

TRAVEL

Odisha—treasure trove of traditional arts

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A visit to Raghurajpur in Odisha will rekindle your passion for the traditional arts

You are unlikely to find Raghurajpur in the ‘10 or 20 must-see destinations in Odisha’ list that can be found on the Internet.

Which explains why when Ratnakar Rao, a retired banker, was informed by his tourist guide – on his most recent family trip to Odisha – that the group would be making a stop-over at a “handicrafts village”, he was not particularly enthused. “But Raghurajpur blew my mind away. The concept of an entire village of handicraft exponents was unique,” he says.

Storied history

Located on the banks of Dhaudia river, about 10 kilometres to the north of Puri, Raghurajpur is a heritage village – a treat for an art-buff and tourist alike.

A quiet walk around the village would meet your shopping requirements – from paintings done on cloth and coconuts to stone and wood carvings, leaf engravings, tribal work and

the like, and you get to buy them directly from the artists. What surprises visitors is the down-to-earth, non-commercial approach of the artists; something that Aparna Sambhare from Mumbai discovered on a recent trip. “They (artisans) open their homes to strangers. Their simplicity and humility touches you, and the art too is made from local and sustainable raw materials,” she says.

The use of eco-sustainable products is the hallmark of Patachitra – a unique style of painting on cloth, whose origins date back centuries. “Raghurajpur has sustained the ancient Indian art tradition of painting on palm leaves, which would otherwise have been lost in this age,” says Shilpa Chheda, visiting Professor of Jainism and Aesthetics at Mumbai University.



Patachitra painting

Patachitra usually consists of three layers of fabric conjoined using tamarind paste. Hair from mice is used as a brush to apply colours that are produced using natural substances. The artists rely on the *Ramayana*, the *Mahabharata* or the *Bhagvad Gita* as the base text to draw their inspirations from. Lord Krishna is represented the most in these paintings.

Bend it like Beckham

Raghurajpur is also home to Gotipua dance troupes. Gotipua belongs to the same school of dance as the more famous Odissi (it is performed by young boys who dress up as women). “There is a certain rustic charm about Odisha that is difficult to miss, and the Gotipua experience in Raghurajpur epitomises this,” says Lakshmi Vaidyalingam, a student of Indian Aesthetics.

The boys performing Gotipua can bend their bodies at will, as if it was made out of rubber. It helps that they begin training at the age of five. “Their bodies are supple, their bones soft and flexible at this stage,” explains Jitendra Nayak, a guru in the dance form, adding, “It becomes difficult for the boys to pull off the acrobatics after the age of 15, and that is why they take to Odissi after that point.”

It is this unique blend of arts and culture of historical significance that would make Raghurajpur an interesting destination on the tourist’s calendar. “Many ancient art forms are lost, as they are not supported by people,” says Chheda, adding, “Apart from paintings, the villagers have contributed in keeping an ancient folk dance alive too. Raghurajpur is a unique concept where the entire village sustains these art forms.”

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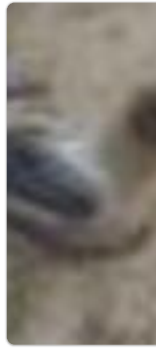
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