

Small Town Designed With Big Ideas On Spiritual Tourism

Emphasis on traditional Indian designs, a 'spiritual' forest, EV buses, a Tower of Joy, a haat...temple inauguration has put Ayodhya on the pilgrimage map

Architect and urban designer **Dikshu Kukreja**, whose firm prepared vision documents for Ayodhya, Bharat Mandapam, Yashobhoomi and India Pavilion at Dubai Expo, tells **Dipak Kumar Dash** that civilisational principles and practices are being increasingly applied in urban planning and architecture:

● What was Ayodhya master plan's theme?

Focus was to make Ayodhya a globally renowned spiritual and tourism destination. Tourist to resident ratio will be extraordinarily high after inauguration of the temple. Spatial and experiential aspects were in focus, as was common man's needs, public spaces and city's liveability aspects.



Q&A

Consortium of Lea Associates, L&T IEL and CP Kukreja Architects took feedback from leaders, state officials, sants and Ram Janmabhoomi trust. Plan has provisions for state houses, country houses, dharamshalas, mutts and akharas. We identified species of trees to be planted across the city to reflect Valmiki Ramayan era.

Ayodhya is envisaged as a temple city, plan's prepared after studying best examples from national and international pilgrim destinations such as Vatican City, Jerusalem, Angkor Wat and Pashupatinath. Emphasis was on walkways, EV buses from entry gates to heart of city.

● What will make Ayodhya a tourist and pilgrim hub?

Providing tourist infra for all economic strata is a key aspect. There will be a yearlong calendar of events, dovetailed with national tourism circuits like Ramayan circuit, which is over 6,000 km long and goes all the way to Rameshwaram in Tamil Nadu.

Homestays, meditation gardens, revamped banks of river Saryu, street markets, an Ayodhya haat, museums, parikramas are part of the plan.

We envisaged a Tower of Joy for a panoramic view, a dedicated zone in a "spiritual" forest for meditation, a theme park with 108 *divya deshams*, conferences, business tourism and spiritual centres.

Ayodhya will be an epicentre for religious and spiritual tourism and will connect tourists to Awadh and Buddhist circuits. Day trips to Gorakhpur, Prayagraj, Varanasi and Lucknow will be in place.

● What is GOI's focus on projects you're involved in?

Government's thrust is on creating world-class infra that represents India's cultural ethos and diversity and showcases a modernity that embraces tenets of sustainable design and planning. Projects strictly adhere to budgets and timelines.

● How much emphasis is on Indian culture and tradition in urban planning today?

I have always

been a strong proponent of embracing Indian culture in design. I'm happy to see this phenomenon being mainstreamed. Today we have moved beyond the notion that only western models of planning should be followed.

Thrust today is to explore traditional Indian practices and adapt them to contemporary needs. Our country with its civilisational heritage incorporated town planning principles in Indus Valley also. Principles of *vastushastra* have once again carved out a distinctive design identity.

● You led G20 initiative on Liveable Cities for the Future. Our cities are in bad shape.

Undoubtedly, a lot of work is required to fix our cities to make them more liveable. As more and more of the population gets urbanised, we need to urgently adopt sustainable and smart planning approaches. Cities need to create vision documents, which incorporate specific needs, challenges and opportunities of a given city. Goals in the document must outline short, medium and long-term strategies. Cornerstone of this must be based on social and economic equality. Finally, aspects of place-making and happiness need to be incorporated if we want our cities to be liveable and memorable.

