KASHIGO · LOCAL INSIDER GUIDE 2026

Varanasi Scam Cheat Sheet

The 9 scams every first-timer faces — and the one-line move that beats each. From a local, free.

1 The boat “price list”

The trick: A laminated “official” card quotes Rs 3,000–5,000 for a sunrise ride — or the price is secretly per-person and doubles mid-river.

Your move: A private wooden boat (2–4 people) is Rs 800–1,500 per hour. Agree the total price AND the exact duration before you step in.

2 Manikarnika “wood donation”

The trick: A kind “helper” explains the cremation, walks you to a balcony, then asks for money toward a family’s firewood.

Your move: It’s invented — the families have already paid. No real priest asks a foreigner for wood money. Never follow anyone up the stairs. No photos.

3 The “free” tour / English practice

The trick: A friendly “student” just wants to practice English and show you the real city for free.

Your move: His English is already perfect. Every shop he walks you into pays him 30–50%. Say “no thanks” and keep walking.

4 The ghat “entry ticket”

The trick: Someone at the top of the steps sells a “ticket” or “camera fee” to enter the ghats.

Your move: The ghats are public and free. Always. Walk straight past.

5 “The temple’s closed” detour

The trick: Your driver says your temple is shut for a ceremony and offers a “government” silk emporium to wait at.

Your move: It isn’t closed. He earns 20–40% on anything you buy. Name your stops up front: “no shops, please.”

6 The fake sadhu photo

The trick: A holy man in saffron beckons you for a photo, then demands Rs 500–1,000.

Your move: Agree a price first if you want the shot — Rs 20–50 is respectful. If you didn’t ask, you owe nothing. Walk away.

7 The “friend boatman” introducer

The trick: A stranger insists on taking you to “his friend, the best boatman” — then vanishes.

Your move: The boatman’s price already hides his 30–50% kickback. You didn’t ask for help — don’t pay for it.

8 ATM “helpers”

The trick: A “helpful” local hovers at the ATM offering to assist you.

Your move: Cover your PIN, refuse all help, and use machines inside banks during busy hours.

9 The foreigner price

The trick: No price is displayed; the shopkeeper reads your clothes and quotes 3–5x.

Your move: Packaged goods have an MRP (max price) printed on them — never pay above it. For crafts, haggle or use fixed-price government emporiums.

THE ONE RULE BEHIND ALL OF THEM

Every scam runs on you not knowing the real price or the real rule. Never accept help you didn’t ask for. Know the number before you’re quoted one. Keep moving.

Know before you land

What	The real number
Private boat (2–4 people)	**Rs 800–1,500 / hour**
Shared public boat	**Rs 30–100 / person**
Airport prepaid taxi into town	**Rs 800–1,000**
Sadhu photo (only if you ask)	**Rs 20–50**
Ganga Aarti at Dashashwamedh	**Free — ~6:45pm, arrive by 5:45pm**
Best sunrise boat window	**5:00–6:30am**
Packaged water & snacks	**Never above the printed MRP**

Five things nobody tells you

→ Sightsee 5–9am, hide from the afternoon heat, then come back for the evening aarti.

→ No photos of the funeral pyres at Manikarnika — people will confront you, and a “fine” scam follows.

→ Don’t drink or bathe in the river, however moving the scene is — it’s a hospital trip for a Western stomach.

→ Carry small cash. Autos, chai and tiny shops are cash-only and nobody has change for a Rs 500 note.

→ At Kashi Vishwanath, leather and phones aren’t allowed inside — use the lockers outside.

This is the free preview.

The full KashiGo Varanasi Guide gives you every price in the city, all 84 ghats mapped, a ready-to-use 2-day itinerary, temple etiquette, a food-safety guide, and the exact scripts to shut down each scam — written by a local born on the ghats.

Get the full guide — $14.99 →
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