



Goja, a local sweetmeat, arranged for sale

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Puri, Temples and timelessness

WHY GO

If the lotus-eaters of Greek mythology were alive today, they would certainly have approved of this part of East India. It has places that can make your usually-rushed life slip into an almost-abnormal tranquility. Think phenomenally-blue sea with roasted sand, a coastal drive flanked by whispering casuarinas and bottlebrush trees, monolithic stone temples, sculptures frozen in time and shy flat-nosed Irrawady dolphins rolling lazily in a lagoon. Puri and close-by Konark and Satapada invite you to languor.

GREAT FROM Kolkata

Start your circuit from Bhubaneswar. About 16km out of the city, stop at Pipli to buy colourful appliquéed bags, furnishings, upholstery, umbrellas and lampshades. The drive from this hamlet to your next stop – Konark – snakes past never-ending paddy fields and hypnotic canopies of trees. Built in the 13th century, the Sun Temple at Konark, with its tiered black pagoda, is a stupendous piece of art. Hire a government guide to take you on a two-hour walkthrough of all its nooks and corners (a board outside the temple lists the authorised

guides). The Chandrabhaga beach and the Ramchandi temple are must-sees as you drive on to Puri (35km, one hour). Mandatory first stop in Puri: the Jagannath Mandir, built in the 12th century by King Chodagangadev (of the Ganga Dynasty). Hindus may step into this gigantic architectural marvel, and allow a different world of voices, chants, offerings and faith to envelop them. (The Raghunandan Library opposite the temple is where non-believers can get a peep into the temple; a 'donation' of Rs 10 is appreciated.) Locals claim that during festivities, more than 2,50,000 people are served food

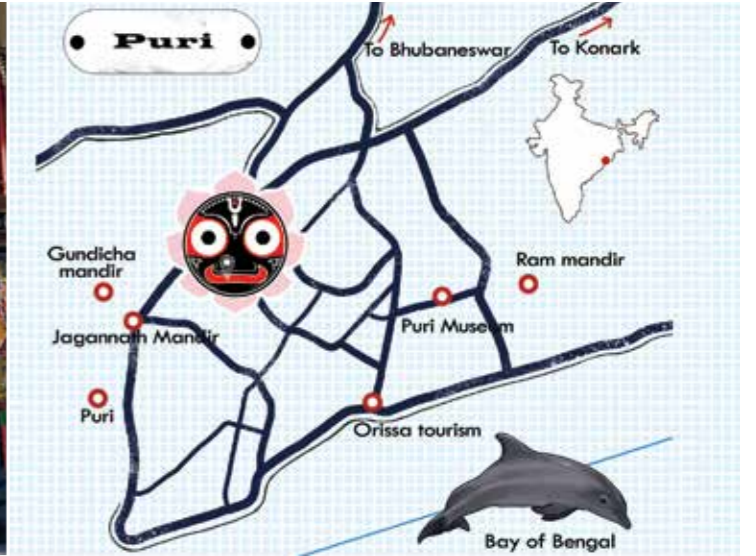
GO NOW

Although October to March is the best time to visit, weather-wise, going now (though it is hot and humid!) will help you escape peak season – June to November – during which the place is overcrowded with people visiting to experience the Rath Yatra and Navratri.

inside the premises. However, beware of the *pandas* (priests) inside the temple trying to tap you for some dough. If you're not inclined to take a siesta, there are ways to pump



A vendor sells his wares on Puri beach by night. Below: Santas at a sand festival on Puri beach. Below right: Appliqued items at a store near the beach in Puri.



up your late afternoons even in a tiny place like Puri. Try the Puri Museum (10am-5pm) on Station Road, and check out the Buddhist temple close by, built by master craftsman Padmashree Sudarshan Sahoo. Evenings are for stuffing your face with street food (not for the weak-stomached) on one of the sandy beaches. Caution: isolated stretches are a rarity in this swarming town. And unless you want to shop or literally rub shoulders with noisy tourists, going to the main beach area near Swarga Dwar is avoidable. Nights in Puri are meant to be languid with a drink and dinner by a bonfire on a beach.

Fifty kilometres from Puri is Satapada, a small village near Chilika (Asia's largest brackish

FACT SHEET

Getting There

Closest metro: Kolkata (472km). Getting to Puri takes 12 hours by road, so it is best to take the train. The overnight Puri Express (leaves Kolkata at 10.35pm; Rs 683 for third AC) and the Puri Howrah Express (leaves Puri at 8.05pm; Rs 683 for third AC) are perhaps the best options. **Closest airport:** Biju Patnaik Airport,

lake) and home to the flat-nosed dolphins. Start early to reach this village or you may miss a boat

Bhubaneswar (60km; two hours by road). The bus to Puri costs Rs 25; an AC car Rs 1,400. **Closest railhead:** Puri (East Coast Railway line) and Khurda (44km).

Getting Around

A car is perfect to explore Puri and places nearby. A taxi from the airport costs Rs 700 onwards. Or try two-wheelers (Rs 250 onwards a day). Buses are available from the bus depot.

that takes you further. Satapada has three jetties – one run by Orissa Tourism Development Corporation (Rs 80 pp for a three-hour tour) and two by private operators (Rs 400 to Rs 1,300 for one to eight-hour tours; do bargain). An island close by will thrill the birdwatcher in you. It is also the place to dig into succulent, stir-fried prawns, sprawl about and read, or sketch or click away, and end the day by watching the sun go down, before you return to Puri. Later, cocooned in your hotel room, thank God for stringing these places together.

WORDS P S BHAVANA

5 EASY TRIPS

Puri Jagannath temple
Below: A *nulia* (boatman-cum-lifeguard) on the beach
Below right: Sweets on sale in front of the Jagannath temple



lonely planet



WHERE TO STAY



Z Hotel: This hotel with its old-world charm – retro posters and high ceilings – was originally the summer palace of the Raja of Serampore. Watch the sunset from its roof terrace, then catch a classic flick from its DVD collection (00-91-6752-222554; zhotelindia.com; Chakratirtha Road, Puri; Rs 700 onwards for a double room).

The Chanakya BNR: This British railway heritage hotel is charming and spacious. The restaurant offers good food, but the service is slow (00-91-6752-223006/00-91-9778373373; chanakyabnrpuri.com; Chakratirtha Road, Puri; Rs 2,000 onwards for a double room).

Mayfair Hotel: An upscale hotel with cosy cottages, a spa and swimming pool. Enjoy the private beach (00-91-6752-227800; mayfairhotels.com; Chakratirtha Road, Puri; Rs 7,000 onwards for a double room, including breakfast).

SAFETY

Areas like the Chandrabhaga beach (Konark) can be extremely unsafe because of high tides and quicksand spots. Follow the rules and check with the *nulia* (boatmen who also double as lifeguards) before taking the plunge.

WHERE TO EAT

In Konark, dig into an Oriya *thali* (Rs 30 onwards) at one of the wayside hotels, washed down with deliciously sweet coconut water (Rs 10). Puri has a number of good vegetarian and non-veg eateries. Religious and brave? Try the *mahaprasad* (blessed offering) at **Jagannath Mandir**. A must-eat: the delectable olive and mushroom pasta served with a bowl of grated cheese at **Honey Bee Bakery & Pizzeria** (00-91-06752-320479; near Z Hotel, Chakratirtha Road, Puri; pasta for Rs 150). Seafood lovers must try the stir-fried shrimps,



prawns or fish for Rs 40 onwards at stalls on Puri beach, or on the island off Satapada.

SHOPPING

Pipli is *the* place to buy colourful appliqué-worked items. Splurge on trinkets, coloured pearls and colossal seashells at the flea market near Swarga Dwar in Puri. *Ikat* textiles are also must-buys. There is nothing much to shop for in Satapada (unless you intend to take seafood home!). Raghurajpur, an artisans village (14km from Puri), is famous for *pattachitra* paintings, wooden and papier-mâché masks, and mud toys.



CHILD-FRIENDLINESS

Children will enjoy the beaches, which offer a chance for playing and running around (see Safety).

MEDICAL FACILITIES

Chemists are easily found in Puri. Although there are a number of hospitals, one may need to drive to Bhubaneswar for medical emergencies.



CLEAN LOO GUIDE

Stop at one of the hotels on the way to Konark, Puri or Satapada for a quick bite and to use the loo. We tried **Toshali Sands** (00-91-9937003223 / 00-91-674-6573463 / 2547074; toshalisands.com;

com; Konark Marine Drive, Puri; also rooms Rs 4,500 onwards) between Konark and Puri.

WHAT TO PACK

Carry sunglasses, binoculars, sunscreen, water and a sturdy hat. Comfy shoes are a must.

GOOD TO KNOW

Most temples have 'Only Hindus Allowed' boards, as well as restrictions on photography, and carrying leather articles, laptops and phones into them. A stone-carving demonstration is available at the Sudarshan Crafts Museum (00-91-6752-22474/0474; sudarshancrafts.com).