



Monks' cells: This temple was built to house Jain ascetics during the reign of the emperor Kharavela in the 2nd century BC



BHUBANESWAR

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STAY Trident Hilton at Nayapalli, visit www.tridenthotels.com/bhubaneswar.

EAT Dalma at Sachivalaya Marg for traditional local cuisine.

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"This is the only temple in Bhubaneswar that has all of them," Sukanta explains, as we marvel at the artistic splendours of the temple.

The exterior face of the building, including the 60m tower, is profusely carved with beautiful figurines of Hindu gods and goddesses.

They make me think that beauty in itself means nothing until it opens the mind of receptive worshippers to an intimate communion with the divine.

The whole temple is full of vivid carvings of alshakanyas — maidens in idle mood, posed seductively to charm any passer-by.

"Like a love poem written on stone," comments Susan, an art student from Canada, who is cherishing the exquisite beauty on the walls.

No other temple in the city compares with Lingaraja in terms of sheer size and spiritual consciousness. But others, such as the 10th-

century-built red and gold sandstone Rajarani Temple, or the elegant Mukteshwara Temple, attract equal artistic acclamation.

The city is also blessed with artefacts from ages-old Buddhist and Jain cults. "Our ancient rulers had more tolerance for other religions than their modern counterparts," says Sukanta, as he drives us outside the city limits to Dhauli, site of the great battle of Kalinga in 261 BC, the

aftermath of which has made the land so historically significant.

After victory the triumphant King Ashoka was so distressed witnessing the carnage of the war, he threw his sword away, embraced Buddhism and preached peace for the rest of his life. Japanese Buddhist groups built a huge Shanti Stupa (Peace Pagoda) on the site in the 1970s, which today draws visitors from all over the world.

Nearby are the twin hills of Khandagiri and Udayagiri, honey-combed with rock-cut caves built for Jain ascetics during the illustrious reign of the Kalinga emperor Kharavela in the 2nd century BC.

As the sun sets, Sukanta decides it's time to chill out. So he drops us at a restaurant where we try the delicious local cuisine of rice, lentils, vegetables and goat meat curry, washed down with Kingfisher beer.

Then we visit a local theatre for an extraordinary performance of Odissi dance, Orissa's cultural pride.

As I return to the comfort of my hotel room, I conclude that the cultural impact of this lovely city goes well beyond its famous temples.

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