

Nalanda

On land | India | 5th century-about 1200 CE | Grades 6-8

Name _____ Date _____

Nalanda was one of the world's first great universities, with students coming from as far away as China and Korea.

Read the story

Nalanda was founded in the 400s CE, during the Gupta Empire, as a great Buddhist monastery and center of learning. It grew for about 700 years with support from kings, especially the Pala dynasty.

Thousands of students and teachers lived here. They studied Buddhism, logic, grammar, medicine, mathematics and astronomy. Getting in was hard. Gatekeepers asked tough questions, and many applicants were turned away.

The Chinese monk Xuanzang studied here in the 600s and wrote about its tall buildings, ponds and lively debates. Nalanda had a huge library said to fill several buildings. Around 1200 CE, it was attacked and burned, and the great center of learning came to an end.

How it ended

Nalanda weakened as support for Buddhism in the region declined. Around 1200 CE, invading forces attacked and burned it. The monks fled, and the buildings fell into ruins covered by earth.

Key words

- monastery: a place where monks live, study and pray
- scholar: a person who studies a subject deeply
- debate: a formal discussion where people argue different sides

Wow facts

- Students had to pass a hard oral test at the gate just to get in.
- Xuanzang, a famous Chinese traveler, studied here for years.
- Nalanda's library was said to be so big it had buildings with names like Ocean of Jewels.

Talk about it

1. What makes a school or university great?

2. Why would students travel thousands of kilometers to study at Nalanda?

Try this

Draw a map of Nalanda as it looked at its busiest. Label three things people did there.

Quick quiz

Circle the best answer.

1. What was Nalanda?

- A. A great center of learning
- B. A fortress
- C. A shipyard
- D. A palace

2. Which Chinese traveler studied at Nalanda?

- A. Xuanzang
- B. Kublai Khan
- C. Confucius
- D. Zheng He

3. What happened to Nalanda around 1200 CE?

- A. It was attacked and burned
- B. It sank
- C. It became a city
- D. It froze

Go further

Open ruinscape.live/nalanda/ for photos, the Then and Now picture where there is one, and links to museum collections and research. On the globe, Lyra Kael can fly the class there and answer questions.

Answer key (for teachers)

1. A. It was a Buddhist monastery and university.
2. A. Xuanzang studied there in the 600s.
3. A. It was attacked and burned, ending its long history.