

LEOH Trip

BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir

Stafford, Texas - October 21, 2022





*All Aboard the Precinct One bus
with driver James Medlin!
He was a great driver, with lots
of corny jokes!*





Before entering the mandir, a guide gave a brief overview of this temple and the Hindu religion.



We then made our way up the steps, with men on the left side and women on the right, to rooms where we removed and stored our shoes prior to entering the temple.



The mandir is beautiful. It was built in 28 months, consisting of 33,000 pieces of hand-carved Italian marble and Turkish limestone. Individual pieces were carved and then shipped to the site, where they were then carefully assembled.

Hinduism, as a religion, is the world's 3rd-largest, with over a billion followers. Hinduism, in general, prescribes eternal duties, such as honesty, refraining from injuring living beings (hence the practice of vegetarianism), patience, forbearance, self-restraint, virtue, and compassion.

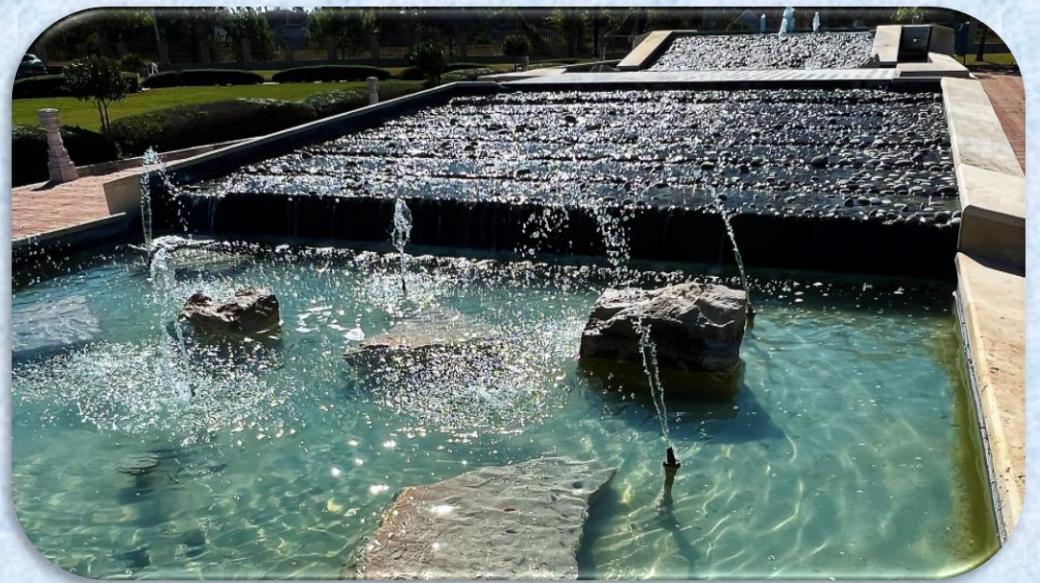
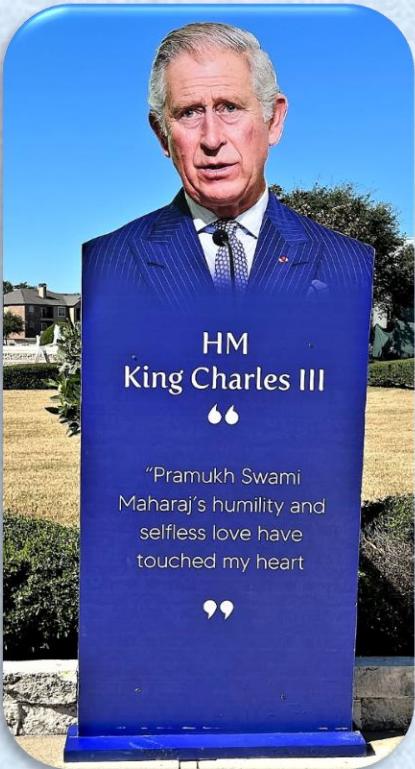
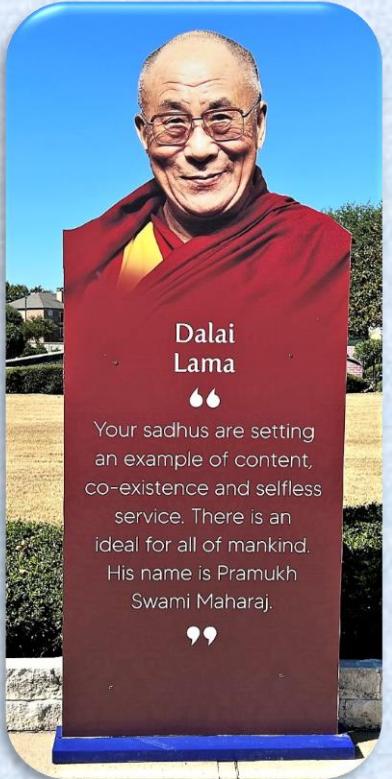
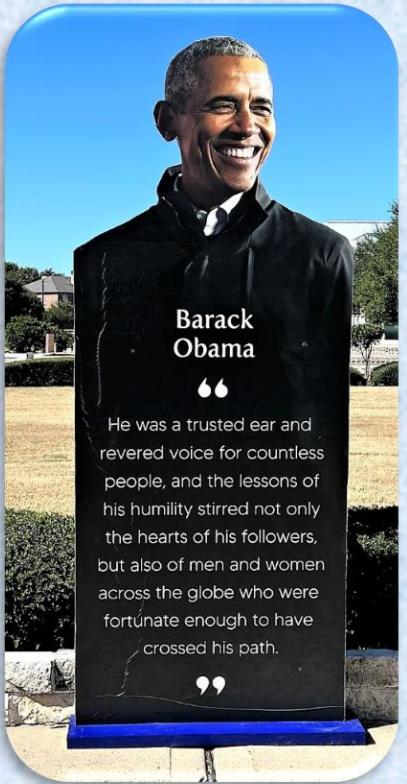
This mandir is a traditional Hindu temple, built by the BAPS Swaminarayan Sanstha, a denomination of this branch of Hinduism (BAPS is short for Bochasanwasi Akshar Purushottam Swaminarayan Sanstha).

It was built according to the Shilpa Shastra, a collection of architectural treatises that have been an integral part of Indian architecture and engineering for thousands of years. It is the first traditional Hindu Mandir of its kind in North America. The sacred images and ceremonies of worship in the Mandir form the very core in elevating the soul to the pinnacle of God-realization, according to Hindu philosophy.

It is believed that God manifested, or incarnated, as Bwagwan Swaminarayan (1781-1830) in northern India. At an early age, he began travelling the continent. He wished to remove misguided religious practices, serve the poor and needy, preach non-violence, and implement social reforms. His sixth spiritual successor and current guru is Mahant Swami Maharaj, who strives to live a devout, humble, and service-focused life.

The mandir is described as a haven for spirituality and a place of paramount peace. Near the end of our tour, we were privileged to attend the 11:00 worship service, and have the opportunity to experience this sense of spirituality and peace.

Our visit was just prior to the celebration of Diwali and the New Year, October 22-26. Diwali is the festival of lights, joy, prosperity and happiness. It symbolizes the triumph of good over evil, and promotes goodwill toward all. The festival involves many traditions, including making colorful art, lighting oil lamps, and sharing food and sweets.

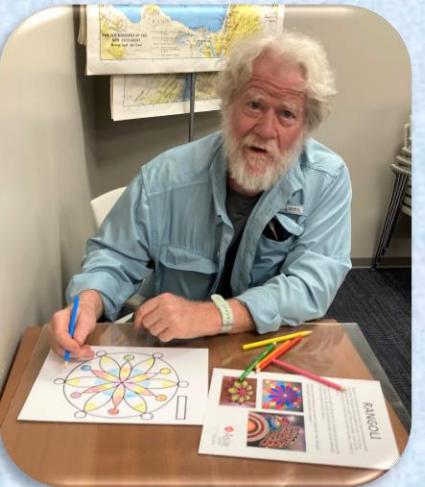


Of interest along our walk outside were these representations of past and current world leaders, including the Dalai Lama, and their thoughts on Pramukh Swami Maharaj (1921-2016), the fifth spiritual successor to Bagwan Swaminarayan.

The grounds around the temple were lovely. Moving water in the form of waterfalls and sprays added to an atmosphere of peace and tranquility.



Following our visit to the mandir, we were ready for lunch at the
Whiskey Cake Kitchen and Bar.
We enjoyed selecting from a wide variety of choices, all good!



After lunch, interested members met in the Bellaire UMC parlor for a workshop. Cathy Podell, with Houston Asiatown Tours, introduced Vehishta Kaikobad, a member of the Asia Society, and a former museum docent who is passionate about art. She introduced members to Rangoli, an artform consisting of brightly colored patterns made with a variety of materials.

For our purposes, we used colored pens or pencils while creating a variety of shapes. Was it art? Or art therapy? Either way, it was fun!