

DIP YOUR TOES IN A PURI BEACH

WHEN TO GO: OCTOBER TO MAY

A quaint old town with little else to sell than an ancient religious heritage as one of Hindu India's four most sacred Hindu pilgrimages, Puri is a rambling seaside town on the eastern coast of Orissa overlooking the Bay of Bengal. Puri attracts visitors and lulls them into a soporific trance, a state of mind popularly known as "Puri Paralysis". Its other major claim to fame is that it is the home of the Lord of the World, Lord Jagannath, whose awesome chariot procession through the streets gave English language, the word "juggernaut", the unstoppable force.

The 'Rath Yatra' or chariot procession is the only frenzied activity that transpires here when the gods who reside in the Jagannath Temple are ceremoniously transported to a garden retreat and the town is flooded by vast multitudes of people who travel to Puri seeking salvation.

Things to Do

Situated on the eastern coast of Orissa, Puri is a splendid beach resort with golden sunshine, miles of yellow sand, blue waves and white surf. Sit under an umbrella, sip coconut water, swim in the shallow sea or surf ride the huge waves or check out the fishing village of the Nolia community. When you are ready to see to go sightseeing, these are the places to see in Puri.

The Jagannath Temple dedicated to Krishna is one of the four dhams or holy places venerated by Hindus and mandatory pilgrimage for the devout. This temple complex was built during the 12th century A.D. by Anantavarman Chodaganga as a place to offer prayers to the God Vishnu. The main features of the temples are its sculpted figures from Hindu mythology and its tapering 65m high spire.

The Jagmohan, the inner sanctum has images of the black hued Jagannath (an incarnation of Vishnu, the god Krishna), his brother Balabhadra and sister Subhadra. It is said that the prasada or the sanctified food served at the temple is the tastiest morsel cooked in Puri. The temple is strictly off limits for non-Hindus.

The area surrounding the temple complex is fairly interesting with the Raghunandan Library, directly opposite the main gate of the Jagannath Temple. This library houses a dusty and neglected collection of rare palm leaf manuscripts and religious texts. Towards the south lies one of the most auspicious cremation grounds for Hindus, the Swargadwar or the gateway to heaven.

Other temples in the town are the Gundicha, the Lokanath, the Sunaragauranga, the Daria Mahabir and the Tota Gopinath temples. Puri is also dotted with holy tanks like Narendra, Markandeya, Sweta Ganga and Indradyumna.