



Konark Sun Temple

Published On: 10-11-2025

The Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) has prohibited tourist entry into the ‘Nata Mandap’ (dancing hall) of the Konark Sun Temple in Odisha’s Puri district. The decision was taken due to structural vulnerabilities and conservation concerns, as parts of the Nata Mandap’s floor and pillars show signs of stress and weathering.

Aspect	Details
Location	Konark, near Puri, Odisha coastline
Built by	King <u>Narasimhadeva I</u> (1238–1264 CE) of the Eastern Ganga Dynasty
Year of Construction	Around 1250 CE
Deity	Dedicated to Surya (Sun God)
Alternate Name	<i>Surya Devalaya</i> or <i>Black Pagoda</i> (by European sailors)
UNESCO Status	World Heritage Site (1984)
Architecture Style	Kalinga (Odisha) School of Temple Architecture

Architectural Features

Design Concept: The entire temple resembles a **gigantic solar chariot**, symbolizing the Sun God’s journey across the sky.

Structure:

oOriginally stood **227 feet high**, making it among the tallest temples ever constructed in India.

oThe chariot features **24 intricately carved wheels**, each about **12 feet in diameter**, drawn by **six stone horses**.

Orientation: The temple faces **east**, designed so that **the first rays of the morning sun** illuminate the main sanctum.

Material Used:

o**Khondalite stone** – main structural material.

o**Laterite stone** – for the boundary walls and flooring.

o**Chlorite stone** – for door jambs and decorative elements.

o**Iron clamps and dowels** – used to join massive stone blocks, some exhibiting **magnetic properties** (believed to attract ships).

Artistic Carvings:

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oDepictions from **Hindmythology**, celestial beings, animals, daily life, and dancers adorn the temple walls.

oThe **Nata Mandap** served as a hall for **devadasis** performing ritual dances.

Scientific Significance:

oThe **wheels function as sundials**, capable of measuring time to within minutes.

Cultural & Religious Significance

Chandrabhaga Festival (February): Annual celebration honouring the **Sun God**, involving rituals, music, and dance near the Chandrabhaga River.

The temple remains a **symbol of artistic excellence, solar worship, and maritime heritage** of medieval Odisha.

Conservation Concerns

Erosion, weathering, and past restorations have compromised parts of the structure, especially the **Nata Mandap** and **Jagamohana (main hall)**.

ASI employs **laser scanning, ground-penetrating radar (GPR), and 3D mapping** for non-invasive conservation.

The **Black Pagoda's** iron structure, while innovative, also contributed to **moisture-induced corrosion** over centuries.