

Design Resource

Sun Temple - Konark, Orissa

World Heritage Site

by

Prof. Bibhudutta Baral, Divyadarshan C S,

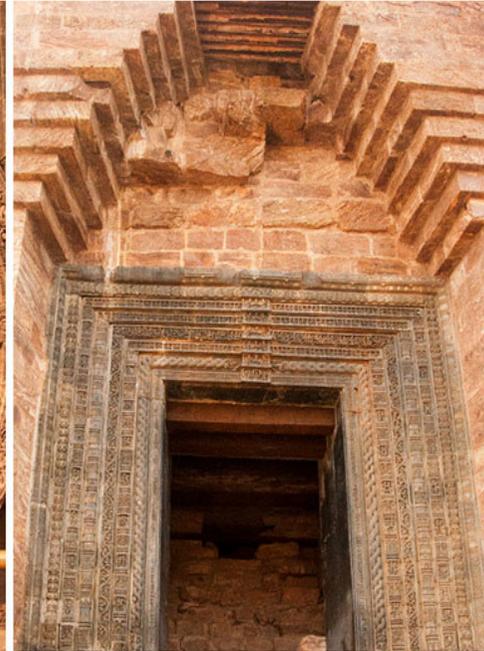
Rakshitha

NID, Bengaluru

Source:

<http://www.dsource.in/resource/sun-temple-konark-orissa>

1. Introduction
2. History
3. Architecture
4. Protection and Management
5. Surrounding
6. Celebrations
7. Video
8. Contact Details



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Source:

<http://www.dsource.in/resource/sun-temple-konark-orissa/introduction>

Introduction

The temple city of Konark is located towards the eastern part of Orissa state. It is situated at a distance around 65km from the capital city of the state Bhubaneswar and 35km from Puri. The city ranges between 86.08 E longitude and 19.53 N latitude. The city is famous for its monumental representation of sun god. The sun temple at Konark is dedicated to Sun god or Surya. It is an outstanding example of temple architecture of the country for its narrative strength of sculptural embellishment. Legendary poet Rabindranath Tagore said about Konark that, 'here the language of stone surpasses the language of man'. It is absolutely true, as the experience here could never be described in words. The entire temple has been constructed as Sun god's chariot with twenty-four wheels and seven horses dragging the temple. Two lions guard the entrance with crushing elephants. It is one of the most famous Brahman sanctuaries of 13th century. The temple is also known as 'Black Pagoda' due to its dark color and the ancient sailors of Odisha used it as a navigational landmark. This temple has been declared as a World heritage site by United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) in 1984.

1. Introduction
2. History
3. Architecture
4. Protection and Management
5. Surrounding
6. Celebrations
7. Video
8. Contact Details



A signboard at the sun temple Orissa.



The wheels probably represent the 12 months of a year and the diameter of each of the wheel is about nine feet.

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History

The word Konark is derived from the Sanskrit name Konarka. Konarka is a combination of two words i.e 'Kona' which means corner and 'Arka' means Sun, when these two words are combined it holds the meaning as 'Sun of the corner'. Thus it was one of the ancient centres for worshipping Sun god in India. The existence of Sun temple is cited in many of the religious texts and Puranas. In Puranas the place is mentioned as Munira or Mundirasvam-in, which was later replaced by the name Konarka.

The present temple exhibits the strength and stability of the Ganga Empire as it was built during 13th century by the King Narasimha Dev I of the East Ganga dynasty. It was built in his royal status and prestige to commemorate his victory over Muslims. The king opted this particular place for the construction of the temple is because Narasimha dev was charmed by the beauty of the Sunrise and the roaring voice of the sea at this place since his childhood. The river Chandrabhaga flowing a mile distance at the north side of the temple was joining the sea. On the bank of this river was the towns flourishing which had its important trades carried out through the sea routes to the foreign countries. And since ancient times two Supreme deities – one mother Earth as Dharitri Maata and the other is Sun god is worshiped. Sun god is regarded as the supreme lord of the world and the chief entity of life giving energy, being the healer of diseases and the bestower of desires. Thus due to the love for this place and the devotion towards Sun god, the King chose to celebrate his triumph on the banks of the Chandrabhaga sea.

However legend says, in honor to Sun god the temple was constructed by Samba, the son of Lord Krishna. And the story goes as, once samba displeased Narada. As a revenge Samba was afflicted with leprosy by the curse. Later when Samba was found innocent he was advised to approach Sun god to cure his disease. Thus he went through the penance of twelve years in Maitreyi forest and after the prescribed period Sun god appeared before him and guided him to recite twenty-one different names of the deity. Next morning while Samba was taking bath in Chandrabhaga he sensed something was getting in contact with his hands. When it was uplifted and examined it was noticed as an image of Sun god standing on a lotus pedestal holding two lotuses in his both the hands. Thus he installed it in the temple which was built by him and worshiped the deity regularly as his disease was cured completely by sun god.

1. Introduction

2. **History**

3. Architecture

4. Protection and Management

5. Surrounding

6. Celebrations

7. Video

8. Contact Details

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1. Introduction
2. **History**
3. Architecture
4. Protection and Management
5. Surrounding
6. Celebrations
7. Video
8. Contact Details



Silver strip cut in square pieces.



Hammer used to hammer on the book.

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Architecture

The temple is constructed in a stunning design of colossal chariot with twenty-four wheels drawn towards the dawn by seven galloping horses which gives the impression of carrying Sun god across heaven. These seven horses which pulls the temple eastwards represents the days of the week. The main entrance of the temple is the eastern gate where the statues of two lions killing war elephants are installed. Beneath the elephant is a man. Here the statue of lion symbolizes pride and elephant symbolizes money which further displays that these two errors (pride and money) can destroy a human being completely.

The massive structure of the temple has a pyramidal roof made of sandstone that rises 30m in height. It is embellished with highly sophisticated and cultured iconographies that depict the day-to-day activities of contemporary life. Temple's base is covered with sculptures consisting deities like lord Vishnu, lord Shiva and goddess Shakthi are intricately carved and scenes of life at court. There are some mythical creatures also drawn on the walls that separate these figures by the drawings of birds and animals like snakes, giraffe and elephants. Another uniqueness of this temple is the massive iron beams that are placed in between every two stones. These beams are used to construct the higher floors of the temple. The other exclusivity of this place is, the peak of the main temple was created using 52 tons of magnet. The arrangements of the main magnet and the other magnets in its unique way resulted the main idol of the temple to float in air.

Like many other Indian temples, Konark Sun temple also consists of several well-structured spatial units. The elaborate view of the Sun temple displays the intricately carved audience hall 'Jagamohana' which is towards eastern side of the temple. The roof of Jagamohana hall is made of horizontal tiers grouped in three stages with life-size female sculptures and two stupendous crowning members surmount the whole. In front and farther to the east is the dancing hall 'Nata mandir'. The principal sanctuary of the temple was surmounted by a high tower with a crowning cap called 'Shikara' that was razed in 19th century. The aesthetical and visually overwhelming sculptures depicted on the plinth of the temple in between the wheels are entirely decorated with musicians, dancers and erotic scenes as well. The entrance of the temple is towards the East-West direction which is another notable point here. In addition of more information about the temple is the area of Sun temple at Konark is about 857ft by 540ft.

Just beyond the entrance is a pair of staircase that leads to shrine. The image is beautifully carved in high-quality green chlorite stone that is the masterpiece of Konark. The idol of lord Surya depicted as the Sun god wearing tall riding boots and is accompanied with small figure of Aruna (the charioteer) at the feet of Lord. After climbing down from this place remains the inner sanctum where the deity was originally enshrined.

1. Introduction
2. History
3. **Architecture**
4. Protection and Management
5. Surrounding
6. Celebrations
7. Video
8. Contact Details

Design Resource

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1. Introduction
2. History
3. **Architecture**
4. Protection and Management
5. Surrounding
6. Celebrations
7. Video
8. Contact Details

The temple is constructed in such a way that the first rays of the rising Sun falls directly on the main entrance of the temple through Nata mandir and gets reflected from the diamond that is just located at the center of the idol in the focal sanctum. But these magnets were removed by the Britishers to get the magnetic stone during the colonial period. There are three images of Lord Surya in three different directions of the temple that are accurately positioned at the appropriate track to catch the rays of sun at dawn, noon and evening. Thus the temple indicates the passage of time that is under the control of Sun god.

The wheels of the temple chariot:

The construction of this temple is a masterpiece of Orissa's medieval architecture. One of the main attractions of this temple is the 24 wheels which are carved around the base of the temple. Each wheel is of about 10 feet in diameter with a set of spokes and elaborate carvings. These wheels are located in both north and south sides of the temple. The specialty of these wheels is, it stands as the symbolic motifs referring to the cycle of all the seasons. The spokes present in the wheel create a sundial and the shadow formed on these wheels helps in calculating the precise time of the day. The eight spokes present in each wheel also represent the eight ideal phases of woman's life. And the twelve pair of wheels denotes the twelve months of the year. There are hunting scenes, military processions and thousands of rampaging elephants that decorates the above and below space of the wheels. There is also a depiction of giraffe towards the south side of the platform that provides information that Konark traded with Africa during 13th century.

The design of the temple is a mixture of abstract and geometric forms that are refreshing to mind and a feast to the eyes. The reason for constructing this temple with such mesmerizing sculptures is a mystery. However according to the localites it is said that when the soldiers won the war and returned with a victory, the king built this temple with such extraordinary erotic sculptures drawn from Kama Sutra which would arouse the victorious soldiers and they could have kids who would become soldiers in future and serve the king. And one of the unique artistic achievements of this temple is, it is constructed over twelve years by 1,200 artisans with the deep commitment of its master builder Bisu Moharana. The architect, Bisu Moharana was such devoted personality who quit his birthplace just to concentrate on the construction of this temple. Later in turn his son involved in the workshop and accomplished the construction which his father was unable to complete.

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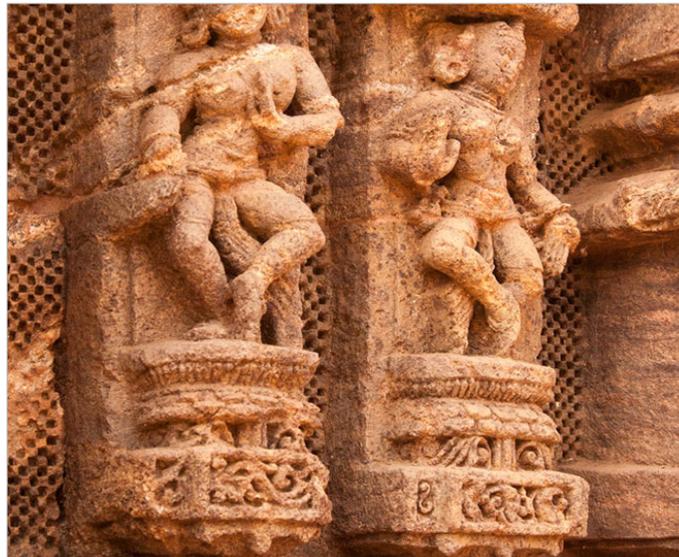
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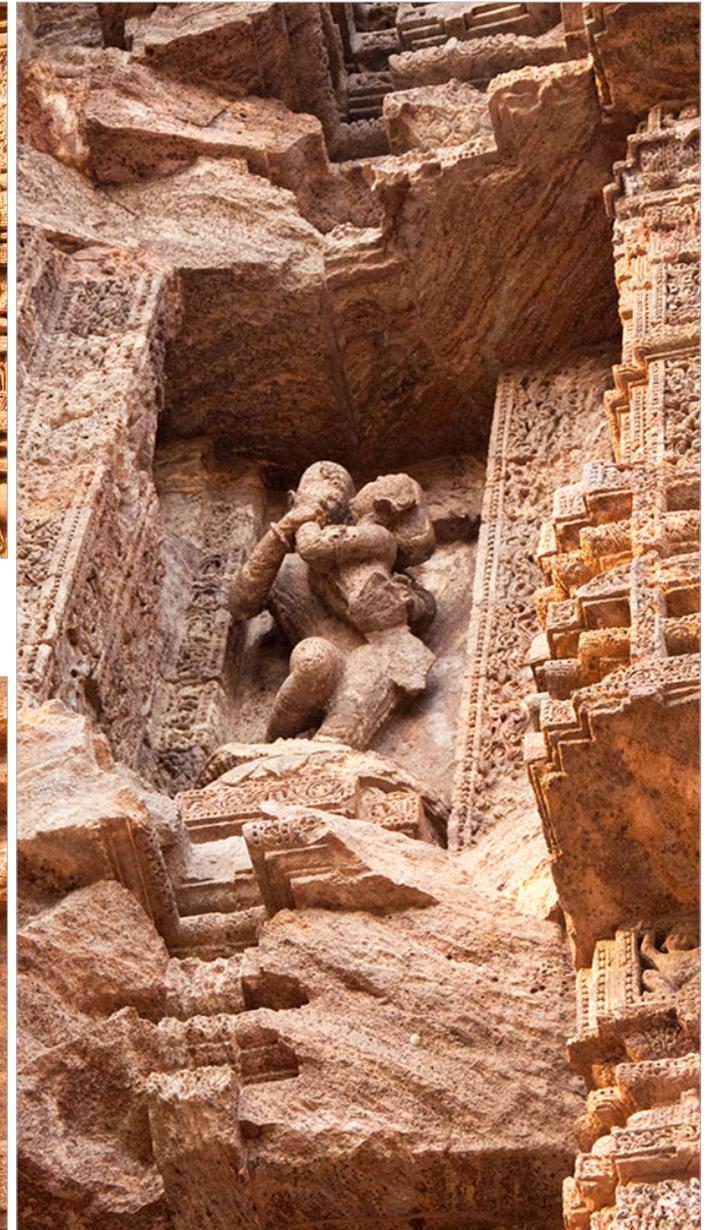
1. Introduction
2. History
3. **Architecture**
4. Protection and Management
5. Surrounding
6. Celebrations
7. Video
8. Contact Details



The sculptures on the temple walls are decorated with all sorts of imaginary, in some places the king himself is seen moving on elephant's back.



Figures playing different musical instruments on wall of sun temple.



Erotic carving at the Konark sun temple.

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<http://www.dsource.in/resource/sun-temple-konark-orissa/protection-and-management>

1. Introduction
2. History
3. Architecture
4. **Protection and Management**
5. Surrounding
6. Celebrations
7. Video
8. Contact Details

Protection and Management

FALL OF TEMPLE:

In course of time Konark temple lost its glory. It is very difficult to conclude the causes of its decay and fall of its magnificent monument. According to scholars their opinions differ on their individual research. Some of the possible causes of the fall of this magnificent temple are listed below.

Incomplete Temple

Historians says that due to the early death of the king Langula Narasimha Dev who is the builder of temple left the temple in haphazard state which led the incomplete construction eventually collapsed. But this argument has no supporting history as a result it is not tenable.

Load Stone

Fables narrate that the loadstone that was on top of the temple was the reason of the fall of temple. As the loadstone having the magnetic effect, it attracted the passing by vessels and other stuffs that circulated through Konark sea resulted in causing heavy damage to the temple. Some legends also state that the loadstone with its magnetic effects disturbed the sailing ship's compass as the result Portuguese voyagers took away the loadstone. As this heavy stone was the central stone holding all the stones and iron columns together keeping the temple walls in balance. Due to its displacement the structure lost the balance and eventually fell down. But there is no record of this occurrence too.

Kalapahada

As the other famous theory says (Kalapahada) Sultan Sulaiman Karrani destroyed the temple along with other Hindu temples when he invaded Orissa during 1508. Kalapahada was the title given to Muslim governor of Bengal. In 1568 as Muslims started ruling Orissa they destroyed most of the Hindu temples.

Earthquake and Thunderstruck

Scholars also argue that the fall of Konark temple might be due to earthquake and thunderstruck. But even this point has no supporting fact, since there is no record of earthquakes in the place. As there is no destruction in any area of the temple's foundation and since the thickness of the temple walls are 20 to 25 feet thus the argument gets no value, while it is not possible for any earthquake or thunderstruck to disturb the temple in any manner.

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PROTECTION AND MANAGEMENT:

Konark Sun temple is protected under the National Framework of India by the Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Sites and Remains Act (AMASR) and its Rulers (1959). Under this AMASR Act, 100 meters outside the property and the further zone of 200 meters outer property constitute prohibited and regulated zone for the development of the outstanding monument. Archaeological Survey of India has undertaken all the conservation programmes through its national, regional and local representatives. The other relevant protective law includes the Forest Act, Konark Development Act and notified Council Area Act.



The temple is in the shape of a gigantic chariot.

1. Introduction
2. History
3. Architecture
4. **Protection and Management**
5. Surrounding
6. Celebrations
7. Video
8. Contact Details

Design Resource

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<http://www.dsource.in/resource/sun-temple-konark-orissa/surrounding>

Surroundings

Initially Konark temple was built on sea bank but now since the sea is receded the temple is bit away from the beach. Outside the Sun temple is surrounded with rosewood, eel and mahogany trees. Close to this temple are the remnants of Vaishnava temple and Mayadevi temple.

Vaishnava Temple was discovered during 1956 at the time of the sand clearance. It is a small brick temple facing east direction in southwest corner of the temple's compound.

The other temple by name Pancharatha is also found here that consists of Jagamohana idol. Images of Balarama and two Parsvadevatas of Varaha and Trivikrama are considered to be affiliated with Vaishnava but these two images are now displayed in the Archeological Museum in Konark. This temple construction is dated back to eleven century A.D.

Mayadevi Temple is popularly known as temple of Mayadevi is towards the west side of the main entrance of the Konark Sun temple. Goddess Mayadevi is believed to be one of the wives of Lord Surya. It is built earlier than the Sun temple and facing towards east that consists of a porch and sanctum. The superstructures of porch are missing while the sanctum is also devoid of any deity. The temple is stylish and roughly noticed that it belongs to late eleventh century A.D.

1. Introduction
2. History
3. Architecture
4. Protection and Management
5. **Surrounding**
6. Celebrations
7. Video
8. Contact Details

Design Resource

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World Heritage Site

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<http://www.dsource.in/resource/sun-temple-konark-orissa/surrounding>

1. Introduction
2. History
3. Architecture
4. Protection and Management
5. **Surrounding**
6. Celebrations
7. Video
8. Contact Details



A sight of visitors at the temple area.

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1. Introduction
2. History
3. Architecture
4. Protection and Management
5. Surrounding
6. **Celebrations**
7. Video
8. Contact Details

Celebrations

Magha Saptami Mela

A stone thrown from Konark beach lies in sacred magical pond where Samba was cured from leprosy. For this reason every year during the full moon phase of Magha (during the month of January and February) a big religious festival is celebrated that is popularly known as Chandrabhaga Mela or Magha Saptami Mela. During this day thousands of pilgrims join on the pool and take a holy dip in medicinal water as mentioned in puranas and watch the sun rise over the sea. The event is followed by the worship of Navagraha.

Konark Dance Festival

Every year during the month of December a dance festival is held in an open-air theatre built near the Sun temple. It is famous as Konark dance festival. The event unites the eminent dancers of the country who perform various dance forms like Bharatanaty, Manipuri, Kathak, Chhow and Odissi. This seems to be an extravaganza journey of ecstasy, art, craft and fun.



The temple is built from khondalite rock.



Main entrance to the temple is decorated with Gajasimha (Lion upon an elephant images).

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1. Introduction
2. History
3. Architecture
4. Protection and Management
5. Surrounding
6. **Celebrations**
7. Video
8. Contact Details



Nirtya mandapa (Dancing hall) of konark.

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Video



1. Introduction
2. History
3. Architecture
4. Protection and Management
5. Surrounding
6. Celebrations
7. **Video**
8. Contact Details

Design Resource

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1. Introduction
2. History
3. Architecture
4. Protection and Management
5. Surrounding
6. Celebrations
7. Video
8. **Contact Details**