

SAMBALPUR IS THE HUB OF TOURISM IN WESTERN ODISHA

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Abstract:

Sambalpur, the western most district of Odisha, had been named after the headquarters town, Sambalpur. The town is derived its name from the presiding goddess Samalai, whose stone image was discovered by Balaram Dev, the first Chauhan king of Sambalpur. Sambalpur is the nucleus of the people of western Odisha. Besides administrative establishment, communication and transportation, emporium, education, health centre and home of Sambalpuri saree, it is also the hub of many tourist places such as Samaleswari temple, Ghanteswari temple, Hirakud dam, Ushakothi wildlife sanctuary, Debrigarh wild life sanctuary, Leaning temple of Huma, Cattle Island, Pradhanpat waterfall, Kurudukut waterfall, Narisimhanath temple and Harishankar temple etc are the prominent tourist places of Undivided Sambalpur district. Visiting these places, there is conducive communication facilities for both land and water in this district. Above all, guest houses facilities are available for the outside tourists. The administration is keeping in vigil for the safety and security for the tourists in these above mentioned places. These places are worthy to be visited.

Keywords: Ghanteswari, Huma, Hirakud, Ushakothi, Narasimhanath and Harishankar.

1. Introduction:

Sambalpur district is surrounded by Deogarh district in the East, Bargarh and Jharsuguda districts in the West, Sundargarh district in the north and Subarnpur and Angul districts in the South. The district has three distinctive physiographic units such as, Hilly Terrain of Bamra and Kuchinda in the North, plateau and ridges of Rairakhol in the South-East and valley and plains of Sambalpur Sub-division in the South- East.



Sambalpur district lies between 20° 40' N and 22° 11' N latitude, 82° 39' E and 85° 15' E longitude with a total area of 6,702 Sq. Kms. Sambalpur district forms a part of North-West upland of Odisha, which is rolling and multiplying the ground slopes from a height of 776 ft. to a height of 460 ft. This district is full of tourist places and important among them have been briefly discussed below. Tourism is now a current important topic and it is presently included in the college curriculum to disseminate knowledge and important of tourism.

Tourism is a foremost growth engine in generating employment opportunities and eradicating poverty. A Part of economic benefits, tourism encompasses social and cultural benefits as well. From social and cultural point of view, tourism provides interaction between the cultures of guest -tourists and host - natives. It too promotes friendship, understanding and social interactions among different parts of the world. Realizing its multiple purposes all the countries of the world are now intent upon tourism.

In a layman's parlance, tourism is the temporary movement of people to destinations outside their normal places of work. However, tourism is the sum total of relationship arising from the interaction of tourists, business organizations, host governments and host communities in the process of attracting and hosting these tourists and other visitors.

In this connection, western Odisha especially the undivided Sambalpur District does not lag behind as it abounds with plenty of tourist places. It is a hub of tourists coming from different places and a repository of scenic beauty. The undivided Sambalpur district has reason enough to boast of a number of historical places and monuments, great shrines and temples, wild life sanctuaries, hill stations, etc. Besides, it shows a remarkable diversity in cultures, religions, festivals, languages, arts, crafts and music etc.

There is very conducive road communication to visit these places. Buses, trains and other conveyances are available to go to these places. The important tourist places of this district are Maa Samaleswari Temple of Barbazaar, Maa Ghanteswari Temple of Chiplima, Huma temple of Huma, Nrusinghnath Temple of Nrusinghanath, Paikmal, Harishankar Temple of Harishankar, Ushakothi Wildlife Sanctuary, Debrigarh Wildlife Sanctuary, Pradhanpat waterfall etc. Below some of the tourist places of this area have been discussed which are worthy to be visited.

2. Goddess Samaleswari Temple -An abode of presiding Deity of Sambalpur



This temple is one of the famous and oldest temples of western Orissa especially Sambalpur district. This beautiful temple is situated at Barbazaar, on the bank of river Mahanadi in Sambalpur.

The construction of the temple had been started by Chhatrasai Dev in the year 1657. However it was completed in 1695 by Balaram Dev. Since then shree Samaleswari, the presiding deity of Sambalpur, is a strong religious force in western part of Orissa. She has been worshipped from ancient

times as Jagatjanani, Adishakti, Mahalaxmi and Maha Saraswati. This temple is divided into two parts. One is Badagudi or Big temple and the other is Sanagudi or small temple. The Sanagudi is also known as the mandap of the temple where Lord Ganesh and other Gods are worshipped by facing Goddess Samalei. The most interesting thing about the Samaleswari Temple is that all the priests of the temple are **Kshatriyas**. The walls of the famous temple are engraved with the idols of Goddesses such as Maa Kali, Maa Durga, Maa Mangala, Maa Ramchandi, Maa Banadurga, Maa Barahi, Maa Matangee, Maa Jualamukhi, Maa Ugratara Etc.

3. Ghanteshwari Temple - A Deity of Bells.



Another attraction of tourists in western Orissa is Maa Ghanteshwari Temple of Chipilima, which is situated 33 kilometers south – west of Sambalpur town is situated on the bank of river Mahanadi. There are bells everywhere at the temple yard. People offer bells to goddess Ghanteshwari or the Deity of Bells, after fulfillment of their wishes. A large number of pilgrims all over the state visit this temple. It is known as the “**light house without light.**” Ghanteshwari temple was built by the earlier sailors for whom the bells served as warning against heavy winds. The significance of the place lies in the great number of small bells hanging all around the temple. The Chiplima Hydro power plant is located near the temple shrine on the same river bank.

4. The Unique Leaning Temple of Huma



Huma temple is situated on the left bank of the Mahanadi which is 23 kilometers south to Sambalpur town. It is believed that its construction was started by King Balaram Dev (1575-1595). However Baliar Singh (1617-1657), the 5th King of the Chauhan dynasty of Sambalpur completed this work in 1670 A.D. This historical temple is situated at the confluence point of river Mahanadi and Dhulijhor. The king had donated 7 villages to Brahmans as the means of their subsistence for their religious service. This temple is known as the leaning temple of Huma, as it does not stand upright and tilts to one side. The main temple is adorned with other temples like Bhairav temple, Jagannath temple, Arun stambha and Kapileswar temple.

The surprising thing about the place is that the main temple tilts in one direction and other small ones to some other direction. Besides, other small structures inside the temple complex including the boundaries of the show the same tilting nature.

Many legends corroborate the construction of this temple. Among them one is that there was a milkman used to go across river Mahanadi every day to worship Lord Shiva – Bimaleswar, the presiding deity of this temple and offer milk to the deity. Surprisingly, one day, the stone idol consumed the milk offered by the milkman. This miraculous incident paved way for the construction of this temple.

During Mahashivaratri, a grand fair takes place at Huma temple. Devotees visiting this temple cannot spare visiting a place named “**Machindra Ghat.**” In this place a lot of “Jude” fishes eat food from the hands of devotees. Apart from that, this is a suitable place for swimming and boating. Devotees cross this deep brackish stream to see some legendary things between Machindra Ghat and river Mahanadi.

For the scenic beauty it attracts more photographers, devotees and scientists. This place is worthy to visit.

5. Hirakud Dam of Sambalpur- The Longest River Dam of India



Hirakud Dam is located 15 km from Sambalpur Town. The length of the dike is 2.5 km long which is the longest dam on a river. The materials used for the construction of the dike are earth, concrete and rods. The main dam is located between "Chandili Dunguri" and "Lamba Dunguri" which is 4/8 km long. The other sides from main dam are 21 km long. The ocean-like stretch of the water mass amply brings great peace in mind. There is a sanctuary near Hirakud Dam. It has been estimated that the concrete materials used in Hirakud Dam can make an 8 meter wide concrete road from "Kashmir" to "Kanyakumari". At the early stage of its construction it received vehement opposition from the villages which were to be submerged due to the construction. Even an Engineer named "Rangeiya" who was working as chief engineer in "Maysore" had doubted the dam's capacity in controlling flood. An estimate made by the Revenue Department shows that 249 villages were submerged and about 30,000 families evacuated their habitats. However, Hirakud Dam has added a new feather to the economic development of western Orissa.

6. Debrigarh Wildlife Sanctuary – A Sanctuary of various species



The Debrigarh Wildlife Sanctuary stands out among all the wildlife sanctuaries in the state in terms of its scope for wide sightseeing. It is in proximity to the Hirakud dam which provides a perfect water source host for the animals, birds and aquatic fauna of the sanctuary. "Apart from the animals, there are also migratory birds that explore nearly 150 kms area of the Hirakud reservoir. As the dam is a standing water body, many varieties of diving ducks can be seen. Perhaps the sanctuary attracts the largest number of diving ducks in winter compared to all the other sanctuaries in Orissa.

Birds such as red crested pochard, great crested grebe are seen in large numbers. In 2008 there was a bird census and the sanctuary recorded more than 32,000 winged-visitors. There are six eco-tourism cottages in the sanctuary at Barkhandia and each has the facilities to accommodate a small family or two adults. Most importantly, the tariff includes all meals. Permission for the entry into the sanctuary is available at the gates, but to stay in the eco-tourism cottages one has to get the DFO's permission from the office in Sambalpur town after paying the fees.

7. Cattle Island – A Natural Wonder



Cattle Island exists in one of the extreme points of Hirakud Reservoir, a natural wonder. It is near Kumarbandh village of Belpahar-Banharpali range which is about 90 km from Sambalpur. The island is a submerged hill, and before the construction of Hirakud Dam a village sat there. During the resettlement period, villagers left some of their cattle behind; when the dam construction was over, the cattle settled on the hilltop. With the passage of time the nearby area was filled up with the reservoir water, turning the hilltop into an island. Being away from human habitat, the cattle are now wild, very swift and untamed. Living on a hilltop with dense forest around, they are larger in size than tamed cattle almost all of which are white in colour. Nearby residents attempt to capture these animals from time to time, but these hunts are rarely successful. Anybody visits to this island is taken by a boat in the Hirakud reservoir.

8. Pradhanpat Waterfall - A Natural Perennial Stream



Pradhanpat initially located in undivided Sambalpur district is now in Deogarh District which is 90 kms away from Sambalpur to the East. This waterfall is very beautiful with lavish greenery all around. It is 70 foot high and surrounded by Pradhanpat hills with big saal trees is rare scenic beauty. There are many big streams in this place and Pradhanpat is famous for them. Here you can see a lot of monkeys.

This place has been facilitated well with nice benches to sit and small bridges etc. The water from this waterfall is supplied to the entire town of Deogarh. So the water in the fall area is not for any type of public use. One cannot realize the beauty and happy moments without watching this place in own eye. It is one of the best waterfalls in Odisha.

9. Kurudukut Waterfall:



This is still not known to many people about this waterfall. It is completely in an isolated area. Here Government is planning to create Hydro Electric Power Project. Till now no proper road has been made to visit to the waterfall. You have to trek 1kms to see the actual waterfall in dense forest area. Only unpaved road made to bottom of the Kurudukut jungle. This waterfall is a small fall but full of jungle beauty and a must go place for nature lover.

10. Ushakothi Wildlife Sanctuary – A Sanctuary of varieties of animals.



Elephants in Ushakothi Wildlife Sanctaury

Ushakothi Wildlife Sanctuary, also known as Badrama Sanctuary, is a popular wildlife sanctuary situated 45 km north-east of Sambalpur, on the National Highway number 53.

This sanctuary was established in 1962, over a total area of 285sq km and is one of the smaller sanctuaries of Orissa. This sanctuary is situated to the west of Hirakud Dam. It is also one of the locations for ecotourism and has accommodation facilities for its travelers, in its premises itself, in the form of the Forest Rest House. This rest house is situated 3 km away from the sanctuary and along with accommodations, it also provides guides and spot lights for nominal charges. The main species of animals here include 35 elephants, tigers, leopards, bison, nilgai, cheetal, wolves, spotted deer, gaur, black spotted panthers, Royal Bengal tigers and wild Asian elephants are the special attractions of this place. These animals can be seen in the help of wildlife safari jeeps available here. The forests of this sanctuary are mainly dry deciduous, containing trees like Neem, Sal, Acacia, Sandalwood, Casuarinas and Arjun. Ushakothi is a veritable paradise for many bona fide denizens of nature, animals and plants. The sanctuary also supports ecotourism activities. The sanctuary's dense deciduous forest is flanked by the Wardha and Penganga rivers covers 130 sq. km.

As these are nocturnal creatures, visitors generally need to get a jeep safari to get a closer view. For this, the forest department provides Jeeps for visitors to explore the sanctuary. The other main attractions of the sanctuary are the Bison and Sambar. The sanctuary also has sloth wild bears which are quite rare but one can see them in the late evenings, when they come to drink water from the nearby streams. The sanctuary also is rich in avian fauna and the main attractions are Racket tail drongos and Flying squirrel.

Two masonry watch towers installed in the Sanctuary provide a good view of the animals which flock to the nearby water points and also one can have an aerial view of the surroundings. These watch towers are located near the saline tank inside the sanctuary at a height of 30 feet.

Visitors who wish to tour the reserve have the option of getting Spot lights and Guide from the Forest officer of the reserve, for a small fee. Photography is strictly prohibited and prior permission need to be obtained to enter the sanctuary.

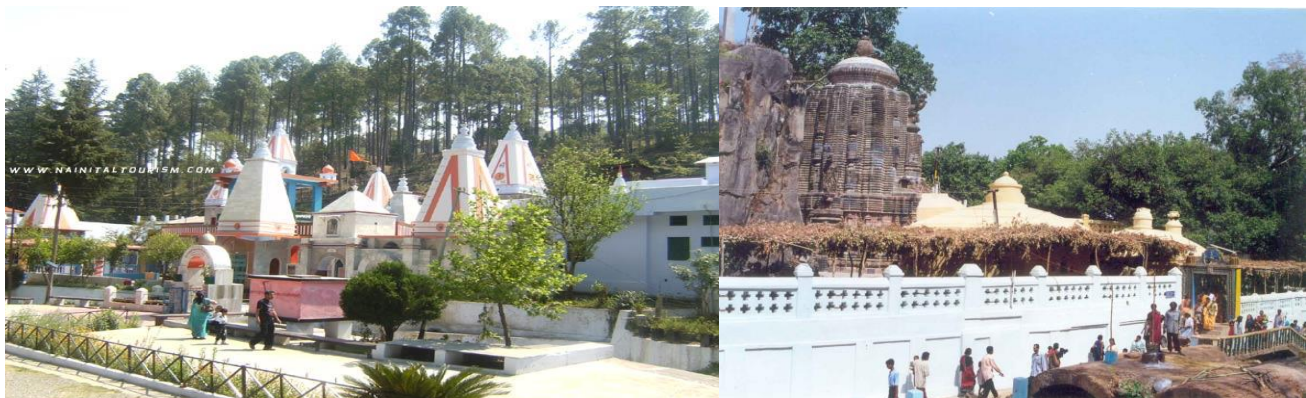
Harishankar Temple- Unique temple to worship both Vishnu and Siva Together



Harishankar is the best tourist place in Odisha. It is the only one place in Odisha, where people worshiped two God Siva and Vishnu together in one temple. This is situated at 83 kms from the main town of Bolangir. This place is naturally very beautiful. Tourist enjoys the natural gorgeousness and the religious spiritual ambiance of this place.

In early days at the time of 14th century Harishankar is discovered by the Chauhan king. Harishankar temple is located in one site of hill Gandhamardhan. A small stream is also here which is coming from the hill. The climate of the place is very cool and peaceful. Tourist can enjoy and spend a very memorable time on this natural place

Nrusinghanath temple – Natural Abode of Lord Marjari Kesari



Nrusinghanath, the great temple of Odisha in India, is situated at the foot hills of Gandhamardhan Hill near Paikmal, Bargarh. The King of Patnagarh, Baijal Singh Dev, laid the foundation of this historic temple in 1313 A.D. It is only 45 feet in height, divided into two parts: the first being the seat of the Lord Nrusinghnath, the second allotted to Jagamohan (antechamber having 3 gates and each supported by 4 pillars. Around six hundred years ago, a woman Jamuna Kandhuni as referred in the book "Nrusingha Charitra" composed a Kavya that sings the glory of Marjara Keshari in regard to suppression and repression of torture and tyranny of Musika Daitya. According to Oriya and Devnagari inscriptions, the temple was built by Baijal Dev in the early 15th century AD. The temple is constructed in Orissan style of architecture.

Here you can also visit Chal dhar (400 m from Temple), Bhim Dhar (425 m from Temple), Sita Kunda (500 m from Temple), Panchupandav (1.5 km from Temple), Kapil Dhar (4 km from Temple), Supta Dhar

(7 km from Temple), Satyaamb (9 km from Temple), Bhim Madua (11 km from Temple), Happy Point (12 km from Temple). In recent year tourism has been developing in around Gandhamardhan hills. An annual big fair held on Nrusimha-Chatrurdasi day during Vaishakha Shukla Chaturdashi (in May) attracts thousands of pilgrims from far and near. Nrusimhanath Temple is about 110 km west of Baragarh and 164 km from Sambalpur. Khariar Road Railway Station is the nearest railhead. Here also a beautiful garden created just near the temple, where Lord Krishna different avatar shown and also a 28 ft Hanuman Statue created inside the center of Garden.

The rare medicinal plants available on the hill are also another attraction. The main temple at Nrusimhanath standing amidst the verdant beauty of the hill has a place of its own, because of its art, architecture and sculptures, which attract historians and research scholars from India and abroad. Historians like- Beglar, Charls Fabri, Dr.G..R. Bhandarkar, Dr. N.K. Sahu etc. have spent lots of time in doing deep research here

10. Conclusion:

The tourist places of Western Odisha are really worth visiting and watching. Many tourists visit these places everyday and enjoy the scenic beauty. People cannot forget longest river dam Hirakud, Gandhi and Nehru minars, Zero points, Chiplima Power generation points, Ushakothi, Debrigarh, Cattle Island, the leaning temple of Huma, Samaleswari temple Devjharan, Phuljharan, Metakani etc. Tourists' places not only generate employment opportunities to some people but also acquaint the tourists to these places for historical point of view.

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