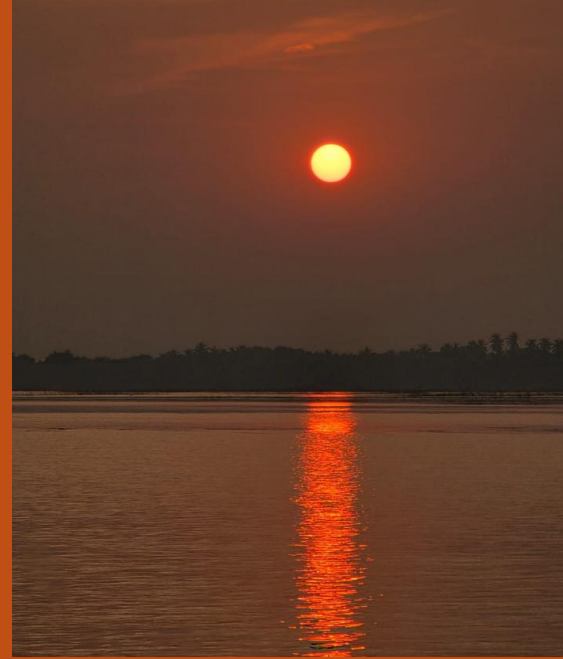
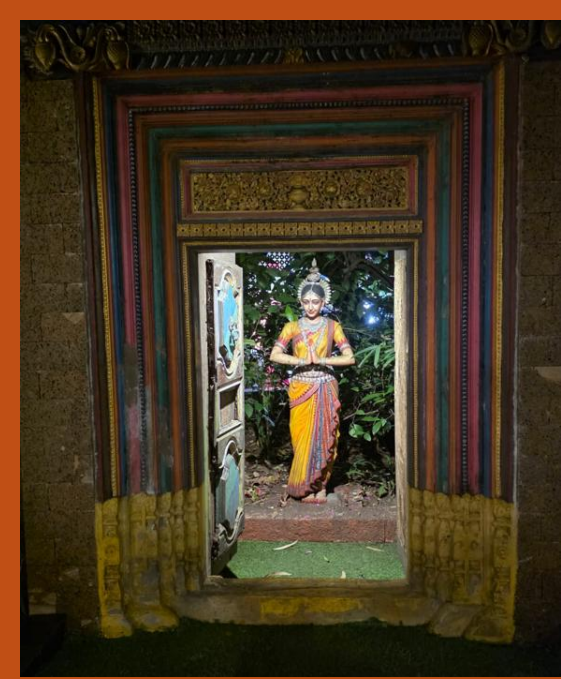


Odisha – A gem waiting to be discovered



Nov 2025

As I sit at Gate 6 in Bhubaneswar airport, awaiting my return flight to Bengaluru, I am reflecting the brief trip to Odisha, lasting about 5 days. First 2 days at a wedding and the next 3 days traveling around. This is probably my second trip to Odisha but my first trip had been work-related and mainly oriented towards visiting steel plant (VISA Steel plant in Kalinga Nagar). I remember staying at VISA Steel's guest house in Bhubaneswar and had not done any sightseeing. This time visited Puri and Bhubaneswar.

First and foremost, what I remember is cleanliness. The roads, beaches and in general surroundings super clean. The beach at Puri is very clean sand, with hardly any debris or seaweed coming on shore. For most part of the beach, it is devoid of sea-shells and very less crowd except on Sunday when there was some groups of weekenders seen.

The waves were not huge but strong and the coastline probably has seen quite a few cyclones in the past. It was perhaps a little chilly to swim but a month or two earlier it would have been perfect. There were no vendors barring 2-3 selling seashells and pearl necklaces. Almost no food. The hotel we stayed in for the wedding in Puri was further South of the town-centre and apart from the Taj hotel, ours was second last in terms of any big construction.

As we get towards the town centre a number of small restaurants juxtaposed by lodges and hotels and the beach is also more commercially active and crowded.

Puri Beach



Swosti hotel where the wedding was arranged was comfortable. The entire hotel was booked by the wedding party and arrangements were fabulous. The functions were grand, food very delicious and the guests were dressed in splendor. Pastel colors dominated with lots of glitter and bling. Punjabi and in general Bollywood music dominated interspersed with some Gujarati Garbha music. In all the ceremonies we saw there were no priests to be seen and apparently the main wedding ceremonies took place well after 11 pm and into 2-3 am in the night. Overall relaxing fun and great to catch up with masa, cousins Prachi/Janak, Nipa/Soumel, Ajay/Antara and Vikas/Hita.

After the wedding we changed hotel in Puri from Swosti to Mayfair Waves. It was along the same coastline and had its own beach access. There we met up with our Pebblebay friends Ganga, Nirupa and Vidya (collectively called the Canasta Coterie). Parallel to the beach was a long (km or so) walking track set amidst manicured garden. We saw the famous temple Jagannath Puri, passing through the highly congested Anand Bazaar. It was literally flesh on flesh crowd as we weaved our way through the mass of humanity into the temple compound.

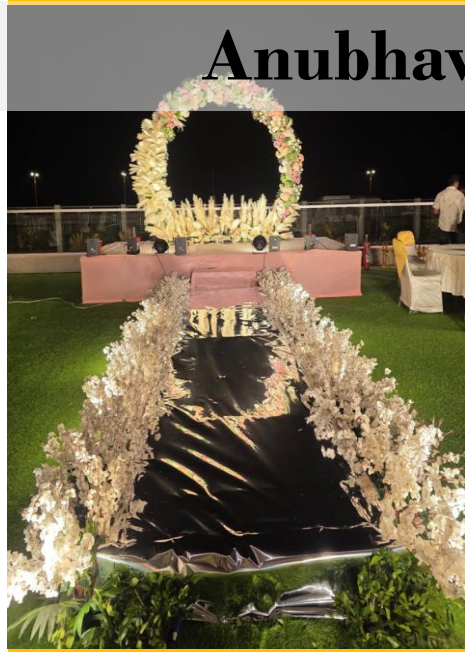
One of our friends Ganga had arranged some special access to the temple and we had to wait until 12 noon for the pooja to finish and we squeezed our way in to see most all the deities, within touching distance of the sanctum-sanctorum. Unfortunately, we had to leave our phones and of course our chappals, in the car so no photos possible.

Anubhav and Dhwani Wedding - Puri

The big grand wedding of Anubhav and Dhwani at Puri was a spectacular blend of tradition, music and culinary delights



Anubhav and Dhvani Wedding - Puri



The temple visit was followed by a nice Thali lunch at the Grand Restaurant near the police station near the temple. It was delicious. We then proceed to get back to our car and our feet were happy to back on our slippers. We then went back to the hotel, changed into shoes and shorts and then proceed to the next highlight of the trip the Chilaka lake. It is South Asia's largest brackish water body and home to many migratory birds and a sanctuary for the Irrawaddy Dolphins. We took an hour-long boat trip and spotted some dolphins frolicking in the distance. Unfortunately, the boat had a motor and there were a few boats and the dolphins ensure they kept a certain distance. Had we been quieter, we could have got closer.



After the boat trip the return back was also eventful. The usual hour long trip took double the time as there literally hundreds of cows wandering in the middle of the road and we had to dodge and go around them. These cows are predominantly white in color and of much smaller structure and height. They have the same hump on their backs like the Desi cows and some almost so thin, you can see their ribs. But their eyes are the most attractive, black, olive shaped and shiny. I was wondering how life would be for such a cow. Nowhere to go in particular, somehow get through each day through traffic and noise and find some grass to eat. Dinner was at the hotel where we had ordered some special food from the temple. The dishes were waiting for us and came packed in coconut shells. There were 10 dishes in all. All very tasty, particularly the sweet.



Chilika Lake - Orissa





The next day we had probably the most productive day. We first went to the artists village of Raghurajpur where the entire village comprising of probably 100+ houses in 3-4 lanes, do work called “Patta Chitra”. Patta is 3 layers of old recycled sarees glued together by a paste and then becomes a stiff canvas like material. On that “Chitra” artwork is done and hence that name. Most of these artists have the surname “Swain” and many have won awards at National level. The other crafts seen were art done on coconut shells, betelnut shells etc. We bought a few as memories and for the same item at the airport it was double the price. But you do get a little coerced by the various artisans as they want you to buy from each of them.

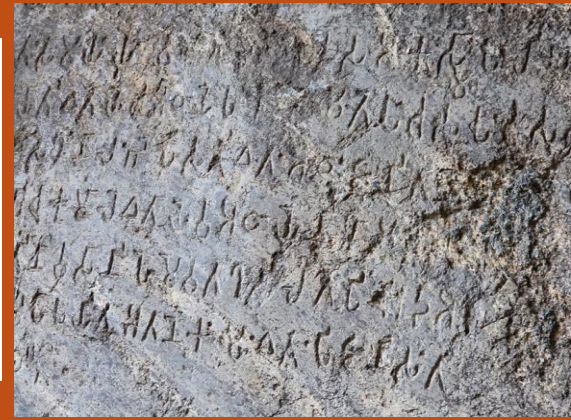
After that we drove to an Eco-resort, where we had lunch. The eco-resort was also very nice. Simple surroundings, lots of butterflies flying mostly in one direction as if they have been summoned for a grand meeting, a backwater and then a sandbank and then the sea and some fishermen casting nets to catch the smaller sized fish. Food was tasty and simple.

We were accompanied by some of the officials that Ganga had known through her work and we learnt a bit about life in Puri and in Bhubaneshwar, Overall, the people we interacted with said that the previous govt under former Chief Minister Mr. Biju Patnaik was much better and lot of projects etc got done. The current govt have not done much in the last 1.5 years. Puri whilst very peaceful and inexpensive does not have good medical facilities and for bigger ailments one needs to go to Bhubaneshwar (60 kms away).

Raghurajpur – Centre for Patta Chitra - Orissa



After lunch we drove to Dhauli to see Emperor Ashoka's edicts carved on a rock. Near that there is a nice park and further to that there is a more modern structure with a Buddha statue and a shrine, on a hill (probably funded by Japanese) as there are some markers highlighting their contributions.



We then made our way to the hotel Mayfair Lagoon in Bhubaneshwar. A big complex with a myriad of pathways, corridors and walkways. Lots of greenery and various statues covering European and Asian cultures dotted around the hotel. Good property with swimming pool, tennis and pickleball courts and a good collection of restaurants. We ate at a few – dinner at ‘Sichuan’ and breakfast at the ‘Tea Pot’. Most importantly it also has a tennis court.



I had to return back but Odisha is certainly a place to return for perhaps longer stays of 2-3 weeks duration. Lots of new things to see.

My bucket list just got longer.



Sun Temple - Konarak - Orissa

