Changu Narayan Temple: UNESCO World Heritage Site

The Changu Narayan Temple, one of the oldest temples, is almost 3000 years old and is thought to have been constructed in the Lichhavi Era, around the fourth century. The temple, located on a hilltop 4 kilometers north of Bhaktapur, used to be surrounded by a dense champak tree forest and the small community of Changu.

The Manohara river flows alongside the hill, located 12 kilometers east of the capital. The main shrine was built around 325 AD, and the temple was rebuilt in 1702 AD after a terrible fire.

An ancient Hindu temple named Changu Narayan is found in Nepal's Changunarayan Municipality in the Bhaktapur District atop a tall hilltop, also known as Changu or Dolagiri. This hill is located a few miles north of Bhaktapur and roughly 7 miles (or 12 km) east of Kathmandu. The Hindu population holds great reverence for the Lord Vishnu-dedicated shrine.

According to legend, a monarch of Kashmir offered his daughter Champak to the prince of Bhaktapur for marriage. She is thought to have inspired the name of the temple. Apart from the main temple, several additional shrines are on the property dedicated to Gods and Goddesses such as Chinna Masta, Lord Ganesh, and Lord Krishna.

The temple is devoted to the Hindu deity Lord Vishnu. One of the earliest stone slabs, which belongs to the fifth century and has several inscriptions from the Lichhavi Era, is also found on the grounds of Changu Narayan.

Architecture of Changu Narayan Temple

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The Changu Narayan Temple is situated above hills and is encircled by a Champak tree forest. In and near Changu Narayan are residents of the Brahman, Chhetri, Tamang, Newar, and other communities. With the growth of tourism in this area, there are numerous small and medium-sized hotels, restaurants, gift shops, etc. On the route to Changunaran, there is an old stone tap that is thought to have been there since the time of Lichhavi.



As far as temples go, Changu Narayan is the oldest in Nepal. Rich embossing artistry makes it a landmark in Nepali temple construction. The temple has a two-story roof supported by a tall stone plinth. Professor Madhan Rimal of the Sociology and Anthropology Department of Tribhuvan University claims that the temple is neither built in the Shikhara architecture nor the pagoda style. In terms of architectural design, he would characterize it as a traditional Nepali temple. At Gokarna Mahadev, you may find a lot of similar qualities.

Lord Vishnu-themed statues and works of art surround the shrine. In the main temple's courtyard, we may also discover temples dedicated to Lord Shiva, Ashta Matrika, Chhinnamasta, Kileshwor, and Krishna. The temple features four doors, and on either side of each entrance are life-size pairs of various animals, including lions, sarabhas, griffins, and elephants. The struts that support the roof are decorated with carvings of Lord Vishnu's eleven incarnations and other idols.

Naga carvings are gilded on the entrance door (snakes). At the top of a stone pillar on the main entry gate (i.e., the western entrance gate), we can see the Chakra, Sankha, Kamal, and Khadga. A Sanskrit inscription can be found on these stone pillars.The stone inscription pillar was built in 464 AD by Licchavi (kingdom) King Manadeva and is regarded as the oldest inscription in Nepal.

History Behind Changu Narayan Temple

In the past, a Gwala, or cow herder, acquired a cow from Sudarshan, a Brahmin. The cow had a reputation for producing a lot of milk. Previously, the cow was taken to Changu by the cow herder for grazing. Changu was then covered with a grove of Champak trees.



A young boy frequently visited a grazing cow beneath the shade of a specific tree to sip her milk. Each evening, when the cow herder milked her and led her home, he discovered only a

minimal amount of milk. This frustrating pattern continued for several days. Growing deeply discouraged, the herder contacted the Brahmin, Sudarshan, and complained that the cow produced far too little milk. After witnessing the situation firsthand, Sudarshan agreed with the cow herder.

The Hidden Discovery

The following day, the cow grazed in the forest while the two men watched closely. Both the cow herder and the Brahmin crouched quietly behind a nearby tree. Suddenly, a young black boy emerged from the trunk and began guzzling the cow's milk, shocking both men. Convinced that the youngster represented the devil and that the tree served as his residence, the indignant Brahmin cut down the Champak tree.

Lord Vishnu's Divine Revelation

The Brahmin's actions caused fresh human blood to spill straight out of the trunk. Terrified that they committed a grave offense, the Brahmin and the cow herder began to sob. Suddenly, Lord Vishnu emerged from the tree and told them that they bore no fault.

Vishnu narrated how he had unintentionally killed Sudarshan's father while hunting in the forest, committing a heinous crime. Bearing a curse for this deed, he rode his divine mount, Garuda, across the globe before resting upon the hill at Changu. He lived there anonymously by stealing milk from grazing cows. When the Brahmin cut down the tree, the blade struck Vishnu, beheading him and ultimately atoning for his past sins.

The Origin of Changu Narayan Temple

After listening to Lord Vishnu's divine explanation, the cow herder and the Brahmin decided to worship the sacred location and built a small shrine in his honor. People have revered this holy site ever since. To this day, descendants of the original cow herder serve as Ghutiyars, while descendants of Sudarshan serve as the official temple priests.

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Monuments in Changu Narayan Temple



Mandeva built a historical pillar in 464 AD.

Garuda and Chanda Narayan

Indeed, Garuda—the divine flying chariot of Lord Vishnu—features a striking human face and loyally serves Vishnu. **Specifically**, historians call the seventh-century stone sculpture of Vishnu riding Garuda **Chanda Narayan** (or Garuda Narayan). **Moreover**, the Nepal Rastra Bank features an image of this exact sculpture on its 10-rupee paper note.

Sridhar Vishnu and Vaikuntha Vishnu

- **Sridhar Vishnu: Dating** back to the ninth century, this stone sculpture vividly portrays Lord Vishnu, Laxmi, and Garuda together.

- **Vaikuntha Vishnu: Created** in the 16th century, this sculpture shows Vishnu reclining in the Lalitasan position atop a six-armed Garuda while Laxmi sits gracefully on his lap.

Chhinnamasta Shrine

Devotees dedicate this sacred temple to Chhinnamasta Devi, who famously sacrificed her life by beheading herself to feed her blood to Dakini and Varnini.

Kileshwor Temples

According to local lore, a pair of two-story Lord Shiva temples miraculously appeared here to protect the surrounding hill. **Furthermore**, Hindus revere the central image as Garuda Narayan, while Buddhists honor it as Hariharihari Vahan Lokeshwara. **Naturally**, only the temple priest holds permission to view the sacred image directly.

Epic Sculptures and Mythological Representations

Vishworup Sculpture

Crafted in the seventh century, this exquisitely carved stone sculpture depicts the famous moment from the Bhagwat Gita where Lord Krishna reveals his universal form to his follower Arjun.

Vishnu Vikrant

This seventh-century Trivikram Vishnu sculpture portrays the well-known narrative scene between Lord Vishnu and Bali Raja.

Narasimha

Dating to the seventh century, this dynamic sculpture features Narasimha—a fierce manifestation of Lord Vishnu—slaying the demon King Hiranyakasyapa to save his devoted follower Prahalad.

Navigating the Temple Complex

When you enter the temple courtyard through the main Eastern gate, you will immediately spot the next historical monument standing on your right side.

Conclusion



The temple is a superb example of Nepali architecture, with ornate embossed wood and metal sculptures. The temple is a two-story structure with a high stone plinth. According to research by Professor Madan Rimal of the department of Sociology and Anthropology, the temple's architecture is traditional to Nepal. It is similar to that of the Gokarna Mahadev temple. It is neither in the Shikara style nor the Pagoda style. The temple features four doors, and on each side of each entrance, a life-size pair of animals, such as a lion, sarabha, griffin, or elephant, stands to watch. The 10 forms of Lord Vishnu and other wooden icons can be seen on the temple's struts. The temple grounds are lighted during celebrations like the Changu Narayan Jatra, Mahashanan, Haribodhimi Ekadashi, and particularly Nag Panchami.

FAQs

1. Is Changu Narayan World Heritage Site?

A world heritage site is the Changu Narayan Temple. Archeological, historical, and cultural significance can be found in the priceless stone sculpture and antiquated inscriptions.

2. What is Changu Narayan temple famous?

A two-story Lord Vishnu temple in the pagoda style called Changu Narayan is surrounded by age-old carvings and statues. It is said to be the oldest Hindu temple still in use in the Kathmandu Valley till today.

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Inclusions

Exclusions