

EXCURSION OPTIONS FOR 10 NOVEMBER 2014

Option 1: Lake Chilka	Option 2: Antiquities in and around Bhubaneswar
<p>Lake Chilka is a seawater lagoon about 55 km south of Toshali Sands. It is well-known for its scenic beauty as well as for being a unique ecological zone.</p> <p>A bus will leave for Chilka directly after breakfast and should reach the village of “Satapara” (all the ‘a’s are long, as in ‘calm’) in about one and a half hours. From Satapara, we will hire small country-made motorboats (each with a driver), seating 6 passengers per boat, and go out on the lake.</p> <p>The full excursion on the lake lasts about 3 hours, and will take you up to the sand bar separating the peaceful lake from the rough waters of the Bay of Bengal. On the way, you are likely to see some wild Irrawaddy dolphins, which live in this lake (<i>Orcaella brevirostris</i>). These are sea-going mammals that look similar to beluga whales but are more closely related, genetically, to killer whales. They are, however, quite harmless. Lake Chilka is also famous as a haven for migratory birds which come here mostly from Siberia during the winter. The season for that is just beginning, and so you need a bit of luck to see them.</p> <p>The depth of the lake is nowhere more than about 15 feet, but its waters contain many organisms that bite, sting and scratch. It is not advisable, therefore, to go in the water or even to trail your fingers in the water.</p>	<p>The Puri-Bhubaneswar area is rich in antiquities and monuments of historical interest, reflecting about two and a half millennia of civilization.</p> <p>A bus will leave for Bhubaneswar directly after breakfast and should reach the caves at two low hills called “Udaygiri” and “Khandagiri”, just north of the city, in about two hours. Udaygiri was once a Buddhist monastery, and one can see the caves in which the hermits lived once upon a time. Also at Udaygiri is an ancient inscription celebrating the conquests of an Orissan warrior-king called Kharavela, dating from the second century BCE. Khandagiri was a monastery occupied by extreme ascetics professing the Jain religion.</p> <p>We will then enter the city of Bhubaneswar, and see the “Rajarani” and “Mukteshwar” temples dating from the 10th and 11th centuries and once dedicated to the Hindu god Shiva. These are known for the profusion of carvings covering the outside of the temples.</p> <p>Finally we will visit the Buddhist stupa at “Dhavalgiri” (= white mountain), locally called “Dhuli”. This is a modern building, built by the Japanese <i>Sangha</i> to replace an ancient stupa that once stood here. At the base of the mountain is a rock inscription dating back to the Emperor Ashoka (3rd century BCE), and proclaiming his conversion from a warrior king to a champion of “Dhamma” (= good conduct).</p>