



NRUSINGHANATH TEMPLE

&

Gandhamardan

A Sacred Guide

History . Mythology . Rituals . Nature



ॐ उग्रं वीरं महाविष्णुं
ज्वलन्तं सर्वतोमुखम्
नृसिंहं भीषणं भद्रं
मृत्युर्मृत्युं नमाम्यहम् ॥

PREFACE



Nrusinghanath Mandir stands at the confluence of nature, devotion, and living tradition. Situated in the sacred folds of the Gandhamardan hill range, this temple is not merely a place of worship but a continuing spiritual ecosystem shaped by centuries of ritual practice, pilgrimage, and community life.

This book has been compiled to document and present the historical, ritualistic, cultural, and ecological dimensions of Nrusinghanath Mandir in a single coherent narrative. Much of the temple's legacy lives through oral traditions, priestly lineages, and seasonal festivals that are best understood through lived experience rather than isolated records.

The aim of this work is not to reinterpret tradition, but to preserve and present it with clarity and respect—for devotees, researchers, visitors, and future generations. Information herein has been gathered through temple records, local knowledge, cultural documentation, and field observation. Ritual practices and timings described reflect standard observances and may vary during festivals and special occasions.

— Compiled & Edited

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INTRODUCTION

Nrusinghanath (also known as Nrusimhanath or Nrusinghanath) is a sacred hill-edge temple complex located at Paikmal in the Bargarh district of western **Odisha**, set on the northern slopes of the **Gandhamardan hills**. Revered for centuries, the site represents a harmonious blend of **spiritual devotion**, **mythology**, **natural heritage**, and **historical depth**.

At its heart, Nrusinghanath is a prominent **Vaishnava dham**, dedicated to Lord Nrusingha (Narasimha), the half-man, half-lion incarnation of **Lord Vishnu**. Worshipped as a divine guardian, the deity symbolizes protection, justice, and unwavering faith. The temple remains a living centre of ritual, where daily worship, sacred offerings, and annual festivals continue ancient traditions.

The surrounding **Gandhamardan Parvat** is deeply rooted in sacred lore. According to the Ramayana, a fragment of the Sanjeevani mountain carried by Hanuman fell upon these hills, blessing them with extraordinary medicinal wealth. Even today, the forests of Gandhamardan are renowned for their herbs used in **Ayurvedic and traditional** healing practices.

The region also bears traces of early **Buddhist heritage**, historically known as **Parimalagiri**. Ancient caves and rock shelters suggest the presence of Buddhist monks who once meditated in these tranquil surroundings, adding another layer to the site's spiritual legacy.

Waterfalls, perennial streams, caves, and forested trails define the natural beauty of Nrusinghanath, while vibrant festivals—especially the **Baisakh Mela**—bring together **devotion**, **culture**, and **community** life. Together, these elements make **Nrusinghanath** a place of pilgrimage, discovery, and reflection.

MAKING / HISTORY OF THE TEMPLE

Foundation and date

The temple is traditionally credited to **King Baijal (Baijal Dev / Baijal Singh Dev)** of Patnagarh/Patna. Inscriptional and local records most commonly place the main foundation in the early **15th century CE**; an on-site inscription date frequently quoted in district literature is **17 March 1413 A.D.** (some local sources mention variations – an alternate popular reading cites **1313 in older accounts**; historians accept early 2nd millennium medieval dating but the 15th century is widely reported).



**King Baijal Singh Dev
(Early 15th Century)**



**Stone architectural detail
of Nrusinghanath Temple.**

Architectural style and special features

Kalinga (Deula) style temple form adapted to a hill-foot setting. Although not extremely tall (approx. **45 ft**), it is architecturally distinctive:

- The temple is divided into **two main parts**: the garbhagriha (sanctum, “seat” of the Lord) and the jagamohana (assembly hall/antichamber).
- The **jagamohana** has **three gates** supported by **four pillars** made of an unusual rock – local tradition says these stones are not

native to Gandhamardan and glitter when rubbed. Scholars interpret the pillars as an indicator of royal patronage and the transregional movement of material.

Foundation and date

Several inscriptions and local chronicles mention Baijal Dev (**Chauhan ruler**) and subsequent repairs and patronage by local chieftains. Over the centuries the temple absorbed artistic motifs (Vaishnava panels, river-goddess sculptures, Navagraha line) while remaining a living ritual center.

HISTORY / MYTHOLOGY OF NRUSINGHANATH

This section merges pan-Indian mythic themes of Narasimha with rich local legends that make the site unique.

Classical mythological root (Narasimha)

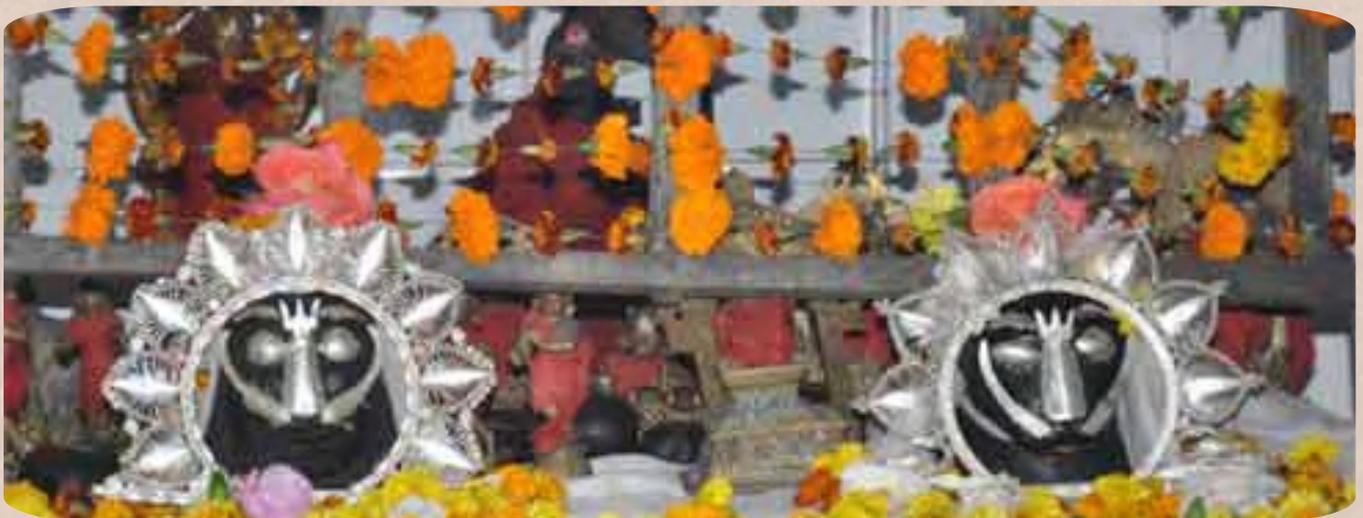
The temple's principal deity is Lord **Nrusingha (Narasimha)** – Vishnu's **man-lion** avatar who slays Hiranyakashipu to protect Prahlada. This cosmic theme of protector-deity underlies many temple rituals and the theological mood of the place.



**Nrusingha Avatar
(Narasimha)**

Local incarnation: Marjara-Keshari (the Feline King)

In local Odia devotional literature (the Nrusingha Charitra and other kavyas), a localized feline form **Marjara Keshari** appears in stories where Vishnu takes a cat-like form to pursue **Musika Daitya (Mouse Demon)** who had hidden in mountain tunnels. This is a symbolic tale of the triumph of order over petty tyranny. The image worshipped at Paikmal emphasizes the “**waiting guardian**” character: the deity watches the tunnel for the demon’s emergence – an idea that amplifies the hill’s watchful, protective identity. (This story is narrated in local kavyas and oral history).



Lord Shri Nrusinghanath

The discovery legend (Hari & Yamuna)

A **Kondh tribal couple**, Hari and Yamuna, are central figures in the temple's origin stories:

- While digging on the hill Yamuna's spade struck a stone that bled; frightened, she fled.
- The stone (or image) appeared in her dream as Lord Marjara-Keshari instructed her to retrieve and worship the image.
- A royal vision by King Baijal Dev corroborated the revelation; he oversaw the formal installation and construction of the temple at that sacred spot.
- The Kondh couple were made the first caretakers/priests; their descendants retain ritual privilege (for example, raising the temple flag during the Baisakh festival), even though regular priestly functions have largely moved to Brahmin priests. This origin story marks the temple as a point of intersection between tribal and mainstream Hindu devotional worlds. (Local oral tradition; district accounts)



A local oral tradition describing the first recognition of Lord Nrusingha by a tribal couple in the forests of Gandhamardan.

Symbolic meaning and regional role

Nrusinghanath functions both as a guardian deity (watching the tunnels and valleys of Gandhamardan) and as the focus of agrarian and community cycles — harvest festivals, healing pilgrimages (because of the hill's medicinal reputation), and fairs that link religious ritual to local commerce.

ABOUT GANDHAMARDAN PARVAT

Physical geography & extent

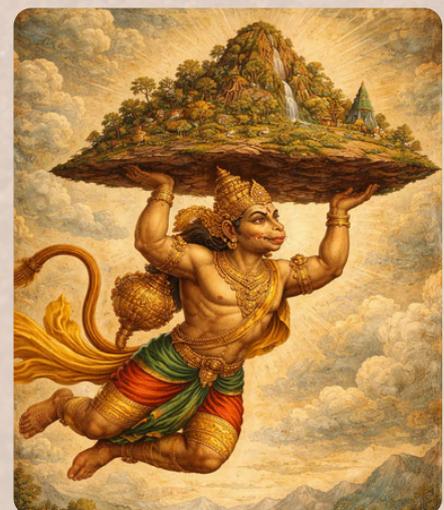
Gandhamardan is a long, wooded hill range along the Bargarh–Bol angir border. The massif presents a series of terraces, water-scarped slopes and forested ridge lines. Elevations on the range rise to approximately **3,200–3,250 ft** at the highest points of the range and form a scenic green ridge on the western Odisha landscape.



Gandhamardan Parvat

Mythic identity: the Sanjeevani fragment

The dominant myth: when Hanuman carried the Himalayan herb-mountain to Lanka to save **Lakshmana**, a portion slipped and fell here; that fallen portion became Gandhamardan. Because of that myth the hill is believed to naturally harbour a concentration of medicinal herbs like those of the Himalaya – a claim reinforced by local botanical abundance and traditional herbal knowledge. The “**Sanjeevani origin**” story is ubiquitous in local lore and is often invoked during the Baisakh Mela and healing pilgrimages.



Hanuman soaring with Gandhamardan Hill

Biodiversity & medicinal heritage

Gandhamardan is locally famed as an herbal repository. Community knowledge and some botanical surveys report hundreds to thousands of medicinal taxa (local tradition often cites “**over 5,000**” species – a figure reflecting rich diversity and many minor taxa catalogued in folk medicine). The hill’s plants are used in Ayurvedic practice for ailments from respiratory infections to chronic diseases. A medicinal park near the temple displays many important taxa under Forest Department supervision. The mountain’s flora and fauna make it important for conservation and for ethnobotanical research.

Cultural ecology

The hill’s forest cover, perennial springs (**Papaharini and Saptadhar**), caves and sacred pools create a multi-use landscape: ritual bathing, plant collection (traditionally by local healers), pilgrimage, and biodiversity conservation. Seasonal fairs and festivals tie human livelihood cycles to ecological events (e.g., pilgrimage peaks in **Baisakh**; medicinal plant harvesting seasons).

PLACES TO VISIT

Papaharini (Papahari) & Saptadhar - “Destroyer of Sins”

Papaharini is the main perennial stream that emerges from the Gandhamardan ledge. It is formed by the confluence of seven springs called Saptadhar, then flows as a steady fountain that eventually joins Ang and Mahanadi rivers. The Saptadhar complex has several small falls, pools and ghats. (Approx. flow: 25 km before joining tributaries.)

Mythology & ritual: The name Papaharini literally means “**destroyer of sins**”. Bathing here is believed to cleanse devotees of past sins (even the sin of killing a cow, gohatya, in the local belief). Pilgrims perform ablutions at the Kak Kund, Papahari Gokund and other ghats. During the Baisakh Mela the Papaharini is venerated as “Papaharini Ganga” and used for large ritual dips (Devsnan).



Papaharini Jharana

Bhimdhar & Chal Dhar

Bhimdhar is a higher waterfall (**approx. 20 ft**) and Chaldhar is a **10-foot** fall below it. Both are within a short walk (under 1 km for Chaldhar; a longer hike for Bhimdhar).

Mythology : Locally, Bhimdhar is believed to have been created by Bhim (of the Pandavas) by striking the rock with his gada (mace) during their exile; hence the name Bhimdhar. Chaldhar is used for ritual bathing and tourist recreation. Close to these you will find **Ganapati Ghat** (with a rock image of Ganesa) and the Pahadi Shivling on the hill.



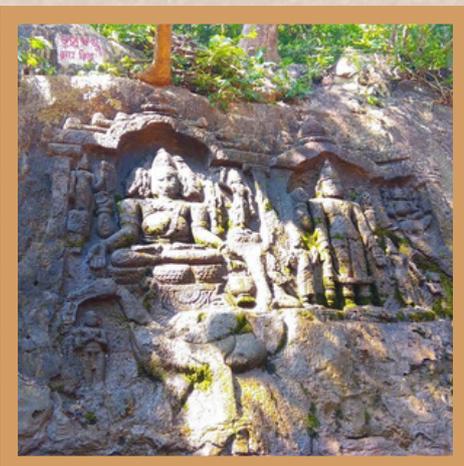
Chal Dhar Jharana

Sita Kund

A small sacred pool close to the temple-area ghats.

Mythology : It is believed to be the bathing place of Mata Sita during episodes of the **Ramayana** – visitors perform ritual dips and offer flowers. The presence of a “Sita Kund” links the Gandhamardan to Ramayana geography and strengthens the Sanjeevani/Hanuman associations.

Panchu Pandab Ghat & Tridev Ghat



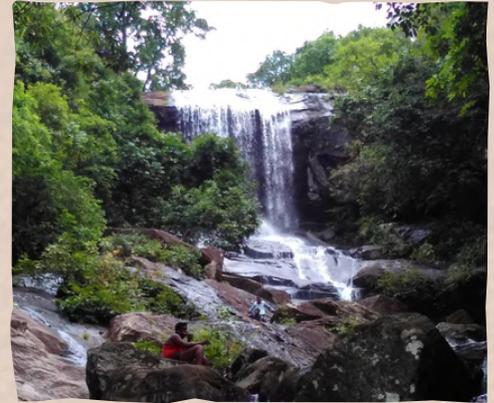
Rock benches and ghats with carved images; Panchupandav Ghat is a place with rock-images historically associated by locals with the **five Pandavas**. Tridev Ghat features three images thought to represent **Brahma-Vishnu-Maheshvara (Tridev)**. There is also a **Pitrupinda** ghat used for ancestral rites and a nearby Kak Kund tank.

Mythology : Local legend links these images to the Pandavas’ stay in exile; archaeologists read them as historic **Siva / Vishnu / Brahma** and other religious images carved over centuries. Either way, the place provides a vivid layering of epic narrative and material heritage.

Kapil Dhar

A major waterfall of **~35 feet**, fed from Saptadhar springs and located roughly **4 km from the temple**. It forms a scenic cascade and is a favourite photo/relaxation spot.

Mythology : Named after **Kapil Rishi** (legend associates a Rishi's penance and the spring's origin). Pilgrims treat the waterfall as both a natural wonder and a consecrated place where sages may have performed tapasya.



Kapil Dhar

The Mighty Mandap (Buddhist Cave / Rock Shelter)

A large rock cave about 10–11 km from the temple (dimensions commonly cited **~150 ft × 50 ft × 25 ft**). Characteristic of ancient Buddhist caves and possibly used as vihara/cell complexes.

Mythology : **Hiuen-Tsang's 7th century CE** account of Parimalagiri describes multi-storied monasteries and golden Buddha images on the Gandhamardan plateau; the cave resonates with that description. Local lore sometimes ascribes miraculous stories to the cave (meditation of sages, protection by mountain spirits). The Mandap is best seen at dawn or dusk when light gives the rock columns dramatic relief.

Bhim Madua

A massive semi-circular natural cave or shelter that serves as a resting shed for large numbers (**traditionally said to shelter 1,000+ people**). It is positioned higher on the hill and provides panoramic views.

Mythology : Sometimes identified as an ancient monastic hall or vihar; local tradition calls it a resting place created or used by **Bhima** (Pandava). Historians note its form is similar to early viharas; it may have functioned as a congregation or shelter area in antiquity.

Other nearby places

Harishankar Temple (southern slope; in Bolangir): A twin-dham relation with Nrusinghanath – both shrines are visited together by pilgrims crossing the ridge. Harishankar itself has waterfalls and a combined **Shiva-Vishnu** worship tradition.

Debrigarh Wildlife Sanctuary (Barapahar hills): Not a Gandhamardan subsite but an important nearby wildlife area for birding and trekking; historically used as refuge in rebellion episodes – today a protected park with varied fauna.

Ambabhona (Kedarnath Temple), Ganiapali, Papanga, Melchhamunda, Padampur, Bargarh, Sohela, Bijepur: Villages and towns with Chauhan period temples, weavers' craft centers, Buddhist relics, and sites of local myth. (See longer list in your supplied notes for distances and local craft notes.)



**Harishankar Temple
(southern slope; in Bolangir)**



Debrigarh Wildlife Sanctuary

RITUALS AND TIME-TABLE OF TEMPLE

The temple's daily ritual cycle is rhythmic and oriented around bhoga (food offerings). If you wish to coordinate darshan with ritual moments, plan using these times.

Temple daily schedule

4:00 AM – Temple Opens

5:30 AM – First Bhog (Pratah Bhog):

small offering (anna/prasad) placed before the deity and distributed. Pilgrims often aim to be present for this early morning bhog.

6:00 AM – Khichdi Bhog:

a boiled rice / khichdi style offering (symbolic breakfast) prepared in the temple kitchen. Khichdi bhog is simple food and frequently distributed to early visitors. (If you want khichdi prasad, arrive before/at 6:00 AM.)

11:00 AM – Raj Bhog (Main Mid-day Offering):

the principal cooked offering of the day; larger in quantity and sometimes richer fare. Distributed as prasad after the ritual. This is a customary time for many devotees to have laghu annadan (small food distribution).

12:00 PM – 2:00 PM – Temple closed:

routine cleaning and rest for priests. Plan your on-site activities accordingly.

4:00 PM – Bal Bhog (Afternoon Light Offering)

7:30–8:00 PM — Yamini Bhog (Evening Offering) & Arati

final offering and surrendering of the day; small prasad distribution; temple closes at 8:00 PM.

Notes about ritual practice and access:

- Certain inner sanctum rituals are performed by priests only; visitors witness aratis and bhog distribution.
- On festival days timings are augmented (extra yajnas, processions and later night services). For Baisakh Mela the schedule expands into continuous ritual and market activity across the day and night.

Mythological Belief:

- It is said that Lord Nrusingha prefers to be served by priests who have retained **brahmacharya** (celibacy), symbolizing purity, discipline, and spiritual devotion.
- This tradition continues from ancient times when sages meditated across the Gandhamardana range.

FESTIVALS

MAJOR TEMPLE FESTIVALS

Nrusimha Chaturdasi / Baisakh Mela (principal)

Timing: Begins on **Baisakh Shukla Chaturdashi** (11th tithi of the bright fortnight of the Baisakh month) and continues to the full moon.



Rituals & events:

- ✦ Vishwa Shanti Mahayajna (a large peace yajna)
- ✦ **Bijamantra Japa** (collective mantra chanting)
- ✦ **Birthday / Pratishtha celebration of Lord Nrusingha** (procession and special offerings)
- ✦ **Dhvaja Bandhana** (flag-tying/hoisting ritual)
- ✦ **A huge Baisakh Bazaar (trade fair)** with hundreds of stalls stretching for ~1 km selling handicrafts, textiles, cosmetics, toys, regional food and medicinal herbs.

Social role: An annual social and trading hub; pilgrims perform long hill crossings between Nrusinghanath and Harishankar and back – a cross-ridge devotional circuit that reinforces a shared sacred geography.

OTHER MAJOR FESTIVALS (CALENDAR)

- ✦ **Akshaya Tritiya (Baisakh)** – auspicious beginnings & donations
- ✦ **Ratha Yatra & Bahuda (Asadha)** – chariot rituals reflecting Jagannath tradition
- ✦ **Raksha Purnima, Janmashtami, Nuakhai (harvest)** – community festivals
- ✦ **Durga Ashtami, Diwali, Kartik Purnima, Makara Sankranti, Mahashivratri, Holi** – regional and pan-Indian observances marked at the temple with local flavors.

OTHER CULTURAL FESTIVALS AROUND GANDHAMARDAN

Dhanuyatra (Bargarh) – the famous open-air theatrical festival held in winter. Visiting during Dhanuyatra enriches the cultural itinerary with a unique folk theatre experience.

FOOD & PRASAD SEVA

At Nrusinghanath Mandir, the preparation and distribution of food follows the sacred tradition of Prasad seva – the offering of food as an act of devotion and service.

Food prepared within the temple is first offered to the deity as bhoga and thereafter distributed to devotees as prasad. This practice emphasizes humility, equality, and collective participation rather than charity or commerce.

HARIHAR PANGAT (BHOGA DISTRIBUTION)

Harihar Pangat is a traditional form of bhoga distribution conducted daily after the **Lord is offered food** at mid-day.

- ★ **Time:** – Around 12:00 PM (Post mid-day bhoga)
- ★ **Nature:** – Symbolic bhoga (not a full meal)
- ★ **Availability:** Free for all devotees present within the temple premises
This practice forms an integral part of the temple's annadan tradition and reflects the principle that all devotees partake equally in the Lord's offering.

PRASAD (MEAL OFFERING WITH SEVA CONTRIBUTION)

After the completion of Harihar Pangat, prasad meals are made available to devotees.

- ★ **Time:** – Approximately from 12:00 PM to 3:00 PM
- ★ **Nature:** – Simple, freshly prepared prasad meal
- ★ **Availability:** A nominal seva contribution is accepted towards preparation and temple services. This arrangement allows continued participation in annadan seva while supporting the sustainability of daily food preparation.

Serving duration and quantity may vary on festival days and during peak pilgrimage periods.

HOW TO REACH NRUSINGHANATH MANDIR

Nrusinghanath Mandir is located in Paikmal Block of Bargarh District, Odisha, amidst the sacred landscape of the Gandhamardan hills. Despite its serene and forested setting, the temple is well connected by road, rail, and air through nearby towns and cities.

LOCATION OVERVIEW

- ✦ **District:** – Bargarh (Odisha)
- ✦ **Block:** – Paikmal
- ✦ **Distance from Paikmal Town:** – Approximately 5 km

Paikmal town serves as the nearest local hub for transport, markets, and basic facilities.

BY ROAD

- Nrusinghanath Mandir is easily accessible by road.
- Paikmal is well connected by state and regional bus services from nearby towns and districts.
- From Paikmal town, the temple is around 5 km and can be reached by:
 - Local taxis
 - Auto-rickshaws
 - Private vehicles

BY RAIL

The nearest major railway stations are:

- ✦ **Nuapada Railway Station** – approximately 36 km from Paikmal
- ✦ **Bargarh Railway Station** – approximately 110 km from Paikmal
- ✦ **From both stations:**
 - Buses and shared/private taxis are available to reach Paikmal town
 - Local transport from Paikmal connects directly to the temple

BY AIR

The nearest airports connecting the region are:

- **Raipur Airport (Chhattisgarh)** – approximately 161 km from Paikmal
- **Jharsuguda Airport (Odisha)** – approximately 203 km from Paikmal
- **Bhubaneswar Airport (Odisha)** – approximately 434 km from Paikmal

From these airports:

- Visitors can travel by train or road to reach Paikmal.
- From Paikmal, local transport services are readily available to reach Nrusinghanath Mandir.

LOCAL CONNECTIVITY

- Local taxis and shared transport are easily available at Paikmal.
- During festivals and peak pilgrimage periods, transport frequency increases.
- Signage and local assistance are generally available for first-time visitors.

VISITOR NOTE

Travel durations may vary depending on season, festival schedules, and weather conditions. Devotees are advised to plan journeys with sufficient time, especially during major festivals such as Baisakh Mela.

SAFETY, CONDUCT & RESPECT (GUIDELINES FOR ALL VISITORS)

Nrusinghanath Mandir is a living place of worship, situated within the ecologically and spiritually significant landscape of the Gandhamardan hills. Visitors are requested to observe the following guidelines to ensure personal safety, maintain sanctity, and respect long-standing temple traditions.

PERSONAL SAFETY

- Temple pathways, stone steps, and surrounding hill areas may be uneven or slippery, particularly during the monsoon season.
- Visitors are advised to wear comfortable footwear and move cautiously within the temple premises and nearby natural areas.
- Elderly devotees and those with health concerns should plan their movement carefully and seek assistance where required.
- During festivals and peak pilgrimage periods, large crowds may gather; patience and awareness are advised.

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RESPECT FOR TEMPLE PRACTICES

- Entry into the temple should be made with clean attire and respectful conduct.
- Certain rituals and activities within the inner sanctum are performed exclusively by priests; devotees are requested to observe from designated areas.
- Photography and videography inside the sanctum are not permitted, unless expressly allowed by the temple administration.
- Silence and decorum should be maintained during darshan, arati, and bhoga distribution.

ENVIRONMENTAL RESPONSIBILITY

- The Gandhamardan region is ecologically sensitive. Visitors are requested not to litter or disturb the natural surroundings.
- Plastic waste, food remnants, and other refuse should be disposed of only in designated areas.
- Trees, water bodies, forest paths, and wildlife are to be treated with care and reverence.

GENERAL CONDUCT

- Instructions issued by temple administration and volunteers should be followed at all times.
- Consumption of alcohol, intoxicants, or any disruptive behavior within or near the temple premises is strictly prohibited.
- Devotees are encouraged to approach their visit with humility, patience, and devotion, in keeping with the sacred character of the site.

SOURCES & CREDITS

This guidebook has been compiled with care to reflect the living traditions, ritual practices, and cultural memory of Nrusinghanath Mandir and the Gandhamardan region

SOURCES

- Temple Administration & Priests
- Ritual practices, daily schedules, and temple traditions as observed through ongoing worship.
- Local Residents & Community Elders
- Oral histories, customary practices, and regional knowledge preserved through generations.
- Traditional Granthas & Earlier References
- Scriptural and historical context related to the worship of Lord Nrusinghanha and associated Vaishnavite traditions.

PHOTOGRAPHY

Photographic material included in this guidebook comprises on-site documentation as well as select images sourced from public social media accounts and digital platforms for representational purposes. Wherever possible, efforts have been made to acknowledge original creators. Rights to respective images remain with their original photographers.

DESIGN & COMPILATION

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Illustrations & Visual Assets:

Aradhana Biswal & Sitanshu kumar Sahoo

CLOSING NOTE

Ritual practices, schedules, and access may vary during festivals and special observances. This guidebook is intended as a reference and companion, and not a substitute for on-site guidance provided by the temple authorities.

For verified updates, darshan timings, puja and prasad booking, accommodation services, travel guidance, nearby heritage information, and upcoming online donation facilities, please visit the

official website: www.nrusinghanathtemple.in

Official Digital Portal of
NRUSINGHANATH TEMPLE

www.nrusinghanathtemple.in



Scan to access puja & prasad booking,
accommodation services, travel guidance,
nearby heritage information, blogs, and
upcoming online donation facilities.

Paikamal, Bargarh District, Odisha

Official Website of Nrusinghanath Temple Administration