

ODISHA UNRAVELLED

January 2021

A Newsletter by Department of Tourism, Government of Odisha



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Odisha in 2021
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LEUCISTIC NORTHERN SHOVELER AT MANGALAJODI

Picture Credit : Ashish Kumar Jena

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ODISHA UNRAVELLED

*A Newsletter by Department of Tourism,
Government of Odisha*



ODISHA
INDIA'S BEST KEPT SECRET.

FOREWORD



JYOTI PRAKASH PANIGRAHI

*Minister of State (IC) for Tourism and
Odia Language, Literature & Culture*

The conclusion of 2020 gives us satisfaction from the way we have collectively stood up to the challenges, and hope for a more fulfilling and safer year for travellers. Our key mission has consistently been to enrich the Odisha experience, towards which all our efforts have been oriented.

We have worked both ways, in terms of localising experiences through homestays and cuisine, as well as imparting a premium touch to hospitality.

Our campaigns, be it Eco Retreat Odisha or Odisha By Road, have complemented each other – thus giving the travel and trade sector ample opportunities to make the best of 2021, notwithstanding the lurking risks at the global stage.

This edition of the newsletter is a special effort in articulating our endeavours and achievements of 2020 and plans for the future.

Happy reading.

EDITOR'S NOTE



VISHAL DEV, IAS

*Principal Secretary, Tourism,
Sports & Youth Services*

Year 2020 has brought several positive tidings to the shores of Odisha. Beach tourism has received a fillip, with the Blue-Flag certification of Puri's Golden Beach. Odisha Tourism is on an ambitious drive to get five other beaches certified - Pir Jahania, Haripur, Pati Sonapur, Niladri and Muhan. Moreover, our plans for integrated beachfront development at Talsari-Udaypur and Puri-Konark are progressing well.

Community-managed ecotourism - Odisha's most championed segment - is set for an aesthetic overhaul. Cuisine will be among the best aspects of travel to Odisha, with OTDC's foray into premium fine-dining in Odia Cuisine under the brand name of Nimantran. Visitors will also get to go local, with the Government of Odisha set to launch a scheme to

encourage homestays in key locations.

Holidays in Odisha promise to be unprecedented in 2021, with Odisha Tourism introducing several niche experiences to be activated. Key among them is the introduction of cruise tourism in the state's beautiful wetlands - the iconic Chilika Lake, Bhitarkanika backwaters, the mighty Mahanadi and Hirakud Reservoir.

We have brought a closure to 2020 in style, with Eco Retreat Odisha receiving tremendous response from tourists across all five locations. The last two weeks of the year have witnessed almost 100% occupancy, and with two whole months to go, there's a lot in store.

On behalf of Odisha Tourism, I wish all our readers a safe and prosperous 2021. Keep exploring Odisha, India's best kept secret.

REACHING OUT TO LEVERAGE REGIONAL TOURISM

Odisha Tourism has embarked on a campaign of interstate collaboration to enhance the region's long-duration tourism potential.



Riding on innovations in niche tourism complemented by the Odisha By Road campaign, Odisha Tourism reached out to the travel trade fraternity through virtual roadshows in collaboration with industry partner FICCI. Three roadshows for the states of Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand and West Bengal were conducted in the recent months, witnessing participation of over 200 tour operators.

“The states of this vibrant region are cultural siblings, with deep-rooted commonalities. Despite this, we have our own unique offerings to exhibit to explorers. Together, our states can make this region the most sought-after winter destination for Indians, looking for-

ward to a getaway after reeling under the pandemic for nine months”, said Minister of Tourism Shri. J.P. Panigrahi.

Adding to the perspective, Principal Secretary Tourism Shri. Vishal Dev said, “Odisha’s excellent road connectivity enables enjoyable road trips throughout the state. Our diverse road itineraries have tremendous potential for tour operators to market curated trips as well as independent travellers.”

ADAPTING TO THE NEW NORMAL: TRAINING IN COVID-19 PROTOCOLS

Odisha's hospitality industry has applauded the Government's initiative as the most inclusive pandemic time capacity building initiative.



In what has been applauded by Odisha's hospitality industry as the most inclusive awareness outreach campaign on COVID-19 risk mitigation and revival training for the tourism & hospitality sector conducted by a state government, Department of Tourism in collaboration with premier hospitality institute IITTM organised two sessions on "Facing the New Normal" in the recent months following the complete opening up of the state's tourism sector.

The first workshop on "Opening up Hotels, Restaurants &

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The idea was to touch every stakeholder about the importance of adherence to protocols. Our conviction in our message of safety assurance is founded in our diligence on protocols.

- Vishal Dev, IAS
Principal Secretary, Tourism

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other Hospitality Units in Odisha" focused on the diligence to be exercised by hospitality units while opening up after months of inactivity. The emphasis was on "automation for easy access and self-reliance, and contact-less service as the way forward".

The second workshop was based on "Standard Operating Procedures (SoP) for Travel Trade Intermediaries in Odisha", including tour operations, manpower management and destination protocols.

SAMBALPUR'S HERITAGE PUSH



Townhall

Sambalpur, globally renowned as a handloom hub, is known for its rich cultural legacy. The seat of Goddess Samaleswari, it occupies a pivotal place in India's freedom struggle and has cultivated several greats such as freedom fighters Veer Surendra Sai and Laxmi Narayan Mishra besides literary figures like Gangadhar Meher, Bhama Bhoi, Satya Narayan Bohidar, Swapneswar Das, Gokulanand Panda, Sunil Mishra and Braja Mohan Panda.



The recent heritage restoration projects will provide a fillip to Sambalpur's cultural vibe and offer tourists richer day tourism options.

Sambalpur was also home to revered Assamese novelist and playwright Lakshminath Bezbaroa who penned several of his key works there.

In an effort to revitalise its architectural heritage, INTACH recently completed the restoration of Lakshminath Bezbaroa's home, besides the Victoria Town Hall to house a museum where customs, traditions and history of the region will be showcased.

Moreover, the recently restored Rani Bakhri will also host OTDC's authentic Odia cuisine restaurant, Nimantran.

These projects will play a significant role in upping the experience quotient of Western Odisha's cultural capital.



Rani Bakhri



Bezbaroa House

OVERHAULING HOSPITALITY

Odisha Tourism Development Corporation (OTDC) has initiated a courageous campaign to transform its hotel properties, with a view to enhancing its brand identity as the tourists' preferred "host in Odisha".

Aranya Nivas, Dangamal



OTDC recently concluded the process of selecting private operators for augmenting, operating and managing key properties such as Panthanivas Balasore, Bhadrak, Gopalpur and Taptapani.

In a development that will cater to increasing demand for comfortable accommodations in Bhitarkanika, OTDC's 12-room property at Dangamal, Aranyanivas Bhitarkanika was recently inaugurated by Shri. Naveen Patnaik, Chief Minister, Odisha.

"Odisha's pioneering achievements in promoting responsible tourism have received another fillip with this property. I congratulate OTDC for making Bhitarkanika more hospitable", said Shri Patnaik.

White Crab Cafe



OTDC's recent cafe foray, with new spots such as White Crab Cafe at Puri's Blue Flag Beach and the Chandrabhaga Beach Cafe, has successfully bridged a critical F&B gap.

"Other than leasing out properties, we are also expeditiously upgrading the infrastructure at Panthanivas Bhubaneswar, Puri, Sambalpur, Rourkela and Rambha. These properties, besides housing all-new rooms, will offer premium gastronomic experiences in our in-house bakeries, bars and restaurants."



SACHIN RAMCHANDRA JADHAV

Managing Director OTDC



Ratnagiri, Jajpur



Mandasaru, Kandhamal



Blue Flag Beach, Puri



Yoga at Blue Flag Beach, Puri

WELLNESS AND SPIRITUALITY: TRAVELLING TWINS

Spiritual in ethos and therapeutic in experience, Odisha has steadily earned the attention of seekers. Thanks to watershed projects such as the Puri Transformation Project and Blue Flag Beach, Odisha was recently recognised as the best Spiritual and Wellness Destination at Travel + Leisure's India's Best Awards 2020.

Beyond the citadel of Lord Jagannath, several architectural gems dot Odisha's landscape

– from Lingaraj and Mukteswar Temple in Bhubaneswar to Khiching Temple in Mayurbhanj. The Diamond Triangle Buddhist Circuit comprising Lalitgiri, Udaygiri and Ratnagiri presents a panoramic view of Buddhist history from its inception to diffusion.

To complement spiritual quests, wellness is another emerging segment of Odisha's tourism landscape, especially within dense forests and hill-stations in the state's fascinating hinterland.

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In Odisha, you can take wellness to a virgin high, at the zen-inspiring Silent Valley of Mandasaru. The deciduous ecosystem located in Kandhamal is a 15 km gorge fortified by 22 hills and cut by several waterfalls. While camping at Ecotour Odisha's quaint accommodations, visitors can enjoy nature at its therapeutic best.

”

EXPERIENCING ODISHA IN 2021

2020 was a hectic year for Odisha Tourism. While travel plans world over were quarantined, we worked overtime to transform the tourist experience in Odisha – to make it safer, more diverse yet personalized and more satisfying.

While Chief Minister Shri. Naveen Patnaik led the way with the bold transformation of the pilgrimage hotspots of Puri's Shri Jagannath Temple and Bhubaneswar's Lingaraj Temple, we organized what the hospitality industry applauded as amongst the most comprehensive pandemic-time sector outreach and capacity building programmes by a state government.

Our teams conducted recces to every priority destination to kick off the development process. Discussions on experience enrichment were conducted on-site.

A detailed infrastructure gap assessment of essential and value adding facilities has been prepared for 46 destinations, basis which development plans are in the process.

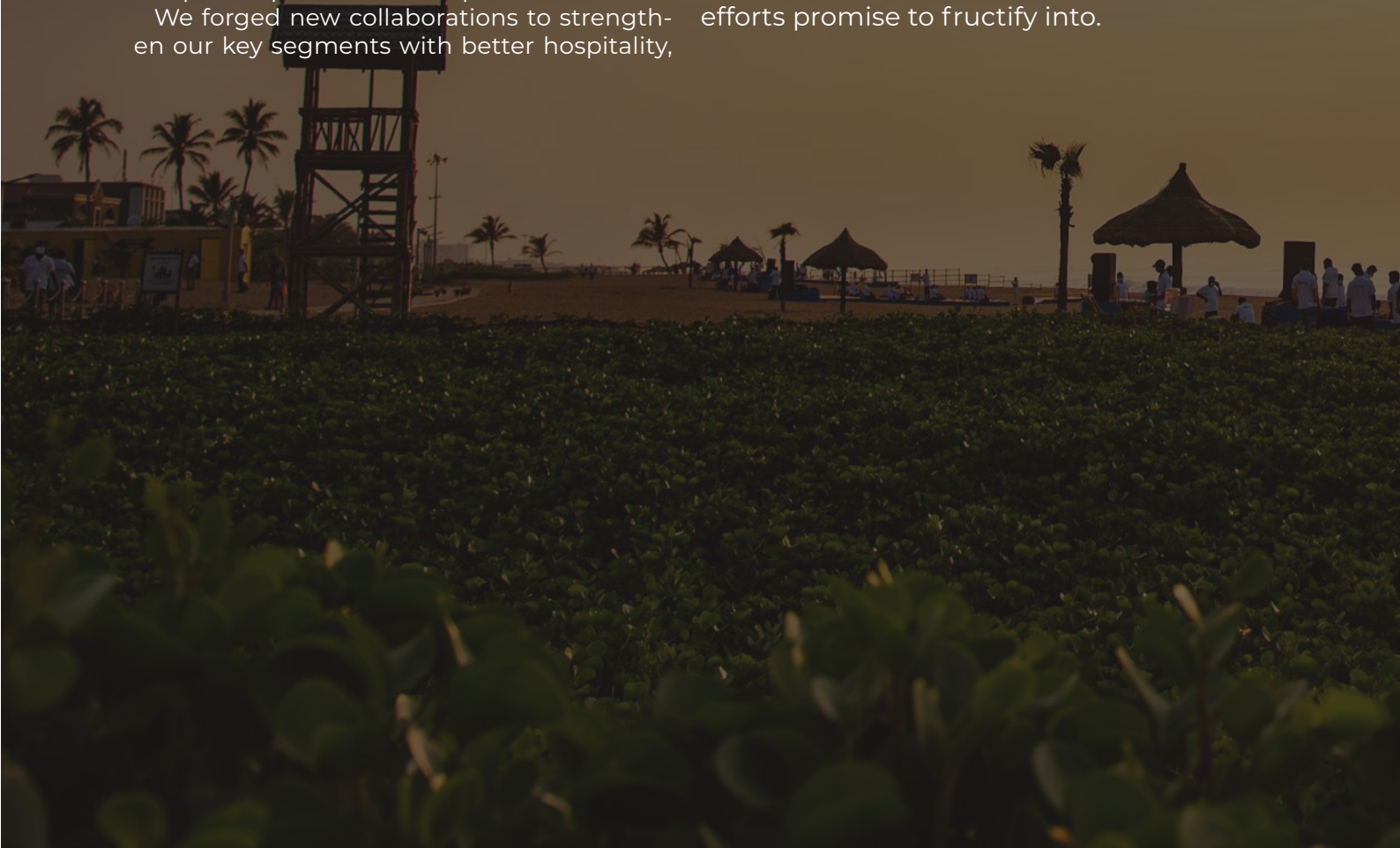
We forged new collaborations to strengthen our key segments with better hospitality,

enhanced aesthetics and deeper tourist engagement.

Our resolve to revive our vibrant event calendar paid rich dividends. Having pioneered risk mitigation and revival strategies, Odisha Tourism organised the Konark Festival and Sand Art Festival 2020. It was inaugurated by Chief Minister Shri. Naveen Patnaik, to emerge as India's first cultural festival post opening up of the lockdown – in complete adherence to COVID-19 safety protocols – from social distancing in access and seating, to comprehensive sanitisation.

We also formulated new schemes to incentivize the growth of niche tourism segments to complement the upcoming Tourism Policy, while on the regulatory front, a framework legislation to help facilitate bona fide developments, help preserve tourist destinations and protect the wellbeing of tourists is on the anvil.

Read on to know the outcomes that our efforts promise to fructify into.





Ecotourism: Odisha's most championed segment is set for an aesthetic overhaul, through enhanced quality of accommodations and services, while preserving sustainability. We are targeting to double its capacity of nature camps from over 300 at present to 600 in the coming years.



Beach: Sun God's shining on Odisha's 482 km long tan & turquoise coastline. After Puri's Golden Beach, Odisha Tourism has embarked on a campaign to transform five other beaches for the coveted Blue Flag - Pir Jahania, Haripur, Pati Sonapur, Niladri and Muhan. Besides, masterplans for the integrated development of beachfronts of Talsari-Udaypur and Puri-Konark are evolving fast.



Water tourism: A major surge is on its way, with the rapid progress of cruise tourism in the state's beautiful wetlands – from the iconic Chilika Lake and Bhitarkanika backwaters to the Mahanadi River and Hirakud Reservoir. Plans are progressing fast, with catamarans being taken up for augmentation into night cruise vessels. The Silver City Boat Club will also be inaugurated soon, offering tourists a never-before experienced aspect of Cuttack on Mahanadi. Tampara Lake in Ganjam is already earning popularity as a water sports hub.



Glamping: Eastern India's foremost glamping festival, Eco Retreat Odisha is back to conquering hearts and minds. After the 2020-21 edition at Bhitarkanika, Daringbadi, Hirakud and Satkosia besides Konark, the annual retreat will be introduced at diverse locations to offer the best of Odisha with style.



Cuisine: The aromas of Odia Cuisine are sure to invite attention, with OTDC's foray into premium fine-dining under the brand name of **Nimantran**. For starters, three restaurants are set to open in Bhubaneswar, Puri and Sambalpur, which will push up the exotic quotient of the underrated offering.



Homestays: Visitors to Odisha will also get to go local, with the state government set to launch a scheme to encourage homestays in key locations so as to personalise Odia hospitality – offering tourists unique cultural experiences in hospitality, cuisine and other local ways of life while dwelling in local family homes.



Heritage hospitality: Royalty is seldom associated with Odisha. But several heritage homestays in the state are open to tourists, hosted by erstwhile royal families – from Belgadia Palace in Mayurbhanj to Killa Aul Palace near Bhitarkanika, from Dhenkanal and Gajalaxmi Palaces in the centre of the state to Parikud Palace in the quaint Satapada to Kalahandi Palace in the state's enigmatic west. We will also launch a scheme to encourage several more heritage hotels to open up in the coming years.



Road trips: The most enjoyable route to discovering Odisha's hidden jewels is through the state's excellent road network. Odisha Tourism offers diverse itineraries ranging from two to five nights, through beaches, forests, hill-stations, tribal hinterlands, waterbodies, cities and promising experiences in cuisine, heritage, adventure, ethnic encounters, arts and handicrafts, leisure, wildlife and ecotourism. The journey's just begun. We'll keep introducing many new routes to discovery.

BIRDS OF A HUNDRED FEATHERS: CHILIKA BIRD FESTIVAL 2021



Odisha's birding experience has been soaring higher. The flagship Chilika Bird Festival shone bright despite the twin scares of the pandemic and the avian flu.

The 3rd National Chilika Bird Festival was inaugurated by Shri. Naveen Patnaik, Chief Minister, Odisha, who eloquently described the destination as "a pilgrimage for over a million winged visitors of varied species, which undertake flights to the mighty but calm Chilika Lake – Asia's largest brackish water lake." Shri. Patnaik applauded the efforts of Odisha Tourism and Ecotour Odisha for having organised the event "which promises to add another feather in Odisha's hat – a soaring birding hub".

The three-day programme witnessed the participation of 55 selected birders representing nine states – Maharashtra, Karnataka, Delhi, Haryana, Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh, Telangana and West Bengal, besides Odisha.



**SURESH CHANDRA
MAHAPATRA, IAS**

Chief Secretary, Odisha

"Chilika's Mangalajodi is a pioneering work in community-led conservation. It is an unparalleled birding destination. I take great pride in conveying that this year's census has revealed a total count of 11.42 lakh birds across over 190 species."



SYNERGY FOR SUSTAINABILITY

Department of Tourism has renewed its strategic understanding with Department of Forest & Environment to enhance Odisha's ecotourism experience.

Tourism and Forest & Environment Departments of Govt. of Odisha have renewed their Understanding, first signed in March 2017. The objective is to tap and promote the state's ecotourism potential – thus creating alternative employment opportunities for local community. The key aspects of the understanding are:

- To jointly develop and market packages, experiences and itineraries
- To conduct collaborative research on ecotourism – including community tourism, outdoor recreation, wildlife tourism, etc.
- To work to develop zonal tourism masterplans for protected areas complying with the Eco Sensitive Zone Notifications & Guidelines of MoEFCC, Govt. of India
- To collaboratively develop necessary tourism infrastructure in the Tourism Zones of Protected Areas



Articulating the strategic agenda of Odisha Tourism, Principal Secretary Tourism, Shri. Vishal Dev, IAS said, "The highly successful collaborative teamwork of the Tourism and Forest & Environment Departments today enters its second phase, in which we jointly strive to double the capacity of Ecotour Odisha accommodations to 600, while enhancing the tourist experience and aesthetics through infrastructure and skill upgrade."



AKSHITA BHANJ DEO

MIRRORING A BRAND

Arguably, the most potent brand ambassadors of a destination are its people. Ms. Akshita Bhanj Deo, Director at Belgadia House of Mayurbhanj, presents a youthful vision for brand Odisha and calls upon the world to experience India's best-kept secret.

There is a saying in Odisha, "we are a land of twelve months and thirteen festivals". We are a community that celebrates and holds gratitude for the abundance this land has gifted us. Over the past year, having lived in Mayurbhanj and observed the turbulent times being faced by the nation and state, the word that emerges from the depths and expanse of Odisha is 'resilience'.

Odias for eons have been warriors, sea-faring traders, artists, and most of all explorers. We have an unending curiosity for the world and love to celebrate with gratitude all its nature and bounty. As Odisha Tourism rolls out its juggernaut plans to collaborate with different departments and sectors keeping social equity and impact in mind, what makes me smile is knowing that we are giving our youth a chance to be part of a revolution keeping the new Odisha in mind, one where social agency and entrepreneurship are paramount and we can together change the perception of our state and infuse it with innovation, technology, and sustainability.

We are a community rooted in our traditions and culture, who have always emerged stronger in the face of crisis. We do this knowing that we are descendants of an ancient empire that has its influence spread over vast areas of Asia and the world. Whether that be from

our cuisine, festivals, dress, languages, art forms, etc., it was a land even Ashoka, one of the greatest Kings of India tried to conquer and failed - as we Odias only march to the beat of our own drum! We carve our own way where there is none, we are the traveller's paradise for the one who takes the path less travelled.

It is time for us to take immense pride in our unique and powerful culture and use tourism as a means to invite the world to join us in celebrating Odisha and do our part to take

their roots here to come and invest in Odisha by travel and I promise you will leave with an intimate connection to your home and community like never before. We find ourselves, by rediscovering our roots, home, and soil.

The time has come for Odisha to take its rightful place on the national stage and be a global player in hospitality. With our generation living in a world that is so hyperconnected and assimilated with very little left to the imagination, let 2021 be the year of Odisha, whose brand of



our state to achieve even greater heights. There are few things more patriotic than to contribute to your state's growth by traveling through it, rediscovering your own roots and origins. I urge all the people who have

hyper-local authenticity is synonymous with discovery and exploration. For the first time in centuries we are inviting the world to uncover India's best-kept secret - and I hope you will be a part of it!



DR. SUNIL PATNAIK

CULTURAL CONNECT

The interplay of faith and commerce has always been a fascinating realm for scholars and discerning observers. Historian and archaeologist Dr. Sunil Patnaik's observations on the historical linkages between Odisha and Southeast Asia make for interesting reading.

TARA AS SAVIOR GODDESS

The spread of Indian cultural elements in various parts of Asia reveals the extensive strong connectivity that existed in the historical period. At least, from the beginning of Common Era, we have good evidence of the spread of Indian cultural and religious influences to Southeast Asia, first Buddhism and from fourth or fifth centuries, Brahmanical-Hinduism. There is evidence of an increasing use of Indian Hindu and Buddhist religious ideas, monuments and icons and Indian scripts and languages.

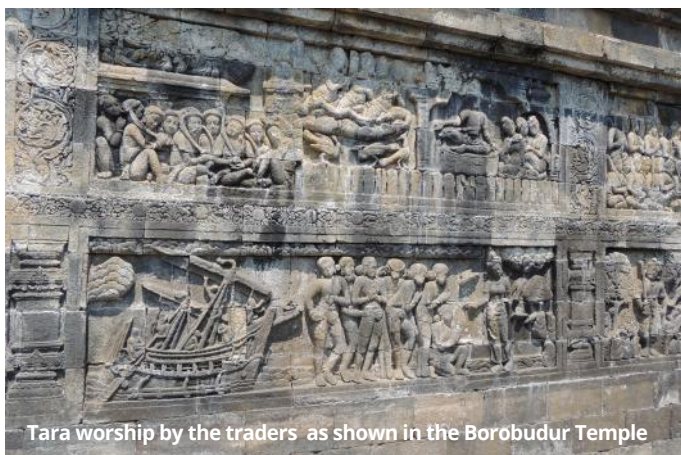
The connection between Buddhism and trade, including that to Southeast Asia is not casual. Rather, we can see in the Early Common Era, a mutually supportive system. **At the ideological level, Buddhism encouraged lay devotees to accumulate wealth by trade. At the social level donations**

to Buddhist monasteries gave status to traders, and at the professional level Buddhist monasteries were repositories of knowledge and essential skills such as writing. Not all traders were Buddhist, though many wealthy ones were. Sea travel was the fastest, most economical and safest way to move people and goods in the ancient world.

The existence of monasteries near major commercial nodes and trading routes, the establishment of trade networks may have facilitated the spread of Buddhism as well as ensured its support by merchant communities. Buddhist sites in the Western Deccan, the Konkan coast, West Bengal, Andhra Pradesh, Odisha, and Tamil Nadu were strategically located in the vicinity of ports along the trade routes connecting the mainland to Sri Lanka and further afield to Southeast Asia.

Buddhist vestiges, however scant, have been found in such remote insular locations as the Maldives Islands in the Indian Ocean and Socotra in the western Arabian Sea.

The widespread presence of maritime scenes of navigation and shipwreck, depicting sea travel in its political, spiritual, and economic ramifications in sites located on / near the coasts or along trading routes in South and Southeast Asia suggests that those scenes, rather than being purely symbolic and metaphysical representations of spiritual dangers, were linked to an actual imaginary. This, in turn, testifies to the increasing popularity of maritime travel in Buddhist communities from the 6th century CE onwards. The practice of Buddha dharma could be clearly understood from the **Astamahabhaya Tara images of Ratnagiri**. There are altogether three Astamahabhaya Tara images (two from Ratnagiri and one from Shergada) are reported being depicted as astamahabhaya and the date ranges from 8th to 11th century CE revered as saviour deity in eastern India whereas in western Indian caves Avalokitesvara is revered as the saviour deity from the eight perils. Sadharmapundarika Sutra mentions Avalokitasvara as the saviour. It makes us to appreciate that the practice of Buddha dharma drew not just from contemporary and earlier textual traditions but also from the requirements of communities which provided patronage to the Samgha.



Tara worship by the traders as shown in the Borobudur Temple

ASTAMAHABHAYA TARA

Tara's images are reported from Ratnagiri in large numbers of about 15 independent images. All are seated in lalita pose holding a nilotpala in left hand and varada pose in right hand. More images are also found from Ayodhya, Solampur, Kundereswara, Banaswarnasi, and Boudh. The plastic treatment and the expression of the face of images are well maintained. Smiling face, clad with sari and decked with Jewels. The dating of the images is 10th century CE. to 12th century CE. The Ratnagiri images are displayed artistically superb than other Taras.

At Ratnagiri, we have two Astamahabhaya Tara images. The first and the earliest image, still at the site in the Museum depicts the two armed Tara standing in a slightly flexed pose on a Visvapadma. Her right hand, partially damaged, is lowered in varada where it is framed by a lotus rising from visvapadma, which blossoms opposite her face. Her exquisitely modelled face with down cast eyes, is softly illuminated from within by an aura of spiritual warmth and compassion. The Astamahabhayas or eight great perils are carved on the back-slab, four on either side super one above the other. The persons in danger are depicted praying fervently to Tara for succour. Tara is rendered in miniature form above each peril coming to the rescue. In each case, she is seated in Vajraprayanka on Visvapadma. Beginning at the top on proper right, where the back-slab is partly broken and the image of Tara is mostly obliterated. The perils are (1) Sarpa-bhaya or attack of serpent (2) Simha-bhaya or attack of a lion (3) Taskara-bhaya or attack of robber having bow-arrow (4) Jalarnava-bhaya or peril from a boat sinking at sea. Beginning on the top left the remaining perils are (5) Hasti-bhaya or attack of a wild elephant (6) Pagala-bhaya i.e. a fettered man being menaced by an official brandishing a sword (7) Pisha-bhaya or attack of a terrifying goblin and (8) Angi-bhaya or being threatened by fire. Stylistically the image can be dated to late 8th century CE.

Though there are very few surviving examples in Odisha, they vary in date from the 8th to 12th century CE. **Tara's sustained popularity may be due to the fact that she was particularly esteemed by the trading class and pilgrims, who**

as noted by M.Ghosh, "used to undertake long journeys through forests, rivers, oceans and unknown towns and who were to reckon with most of these perils". This is also supported by inscripational evidence.

There are many other images found scattered in the Buddhist sites of Odisha. Multiplicity Buddhist gods become order of the day when India was in contact with other countries for trade and commerce. **Some images become trans-oceanic – like Tara, Vaisravana, Avalokitesvara etc.**



Astamahabhaya Tara, Ratnagiri

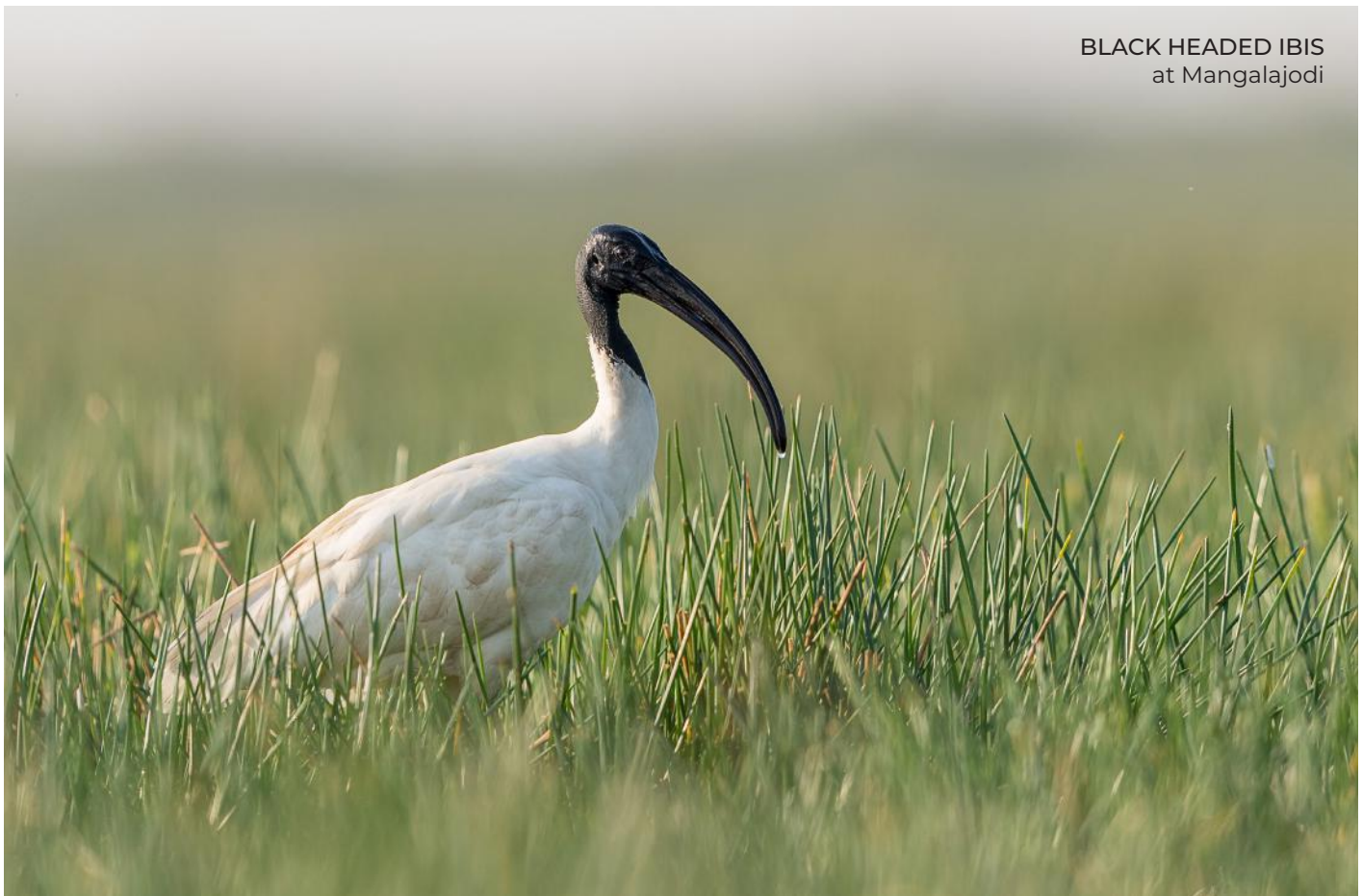
Vaisravan is a god of wealth particularly for merchants and traders as the Buddhist monks were great travellers. We had our trans-oceanic trade with China, Indonesia, Sri Lanka, Cambodia and in-land trade contact with North-Western India for practical purpose Buddhist images were grown as found from the Odishan Buddhist Monasteries of Ratnagiri, Udaygiri and Lalitagiri.

ABOUT ODISHA TOURISM

Established as Department of Tourism & Culture in 1973, the Department of Tourism (DoT) strives to:

1. Promote diverse and sustainable tourism with a view to enhancing the national and global visibility and favourability of Odisha as a prime tourist destination
2. Create employment opportunities to bring socio-economic benefits to the community and boosting community participation in tourism
3. Preserve, enrich and promote Odisha's unique cultural heritage and ecological diversity through sustainable development

Apart from undertaking various initiatives for the development of tourism infrastructure and services in the state under the Odisha Tourism Policy 2016, DoT aims to establish its brand globally and enhance the favourability of Odisha as a prime tourist destination through the twin strategies of event based promotion and destination experience promotion, through innovative advertising and multimedia based outreach to national and global markets.



BLACK HEADED IBIS
at Mangalajodi

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