



## REVAMPING BUDDHIST TOURISM IN THE DIAMOND TRIANGLE OF ODISHA

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### Abstract

The Diamond Triangle of Odisha, comprising the historical sites of Ratnagiri, Udayagiri, and Lalitagiri, stands as a testament to India's rich Buddhist heritage along with other major sites. This region holds immense potential to become a thriving hub for International Buddhist tourism, combining rich cultural preservation, economic development, and global engagement. The main purpose of this paper is to focus on the revamping of Odisha tourism for promoting Buddhism in the global context at the Diamond Triangle. This research presents a comprehensive plan to revamp Buddhist tourism limited to the Diamond Triangle, aligning with the broader goals of heritage conservation and sustainable tourism. Further, this paper discusses how the concept of 'VasudhaivaKutumbakam' will play a vital role in the cultural exchange between India with the rest of the world in the context of Buddhist tourism. Based on the secondary data collected and analysed, this paper assesses the enormous awareness and potential of Odisha tourism sector for promoting Buddhism globally. In the concluding session, limitations of the study, post-COVID circumstances on Buddhist tourism, recommendations provided for undertaking more detailed studies in this proposed area have been discussed.

**Keywords:** *Buddhist Tourism, Odisha, Diamond Triangle, VasudhaivaKutumbakam, Sustainable tourism.*



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### 1. INTRODUCTION

Odisha, a coastal state on the eastern side of India, is surrounded by West Bengal and Jharkhand to the north, Andhra Pradesh to the south, the Bay of Bengal to the east, and Chhattisgarh to the west. Geographically, it falls between latitudes 17° 49' N to 22° 34' N and longitudes 81° 27' E to 87° 29' E. The state is crisscrossed by numerous small and large rivers that eventually flow into the Bay of Bengal, which bathes its southern shores. According to the 2011 census data, Odisha ranks eleventh in terms of population and ninth in terms of land area.

With a coastal length of 482 kms, the state enjoys a constant connection to the blue waters of the Bay of Bengal. Odisha is rich in mineral and other

natural resources. Additionally, its art and crafts have gained recognition both domestically and internationally. The state's works of Applique, Metal Crafts, Silver Filigree, and Patta Chitra have received special acclaim from various parts of the world ([Nayak, et.al 2018](#)). Odisha's diverse topography, vibrant culture, and captivating festivals make it a compelling destination for tourists. Visitors, hailing from neighbouring states to distant countries, flock to the state, particularly during festive seasons.

### 2. OBJECTIVES

- The main objective of the paper is to focus on the emerging role of Odisha tourism for promoting Buddhism in the global context.

- To investigate the link between ancient Odishan Buddhist culture with its potential in modern tourism sector.
- To make a Tourism Heritage Management plan for the diamond-triangle of Odisha with an emphasis of revamping strategies.

### 3. METHODOLOGY

In order to implement the proposed research, a comprehensive plan with suggestions is being discussed in this write-up. Based on the data collected through secondary sources, this paper assesses the extent of awareness and responsiveness of Odisha tourism sector for promoting Buddhism. In the concluding section, limitations of the study are been discussed and recommendations provided for undertaking more detailed investigations in the area.

### 4. BUDDHIST HERITAGE OF ODISHA

Buddhism, as a religion, includes a variety of traditions and beliefs based on the philosophy and doctrines of Siddhartha Gautama; Lord Buddha. Buddhism has spread extensively throughout Indian subcontinent for 2500 years. Buddhism acts as a significant component in the religious history of Odisha. Odisha boasts a rich and profound Buddhist heritage, with a history dating back to Mauryan period. The state is home to several significant Buddhist sites, including the famous Ratnagiri, Lalitagiri, and Udayagiri complexes (Mukherjee, 1957). These archaeological treasures hold the remains of ancient monasteries, stupas, and sculptures that provide invaluable insights into the flourishing Buddhist culture in the region. Moreover, inscriptions and artifacts found in these sites suggest that Buddhism played a crucial role in the socio-religious fabric of ancient Odisha (Pani, 2018). The state's Buddhist heritage is a testament to its historical and cultural importance in the development of Buddhism in India, attracting scholars, researchers, and tourists seeking to explore the profound connections between Buddhism and Odisha's rich past.

### 5. DIAMOND TRIANGLE OF ODISHA

As per the account of the famous Chinese traveller Xuen-Zang (Hien Tsang) who visited Odra (Odisha) in about 639 C.E., Buddhism was in a flourishing state in the country and "Pu-siep'o-k'i-li" (Pushpagiri) monastery was an important establishment during that period. This is identified with the remains of Udayagiri, Ratnagiri and Lalitagiri based on the inscriptional evidences. According to him, the location of Pushpagiri University was over a hill with a 'super natural light' (Beal, 1963). Udayagiri, Ratnagiri and Lalitagiri are isolated hills of the Assia range in Odisha. These three hillocks together termed as the "Diamond Triangle of Odisha" for its rich and

wide remains of Buddhism since Mauryan period. Archaeological excavations were carried out by Archaeological Survey of India in these three locations to trace the material evidences related to Mayana and Vajrayana Buddhism. The excavation revealed ample discoveries of artefacts, antiquities, coins, stone and terracotta plaques, structural fragments, sculptures, and massive stupas. All the three hillocks revealed massive circular stupa made of stone and brick (Patnaik 2016).

### 6. BUDDHIST TOURISM IN ODISHA

India is a land of cultural diversity which attracts tourists from each corner of the globe. The deeply rooted culture, tradition, religion, and monumental architectures of India generates major tourism attraction in global context. Cultural tourism and religious tourism are a part of humankind since historical period. Buddhism in India attracts tourists and travellers across the globe specifically the South-east Asian countries. The foot flow of the tourists visiting India have increased over the last decade. The state witnessed the most tourist footfall at the world-famous Sun temple at Konark in the previous year amidst COVID-19 epidemic. As a state, Odisha holds a lot of important Buddhist monuments and sites which intrigues tourists, history enthusiasts, travellers to visit the state. According to the statistics of Ministry of Tourism, India has witnessed a gradual increase in the Buddhist Tourism sector in the past 5-7 years. The major cultural events of Government, Azadi ka Amrit Mahotsav and G20 Global Summit has opened up global tourism sector post COVID-19 in India.

According to a survey report of Odisha Tourism Department, in 2017-18, a total of 1,02,995 foreign tourists visited Odisha with a growth rate of 32 percent than the previous years. As per the 2022 report, the state has seen gradual rise post the epidemic conditions. Both domestic and foreign tourist footfall had increased after 2020 COVID-19 conditions in Odisha. As per the survey report, there is a sharp increase of 120% in domestic tourists and 1082% increase in foreign tourist footfall in Odisha. Most of the foreign tourists belong to the Buddhist dominant countries like Sri Lanka, Japan, China, Cambodia, Thailand, Bhutan, Myanmar, Laos and Mongolia (Annual Report, 2023).

### 7. TOURISM HERITAGE MANAGEMENT AND DEVELOPMENT PLAN

Tourism is one of the largest and fastest-growing economic sectors in the world, responsible for 9 percent of global GDP as per UNWTO. Responsible tourism can be a driver of sustainable development and the preservation of natural and cultural heritage, but if unplanned and poorly managed it can be socially, economically, and culturally disruptive and cause

damage and degradation to sensitive ecosystems, landscapes, monuments, and communities (UNESCO, 2016). To make tourism sector economically firm and globally successful, a comprehensive and detailed heritage management and development plan is needed to analyse and emphasize the needful deeds. When it comes to the cultural tourism, especially religion associated tourism, certain basic and critical infrastructural development is needed. To understand this. A vibrant development plan in the context of the diamond triangle of Odisha is suggested as follows.

### 7.1. Infrastructure Development

- Advanced and well-connected roads with adequate transportation facilities and signage to make the area easily accessible to tourists.
- A dedicated visitor centre and kiosks with information about the site and its archaeological, historical significance tagged with a map of the region.
- A clean and well-maintained amenities like restrooms, drinking water, child and women care rooms, and waste disposal systems.
- Installing informative sign boards, plaques, multi-audio electronic guides at each site to educate visitors about the history, culture, and significance of the diamond triangle.

### 7.2. Community Engagement

- Involving the local community and audience in the tourism sector by offering adequate training in guiding, providing hospitality and other promotional activities relevant.
- Encouraging the community in the production and sale of cultural souvenirs using the traditional and indigenous knowledge systems, i.e., handicrafts, sculptures, miniature art etc.
- Educating local volunteers as Heritage guides who can share insights and guide the tourists.

### 7.3. Conservation of monuments, sites, and antiquities

- Ensuring well-conditioned conservation and preservation status of the Buddhist stupas and monasteries at Udayagiri, Lalitagiri and Ratnagiri.
- Upholding a clean and picturesque and landscape environment around the structures in the diamond triangle to attract more international tourists.
- Periodical inspections on the conservation condition of the monument and antiquities to safeguard the structural and material strength.
- Innovative display of antiquities and other important findings at the site for the visitors.

- Promoting responsible tourism by educating visitors on the importance of heritage conservation.

### 7.4. Digital Promotion and Social Publicizing

- Creating a dedicated portal and mobile app with comprehensive information, history, navigation details, virtual tours of the Buddhist diamond triangle.
- Leveraging social media platforms and Artificial Intelligence to attract a wider audience globally.
- Collaboration with travel agencies, both domestic and international, to offer package tours to the Diamond Triangle along with other important Buddhist sites in the state.

### 7.5. Cultural Exchange Programs

- Organising cultural exchange programs where visitors can engage with local communities to learn about their traditions, lifestyle, and cuisine.
- Tracing the similarities and differences in the Buddhist philosophy and knowledge in contemporary society with the international cultural exchange programs.
- Promoting yoga, meditation, and mindfulness retreats to align with the Buddhist philosophy of the region as a part of *Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam*.

### 7.6. Cultural events and Festivals

- Conducting occasional cultural events to celebrate the widespread Buddhist philosophies, heritage, lifestyle, to attract tourists providing a common platform for the local artisans and performers to engage with global audience.

### 7.7. Accommodation and Dining

- Developing a decent range of accommodations and budget-friendly staycations and guesthouses to host variety of travellers across the globe.
- As the Diamond Triangle of Odisha is located in remote area and far from the capital, proper accommodations are necessary to ensure the safety and flow of tourists.
- Promoting the rich local cuisines and encouraging the authentic Odia and Buddhist dishes.

### 7.8. Feedback and Improvement

- Gathering feedback from domestic and international tourists to assess the conditions and improve the visitor experience by addressing the needed concerns.

## 8. DISCUSSION

Sincelast fewyears, the tourismdepartment of Odisha in collaboration with OdishaInstitute of Maritime and South East Asian Studiesand the Archaeological Survey of India has beenregularly organizing Kalinga InternationalBuddhist Conclave to publicize the Buddhisttourism potential of the state in the global forum.The primary focus of the conclave is thedevelopment of the Diamond Triangle along withother tourist hot spots (**Annual Report, 2023**). Post COVID-19 conditions, the global tourism sector is still in the road of recovery and running. The Odisha Tourism in collaboration with the Ministry of Tourism and Culture are working on promoting the state's tourism in global context. Mann ki Baat, Azadi ka Amrit Mahotsav, G20 World Summit, Konark Festival, Know India Program, are some of the state and central initiatives of India to promote tourism and attract more tourists from both domestic and international. IndianRailways have initiated a special Buddhist Touristtrain, Mahaparinirvan Express, whichincludesOdisha in its route. Presently, to boost Buddhisttourism in the country, the centralgovernmentlaunched a project of Rs.450 lakh investing in theBuddhist Circuit in collaboration with the WorldBank. The main focus of the scheme is to developand promote all places connected with LordBuddha and Buddhist heritage throughout thecountry. Hence, the Government of Odisha pitchedfor the inclusion of Odisha in the proposedBuddhist circuit (**Nayak, 2018**). By implementing these strategies, the Diamond Triangle of Odisha can become a premier Buddhist tourism destination, attracting visitors from around the world while preserving its rich heritage and benefiting the local community. International collaboration with leading Buddhist organisations, universities, monasteries, and forums will further promote research, educational programs and cultural exchanges which will solidify the position of Diamond Triangle of Odisha as a Global Tourist Destination.

## 9. CONCLUSIONS

The proposed plan to revamp Buddhist tourism in the Diamond Triangle of Odisha encompasses a multifaceted approach that not only preserves cultural heritage but also stimulates economic growth and global engagement. By implementing these strategies, the Diamond Triangle has the potential to shine as a premier Buddhist tourism destination, attracting visitors from around the world while preserving its rich heritage and benefiting the local community.

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