

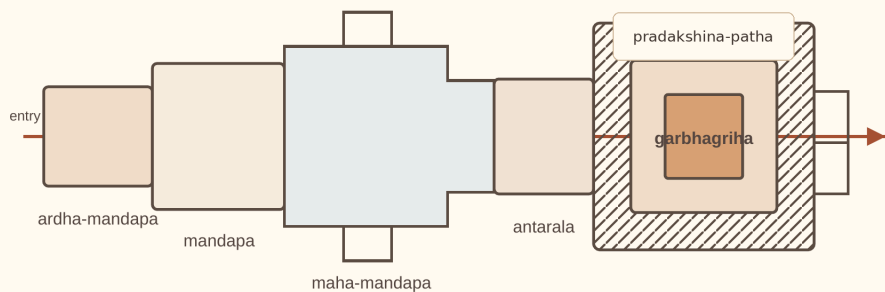
TEMPLE ARCHITECTURE OF INDIA

See what most visitors walk past.

A source-checked field guide for reading route, plan, massing, construction and change on site.

KANDARIYA MAHADEVA · KHAJURAHO
SOURCE-DERIVED PLAN · DP · NOT MEASURED

DP · DERIVED PLAN



Axis arrows show documented approach/spatial direction; compass letters appear only where source-supported.

READ THE PLAN. THEN SEE THE MONUMENT DIFFERENTLY.

68 PAGES · 12 INDIAN CASES · VISIT MODE · 6 PHONE FIELD CARDS · SOURCE TRAIL

From looking to seeing - before, at and after the visit.

Temple architecture becomes easier when information arrives in the order a visitor can actually use it. This guide is built around three short moments rather than a long lecture.

2 min

Before

Learn only the terms, orientation and one comparison that will matter at that site. Know what to look for before the monument is in front of you.

30-90 sec

At

Use a compact observation sequence: sacred core, tower profile, approach, repetition, precinct. The page directs the eye rather than competing with the monument.

3-5 min

After

Check one likely misreading, separate building phases where the evidence allows it, compare with a contrasting site and follow the source trail deeper.

What this guide will not do

It will not ask you to memorise dozens of labels before you can enjoy a visit. It will not turn Nagara, Dravida or Vesara into rigid boxes. It will not imply that a complex built over centuries has one date.

What it adds to free search

Observation order, official geographic context, monument-to-monument comparison, "what changed later?" checks, portable field prompts and a visible source/provenance trail.

The operating rule: identify what you can actually see first. Use dates, dynasty names and terminology to explain the observation - not to replace it.

Five clues used throughout

1. Find the sacred core.
2. Read the tower profile.
3. Follow the approach.
4. Notice repetition and hierarchy.
5. Read the wider precinct.

One note on living sites

Architectural observation never overrides worship, restricted areas, local photography rules or current ritual use. The building is both heritage and, at many sites, a living sacred place.

Drawing status is shown where it matters: OS = teaching schematic; DP = source-derived but not measured; MA = measured/archival material only when its source and reproduction status genuinely support use. OS Observation schematic - simplified teaching illustration, not measured. DP Derived plan/elevation - independently redrawn from cited evidence, not measured. MA Measured / archival drawing - used only where source status genuinely supports reproduction.

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The plan is not hidden information. It explains what the exterior is doing.

A field guide becomes useful when the reader can move between three views of the same architecture: **where spaces sit in plan, how those spaces rise in elevation, and how the whole building reads as mass.** The relationship is monument-specific; this page is an observation method, not a universal temple formula.

Reference anchor - no free-form geometry: this page uses Kandariya Mahadeva as the teaching case. Spatial sequence follows the IGNCA/ASI published ground-plan/elevation record; the redrawing is simplified and not measured.

1 · Read the plan

Ask: where do porch, hall, vestibule, circumambulatory relationship and sacred core sit on the main axis?

2 · Match the elevation

Ask: where does the roof hierarchy intensify, and which exterior mass marks the sanctum?

3 · Translate to the site

Field move: stand back, predict the sacred core from the exterior hierarchy, then check the plan/route against what you actually experience.

Locked rule: foundational architecture diagrams do not invent a universal temple proportion. When geometry matters, use a named monument and cited plan/elevation evidence; when only a reading method is being taught, label it OS and avoid pseudo-precision.

Khajuraho

The axial sequence, widening hall zones and rising roof hierarchy produce a clustered ascent toward the sanctum shikhara.

Thanjavur

A different source-derived plan is used later: long court, subordinate hall mass and a dominant sanctum vimana. The same drawing is never recycled across monuments.

Official geography. Architectural comparison routes.

The locator uses an open LGD-derived India national boundary via Bharatlas. Relevant state names are shown only for orientation; monument dots are fixed to source-checked coordinates. Survey of India Political Map of India, English 13th Edition/2026 is used only as the political-geography cross-check; no Survey of India artwork is reproduced.



Boundary geometry: Bharatlas India national boundary (LGD snapshot 2024; CC0-1.0 / CC-BY-4.0).
State-name orientation, monument anchors, route connectors and labels: Dishantra. Survey of India 2026: cross-check only.

OPEN LGD-DERIVED BASE

What the map teaches

- North / Central**
Compare tower profiles and rising massing - e.g. Khajuraho, Modhera.
- Eastern / Kalinga**
Read Bhubaneswar and Konark through regional relationships, not a generic label.
- Deccan**
Pattadakal is used to challenge rigid style recipes and show architectural exchange.
- Dravida**
Compare Pallava and Chola examples; keep sanctum tower and gateway hierarchy distinct.

Dishantra advantage: all twelve case modules are anchored to official geography, then reused in Visit Mode, comparisons and the source trail.

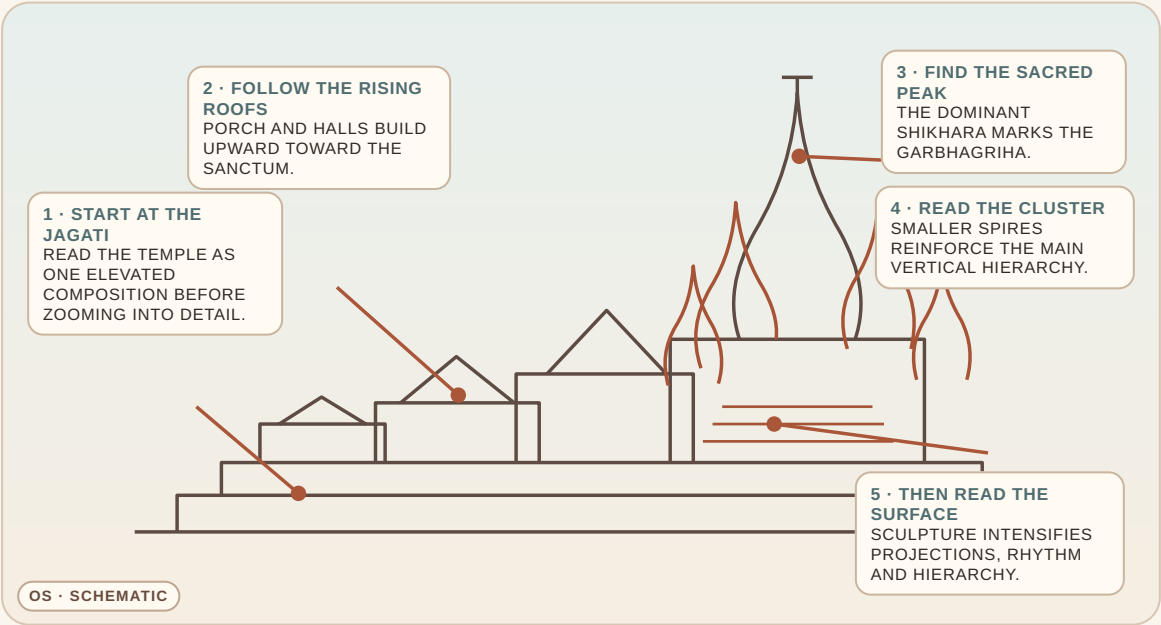
Map credit

Boundary: Bharatlas India national boundary (LGD snapshot 2024; CC0-1.0 / CC-BY-4.0).
Cross-check only: Survey of India Political Map of India, English 13th Edition/2026.
State-name orientation, monument anchors and comparison routes: Dishantra.
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Read the rising mountain before the sculpture.

Kandariya Mahadeva belongs to the mature 11th-century phase of Khajuraho. UNESCO describes the Khajuraho group as a culmination of northern Indian Nagara temple architecture: a raised *jagati*, axially connected spaces and a dominant *shikhara* over the sanctum, intensified by smaller subsidiary spires.

- KANDARIYA MAHADEVA
- SHIVA TEMPLE
- 11TH CENTURY
- MADHYA PRADESH



90-second scan

1

Stand back first.
Find the platform, the full roof sequence and the dominant shikhara in one view.

2

Trace the axis.
Entrance porch → halls → vestibule → sanctum. Notice how the building thickens and rises.

3

Look for repetition.
Smaller tower forms echo the principal spire and make the whole mass read as a clustered ascent.

4

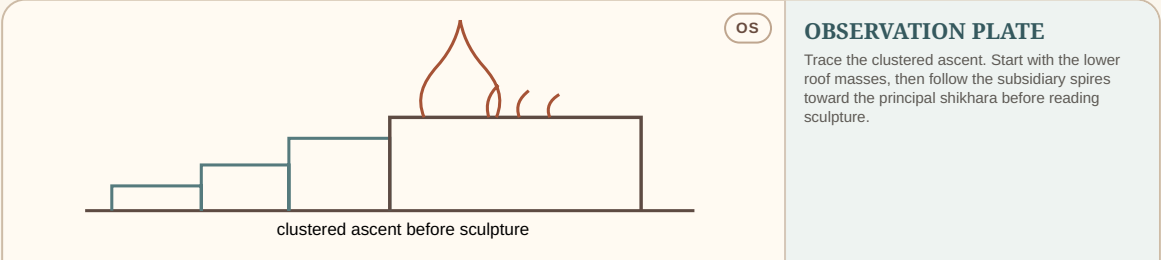
Only then move close.
See how sculpture occupies the articulated wall surfaces rather than floating independently on them.

Do not start here

Do not begin by hunting for the most famous sculptures. If you start only with individual figures, you miss the architectural system that gives those figures their position and visual force.

Field rule:

Silhouette → sequence → hierarchy → surface → detail.

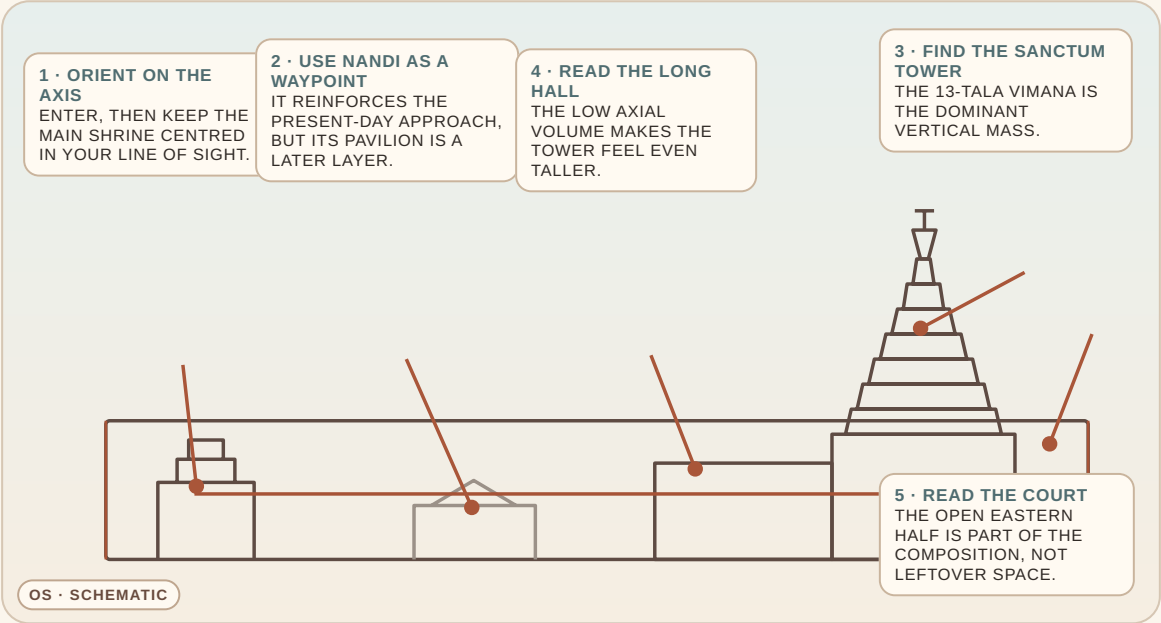


Source basis: UNESCO, Khajuraho Group of Monuments; IGNC/ASI archival descriptions of Kandariya Mahadeva. Drawing is an original explanatory schematic, not a measured reconstruction. OS - Observation schematic; original explanatory massing illustration, not measured.

Read the vimana before the gateway.

Brihadisvara at Thanjavur, commissioned by Rajaraja I and consecrated in 1009-1010 CE, is organised around an unusually clear east-west axis. UNESCO records a 59.82 m sanctum tower with **13 receding talas**, crowned by an octagonal shikhara. At this high-Chola monument, the sacred-core tower - not the gateway - is the principal vertical climax.

- BRIHADISVARA
- SHIVA TEMPLE
- C. 1010 CE
- TAMIL NADU



90-second scan

1

Stop just inside the main axial entry.

Before looking at sculpture, locate the gateway, open court, Nandi, long hall and sanctum tower as one sequence.

2

Let the vimana dominate.

Read the broad base first, then follow the 13 receding talas upward to the octagonal crown.

3

Look back down the axis.

Notice how the low hall, open court and gateway strengthen - rather than compete with - the sanctum tower.

4

Separate building from historical layer.

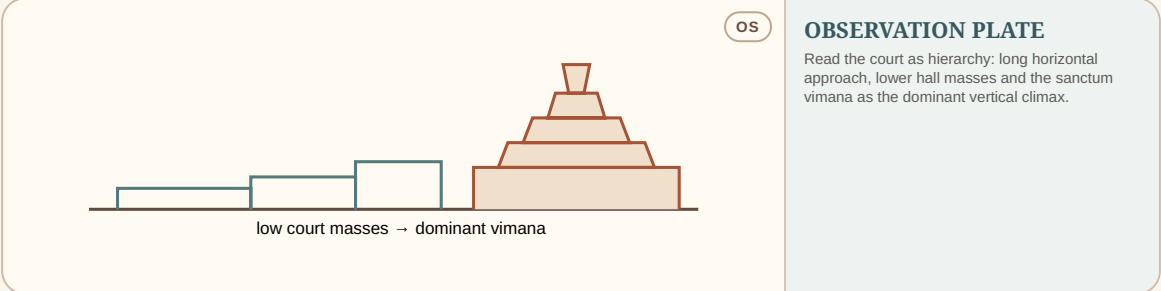
The present route includes later structures. Do not assume everything visible belongs to Rajaraja I's original phase.

Common first mistake

Gateway tower = main temple tower. Not here. The gopura marks entry; the vimana rises over the garbhagriha. UNESCO/ICOMOS specifically notes that in this high-Chola phase the vimana, rather than the gopura, dominates the skyline.

Field rule:

Gateway → court → Nandi → hall → sanctum tower. Treat that as a present-day reading route, not a construction chronology.



At Kailasa, section is as important as plan.

A floor plan alone cannot explain a monument cut downward from living rock. This page now uses **two independently redrawn DP diagrams**, anchored to public-domain historical survey drawings and the IGNC/ASI architectural sheet. They preserve the documented relationships but do not claim measured accuracy.

Plan: released masses inside excavated court

DP · DERIVED PLAN

Derived from: James Burgess, plan of Kailas at Ellora (1911, public domain), cross-checked against IGNC/ASI sheet "The Kailasa temple at Ellora - Ground-plan, section and elevation." Axis/relationship only; not dimensioned or measured.

Section: the court is an excavation, not a freestanding site

DP · DERIVED SECTION

Derived from: E.B. Havell south-elevation/section drawing (1915, public domain) and IGNC/ASI survey material. Historical survey text describes the central fane on a substantial solid-rock basement and the court flanked by rock-cut galleries. This DP preserves the sectional relationship only.

What the section adds:

The plan and section use evidence-anchored DP drawings tied to named public-domain and institutional references. Read them for the relationship between court, rock face, released temple mass and sacred core. They remain deliberately non-measured.

Plan answers: entry, excavated court, Nandi pavilion, main temple mass, sacred core and side-gallery relationship.

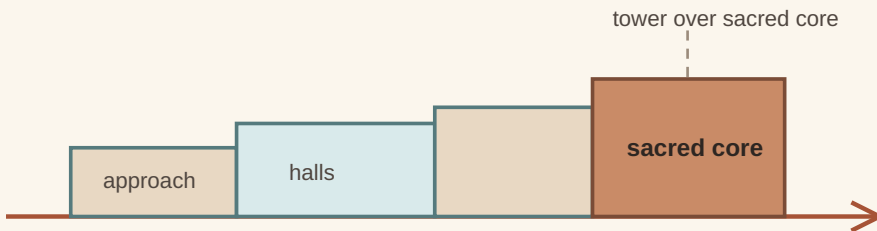
Section answers: rock face, excavated void, solid rock basement, released temple mass and why "architecture by subtraction" is literally visible.

Find the sacred core.

Do not assume the tallest thing is the sanctum.

- 1 **Start with route**
Trace the main movement line from your current entry toward the most restricted sacred zone.
- 2 **Name the threshold**
Look for porch/hall/antarala relationships where they are present; regional layouts vary.
- 3 **Check the tower**
Ask what space the shikhara/vimana stands over - or whether that original tower survives.
- 4 **Confirm with evidence**
Use a plan, signage or source note before turning a visual inference into a factual claim.

OS



Best for: Khajuraho · Thanjavur · Bhubaneswar · Ramappa

Every strong claim should tell you what kind of evidence stands behind it.

OS Observation Schematic Simplified teaching illustration; no implied measurement.	DP Derived Plan / Elevation Independently redrawn from cited architectural evidence; not presented as measured.	MA Measured / Archival / Licensed Only when source and legal- use status genuinely support reproduction.	AP Annotated visual evidence Documentary visual evidence with explanatory overlay when used.
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Dishantra source hierarchy

- 1 Archaeological Survey of India / government monument records**
Primary institutional descriptions, protected-monument records and archival survey material where available.
- 2 UNESCO World Heritage documentation**
Outstanding Universal Value, nomination/evaluation material, conservation records and official site descriptions for relevant properties.
- 3 IGNCA and credible Indian institutional archives**
Historic ASI publications, plans, architectural studies and curated reference material - used with age/context caveats.
- 4 Open India geography / political-geography verification**
Boundary base: Bharatlas India national boundary (LGD snapshot 2024; CC0-1.0 / CC-BY-4.0). Survey of India 2026 is a cross-check only; no Survey of India map artwork is reproduced.
- 5 Specialist architectural scholarship**
Used to deepen form, chronology and transformation analysis; competitor wording/diagrams are never copied.

Evidence is labelled, not implied Observation prompts, independently derived drawings and measured/archival material carry different evidence status. A polished drawing is never presented as measured merely because it looks technical.	What you should be able to verify Which claims are sourced facts, which are observation prompts, which drawings are schematic or derived, and where to go for deeper evidence after the visit.
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- Evidence principle:** when evidence is uncertain, the explanation becomes more qualified - not more dramatic.
- Locked architectural-reference rule:** relationship-first reading follows current visitor-guide practice, but architectural geometry is anchored to monument-specific institutional plans and studies (IGNCA/ASI/UNESCO/official monument records). No decorative sacred geometry, no generic plan reused across monuments, and no DP label without a cited architectural source.
- Source discipline in practice:** Ellora uses independently redrawn plan and section evidence anchored to public-domain Burgess/Havell references and cross-checked with IGNCA/ASI. Derived drawings remain explicitly non-measured unless measured or archival evidence genuinely supports a different status.