

ODISHA UNRAVELLED



ODISHA
INDIA'S BEST KEPT SECRET.

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A Quarterly Newsletter by Department of Tourism, Government of Odisha



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Picture Courtesy- Shubhashis Nayak

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Government of Odisha*



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FOREWORD



Smt. Pravati Parida

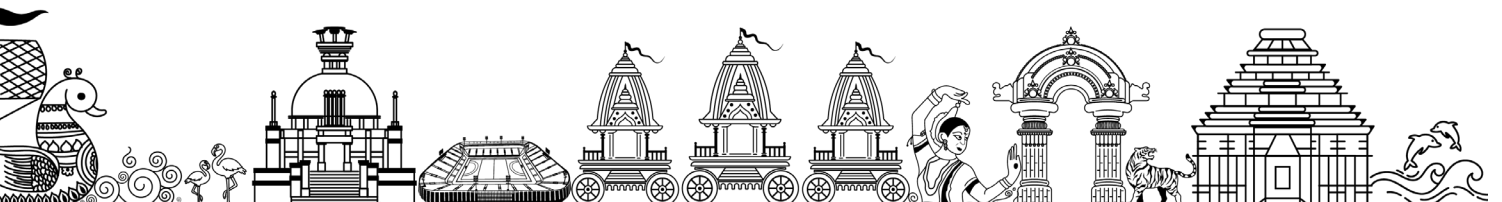
*Hon'ble Deputy Chief Minister, Minister for
Women and Child Development, Mission Shakti and Tourism*

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

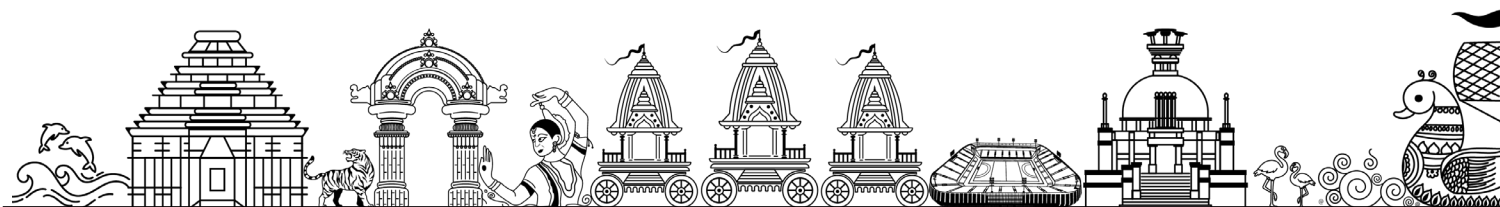


Shri Balwant Singh, IAS

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.





The 28th ITTF-ATTU Asian Table Tennis Team Championships 2025 not only witnessed high-voltage sporting action in Odisha but also became a platform for cultural exchange and tourism promotion. As part of a specially curated familiarisation programme by the Department of Tourism, members of the national table tennis teams from China, Sri Lanka, Oman and Nepal embarked on a journey across some of the State's most iconic destinations, discovering Odisha's unique blend of history, spirituality, nature and living heritage.

The cultural exploration began at the serene Dhau Shanti Stupa, a global symbol of peace and non-violence. Set against the historic Dhau Hills, the site, associated with Emperor Ashoka's transformation after the Kalinga War, offered the visiting athletes a reflective pause from competitive intensity.



Continuing the journey into Odisha's natural heritage, the teams visited Nandankanan Zoological Park, renowned for its conservation-driven approach and natural enclosures. Interacting with the park's rich biodiversity, including rare and endangered species, the players gained insight into Odisha's commitment to wildlife protection and sustainable tourism.

A defining moment of the itinerary was the visit to the majestic Konark Sun Temple, a UNESCO World Heritage Site and an architectural marvel of the 13th century. The intricately carved stone chariot of the Sun God left the visitors awestruck, offering them a deeper understanding of India's ancient scientific knowledge, artistic excellence and spiritual philosophy. Complementing this experience was a visit to the IOCL Interpretation Centre, where interactive exhibits highlighted the linkage between heritage conservation, sustainability and modern innovation.

The immersion continued at Raghurajpur Artisan Village, a living crafts village celebrated for its Pattachitra paintings, palm-leaf engravings and traditional art forms. Engaging directly with local artisans, the international players witnessed centuries-old artistic traditions thriving in contemporary times. These intimate interactions offered a powerful example of how culture, livelihood and tourism coexist in Odisha.

The itinerary also showcased Odisha's pristine coastline through a visit to the State's Blue Flag Beach at Puri. Known for its clean environment, safety standards and eco-friendly facilities, the beach highlighted Odisha's focus on responsible and inclusive coastal tourism, providing a refreshing and relaxed experience for the visiting teams. The journey concluded at Satapada (Chilika Lake), on the edge of Asia's largest brackish water lagoon. A tranquil boat ride through Chilika and sightings of the iconic Irrawaddy dolphins offered a memorable encounter with nature, leaving the visitors with lasting impressions of Odisha's ecological richness. Together, these visits enabled the visiting teams to experience Odisha's multiple destinations, spanning spiritual, cultural, ecological and contemporary dimensions, offering a well-rounded perspective of the State's diverse tourism landscape beyond the championship venue. From heritage monuments and living craft traditions to wildlife landscapes and sustainable coastal destinations, the journey offered a holistic perspective of the State's tourism offerings.



Odisha Parab, the flagship cultural and tourism outreach initiative of the Department of Tourism, Government of Odisha, marked its maiden edition in Bengaluru

as an immersive platform that combined cultural celebration, tourism promotion, diaspora engagement and institutional collaboration, presenting Odisha as a



from 15 to 17 November 2025 at The LaLIT Ashok, Bengaluru. Structured as a carefully sequenced, multi-day programme, Odisha Parab Bengaluru unfolded

State defined by heritage, creativity and contemporary relevance.



DAY ONE: INAUGURATION, DIASPORA ENGAGEMENT AND CULTURAL SHOWCASE

15 November 2025 marked the formal opening of Odisha Parab Bengaluru. The day commenced with the virtual inauguration of the Eco Retreat at Satkosia, Bhitarkanika, Daringbadi, Hirakud, Sonapur and Putsil, reflecting Odisha's growing focus on experiential and sustainable tourism. This was followed by the inauguration of the exhibition by Smt. Pravati Parida, Hon'ble Deputy Chief Minister of Odisha along with the senior dignitaries, officially opening the craft, handloom, tourism and culinary pavilions to the public.



The afternoon featured a dedicated Diaspora Meet, bringing together members of the Odia community residing in Bengaluru. The session was addressed by Smt. Pravati Parida, Hon'ble Deputy Chief Minister of Odisha, Smt. Anu Garg, then Development Commissioner-cum-Additional Chief Secretary, Government of Odisha, along with senior officials of the Department. The interaction reaffirmed the vital role of the diaspora as cultural ambassadors of the State and provided a platform for meaningful dialogue and exchange of perspectives, thereby strengthening emotional and cultural bonds between Odisha and its diaspora.



The evening witnessed the grand inauguration of Odisha Parab. Senior dignitaries from Odisha and Karnataka graced the occasion, including Shri H.K. Patil, Hon'ble Minister for Law, Parliamentary Affairs, Legislation, and Tourism, Government of Karnataka; Shri Balwant Singh, Commissioner-cum-Secretary, Department of Tourism, Government of Odisha; Shri Bijay Ketan Upadhyaya, Secretary, Odia Language, Literature & Culture Department and Shri Deepankar Mohapatra, Director, Department of Tourism, Government of Odisha. The inauguration was followed by a cultural programme showcasing Odisha's classical and folk traditions, setting the tone for the days ahead and concluding with a networking dinner.

DAY THREE: INSTITUTIONAL ENGAGEMENT, G2B MEETINGS AND TOURISM ROADSHOW

The final day, 17 November 2025, focused on structured stakeholder engagement and institutional collaboration. The day began with Government-to-Business (G2B) meetings, providing a platform for dialogue between the Department of Tourism and industry representatives from tourism, hospitality and allied sectors. These interactions explored opportunities for collaboration in destination development, hospitality infrastructure and tourism promotion.

This was followed by Business-to-Business (B2B) meetings, facilitating direct engagement between Odisha-based tourism stakeholders and Karnataka's travel trade, tour operators and hospitality players. The interactions enabled the exchange of ideas, partnership opportunities and market insights.

The programme culminated with the Odisha Tourism Roadshow, featuring a detailed presentation on Odisha's tourism vision and offerings. Addressed by senior officials and industry experts, including Shri Balwant Singh, the roadshow positioned Odisha as a high-potential destination for experiential, sustainable and investment-ready tourism.



A STRATEGIC CULTURAL AND TOURISM OUTREACH

Across three days, Odisha Parab Bengaluru successfully integrated culture, tourism, diaspora engagement and institutional outreach into a cohesive programme flow. The event witnessed strong participation from Bengalureans, tourism professionals, cultural enthusiasts and the Odia diaspora.



More than a cultural festival, Odisha Parab Bengaluru emerged as a strategic outreach platform, strengthening inter-state cultural ties, expanding tourism visibility and reinforcing Odisha's position as a destination that offers depth, diversity and meaningful experiences beyond conventional travel narratives.



MAHANADI BOITA RACE 2025

CELEBRATING ODISHA'S ENDURING MARITIME LEGACY

The timeless maritime spirit of Odisha came alive on the waters of the Mahanadi as the Mahanadi Boita Race 2025 was ceremonially flagged off at Cuttack, transforming the riverfront into a vibrant arena of sport, culture and heritage. Organised by the Department of Tourism, in collaboration with the District Administration, Cuttack, the two-day event formed a key highlight of the iconic Bali Yatra celebrations, reaffirming the seas and its proud nautical traditions.

The race was inaugurated by Smt. Pravati Parida, Hon'ble Deputy Chief Minister of Odisha, along the scenic stretch between Gadagadia Ghata and the Silver City Boat Club. As rhythmic drumbeats echoed across the river and cheering crowds lined the banks, the Mahanadi once again became a living symbol of Odisha's maritime past and contemporary cultural vibrancy.

Parida, Hon'ble Deputy Chief Minister of Odisha, along and the Silver City Boat Club. As rhythmic drumbeats echoed across the river and cheering crowds lined the banks, the Mahanadi once again became a living symbol of Odisha's maritime past and contemporary cultural vibrancy.

A TRIBUTE TO THE SADHABA LEGACY

Rooted deeply in history, the Mahanadi Boita Race draws inspiration from the legendary Sadhabas, the ancient maritime traders of Odisha, who sailed from the Mahanadi and other riverine routes to distant lands such as Bali, Java, Sumatra and Sri Lanka. These voyages laid the foundation for Odisha's maritime trade networks and cultural



exchanges across Southeast Asia. By integrating the boat race into Bali Yatra, the event serves as a symbolic tribute to this legacy of courage, enterprise and global connectivity.

SPORT, SPECTACLE AND COMPETITION ON WATER

Following the ceremonial flag-off, spectators were treated to an exhilarating Fly Boat Show, where high-speed manoeuvres and precision formations captivated audiences and added a contemporary sporting dimension to the celebrations. The competitive boat race tournament that followed featured multiple race formats of 1,000 metres, 500 metres and 200 metres, testing the endurance, coordination and teamwork of the participating crews.



A total of 15 teams, comprising 10 men's teams and 5 women's teams from across India took part in the tournament. Teams representing Bihar, Delhi, Haryana, Jharkhand, Punjab, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh, Chhattisgarh and Odisha turned the Mahanadi into a national sporting arena, reflecting unity, diversity and competitive spirit on the river waters.



LEADERSHIP PRESENCE AND VISION

Addressing the gathering, Smt. Pravati Parida described the Mahanadi Boita Race as more than a sporting event, emphasising its cultural significance and historical resonance. She highlighted how the race bridges Odisha's glorious maritime past with the aspirations of a modern, confident and youth-driven State.



CULTURE-LED TOURISM ON THE RIVERFRONT

Beyond competition, the Mahanadi Boita Race stands as a powerful example of how Odisha integrates cultural heritage with experiential tourism. By animating the riverfront with sport, tradition and public participation, the event enhanced the visitor experience during Bali Yatra while reinforcing the Mahanadi's role as a cultural and economic lifeline of the region.



As oars sliced through the river and boats raced toward the finish line, the Mahanadi Boita Race 2025 emerged as a celebration of continuity, where ancient maritime traditions find renewed expression through contemporary sporting formats. The event not only honoured Odisha's seafaring ancestors but also positioned the State's rivers as dynamic spaces for cultural tourism, community engagement and national sporting exchange.



Odisha Tourism participated in the India International Travel Mart (IITM) Pune, held from 27th to 29th November 2025, reaffirming its commitment to strengthening market outreach and deepening engagement with travel trade stakeholders in western India. The event provided an important platform to promote Odisha as a diverse, year-round destination and to build strategic connections with tour operators, travel agents, destination management companies and hospitality partners.

The Odisha Tourism pavilion emerged as a key attraction at the exhibition, offering visitors a comprehensive overview of the State's rich tourism portfolio. From the golden beaches of Puri and the architectural brilliance of Konark to the serene landscapes of Chilika and the



biodiversity hotspots of Bhitarkanika and Similipal, the showcase highlighted Odisha's unique blend of culture, nature, spirituality and adventure. Special emphasis was also placed on promoting the State's Buddhist circuit, temple tourism and emerging experiential offerings. Participation at IITM Pune enabled meaningful business interactions and networking opportunities, allowing Odisha Tourism officials to engage directly with industry professionals and explore avenues for collaboration. The engagement focused on positioning Odisha as a preferred destination for leisure travel, spiritual journeys, eco-tourism and curated experiences for domestic travellers.

A key highlight of the participation was the promotion of Odisha's sustainable tourism initiatives, including eco-retreats, community-based tourism models, and

responsible travel practices designed to preserve the



State's natural and cultural assets. The pavilion also showcased interpretation-led experiences, nature trails and eco-tourism camps that reflect Odisha's commitment to balancing tourism growth with environmental conservation.

The enthusiastic response from visitors and trade partners reaffirmed growing interest in Odisha as an emerging tourism destination. Insights gathered during the event will support future promotional strategies and partnerships aimed at enhancing tourist inflow and strengthening the State's presence in key source markets.

Through its participation at IITM Pune, Odisha Tourism continues to advance its vision of promoting the State as a culturally vibrant, environmentally responsible and



globally competitive destination, inviting travellers to explore its timeless heritage, living traditions and pristine landscapes.

DEPARTMENT OF TOURISM SIGNS MOU WITH ODISHA FIRE & EMERGENCY SERVICE TO STRENGTHENING SAFETY AND SKILLS IN ADVENTURE TOURISM

DEPARTMENT OF TOURISM SIGNS MOU WITH ODISHA FIRE & EMERGENCY SERVICE



BUILDING A SAFER ADVENTURE TOURISM ECOSYSTEM

In a significant move towards strengthening safety, professionalism and skill development in adventure tourism, the Department of Tourism, Government of Odisha, signed a strategic Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the Odisha Fire & Emergency Service (OFES) on 15 December 2025 at the Odisha State Watermanship and Lifeguard Institute (OSWALI), Konark. The agreement marks a major milestone in Odisha's efforts to position itself as a leading and responsible adventure tourism destination in India.

The MoU signing ceremony was held in the august presence of Shri Mohan Charan Majhi, Hon'ble Chief Minister of Odisha; Smt. Pravati Parida, Hon'ble Deputy Chief Minister of Odisha; Shri Balwant Singh, Commissioner-cum-Secretary, Department of Tourism; and Shri Umashankar Dash, DIG, Home Guards and Fire Services, along with senior officials from both the Department of Tourism and Odisha Fire & Emergency Service.

STRUCTURED TRAINING, CERTIFICATION AND EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES

A key component of the MoU is the development of structured training programmes offering nationally recognised certifications in watermanship, lifeguarding, rescue operations and adventure tourism management. These programmes are expected to create significant opportunities for skill development, employment and entrepreneurship, particularly for Odisha's youth and coastal communities.

By institutionalising professional training and certification, the initiative directly contributes to the State's broader objectives of sustainable livelihood generation and community empowerment, while simultaneously enhancing visitor confidence in adventure tourism activities.

STRENGTHENING REGULATION, MONITORING AND EMERGENCY RESPONSE

The MoU also envisages the establishment of a dedicated Adventure Tourism Cell at OSWALI, joint infrastructure assessments for safety towers and equipment and the deployment of certified lifeguards at key adventure tourism sites. Continuous safety monitoring, regular audits, surprise inspections and strict adherence to Bureau of Indian Standards (BIS) and international safety norms will form the backbone of the regulatory framework.

In addition, the collaboration will strengthen emergency response systems through onsite supervision, preparedness drills and coordinated safety management during adventure tourism operations, ensuring rapid and effective response in critical situations.

VISION-ALIGNED TOURISM DEVELOPMENT

Addressing the occasion, Smt. Pravati Parida underscored that the collaboration aligns closely with the State's Viksit Odisha 2036 vision, aimed at building a modern, aspirational and globally competitive Odisha. She highlighted that adventure tourism, when supported by strong safety frameworks and skilled manpower, has the potential to drive tourism-led economic growth while ensuring community participation and sustainability.

TOWARDS A FUTURE-READY ADVENTURE TOURISM DESTINATION

The MoU between the Department of Tourism and OSWALI reflects the Government of Odisha's commitment to responsible, safe and skill-driven tourism development. As the State continues to diversify its adventure tourism offerings, from water sports, scuba diving and parasailing to trekking and eco-adventure experiences, this partnership ensures that safety, professionalism and quality remain non-negotiable. By institutionalising training, strengthening regulation and embedding safety into every layer of adventure tourism operations, the collaboration marks a progressive step towards building a future-ready, inclusive and globally competitive adventure tourism ecosystem, reinforcing Odisha's position as an emerging leader in India's experiential and adventure tourism landscape.





Each winter, as the sea breeze drifts inland from the Bay of Bengal and dusk settles over the stone chariot of the Sun God, Konark transforms into one of India's most evocative cultural stages. Held annually against the majestic backdrop of the Konark Sun Temple, the Konark Festival is not merely a celebration of classical dance. It becomes a dialogue between living art and timeless architecture, between movement and stone and between the present moment and a civilisational past that continues to inspire.



The 36th Konark Festival, held from 1st to 5th December 2025, reaffirmed this legacy with five evenings of classical brilliance at the Open-Air Auditorium, Konark. Organised by the Department of Tourism in association with the Odisha Sangeet Natak Akademi and the Odisha Tourism Development Corporation, the festival has over decades, grown into one of the country's most prestigious platforms for India's classical performing arts. Framed by the illuminated contours of the Sun Temple, the venue offers a setting unmatched anywhere else in the country, where every performance unfolds in quiet reverence to history.

A STAGE SHAPED BY HERITAGE

What sets the Konark Festival apart is its inseparable bond with place. The Sun Temple, conceived in the 13th century as a colossal stone chariot is itself a masterpiece of rhythm, proportion and cosmic symbolism. Against this backdrop, classical dance forms which is rooted in geometry, storytelling and spiritual expression find their most natural resonance. As night falls, the interplay of light, music and movement transforms the monument into a silent yet powerful participant in the festival.

This unique convergence has made the 36th Konark Festival a pilgrimage of sorts for dancers, gurus, scholars and discerning audiences, who return year after year to witness classical traditions performed in their most authentic and elevated form.

CELEBRATING THE DIVERSITY OF CLASSICAL DANCE

The Konark Festival is renowned for its carefully curated programme that brings together leading exponents of India's classical dance traditions. Over multiple evenings, audiences were treated to performances spanning Odissi, Bharatanatyam, Kathak, Kuchipudi, Manipuri and Kathakali. Each presentation reflected the depth of its respective gharana and lineage, while also engaging with contemporary sensibilities.

Odissi, the classical dance form that originated in Odisha, naturally occupied a place of prominence with performances exploring devotion, rhythm, sculpture and lyrical grace. Alongside it, Bharatanatyam offered architectural precision and spiritual intensity; Kathak brought fluidity, narrative and rhythmic virtuosity; Kuchipudi blended grace with theatrical vitality; Manipuri evoked serenity and devotion; and Kathakali commanded attention with its powerful visual language and dramatic expression.

Together, these forms created a panoramic view of India's classical heritage, reinforcing the festival's role as a national cultural platform rather than a regional showcase.

A PLATFORM FOR LEGACY AND CONTINUITY

Over the years, the Konark Festival has played a critical role in preserving and promoting India's intangible cultural heritage. By providing a prestigious platform for senior gurus, established institutions and accomplished ensembles, it reinforced the importance of rigour, lineage and artistic discipline. At the same time, the festival remained open to new interpretations and choreographic explorations that respected classical frameworks while speaking to modern audiences.

For young dancers and students, witnessing performances at Konark was both an education and an aspiration, a reminder of the standards that classical arts demand and the heights they can reach.

DISTINGUISHED PRESENCE AND INAUGURAL DIGNITARIES

The 36th Konark Festival was inaugurated on 1st December 2025 by Shri Mohan Charan Majhi, Hon'ble Chief Minister of Odisha, in the august presence of Smt. Pravati Parida, Hon'ble Deputy Chief Minister of Odisha, along with other senior Ministers and senior officials of the State

Government. The ceremonial lighting of the lamp marked the formal opening of Odisha's cultural season, lending dignity and gravitas to the commencement of the festival.

The concluding evening on 5th December 2025 was graced by His Excellency Dr. Hari Babu Kambhampati, Hon'ble Governor of Odisha, along with other senior dignitaries, further underscoring the festival's national stature and cultural significance.

Konark Festival: A Pillar of Odisha's Cultural Tourism Identity

From a tourism perspective, the Konark Festival exemplifies how culture can anchor destination identity. It draws cultural travellers, scholars, photographers and global audiences to Odisha during the winter season, complementing visits to nearby heritage destinations such as Puri and Bhubaneswar.

More than an event, the Konark Festival has become a symbol of Odisha's cultural confidence, demonstrating how heritage, when curated with integrity and vision, can remain vibrant and relevant across generations.



WHERE TRADITION COMES ALIVE

As the final notes fade into the night and the dancers take their bows, the Sun Temple stands unchanged, silent, monumental, eternal. Yet for those who have witnessed the Konark Festival, it is impossible to see the monument as stone alone. The rhythms linger, the stories echo and the space remains charged with artistic memory.

In Konark, dance does not merely perform before history, it becomes part of it.



The 15th International Sand Art Festival unfolded from 1st to 5th December 2025 at the pristine Chandrabhaga Beach, adding a striking contemporary dimension to Odisha's cultural season. Organised by the Department of Tourism alongside the 36th Konark Festival, the Sand Art Festival transformed the shoreline into a vibrant open-air gallery, where imagination met the elements and art emerged from sand and sea.



The festival was inaugurated on 1st December 2025 by Shri Mohan Charan Majhi, Hon'ble Chief Minister of Odisha, in the august presence of Smt. Pravati Parida, Hon'ble Deputy Chief Minister of Odisha, along with other senior Ministers and senior officials of the State Government. The ceremonial ribbon cutting marked the commencement of Odisha's winter cultural calendar, setting the tone for five days of artistic celebration along the coast.

A GLOBAL CANVAS ON THE COAST

Renowned as one of India's most distinctive beach-based art events, the 15th International Sand Art Festival brought together 136 artists from across India, including 40 women and 96 men, alongside five international sand artists from Spain, Russia, Japan, Portugal and Sri Lanka. Working against the backdrop of rolling waves and golden sands, the artists created large-scale sculptures that blended technical mastery with powerful storytelling.

Each sculpture reflected themes of national relevance, social awareness, sustainability and cultural identity, turning Chandrabhaga Beach into a living narrative space. From intricate figurative works to monumental symbolic forms, the festival demonstrated how ephemeral art can leave lasting impressions.

ART BEYOND BOUNDARIES

What distinguishes the Sand Art Festival is its accessibility. Unlike conventional galleries, the beach setting invites spontaneous engagement, visitors witness the creative process unfold in real time, interact with artists and experience art as part of the natural landscape. As tides rise and fall, the sculptures stand as temporary yet powerful reminders of creativity's dialogue with nature.

A PLATFORM FOR CULTURAL EXCHANGE

Over the years, the International Sand Art Festival has evolved into a platform for global artistic exchange. The participation of international artists added cross-cultural perspectives, reinforcing Odisha's growing reputation as a destination that embraces both tradition and contemporary expression. For local and national artists alike, the festival provided an opportunity to showcase innovation, collaborate across borders and engage with diverse audiences.

STRENGTHENING ODISHA'S TOURISM IDENTITY

From a tourism perspective, the Sand Art Festival plays a vital role in positioning Odisha as a culturally vibrant coastal destination. Held at the start of the peak tourist season, it attracts domestic and international visitors, photographers, cultural enthusiasts and families, complementing visits to Konark, Puri and Bhubaneswar.



WHERE ART MEETS THE ELEMENTS

As the sun set each evening and the sea breeze swept across Chandrabhaga Beach, the sand sculptures stood illuminated, fragile yet commanding. Though destined to return to the earth, their impact endured in memory and image.

The 15th International Sand Art Festival once again affirmed Odisha's ability to transform natural landscapes into cultural spaces, where art, environment and community come together and where even the most transient creations leave an indelible mark on the cultural imagination.



ODISHA TOURISM SHOWCASES EXCELLENCE AT IITM HYDERABAD 2025

Odisha Tourism participated in the India International Travel Mart (IITM) Hyderabad, held from 4th to 6th December 2025 at the HITEC Exhibition Center. The three-day event brought together leading stakeholders from across the tourism ecosystem, including state tourism boards, international destinations, travel operators, hospitality brands, airlines and industry associations, creating a vibrant platform for collaboration and market outreach.

The Odisha Tourism pavilion attracted significant attention from travel trade professionals, tour operators and visitors, offering an immersive glimpse into the State's diverse tourism offerings, from pristine beaches



and rich wildlife to vibrant culture, heritage circuits and emerging eco-tourism experiences. The participation reaffirmed Odisha's commitment to strengthening its presence in key domestic markets and fostering new partnerships to drive tourism growth.

A highlight of the event was the recognition of Odisha Tourism with the "Best Wildlife Conservation Effort in India" award, acknowledging the State's exemplary initiatives in protecting and promoting its unique ecological heritage. Odisha continues to set national benchmarks through sustained conservation strategies, community participation and responsible tourism development across its diverse landscapes.

The State's globally significant habitats, including Similipal National Park, Bhitarkanika National Park and Satkosia Tiger Reserve, stand as shining examples of conservation integrated with sustainable visitor



experiences. Odisha's pioneering efforts in protecting the Olive Ridley sea turtle nesting sites at Gahirmatha and Rushikulya have earned worldwide recognition and reinforced its reputation as a leader in wildlife stewardship.

In addition to conservation, Odisha Tourism's initiatives such as eco-retreats, low-impact nature circuits, interpretation centres, guided nature trails and community-led eco-tourism models were showcased, highlighting the State's balanced approach to tourism development, where economic opportunities for local communities go hand in hand with environmental preservation.



IITM Hyderabad also provided a valuable opportunity for engagement with key industry stakeholders, facilitating business discussions, networking and promotion of Odisha as a year-round destination for leisure, spiritual, cultural and nature-based travel.



In December, the Government of Odisha took a significant step towards strengthening institutional capacity and professionalising tourism administration by inducting 18 new officers into the Odisha Tourism Service (OTS) cadre. This strategic augmentation of human resources marked an important milestone in supporting Odisha's rapidly expanding and increasingly diversified tourism ecosystem.

The induction of dedicated OTS officers enabled sharper focus on destination development, project planning and effective governance at both the State and district levels. As tourism initiatives expanded beyond promotion to include infrastructure creation, sustainability and investment facilitation, the strengthened cadre played a crucial role in translating policy intent into on-ground outcomes through improved coordination and execution.



The expanded OTS cadre assumed responsibility across key areas such as destination planning and management, project implementation and monitoring, inter-departmental convergence and stakeholder engagement. By positioning trained officers within the administrative framework, the State improved service delivery, streamlined coordination with allied departments and strengthened engagement with local communities and private sector partners.

Aligned with the Think India, Think Odisha, the initiative reinforced the State's commitment to evidence-based planning, innovation and outcome-driven governance. The enhanced cadre supported data-led decision-making, adoption of best practices and



promotion of responsible and sustainable tourism across destinations, contributing to improved visitor experiences and quality standards.

The induction of the new OTS officers also served as a key enabler in advancing Vision 2036 and Vision 2047, which envision Odisha emerging as a leading national and global tourism destination. These long-term visions emphasise sustainability, inclusivity, cultural authenticity and high-quality tourism experiences, objectives that were strengthened through investment in skilled leadership and institutional capacity.

By investing in human capital within the Odisha Tourism Service, Odisha laid a strong foundation for tourism-led economic growth, employment generation and balanced regional development. The induction of 18 new OTS officers in December thus represented not merely an administrative expansion, but a strategic step towards building a professional, accountable and future-ready tourism governance system for the State.





KULDIHA

A HIDDEN PARADISE FOR NATURE LOVERS

Often overshadowed by the better-known Similipal Tiger Reserve, Kuldiha Wildlife Sanctuary remains one of those rare places where nature still feels untouched and time moves at its own pace.

Located at the junction of Balasore, Mayurbhanj, and Keonjhar districts, Kuldiha was declared a sanctuary in 1984 for its rich biodiversity and geological significance. It forms part of a larger mega habitat that connects to Similipal, creating an unbroken expanse of forest. The sanctuary covers three major Reserved Forests – Kuldiha, Tenda, and Devgiri – along with adjoining revenue forests that together support a thriving ecosystem.

What sets Kuldiha apart is its remarkable birdlife. The forest shares many characteristics with the Western Ghats, making it an ideal refuge for both resident and migratory species. For birders, entering Kuldiha is like stepping into a living orchestra of calls and colours. The Malabar Trogon, with its vivid plumage, flashes through the foliage; the Blue-eared Kingfisher glides



low along shaded streams; and the Indian Pitta, often called the jewel of the forest floor, adds its sharp notes to the forest symphony. The White-rumped Shama sings from hidden perches, while the Speckled Piculet and Bar-winged Flycatcher-shrike reveal themselves to the patient observer.

My first visit to Kuldiha came only in 2023, but since then, it has become a regular stop on my birding calendar. Watching a Crimson Sunbird glow amidst the



gulmohar trees or waiting quietly for a Ruby-cheeked Sunbird to appear from the thickets are moments that keep drawing me back.

A short drive away lies Panchalingeswar, a temple dedicated to Lord Shiva on the slopes of the Nilagiri hills. Known for its serene setting and waterfalls, it is also a rewarding birding spot. The blend of spiritual calm and natural beauty makes it a fitting companion to Kuldiha's wilderness.

Reaching Kuldiha is simple. The nearest railway station is Balasore, about 30 kilometres away, while Bhubaneswar around 185 kilometres from the sanctuary. The journey through villages and forested hills offers a pleasant preview of what awaits inside the sanctuary.

For those planning to stay, the Rissia Nature Camp provides a comfortable base. Managed under the Ecotour Odisha initiative, the camp offers clean, spacious tents and wholesome, home-style meals. Bookings can be made at www.ecotourodisa.com by selecting the Rissia Nature Camp option.

Whether you are a birder, a traveller seeking solitude, or simply someone who enjoys being close to nature, Kuldiha Wildlife Sanctuary offers a quiet yet memorable experience. Each dawn begins with birdsong, and each dusk settles into the calm hum of the forest – a reminder of why places like Kuldiha deserve to be experienced and preserved.

– Contributed by Arijeet Palit



At dawn, as I entered the mist-covered forests of Similipal Biosphere Reserve, I felt like I was stepping into a different world. The hills of Mayurbhanj were wrapped in silence, broken only by the distant roar of a waterfall and the rising calls of birds. What made this moment even more powerful was knowing that I was standing inside one of India's largest protected forest landscapes, spread across nearly 2,750 sq. km in its biosphere reserve zone.

Walking through Similipal, I could sense why it earned its place as a UNESCO Biosphere Reserve. Every turn revealed a new layer of life—towering sal trees, hidden orchids, and the quiet rhythm of an ecosystem untouched by time. My guide pointed out the bright red simul trees, from which Similipal gets its name, and I imagined how magical the forest must look in spring when they bloom together.

When I reached Barehipani Falls, I learned it is India's second-highest waterfall, plunging from a height of about 399 metres. The sound was thunderous, echoing across the valley. At Joranda Falls, the experience shifted—this single-drop waterfall falls from about 150 metres, appearing delicate yet powerful. Hidden within the forest, Sitakunda Falls added a mythological charm, believed by locals to be connected to ancient legends.



Similipal is the only place in the world where these melanistic tigers are found in the wild in significant numbers.

Similipal is home to indigenous communities like the Santhal tribe and Mankidia tribe. Their role is not just cultural but ecological. Their coexistence with nature is perhaps the most sustainable model of conservation.



My stay at Gurguria Nature Camp reflected Odisha's careful eco-tourism model. Managed by the Odisha Forest Department.

After experiencing it firsthand, Similipal is no longer just a forest—it is a critical ecological asset. It protects biodiversity, supports livelihoods, regulates climate, and preserves genetic uniqueness like the black tiger.

As I left Similipal, I carried more than memories—I carried facts, stories, and a deep respect for this landscape. In an era of rapid development, Similipal stands as proof that conservation and progress can coexist. Visit to Similipal is not just to witness beauty—it is to understand its value. And once you do, you don't just admire nature—you begin to respect it.

— Contributed by Subhasandhya Nayak



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