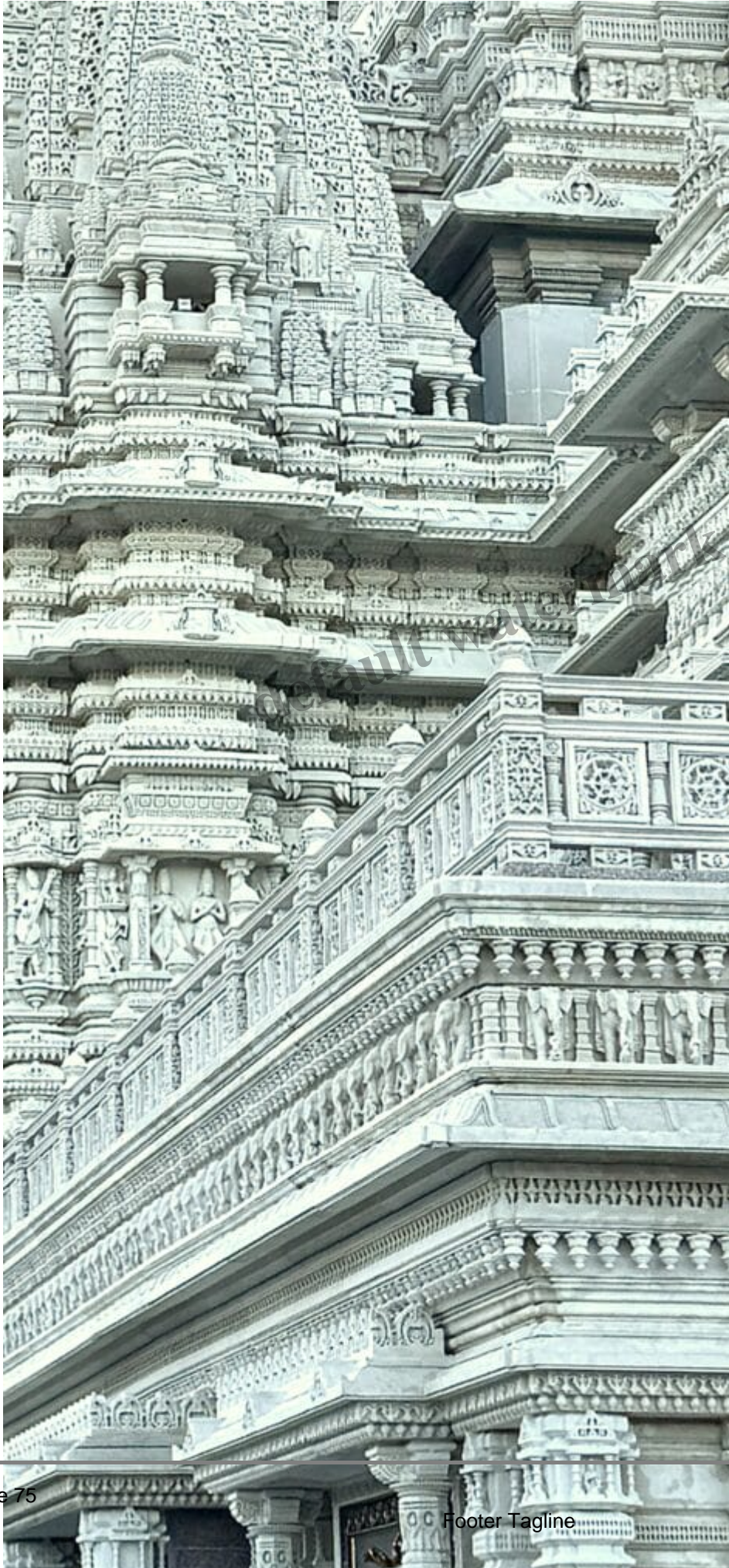


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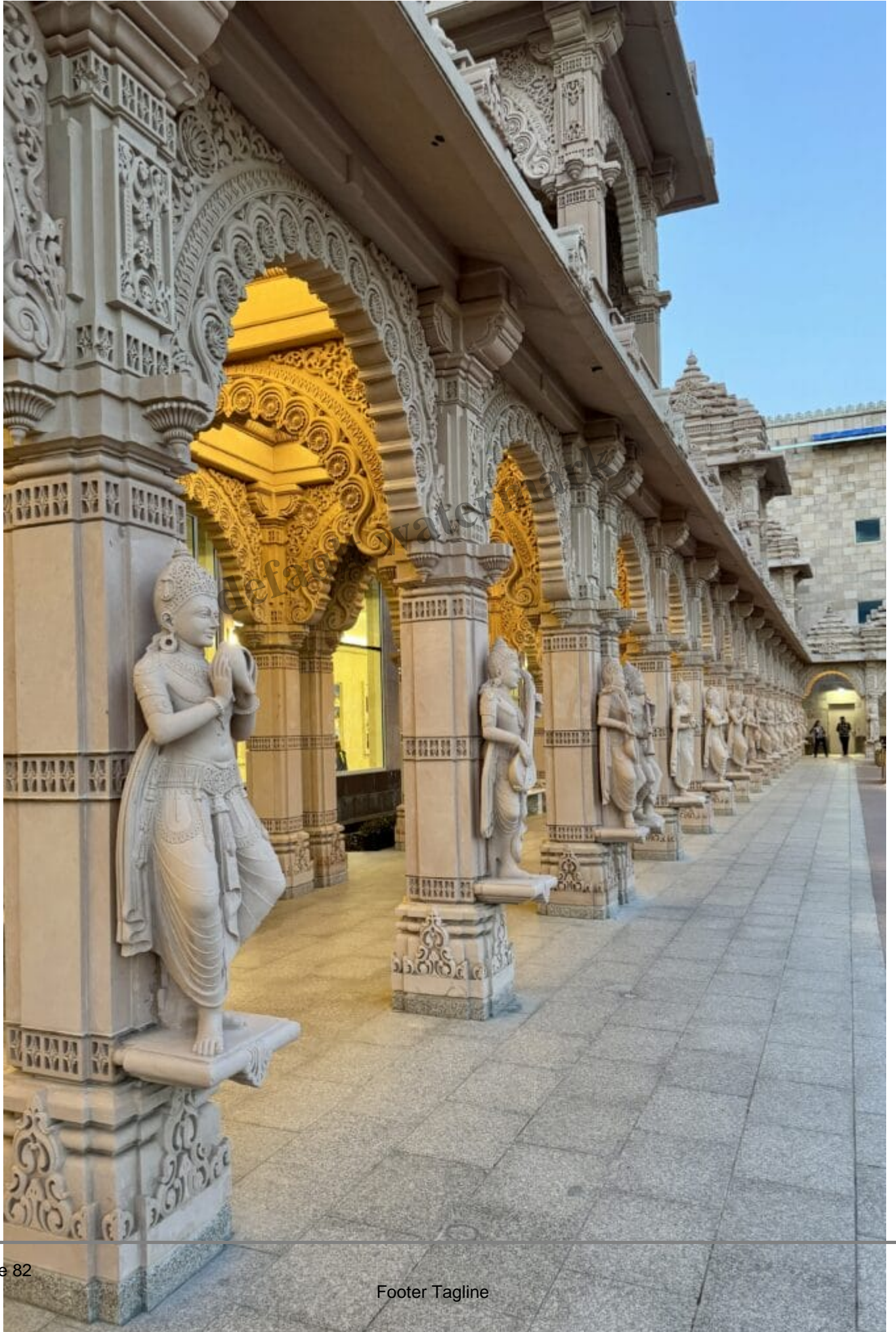
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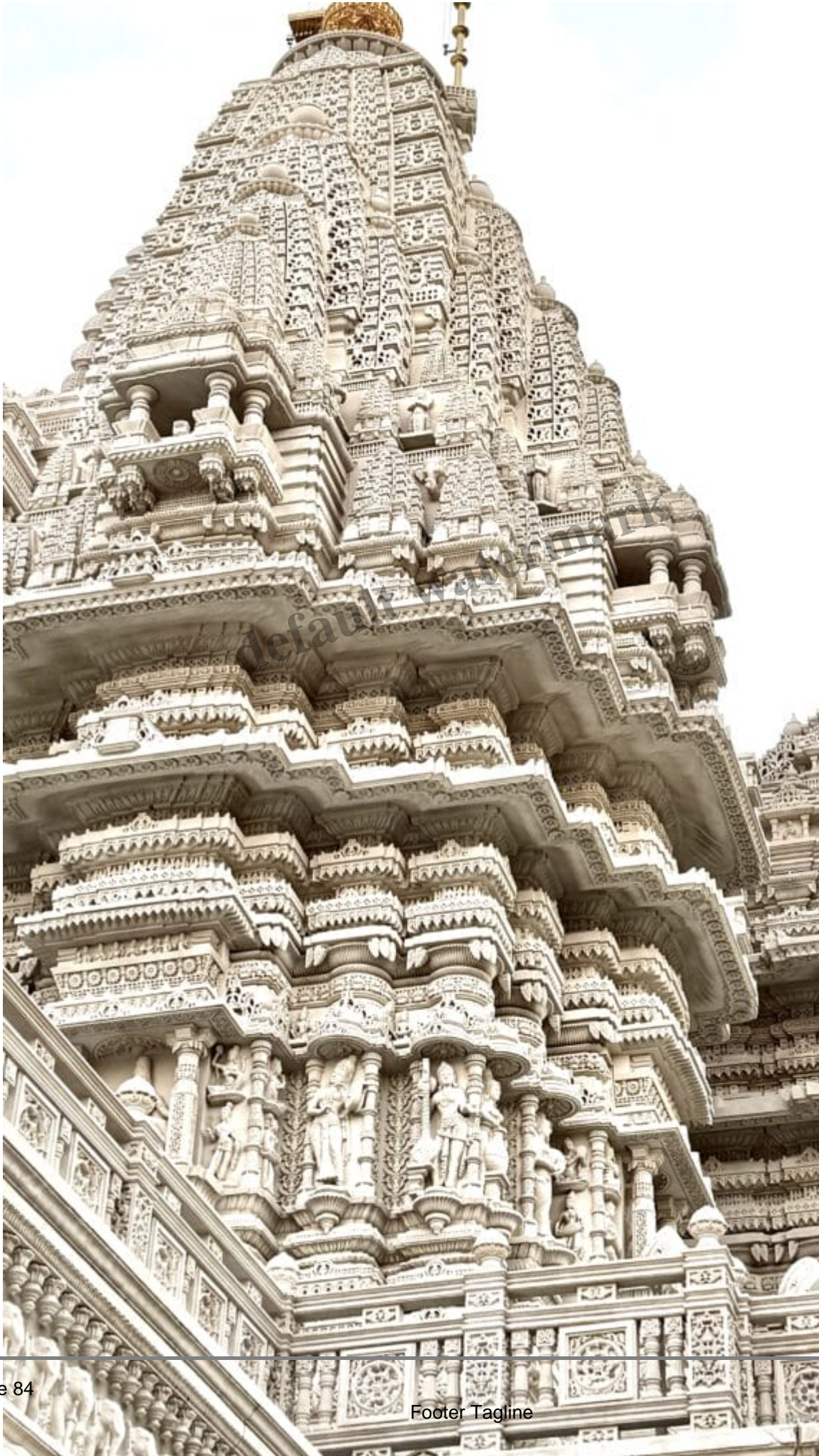




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May there be peace  
in the heavens, in space, on earth,  
the waters, herbs, vegetation,  
and throughout nature.  
May there be peace through Brahman,  
May there be peace,  
peace, and peace everywhere.  
- Yajur Veda (10.129)

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