

17 tourists rescued after harrowing night in Odisha Forest

They battle heavy rain, pitch darkness, and the chilly wind atop 3,000-foot altitude in Gandhamardhan hill

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SATYASUNDAR BARIK



17 tourists were rescued atop Gandhamardhan Hill in Odisha on Thursday (July 24, 2025). | Photo Credit: Special arrangement

Seventeen tourists — including 13 female— will never forget the harrowing 14 hours they spent after losing their way in a dense forest, battling heavy rain, pitch darkness, and the chilly wind atop 3,000-foot altitude.

What began as a pilgrimage trek between two revered temples in western Odisha turned into a nightlong ordeal of fear and endurance, before they were finally rescued early on Thursday (July 24, 2025).

Around 2 p.m. on Wednesday (July 23, 2025), a group of 17 tourists from Jharsuguda district of Odisha and Raigarh district of Chhattisgarh set out on an 18-kilometre trek through forested, hilly terrain that connects the twin shrines of Nrusinghnath and Harishankar on Gandhamardhan Hill in western Odisha.

As daylight faded, they struggled to navigate the narrow and often confusing paths of the Gandhamardhan Hill and eventually lost their way. Fortunately, despite patchy mobile connectivity, they managed to remain in touch with the outside world.

Once local authorities were alerted to the situation, police personnel stationed nearby were quickly mobilised, and a full-scale rescue operation was launched.

“It was a long night for the 17 tourists. From Wednesday evening through early Thursday, our teams tracked their movements and worked tirelessly through one of the most challenging rescue operations,” said Bargarh Superintendent of Police Prahlad Sahai Meena, who directly monitored the mission.

Upon receiving the distress call, a dedicated team of the District Voluntary Force (DVF) — comprising 30 commandos equipped with food supplies, first-aid kits, and rescue gear — was dispatched to the hill. Navigating the difficult terrain, they reached the stranded group at 4 am on Thursday morning and brought them to safety.

The vulnerability of the rescue team—comprising police and forest personnel—was compounded by the presence of Left Wing Extremists in the region.

“As we remained connected over phone, our first advice was to stay on a bald patch of the hill so they could be easily spotted,” recalled Mr. Meena. “But the rescue team couldn’t ascend due to heavy rain and a slippery trail. They had to pause for several hours,” he described.

Adding another layer of difficulty, the stranded group had moved about 500 metres away from the designated spot in wee hours of Thursday. One of the girls was visually impaired, making it extremely difficult to bring her down the hill. A stretcher had to be sent for her evacuation.

The group's night-long ordeal under relentless rain—accompanied by two children aged seven and eight—must have been harrowing. They also faced the looming threat of wildlife in the forested terrain. Traumatized tourists were not in a mood to speak to media after their rescue.

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