

ODISHA UNRAVELLED



ODISHA
THINK INDIA, THINK ODISHA

APRIL 2026 ISSUE 22

A Quarterly Newsletter by Department of Tourism, Government of Odisha



Culinary
Brand Ambassador

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Deomali, Koraput



Picture Courtesy- Trailokya Garnayak

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Government of Odisha*



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FOREWORD



 **Smt. Pravati Parida**

*Hon'ble Deputy Chief Minister, Minister for
Women and Child Development, Mission Shakti and Tourism*

Tourism in Odisha is evolving into a powerful expression of our identity, one that seamlessly brings together heritage, nature, culture and community. Over the past months, the State has witnessed a series of meaningful initiatives that reflect this vision, from globally recognised cultural festivals and innovative tourism outreach programmes to strategic policy interventions that strengthen our tourism ecosystem.

Guided by Odisha Vision 2036 and Vision 2047, our approach to tourism development places equal emphasis on experiential value, sustainability and institutional capacity. In line with this long-term roadmap, the State has taken focused steps to strengthen governance in the tourism

sector, including the induction of 18 Odisha Tourism Service (OTS) cadre officers, aimed at enhancing planning, implementation and service delivery across destinations.

Each initiative highlighted in this edition reflects our commitment to presenting Odisha as a destination of depth and authenticity, while ensuring inclusive growth and sustainable development. As we continue to expand Odisha's presence on national and international platforms, our focus remains on creating memorable experiences for visitors, empowering local communities and preserving the rich cultural and natural legacy that defines our State.

EDITOR'S NOTE



Shri Balwant Singh, IAS

Commissioner-cum-Secretary, Tourism

Odisha's tourism narrative is evolving rapidly, driven by a growing preference among travellers for meaningful, immersive and experience led journeys. Today's visitors seek more than sightseeing, they seek opportunities to engage deeply with the State's culture, heritage, nature and communities, forming emotional connections that last long after their visit ends. In this landscape, festival led tourism and experiential offerings have become central pillars of our strategy, transforming destinations into living spaces of participation, creativity and memorable engagement. The initiatives featured in this edition reflect how Odisha is thoughtfully integrating curated festivals, cultural showcases, nature based experiences and heritage driven programming with broader goals of destination development and institutional strengthening. Whether it is classical arts that celebrate our timeless traditions, vibrant coastal festivals that highlight our maritime identity or nature immersive experiences that spotlight our biodiversity,

each initiative is backed by methodical planning, capacity building, skilled facilitation and strong safety frameworks. This ensures that the experiential journeys we offer are not only enriching but also safe, seamless and professionally delivered. As we expand Odisha's experiential tourism portfolio, our focus remains steadfast on strengthening governance mechanisms, improving service quality and adopting data driven decision making to ensure sustainable and inclusive growth. We are committed to creating systems that empower local communities, enhance visitor satisfaction and uphold the State's reputation for authenticity and excellence. This edition captures the momentum our festival driven and experiential initiatives are generating. Together, they are helping position Odisha as a leading experiential tourism destination, one that delivers long term value to communities, enriches the visitor journey and strengthens the cultural and natural fabric of our State.

ABADHA



TAKING ODISHA TO THE GLOBAL TABLE: A NEW CHAPTER FOR ODIA CUISINE

Food has always been more than sustenance in Odisha, it is an expression of faith, culture and community. From the sacred Mahaprasad prepared in the kitchens of Shree Jagannath Temple to generations-old family recipes and region-specific delicacies, Odia cuisine tells the story of a civilisation shaped by tradition, diversity and deep cultural values. Yet, despite its rich culinary heritage, Odia cuisine has remained one of India's best-kept secrets, often overshadowed on the national and global culinary landscape.

Recognising the immense potential of food as a driver of tourism, cultural preservation and community development, the Department of Tourism, Government of Odisha, has embarked on a landmark initiative to position Odia cuisine as a defining pillar of the State's tourism identity. Launched on the auspicious occasion of Pana Sankranti (Odia New Year), the initiative marks a strategic shift towards promoting Odisha through its authentic culinary traditions while creating opportunities for local communities and tourism stakeholders.



At the heart of this initiative is the onboarding of celebrated chef, author and culinary storyteller Ranveer Brar as the Brand Ambassador for Odia Cuisine. Widely recognised for his ability to present India's regional cuisines with authenticity and depth, Ranveer Brar brings national credibility and global visibility to Odisha's culinary narrative. Joining him in this mission is Chef Abinash Nayak, who has been appointed as the Odia Culinary Champion to lead research, documentation and institutional engagement, while Chefs Anju and Manju will spearhead grassroots outreach through live demonstrations, community engagement and district-level culinary promotion. Together, they represent a comprehensive ecosystem that connects global storytelling with local knowledge



and community participation.

The initiative reflects the Government's vision of promoting tourism through authentic cultural experiences rather than destinations alone. Odia cuisine, with its roots in temple traditions, indigenous ingredients, seasonal practices and regional diversity, offers travellers a unique way to experience the State. Whether it is the sacred Mahaprasad of Shree Jagannath Temple, regarded as one of the world's oldest continuously operating temple kitchens or the distinct flavours found in coastal, tribal and rural households, every meal tells a story of Odisha's living heritage.

Speaking on the occasion, Hon'ble Deputy Chief Minister Smt. Pravati Parida emphasised that the initiative seeks aims to build integrated ecosystem that combines global visibility with local authenticity. By bringing together renowned culinary experts and grassroots practitioners, the Government aims not only to showcase the authentic flavours of Odisha on national and international platforms but also to preserve traditional knowledge, empower communities and strengthen the State's cultural identity through food.





For Chef Ranveer Brar, the association is deeply personal. Describing Odia cuisine as “one of the world’s best-kept secrets,” he highlighted its quiet brilliance, from the sacred kitchens of Lord Jagannath to the poetry of everyday street food and reaffirmed his commitment to giving this rich culinary tradition the recognition it has long deserved. His vision aligns seamlessly with Odisha Tourism’s objective of presenting Odia cuisine to the world in its most authentic form, without compromising its identity or heritage. The programme adopts a holistic approach that goes far beyond promotional campaigns. It focuses on documenting and preserving traditional recipes and culinary practices, engaging with temple cooks, home chefs and local communities, developing immersive experiences such as food festivals, culinary trails and live demonstrations and amplifying Odisha’s food stories through strategic digital outreach. At its core, the initiative recognises local culinary practitioners as custodians of heritage and places them at the centre of Odisha’s tourism ecosystem.

By integrating cuisine into its broader tourism strategy, Odisha is creating new opportunities for cultural tourism, experiential travel and community-led economic development. Visitors today seek authentic stories and meaningful experiences and food has emerged as one of the most powerful ways to connect travellers with a destination’s identity. Through curated culinary experiences, national and international showcases and collaborations with renowned chefs, Odisha is positioning its cuisine as a distinctive offering on the global stage while generating new livelihood opportunities for local communities.

The onboarding of Chef Ranveer Brar is therefore more than the appointment of a brand ambassador, it represents the beginning of a larger movement to celebrate Odisha’s culinary heritage, preserve its traditions and elevate its global profile. As the State continues to strengthen its position as a leading cultural tourism destination, its cuisine is emerging as a powerful ambassador of its history, hospitality and identity, inviting the world to discover the authentic flavours of Odisha, just as they have been cherished for generations.

A NEW IDENTITY, A NEW MOMENTUM: ODISHA TOURISM UNVEILS 'THINK INDIA. THINK ODISHA.' & LAUNCHES THE OMC PURI COASTAL MARATHON

Tourism today is driven by experiences, stories and strong destination brands. Recognising this shift, the Department of Tourism, Government of Odisha, has embarked on a bold new chapter in its tourism journey with the launch of its refreshed destination identity, "Think India. Think Odisha.", alongside the unveiling of the OMC Puri Coastal Marathon, a landmark initiative that blends sports, culture and tourism to redefine Odisha's global positioning. Together, these initiatives represent a strategic step towards building a modern, experience-led tourism ecosystem that aligns with the State's long-term aspirations under Vision 2036 and Vision 2047.

Launched in Puri in the presence of Hon'ble Deputy Chief Minister Smt. Pravati Parida, public representatives, senior government officials and stakeholders from the tourism and sports ecosystem, the event reflected Odisha's evolving approach to destination development, one that integrates branding, visitor experience and event-led tourism into a unified strategy. The occasion began with a ceremonial launch run from the Blue Flag Beach to Taj Resort & Spa, Puri, symbolising the spirit of fitness, community participation and coastal tourism. Adding to the occasion was the unveiling of the official OMC Puri Coastal Marathon logo through an intricate sand art installation at the Blue Flag Beach, celebrating Odisha's artistic heritage against the backdrop of its scenic coastline.





The introduction of “Think India. Think Odisha.” marks more than a new tagline, it represents a renewed tourism philosophy. It positions Odisha as a destination where heritage, spirituality, nature, adventure, cuisine and contemporary experiences converge to create meaningful journeys for travellers. The new identity reflects the State’s ambition to transition from a destination of immense potential to a globally recognised tourism brand through integrated planning, strategic marketing and enhanced visitor experiences. It also reinforces Odisha’s vision of placing tourism at the centre of economic growth, cultural promotion and sustainable development.

Complementing this refreshed brand identity is the launch of the OMC Puri Coastal Marathon, envisioned as a flagship international sporting event that positions Odisha at the intersection of sports tourism and experiential travel. Designed as a unique coastal marathon, the event offers participants the opportunity to run along Puri’s scenic shoreline while experiencing the city’s distinctive blend of spirituality, heritage and natural beauty. By introducing an international sporting event of this scale, Odisha is expanding its tourism calendar beyond traditional festivals and pilgrimage, creating new reasons for travellers to visit the State throughout the year.

With a prize pool of ₹1 crore, the marathon ranks among India’s premier running events and is expected to attract elite athletes, amateur runners and participants from across the globe. Featuring multiple race categories, including the full marathon (42.2 km), half marathon (21.1 km), 10 km and 5 km, the event has been designed to encourage participation across age groups and fitness levels. The simultaneous launch of the official marathon website and opening of registrations further underscore the Department’s commitment to building a professionally managed, internationally benchmarked sporting event.

The identity of the marathon itself reflects Odisha’s rich cultural character. Inspired by the Patita Pavana Bana, the Konark Chakra and the rhythmic waves of the Bay of Bengal, the official logo symbolises movement, resilience and the State’s enduring maritime spirit. These design elements reinforce Odisha’s unique identity while seamlessly integrating culture into contemporary tourism branding.

The choice of Puri as the host city is equally significant. Revered globally as the abode of Lord Jagannath, Puri has long been synonymous with pilgrimage. Through initiatives such as the OMC Puri Coastal Marathon, the city is now emerging as a multidimensional destination where spirituality, culture, wellness, sports and coastal experiences coexist. This evolution not only diversifies Odisha’s tourism offerings but also strengthens Puri’s position as a year-round destination capable of attracting a wide spectrum of domestic and international visitors.

Beyond tourism promotion, the initiative is expected to generate substantial socio-economic benefits by stimulating local employment, supporting hospitality and service industries, creating opportunities for small businesses and promoting a culture of fitness and wellness among youth. It exemplifies how tourism-led events can become catalysts for inclusive economic growth while enhancing the quality of destination experiences.



The launch of “Think India. Think Odisha.” and the OMC Puri Coastal Marathon marks the beginning of a new era for Odisha Tourism, one where strategic branding, world-class events and immersive visitor experiences come together to showcase the State’s extraordinary diversity. As Odisha continues to strengthen its presence on the global tourism map, these initiatives reaffirm its commitment to creating a destination that is vibrant, aspirational and deeply rooted in its heritage, inviting travellers from around the world to experience the many dimensions of Odisha.

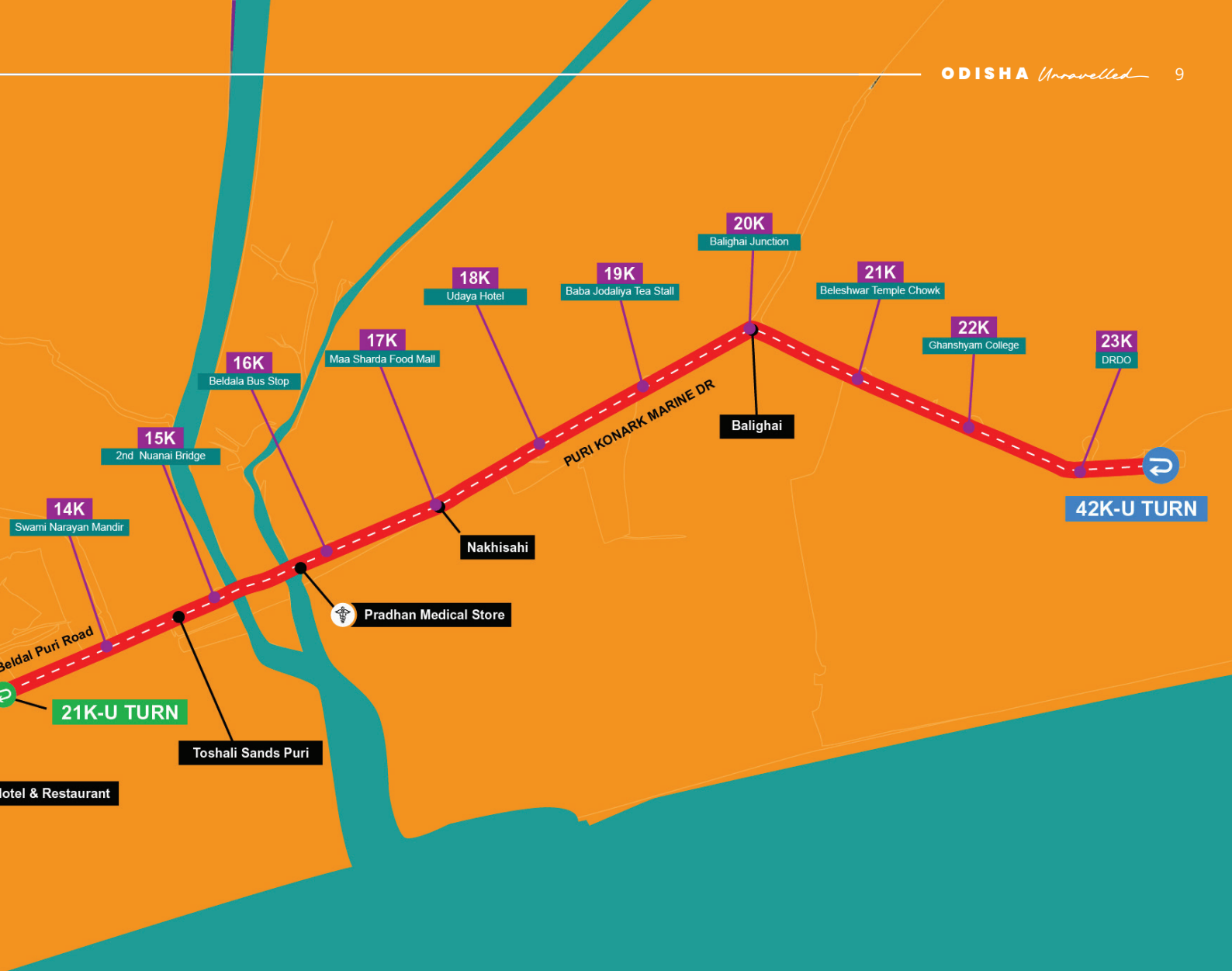


OMC

PURI COASTAL MARATHON 2026

Sunday, 13th December 2026





ROUTE MAP

5K

10K

21K

42K

WHERE ADVENTURE MEETS NATURE: MAHENDRAGIRI EMERGES AS ODISHA'S NEW ECO-ADVENTURE DESTINATION

Rising gracefully from the Eastern Ghats, Mahendragiri is more than one of Odisha's highest mountain peaks, it is a landscape where mythology, biodiversity and adventure come together in extraordinary harmony. Long revered in Indian epics and home to centuries-old temples, the mountain has remained one of Odisha's best-kept natural treasures. Today, it is steadily emerging as a destination where travellers can experience nature in its purest form while embracing adventure in a responsible and sustainable manner.

Indian Mountaineering Foundation ensured that all adventure activities adhered to established safety protocols and best practices, reinforcing the Department's commitment to developing adventure tourism that is both safe and sustainable.

Beyond adventure, the festival celebrated the cultural identity of Mahendragiri. Participants explored the region's spiritual heritage, ancient temples and local traditions while interacting with surrounding communities through cultural performances, regional cuisine and locally guided experiences. By integrating adventure with culture and community participation, the festival created a holistic tourism experience that highlighted the unique character of the destination.

The Mahendragiri Eco Adventure Festival also provided a platform for promoting responsible travel and environmental stewardship. Through awareness activities and nature-based experiences, participants were encouraged to

appreciate the ecological sensitivity of the region and contribute towards its conservation. The active involvement of local communities further ensured that tourism generated livelihood opportunities while fostering greater ownership in preserving the region's natural and cultural heritage.

The festival marks another significant step in Odisha's journey towards becoming a premier destination for eco and adventure tourism. Through its collaboration with the Indian Mountaineering Foundation, the Department of Tourism has demonstrated how expert partnerships, sustainable practices and community participation can come together to unlock the tourism potential of lesser-known destinations. As Odisha continues to diversify its tourism offerings under the vision of "Think India. Think Odisha.", initiatives such as the Mahendragiri Eco Adventure Festival are creating new opportunities for travellers to discover the State's extraordinary landscapes while promoting responsible and experience-driven tourism.







BLUE FLAG BEACH, PURI

GUARDIANS OF THE COAST: BUILDING A SAFER FUTURE FOR ODISHA'S BEACHES

Every year, Odisha's beaches welcome millions of pilgrims, tourists, adventure enthusiasts and families seeking experiences along the State's picturesque coastline. From the spiritual shores of Puri to the pristine beaches of Konark, Gopalpur and Chandipur, these destinations have emerged as vibrant tourism hubs that attract visitors throughout the year. Behind every safe and memorable beach experience stands a dedicated lifeguard, constantly vigilant, highly skilled and prepared to respond at a moment's notice.

Recognising that visitor safety is fundamental to world-class tourism, the Department of Tourism, Government of Odisha, has launched a transformative initiative to institutionalise lifeguard training and strengthen the State's beach and water safety ecosystem. This initiative reflects a long-term vision of positioning Odisha as a safe and premier destination for beach, adventure and water-based tourism by investing in skilled human resources, institutional partnerships and internationally recognised safety standards.

The foundation of this initiative was laid through strategic collaborations with the National Institute of Water Sports (NIWS), Goa, and Odisha Fire & Emergency Services (OFES). While the partnership with NIWS brings national-level technical expertise and standardised training methodologies, the collaboration with OFES enables systematic



identification and capacity building of lifeguards through the Odisha State Watermanship and Lifeguard Institute (OSWALI), Konark. Together, these institutions are creating a structured framework to enhance safety standards across Odisha's rapidly expanding water tourism ecosystem.

The first phase of the residential Lifeguard Training Programme commenced in the month of April at OSWALI, Konark, marking the beginning of an intensive capacity-building exercise aimed at developing a highly trained workforce capable of safeguarding visitors across Odisha's beaches and inland water destinations. Conducted over multiple residential batches, the programme combines



classroom learning with practical training, equipping participants with the knowledge and confidence required to manage real-life emergencies.

The curriculum has been carefully designed to cover essential competencies including rescue techniques, CPR and first aid, open-water rescue operations, disaster response, tourist safety protocols and watersports safety standards. These specialised modules prepare lifeguards to respond swiftly and effectively to emergencies while ensuring that Odisha's tourism destinations adhere to recognised safety benchmarks. By focusing on professional certification and practical preparedness, the programme is creating a new generation of trained first responders dedicated to protecting lives.

The initiative extends far beyond a single training programme. It forms part of the Government's ambitious vision to train nearly 2,000 lifeguards over the next two to three years, creating a robust and scalable safety network across beaches, lakes, dams, rivers and other emerging water tourism destinations. Supporting this vision is the scientific mapping of waterbodies across all 30 districts, enabling evidence-based planning, systematic deployment and efficient utilisation of trained personnel where they are needed most.

Upon completion of the current phase, trained lifeguards will be strategically deployed at key tourism destinations including Puri, Konark, Gopalpur, Chandipur and other prominent beaches. Their presence will significantly strengthen Odisha's beach safety infrastructure, improve emergency preparedness and enhance visitor confidence, particularly during peak tourist seasons and major festivals when footfall increases

substantially.

The programme also represents a proactive response to the growing need for enhanced public safety across waterbodies. Rather than relying solely on emergency response, the Department has adopted a preventive approach centred on institutional training, standardised operating procedures and strategic deployment of professionally trained lifeguards. This comprehensive safety framework is expected to minimise risks, reduce drowning incidents and create a safer environment for both residents and visitors.

Beyond strengthening tourism infrastructure, the initiative is creating meaningful opportunities for young people across the State. By developing a skilled cadre of certified lifeguards, Odisha is generating sustainable employment while fostering a culture of professionalism, public service and responsibility. Every trained lifeguard becomes an ambassador of the State's commitment to visitor safety, ensuring that every tourist experiences Odisha's natural beauty with confidence and peace of mind.

As Odisha continues to expand its beach, coastal and adventure tourism offerings under the vision of "Think India. Think Odisha.", the OSWALI Lifeguard Training Programme stands as a testament to the Government's commitment to building a tourism ecosystem where safety, sustainability and service go hand in hand. By investing in people, strengthening institutions and adopting nationally recognised standards, Odisha is laying the foundation for a safer, more resilient and globally competitive tourism destination.





RAMACHANDI BEACH

BUILDING TOMORROW'S DESTINATIONS: ODISHA CHARTS A ROADMAP FOR GLOBAL TOURISM EXCELLENCE

Tourism has emerged as one of the strongest drivers of economic growth, employment generation and regional development. As destinations around the world compete to offer seamless visitor experiences, sustainable infrastructure and globally benchmarked services, Odisha is taking decisive steps to position itself among India's leading tourism destinations. Reinforcing this vision, the Department of Tourism, Government of Odisha, organised a State-Level Workshop on Development of Global Standard Tourist Destinations, bringing together policymakers, district administrations, industry stakeholders and subject experts to chart a comprehensive roadmap for transforming Odisha's tourism landscape.

The workshop was organised in alignment with the Government of India's flagship initiative of developing at least one Global Standard Tourist Destination in every State under the vision of "One State – One Global Destination", envisioned by Hon'ble Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi. The initiative reflects a paradigm shift in destination development, where tourism is viewed not merely as the creation of attractions, but as the development of integrated ecosystems that offer exceptional visitor experiences while generating sustainable economic opportunities.



Chairing the workshop, Hon'ble Deputy Chief Minister Smt. Pravati Parida underscored tourism's transformative potential as a catalyst for economic growth, entrepreneurship and balanced regional development. She emphasised that developing world-class destinations requires a whole-of-government approach, supported by strong institutional mechanisms, sustainable planning and active stakeholder participation. Her address highlighted the need to create destinations that meet global standards in infrastructure, service delivery and visitor experience while preserving Odisha's unique cultural and natural heritage.

A key highlight of the workshop was the presentation of two high-potential tourism circuits proposed under the initiative, Puri-Konark and Hirakud. While the Puri-Konark circuit was envisioned as a globally benchmarked heritage, spiritual and coastal tourism destination centred around the Jagannath culture, the Konark Sun Temple, Odisha's coastline, Chilika and the heritage crafts village of Raghurajpur, Hirakud was presented as a flagship eco-tourism, water tourism and adventure tourism destination built around the iconic reservoir and the Debrigarh Wildlife Sanctuary. These proposals reflect Odisha's strategy of leveraging its diverse tourism assets to create internationally competitive destination experiences.



The deliberations extended beyond infrastructure to address the broader ecosystem required for world-class destination development. Participants discussed the establishment of Destination Management Organisations (DMOs), integrated destination planning, governance frameworks, visitor management systems, sustainability, private sector participation and inter-departmental convergence. Equal emphasis was placed on strengthening connectivity, enhancing tourism amenities, improving cleanliness and safety, developing skilled human resources and delivering seamless visitor experiences across every touchpoint.

The workshop underscored the importance of institutional collaboration in shaping Odisha's tourism future. Representatives from key Government departments, along with premier institutions such as the National Institute of Water Sports (NIWS), Indian Mountaineering Foundation (IMF) and the Adventure Tour Operators Association of India (ATOAI), as well as industry bodies and hospitality associations, shared valuable insights and recommendations on destination planning, infrastructure, sustainability and visitor experience. Their collective expertise reinforced the importance of a coordinated, multi-stakeholder approach towards developing globally competitive tourism destinations.

The discussions culminated in the identification of priority interventions, institutional reforms and strategic projects required to transform Puri-Konark and Hirakud into globally benchmarked tourism destinations. The recommendations emerging from the workshop will be consolidated into a comprehensive roadmap that will guide future investments, infrastructure development, governance mechanisms and destination management strategies.

The workshop marks an important milestone in Odisha's tourism journey. Rather than focusing solely on increasing visitor numbers, the State is adopting a holistic approach that prioritises sustainability, quality infrastructure, effective governance and enriched visitor experiences. By bringing together government agencies, industry experts and institutional partners on a common platform, the Department of Tourism has laid the foundation for a new generation of tourism destinations that are globally competitive, environmentally responsible and economically inclusive.

As Odisha advances under the vision of "Think India. Think Odisha.", initiatives such as the State-Level Workshop on Global Standard Tourist Destinations reaffirm the Government's commitment to creating destinations that not only attract visitors but also generate livelihoods, encourage investment and celebrate the State's extraordinary cultural and natural heritage. Through strategic planning, institutional collaboration and a shared vision for excellence, Odisha is charting a clear roadmap towards becoming one of India's foremost tourism destinations.







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Raghurajpur, Puri