

**Quick snapshot of my visit**

I visited Orissa to get a pulse on one of the most resource-rich states of the country. The state boasts bountiful natural resources and a large coastline but has not been lackadaisical in its approach to development as many resource abundant regions typically are. Rather than relying solely on tourism for revenue, Bhubaneswar (the city of temples draws 1.5 mn tourists), is emerging as an IT/ITES and education hub. This has allowed it to post the highest employment growth among tier 2 cities, outranking 16 others.

**Gearing for growth**

The Biju-Patnaik airport terminal is less than a year old. It is among the new breed of small airports which are very modern and meticulously organized. Although, 'small' in such contexts is not usually considered 'beautiful', this is an exception. International operations to SE Asia and the Middle East are imminent. The city centre has wide roads and boulevards and is organized in a grid format with distinct, self-dependent units. This limits locals' dependency to commute across the city. The city is poised for growth and it has proactively geared up for the large influx of graduates that are likely to flock there. There are pockets of old and new - in the outskirts I found a farm which was home to ~100 cattle adjacent to the Tata Ariana housing project which was to accommodate 1,100

families in its 1/2/3 BHK apartments and entertain them at the clubhouse by 2017.

**The 'where are you from?' test**

Although the city has braced for change, migrants are still rare to come across. Typically out of ten people I interact with in a large metro, 7-8 are from other cities or states. Here, I was surprised to see that the population is still largely local - on average, 7/10 people were from the city, 2 were from Cuttack (neighbouring city <30 km away), and 1 was from West Bengal, who had shifted to Bhubaneswar for better career prospects. I think over the next decade that ratio will change drastically as young people from within Orissa and surrounding states of West Bengal, Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Bihar and UP, move here. This is going to reduce the pressure on larger metros, which are already bursting at the seams, as cities like Bhubaneswar create conducive ecosystems.

**The varied cultures of India**

Through my travels I have continually been amazed by the variety of our culture, language, traditions and cuisine. Witnessing a *Laxmi-puja* underway in the village of Biripurusutompur helped reinstate the concept that dawned upon me during one of my trips down south: we are united as a nation largely by what is sold to us. The media has helped accentuate this feeling of unity by spreading

awareness across the country about what people in other regions are consuming and this is having a profound impact on lifestyles and consumption trends. The bollywood music playing at Pantaloons and the latest Titan watch on display are the rare associations of familiarity, without which we would find little in common with each other. India has too varied a populace - its aspirations, traditions, tastes and preferences seldom lend themselves to generalization.

**My 7.5 hour train ride in Phailin's wake**

I took a 2nd class train ride to Puri to see the effects of Phailin in the coastal regions. The inclement weather because of the low pressure formation over the Bay of Bengal meant we couldn't proceed further without the tracks going underwater. I was fortunate to be sitting beside an elderly man who spoke only Oriya and sculpted stone blocks for temples. Despite our communication barrier, I was amazed by his selflessness and optimism, characteristics I found to be quite common among fellow passengers. Although we were stranded for 7.5 hours until the tracks were cleared, I like to believe that I learnt a lot more on my 7.5 hour train ride to Puri than I would have on a 7.5 hour business class flight to Zurich.

**I invite your comments** ([soumil@dmzpartners.in](mailto:soumil@dmzpartners.in))



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