



## RATNAGIRI BUDDHIST SITE: HISTORY

**NEWS:** A colossal Buddha head, a giant palm unearthed amid ASI excavation in Ratnagiri. What this means

### WHAT'S IN THE NEWS?

The Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) has made significant discoveries during ongoing excavations at the historic Ratnagiri Buddhist site in Jajpur district, Odisha.

### Findings at the Ratnagiri Buddhist Complex

#### 1. Buddhist Monastery Complex:

- The monastery, dating back to the 8th century CE, reflects Ratnagiri's importance as a Buddhist educational and spiritual hub.
- It flourished between the 8th and 11th centuries under **the Bhauma Kara dynasty**.
- Decline began in the 13th century CE due to invasions but saw sporadic activity until the 16th century.

#### 2. Artefacts Unearthed:

- **Hundreds of votive stupas**, small-scale stupas used for worship and offerings.
- A **colossal Buddha head** (3-4 feet tall) and a **massive palm** (5 feet) that showcase intricate craftsmanship.
- Sculptural fragments of Buddhist deities highlight the site's artistic and religious significance.
- **Inscribed stones**, pottery, beads, and stone pillars provide insights into daily life, trade, and religious practices of the time.





### 3. Architectural Features:

- Remains of an **ancient brick wall**, possibly part of a larger structure, indicate the site's expansive architecture.
- Discovery of a **monolithic elephant** (5 feet in length, 3.5 feet in height) suggests symbolic and artistic representation of Buddhist ideals.

## Historical Significance of the Discoveries

### 1. Buddhist Legacy in Odisha:

- Ratnagiri is one of the three sites forming the **Diamond Triangle of Odisha**, along with **Udayagiri** and **Lalitagiri**.
- It was developed into a prominent Buddhist centre by the Bhauma Kara dynasty, which actively patronized Buddhism.
- The site showcases Odisha's contribution to Buddhist art, architecture, and learning.

### 2. Maritime and Cultural Links with Southeast Asia:

- Odisha, historically known as Kalinga, had strong **maritime trade links** with Southeast Asia.
- The discoveries at Ratnagiri reinforce its role as a conduit for spreading Buddhism to regions like Sri Lanka, Java, Sumatra, and Bali.

### 3. Buddhist Art and Culture:

- Buddha sculptures at Ratnagiri feature **unique hairstyles** and detailing not found in other parts of India, reflecting a distinct regional style.
- The votive stupas and sculptural fragments signify the flourishing of Mahayana Buddhism during its peak.

## Odisha's Role in the Spread of Buddhism

### 1. Ashoka and Buddhism:

- Emperor **Ashoka's Kalinga War** in 261 BCE was pivotal in his conversion to Buddhism.
- He actively promoted the religion across India and Southeast Asia, using Odisha as a cultural and trade hub.

### 2. Maritime Connections:



- Kalinga's ancient trade network exchanged items like **pepper, cinnamon, silk, and jewellery** with regions like Bali, Java, and Sri Lanka.
- This trade also served as a channel for spreading Buddhist teachings and art.

### 3. Key Figures and Events:

- **Tapassu and Bhallika**, believed to be from Utkala, were the first disciples of Lord Buddha.
- The annual **Baliyatra festival** celebrates Odisha's maritime legacy and cultural links with Southeast Asia.

## Cultural and Religious Impact

### 1. Architectural and Artistic Excellence:

- The monolithic elephant and colossal sculptures highlight the artistic mastery achieved during the site's peak period.
- The intricate votive stupas reflect the widespread religious devotion and craftsmanship of the era.

### 2. Historical Records and Legacy:

- Accounts by **Hiuen Tsang**, the 7th-century Chinese Buddhist monk, suggest Odisha's prominence as a Buddhist centre.
- Ratnagiri's artefacts and inscriptions contribute significantly to understanding Buddhism's evolution in the region.

## Key Facts about the Ratnagiri Buddhist Site

### 1. Location:

- Situated in Jajpur district, Odisha, between the Brahmani and Birupa rivers.
- Part of the **Diamond Triangle** along with Lalitagiri and Udayagiri.

### 2. Peak Period:

- Flourished between the 7th and 10th centuries CE, with its last constructions in the 13th century CE.

### 3. Unique Features:

- Ratnagiri's Buddha sculptures have distinctive hairstyles and detailing not found elsewhere in India.



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- It was a center for Mahayana and Tantrayana (Vajrayana) Buddhism.

**Source:** <https://indianexpress.com/article/long-reads/asi-excavations-at-odishas-ratnagiri-puts-spotlight-on-ancient-buddhist-site-its-se-asia-links-9784948/#:~:text=In%20December%2C%20when%20Archaeological%20Survey,and%20to%20find%20material%20evidence>



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