

# Where stones breathe life

## TOURISM A

journey to Khajuraho temples is as awesome as it is thought provoking, discovers

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The pleasure of checking into the Holiday Inn Resort at Khajuraho is a soothing experience. Scores of verdant Ashoka trees line up to greet as you make your way to the entrance. Almost all the important monuments are within walking distance from here.

One starts the journey by visiting the ancient Jain temples of Adinath and Parswanath. There are rows of sculptures on the outer walls of the Parswanath temple, depicting nymphs, Jain tirthankars and animals. There are sculptures of lions and elephants outside the entrances of all these temples. It is estimated that these temples were constructed around 950 A.D. by the Jain rulers of Bundelkhand. The Adinath temple depicts a pitcher (kalash) on top. There are very intricately carved yet delicate sculptures of nymphs that decorate the walls of the Adinath temple. Happiness, grief, playfulness, love and anger exude from the delicately sculpted faces of each nymph. The Shantinath temple was constructed around 1900 A.D. on the ruins of other dilapidated temples.

After completing the Jain circuit, one moves to the massive complex of Hindu temples nearby. As one enters the gardens that surround these monuments, one gets transported into an ancient era. There are a number of temples in this complex. The Varaha (wild boar) temple, is a giant sculpture of a boar almost two metres high. Made of solid stone, this monolith statue has remarkably withstood the vagaries of time

and invasions, protected by a cosmic force. The intricate carvings of nymphs that adorn this incarnation of Vishnu are a tribute to the master craftsmen who created them ages ago. The giant sculpture of Nandi (the bull), the celestial vehicle of the three-eyed Shiva, is six feet tall and is situated diametrically opposite the main Shiva temple. A pair each of elephants and lions guard the entrance of these twin shrines. This temple has several sculptures of voluptuous nymphs and couples in erotic postures. Sculptures of flowers, plants, horses, elephants and men and women in embrace alongside each other is nothing more than a divine metaphor symbolising the cosmic unity of all beings on this planet. The next temple in the complex is the Shiva temple and several voluptuous nymphs and couples in erotic postures decorate its walls. There are full bodied, young nymphs in various postures, including one with a parrot, another playing the flute, a third looking into a mirror. There is a stone Shivaling which crowns this temple, dedicated to the destructive deity.

The next temple is dedicated to the Sun God, Surya. A five feet sculpture of Surya crowns this temple. The image is strikingly similar to the one at Konark in Orissa. Eleven-headed Vishnu, representing his 10 incarnations is seen adorning this Sun temple. Another Shiva temple with a smaller stone Shivaling, is known as Kandariya Mahadev (Mountain of Masonry). The cosmic forces of creation, maintenance and destruction are symbolised through sculptures of Shiva, Vishnu and Brahma. There are more than 600 sculptures of nymphs, plants, animals and couples, which dot this poetry in stone. There are two temples, one dedicated to Goddess Parvati and another to the Cosmic mother Jagdambi alongside the others in the main complex.

A few other ancient temples that dot Khajuraho include the Vaman, the Brahma, the Khakra, the Dulhadeo, the Jatkari, the Ghantai, the Chausath Yogini (Sixty-four Deities) and the Javari. A visit to the temple complex at Khajuraho is indeed a deeply spiritual experience for the seeker. The

temple touches the emotional chords of the visitors and offers answers to seekers looking for discovering the true purpose of cosmic existence. Environmentalists can discover the cosmic unity here and tourists can get photographs which can rival picture postcards. The weather is pleasant

How to get there?

Khajuraho has an airport and is connected by flights to New Delhi and Varanasi.

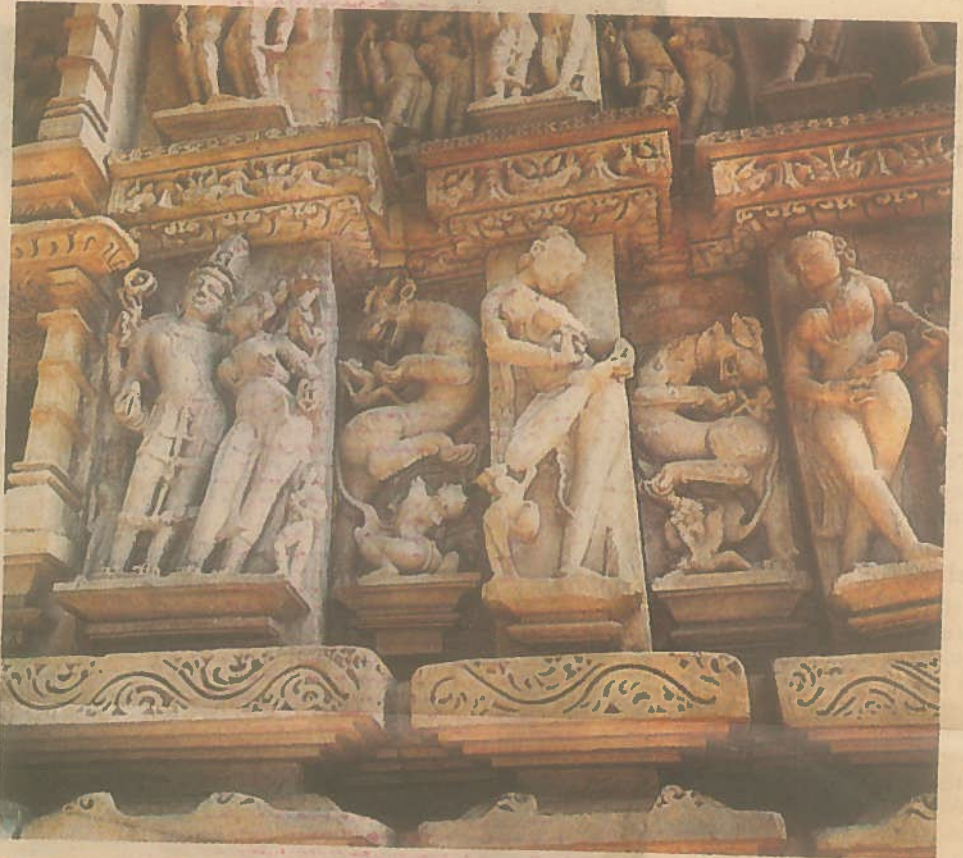
The nearest railhead is Jhansi. Khajuraho is a 185 km. drive from Jhansi. (costs Rs.1500)

Where to stay?

The Holiday Inn Resort, Khajuraho is a comfortable place to stay. It is ideally located near the temples and is dotted with innumerable trees. Mornings are extremely musical, with hundreds of birds singing migratory tunes, under the canopy of green surrounding this picturesque resort.

Where to eat?

Lots of small restaurants serving Indian, Italian and Continental cuisine dot Khajuraho. Agrawal Restaurant offers simple but deliciously sumptuous North Indian vegetarian fare.



A SLICE OF HISTORY: A journey to Khajuraho is like walking the lanes of the past