

Mayurbhanj, Odisha

Heritage, Livelihoods
and Culture-Led Development



Mayurbhanj

A Kaleidoscope of Nature and Culture

Mayurbhanj, the crown jewel of northern Odisha, is renowned for its breathtaking natural beauty, characterised by dense forests, majestic waterfalls, and rich biodiversity. Alongside this remarkable landscape, the district sustains a vibrant and diverse heritage of traditional arts, crafts, performance practices, and built heritage that continue to shape community identity, livelihoods, and local economies. From the UNESCO-recognised Mayurbhanj Chhau dance to Sabai grass craft, Dhokra metal casting, Kashi grass weaving, and bamboo craft, Mayurbhanj demonstrates how traditional knowledge systems can generate sustainable livelihoods while safeguarding cultural heritage. The district is also home to significant built heritage, including the historic Mayurbhanj Palace and distinctive terracotta architectural traditions, reflecting the region's rich artistic legacy, royal history, craftsmanship, and architectural knowledge. Together, its natural, cultural, and built heritage create a distinctive cultural landscape that offers immense potential for sustainable tourism, community-led enterprise, and heritage-based development.

Visitors can

- Witness live performances of the diverse traditions of Chhau dance
- Visit artist communities practising Sabai, Dhokra, Bamboo and Kashi grass crafts
- Participate in artist-led workshops and learn traditional craft-making techniques
- Purchase authentic handcrafted products directly from artist communities
- Explore the scenic landscapes, waterfall, forest
- Visit historic royal landmarks
- Experience local festivals, indigenous traditions, music, cuisine, and warm rural hospitality



Roots to Prosperity

Roots to Prosperity is a Axis Bank Foundation supported project, implemented by Contact Base (www.banglanatak.com) to strengthen creative livelihoods and experiential rural tourism across Seraikela-Kharsawan (Jharkhand), Mayurbhanj (Odisha) and Koraput (Odisha). The initiative supports 5500 traditional cultural practitioners through

- Skill enhancement and design development
- Entrepreneurship
- Market access
- Heritage-based tourism experiences
- Youth engagement and women's participation
- Community-led cultural institutions and museums

Why it Matters

The programme demonstrates how culture can contribute to rural development by:

- Creating sustainable livelihood opportunities
- Supporting women-led enterprises
- Encouraging youth participation in heritage practices
- Promoting environmentally sustainable production
- Strengthening cultural identity and community pride
- Developing responsible cultural tourism destinations



Living Heritage of Mayurbhanj

Mayurbhanj Chhau

Mayurbhanj Chhau, nurtured under royal patronage, is a maskless form rooted in the martial art of Pharikhanda (combat techniques of foot soldiers). With painted faces and agile, acrobatic movements, dancers narrate stories from mythology, nature, and daily life. Today, it remains a vibrant expression of Odisha's living heritage.

Villages

Rairangpur & around :

Rairangpur & around : Mohishkudor, Tarana, Jampani, Uperbeda, Rangamatta, Talapati, Rengalbeda, Kandsore, Talgaon, Belposi, Tedra, Sagajodi, Tentoposi, Baledih, Kendrai, Deogan, Bholbeda, Podadiha, Tikhia, Kuchaipal, Edelbeda.

Baripada & around :

Bara Jamboni, Dantia Mohan, Bhurkundi, Sarda, Rautara, Nichuapada, Sunahaja, Karatapata, Begunadiha, Kadakatha, Pandupal, Salasahi, Badabaincha, Kani Mahuli



Know more at: www.chhaudanceindia.com

Natural Fibre Craft

Sabai

Sabai craft is a prominent eco-friendly craft tradition of Mayurbhanj, rooted in the sustainable use of locally available natural resources. Sabai grass (Babui/Bobai ghasa) is woven into baskets, trays, mats, wall hangings and contemporary home décor, providing livelihoods for rural women. The tradition preserve traditional knowledge, support women-led livelihoods, promote environmentally responsible production, and contribute to local economic development.

Villages (around Baripada): Rangamatia, Galdih, Baddhenkia, Mahabila, Kujidihi, Salasahi, Badsole

Kashi Grass

Kashi Grass grows abundantly in the forest fringe landscapes of Mayurbhanj, flourishing naturally after the monsoon. Women collect, wash, and sun-dry the grass before combining it with date palm leaves to make baskets, trays, storage boxes, lamp shades, planters, wall décor, and other products that blend traditional skills with modern design.

Village: Talgaon near Rairangpur



Dhokra Metal Craft

Dhokra is an ancient brass casting tradition that uses the lost-wax technique and traces its origins to the Indus Valley Civilisation over 4,000 years ago. Known for its distinctive handcrafted aesthetic and intricate motifs, Dhokra artisans create animal figures, devotional icons, jewellery, and utility objects. In Mayurbhanj, the craft also holds religious significance through the making of the Laxmi-Narayan idol riding an elephant.

Village

Kudiakhunta



Bamboo Craft

Bamboo Craft Bamboo craft is central to everyday life reflecting a close relationship between people, material, and environment. Guided by knowledge passed down through generations, communities use bamboo for domestic, agricultural, and ceremonial purposes since time immemorial. Artists possess a deep understanding of bamboo, its strength, flexibility, and seasonal qualities, creating objects that are functional and durable. Now, they are also adapting to contemporary markets by diversifying into home décor, lifestyle items, and modern designs. Locally sourced, selected bamboo sustains eco-friendly practices and continues as a living tradition balancing utility, culture, and ecology.

Villages

Kandsore and Chanpal in Rairangpur



Natural Wonders and Historic Attractions

- Simlipal Forest: A vast forested landscape and biodiversity hotspot, renowned for its rich wildlife, sal forests, hills and scenic beauty.
- Waterfalls: Mayurbhanj is home to spectacular waterfalls set amidst its forests and hills. Devkund, Joranda and Sitakund are regularly visited by tourists, while Ashurghati near Rairangpur remains a lesser-known natural attraction with significant potential for nature-based tourism.
- Mayurbhanj Belgadia Palace: A historic royal residence near Baripada, associated with the former Mayurbhanj royal family and noted for its distinctive colonial-era architecture.
- Haripur Terracotta Temple: A historic temple site showcasing the region's distinctive terracotta craftsmanship and architectural heritage.
- Kichekeshwari Temple and Museum: An important historic temple at Khiching dedicated to Goddess Kichekeshwari, accompanied by a museum housing sculptures and archaeological artefacts.
- Jagannath Temple, Baripada: A prominent historic temple dedicated to Lord Jagannath and an important centre of religious and cultural life in Baripada.

Festivals Ahead

ICH Festival at Baripada

November 27 – 29, 2026



Artists Contact

Mayurbhanj Chhau (Rairangpur)

Dibar Nayek	9078305008
Budheswar Munda	8018571324
Sushanta Dhal	9337547521
Sudhir Kumar Nayek	826036865

Mayurbhanj Chhau (Baripada)

Sudhir Kr. Nayek	9337510530
Shobhakar Mukhi	9337510530
Haripada Mohanta	9937397066
Tanushree Behera	7008900595
Brajakishor Mohanta	8637211411

Sabai Craft

Sumitra Barik	9348212780
Jayanta Nayek	7008114621
Urmila Dehuri	6370797582
Madhumita Das	6370102160
Gouri Mahapatra	9777425682

Kashi Ghash

Bharati Mahakur	7325914470
Jagarnath Peogan	9040332568
Taramoni Mahakud	7681021806

D(h)okra Metal Craft

Kishor Rana	8249287370
Kunal Rana	6372597875
Subodh Rana	6370085663
Ashok Rana	9348475389

Bamboo Craft

Pujadebi Kuanr	9263333832
Banita Baitha	8456910860



About Us

Contact Base (banglanatak dot com) is a not-for-profit organisation working on inclusive and sustainable development through culture-based approaches. With advisory status to UNESCO's 2003 Intangible Cultural Heritage Committee and recognition from national and international institutions, the organisation works across India to safeguard living heritage while supporting community-led development.



Our work has been published as case studies in UN Tourism publications and Harvard Business Review



Awards & Recognition

- Best Practice in Osaka Expo 2025
- Outlook Responsible Tourism Award 2023
- Jeonju International Award for promoting Intangible Cultural Heritage 2019
- Bihar Innovation Forum II award for Good Practice in Non Farm Sector 2014

Art For Life (AFL)

Our flagship initiative, AFL, is a culture based development model focusing on holistic development of marginalised cultural practitioners by making their traditional cultural practices the premise for inclusion and poverty alleviation. AFL promotes Village, Artist & Art together. This tripartite focus makes AFL a catalytic methodology in paving the path for developing community based tourism. Development of grassroot entrepreneurship of tradition bearers of skills in art and culture has resulted in significant return on investment. We also work to protect the rights of the artists through Intellectual Property Rights.



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