

The temple of Borobudur

The Buddhist temple of Borobudur, a World Heritage Site since 1991, is located in the centre of the Island of Java, Indonesia.

This monumental complex, unique of its kind, dates to the 8th century AD. According to local tradition it was designed by the architect Gunadharma for the ruling House of the Shailendra (750-850). The Buddhist site remained active for about two centuries, until it was gradually abandoned in the mid- 10th century. Scholars have suggested many reasons for the abandonment of Borobudur: volcanic eruptions in the area, dynastic changes, or conversion of the local population to Islam. In 1814 the Dutch engineer H.C. Cornleius, following instructions from local people, located the huge sanctuary half-buried by vegetation.

The temple is made up of ten terraces divided into three levels - Khamathatu, Ruapadathu and Arupadathu - and appears as a stepped pyramid, with a base of 122 metres and a height of 35 metres. The building combines the form of a stupa (a Buddhist sacred mound containing relicts), of Mount Meru (a mythological Hindu mountain) and a mandala (a Buddhist symbol of the universe comprised of a square representing the land and a circle representing the sky). The entire structure is covered with 2672 bas-reliefs, mostly relating to Buddha with 504 representational statues plus several perforated stupa located on the final circular terraces.

The circular path that leads from the entrance at the ground level - Khamathatu: the world of passions - to the top of the temple is walked by Buddhists, lay people and monks alike. The path symbolically expresses the ascent from earth to heaven through a journey of purification - Ruapadathu, the second level of the temple - which leads to the third and final level - Arupadathu - where perfection is achieved.

