

CAR FESTIVAL

‘RATHA JATRA’ or the ‘Car Festival’ is the most important festival of Lord Jagannath. This colourful festival, which draws millions of devotees from various parts of the country as well as from abroad to Puri, is held in June-July every year. Lord Jagannath, which literally means the Lord of the Universe, comes out of His sanctum sanctorum to give audience or Darshan to all devotees belonging to all sects and communities among the Hindus. Those who take part in the Car Festival earn their passage to the Heaven.

‘Snana Purnima’ marks the beginning of this festival. On this day the three deities—Lord Jagannath, Lord Balabhadra and Devi Subhadra take prolonged bath on an open platform known as ‘Snana Bedi’. Then they retire for 15 days popularly called the period of ‘Anabasara’ and remain in isolation ; the Gods come out of the temple in a colourful procession to board their respective Chariots and thereafter begin the Journey known as ‘Ratha Jatra’.

Reference to Car Festival is available in various scriptures like those of Buddhists, Jains and Hindus. However, the present concept of Lord Jagannath is most popular. According to the prevailing concept, Lord Jagannath was originally worshipped by *savaras*, a Scheduled Tribe of Orissa. Car Festival symbolizes the Lord’s desire to come out of the temple for a brief period to give audience to the ‘Patitas’ (i.e., the lowest of the low) and redeem them. The chariots of Lord Jagannath and His brother Balabhadra and sister Subhadra are drawn by thousands of devotees in three gorgeously decorated chariots from the main gate of the temple to Gundicha Mandir near about 3 Kms. away. At Gundicha Mandir the Lord along with His entourage remains for 7 days.

When the chariots move on the main thoroughfare of Puri known as Bada Danda (Grand Road) through a vast concourse of humanity that usually throng to have His Darshan, the atmosphere is charged with sanctity. It is delightful to witness the foreigners in saffron robes dancing and reciting musical compositions in honour of Lord Jagannath and Krishna to the accompaniment of cymbals and Mridangas.

The Gods perform their return journey on the 9th day and this is known as ‘Bahuda Jatra.’

The deities, after a seven-day stay at ‘Gundicha Mandir’ commence their return journey or the Bahuda Jatra, on the tenth day of the bright fortnight of Asadha. The return journey of the chariots takes place in the same order as in the Ratha Jatra. Balabhadra’s chariot moves first, followed by those of Subhadra and Jagannath. On His way back, Jagannath stops for a while at Ardhasani temple popularly called Mausi Maa temple or the Temple of Aunt. He accepts his favourite rice-cake, *poda pitha* from the Aunt.

The three chariots, pulled by thousands of devotees, reach back the Singhdwara in the late afternoon of the Bahuda Day. On the next day the Bada Ekadasi, the three deities are attired in costumes of glittering gold ornaments and are worshipped by thousands of devotees. This form of the deities is known as the ‘Suna Vesha’. On the Dwadasi day the three deities go back to their original place of the temple, the Ratna Singhasana, in the Pahandi style. Their arrival into the sanctum sanctorum marks the end of the Ratha Jatra, the grand festival of chariots.

CHARIOTS

The three chariots are built anew annually excluding the Kalasa. 14 subsidiary deities, charioteers and horses, 1072 pieces of logs (i.e., Phasi, Dhaura, Mai, Simili) are brought from Daspalla and Ranapur forests. Nearly 125 temple carpenters (including helping assistants) work for 58 days at the Mahakhala (in front of the Palace) and chisel out 2,188 pieces of wood for the construction of the three chariots. The construction work commences on the AKSHAYA TRUTIYA. Each chariot is covered with new cloths of radiant colour. Nearly 1,090 meters of cloth are used for this purpose. The chariots are fastened with four long sturdy ropes (Each 240-250 'with 8" diameters) each so as to facilitate the devotees to pull them. The Kerala Coir Corporation provides these specially manufactured coconut fibre ropes, iron nails, brackets, clamps, etc., used for this purpose are indigenously prepared by the native smiths near the Dolavedi and it takes them more than a month. The techno-engineering details of the chariots are indeed a technical marvel by any standard for their static and dynamic stability. The superstructure (Above the wheels) contains eighteen pillars and roofs at various stages, which are known as Bhuin, Potala, Parabhadi, etc. Each chariot contains nine Parswa devatas, (Subsidiary deities), two Dwarapalas (Door keepers), one Sarathi (Charioteer) and presiding deities of the crest banner (Dhwaja Devata), all made of wood.

DESCRIPTION OF CHARIOTS

Chariot of Jagannath –

NANDIGHOSHA/GARUDADHWAJA/KAPIDHWAJA

Number of wheels	:	16
Total Number of wooden pieces used	:	832
Height	:	13'.5m
Length and breadth	:	34'6" x 34'.6"
Wrappings	:	Red, Yellow colour cloths
Guarded by	:	Garuda
Name of the charioteer	:	Dahuka
The flag	:	Trailokyamohini
The horses	:	Shankha, Balahaka, Suweta, Haridashwa
The rope	:	Sankhachuda
Presiding Nine Deities	:	(i) Varaha (ii) Gobardhan (iii) Krushna, Gopi Krushna (iv) Nrusingha (v) Rama (vi) Narayan (vii) Trivikrama (viii) Hanuman (ix) Rudra

Chariot of Balabhadra – TALADHWAJA

Number of wheels	:	14
Total Number of wooden pieces used	:	763

Height	:	13'.2m
Length and breadth	:	33' x 33'
Wrappings	:	Red, Bluish green colour cloths
Guarded by	:	Basudev
Name of the charioteer	:	Matali
The flag	:	Unnani
The horses	:	Tibra, Ghora, Dirghasharma, Swornanava
The rope	:	Basuki
Presiding Nine Deities	:	(i) Ganesh (ii) Kartikeya (iii) Sarvamangala (iv) Pralambari (v) Hatayudha (vi) Mrutyunjaya (vii) Natamvara (viii) Mukteswar (ix) Sheshadeva

Chariot of Subhadra – DARPADALANA/PADMADHWAJA

Number of wheels	:	12
Total Number of wooden pieces used	:	593
Height	:	12'.9m
Length and breadth	:	31'.6" x 31'.6"
Wrappings	:	Red, Black colour cloths
Guarded by	:	Jayadurga
Name of the charioteer	:	Arjuna
The flag	:	Nadambika
The horses	:	Rochika, Mochika, Jita, Aparajita
The rope	:	Swarnachuda
Presiding Nine Deities	:	(i) Chandi (ii) Chamunda (iii) Ugratara (iv) Vanadurga (v) Shulidurga (vi) Varahi (vii) Shyamakali (viii) Mangala (ix) Vimala