

Seraikela Kharsawan, Jharkhand

Where Living Heritage Meets Nature



Seraikela Kharsawan

The Hidden Gem

Nestled in southern Jharkhand, Seraikela Kharsawan is a nature-culture destination where the Dalma Hills, the Kharkai and Subarnarekha rivers, and the Chandil reservoir create a picturesque landscape. The district is among the few places where multiple variants of the UNESCO-inscribed Chhau dance tradition continue to thrive, including the graceful Seraikela Chhau with face-sized masks, the martial Kharsawan Chhau performed without masks and with painted bodies, and the vibrant Manbhum Chhau (known as Purulia Chhau in neighbouring West Bengal) distinguished by its large ornate masks. Rich in Indigenous heritage, the district is also home to bamboo and Kashi grass craft traditions. Seraikela Kharsawan invites visitors to immerse themselves in its living cultural traditions, interact with traditional artists, and experience the warmth and rhythms of rural life.

Visitors can

- Witness live performances of the diverse traditions of Chhau dance
- Meet mask makers creating the iconic Seraikela Chhau masks
- Visit artist communities practising 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
- 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 Seraikela Kharsawan

Seraikela Chhau

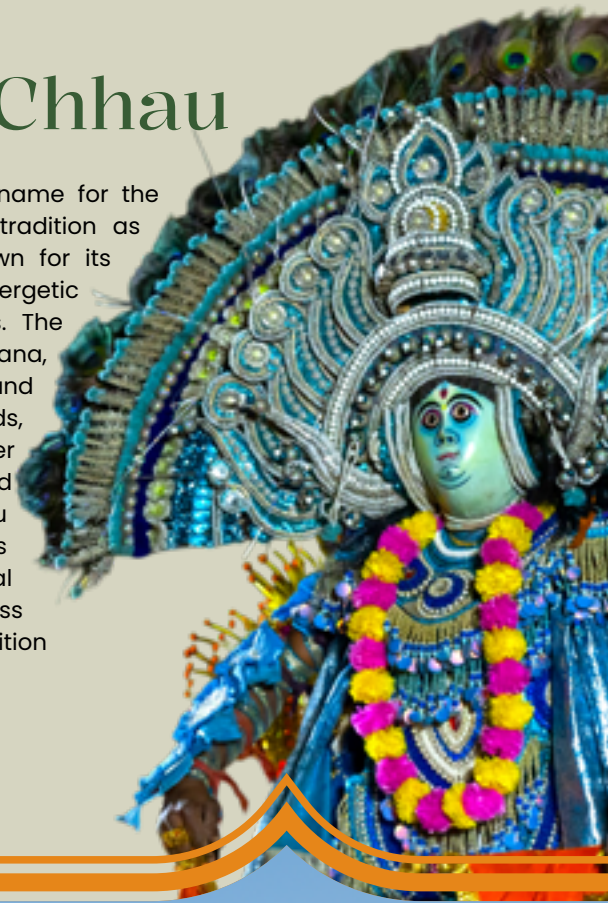
Seraikela Chhau is a UNESCO-recognised masked dance tradition from Seraikela Kharsawan district of Jharkhand. Evolving under the patronage of the Seraikela royal family, it is distinguished by its refined semi-classical aesthetics, stylised choreography, and expressive face-sized masks that evoke the navarasas (nine emotions). Blending martial techniques with graceful movement, the dance draws inspiration from mythology, nature, animals, and everyday life. Its nuanced vocabulary of controlled head, neck, and body movements enables performers to portray a wide range of characters and emotions. Today, around 15 active troupes continue to practice and perform this living tradition.



Know more at: www.chhaudanceindia.com

Manbhum Chhau

Manbhum Chhau is the regional name for the UNESCO-inscribed Purulia Chhau tradition as practiced in Jharkhand. It is known for its large masks, colourful costumes, energetic movements, and acrobatic jumps. The dance tells stories from the Ramayana, Mahabharata, local legends, and mythology. Dancers portray gods, demons, animals, and other characters through movement and gesture. Today, Manbhum Chhau also includes stories on social themes while continuing with its traditional repertoire. Nearly 27 troupes across the region keep this dance tradition alive.



Kharsawan Chhau

Kharsawan Chhau is a distinct maskless dance tradition, deeply rooted in the cultural memory and practice of the indigenous Ho communities of Seraikela Kharsawan. Instead of masks, dancers use face and body painting like Mayurbhanj Chhau tradition to represent different characters and emotions. Characterised by expressive facial gestures, painted bodies, and vigorous movements inspired by hunting, farming, and ritual life, its performance repertoire include stories from everyday life as well as mythological themes. Around 10 troupes continue to practise and perform this tradition, keeping its unique style and knowledge alive across the region.



Seraikela Chhau Mask

Seraikela Chhau masks are distinguished by their compact, minimalist form, designed to complement the dance's nuanced expressions. Crafted through a meticulous process of moulding, drying, burnishing, and painting, they are intricately crafted to evoke the navrasas and coloured using traditional mineral and plant-based pigments. Fine details are carefully rendered by hand before headgears, feathers, beads, and embroidered elements are attached separately. The understated elegance of these masks mirrors the refined aesthetic of Seraikela Chhau, where subtlety and precision take precedence over spectacle. Tentoposhi village, 30 minutes from Seraikela town keeps the tradition of mask making alive, while we can find crafting of mask and headgear also in Seraikela town.



Natural Fibre Crafts

Kashi Grass

Kashi Grass grows abundantly in the forest fringe landscapes of Seraikela Kharsawan, 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.

Cultural Hubs

Located in the foothills of the Nimdih block in Seraikela Kharsawan district, the villages of Rajagora, Bhangat and Ketunga are known for their Kashi grass artistry. Surrounded by forests and rich vegetation, these villages are emerging to be ideal craft hubs.



Bamboo Craft

For generations, rural communities across India have used bamboo for household, farming, storage, and ceremonial needs. The skills are passed down within families. In Jharkhand, bamboo craft is practised in the Nimdih and Kukru blocks of Seraikela-Kharsawan district by the Mahali community. Artisans traditionally made winnows, baskets, and other household items using locally available bamboo. Today, they are creating new products by combining bamboo with wood and using dyed bamboo strips, expanding their product repertoire to boxes, baskets, lampshades, wall hangings, and other home décor items. New weaving techniques and designs have helped the craft reach wider markets while keeping its traditional knowledge and sustainable practices alive.

Cultural Hubs

The villages of Sima, Tetlo, Matkamdih, and Chirugara in Seraikela Kharsawan are among the district's primary cultural hubs of bamboo craft.



Natural Wonders & Historic Attractions

Dalma Hills

The forested Dalma Hills offer spectacular natural landscapes, rich biodiversity, trekking opportunities, birdwatching, and panoramic views of the surrounding countryside. The region is an ideal destination for travellers seeking peaceful encounters with nature.

Chandil Dam

Built across the Subarnarekha River, Chandil Dam is one of the district's most scenic attractions. Surrounded by rolling hills and tranquil waters, it offers beautiful vistas, boating opportunities, and memorable sunsets that attract nature lovers and photographers alike.

Seraikela Palace

The historic Seraikela Palace stands as a reminder of the former princely state whose royal patronage played a pivotal role in the evolution of Seraikela Chhau. Its architecture and history provide valuable insights into the district's rich cultural heritage.

Kharsawan

Surrounded by picturesque landscapes, forests, and traditional villages, Kharsawan offers visitors opportunities to experience the district's indigenous culture, rural life, and scenic beauty in an unhurried setting.



Artists Contact

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Kharsawan Chhau

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Manbhum Chhau

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Saraikela Chhau Mask

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Bamboo Craft

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Kashi Grass

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Biswanath Sabar	7856082101
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Possible Stay

Nimdihi Gandhi Ashram is a peaceful 20-acre campus inspired by the values of Mahatma Gandhi. Surrounded by nature, it offers comfortable eco-friendly accommodation with attached western-style toilets. The campus also practices organic farming. Guests can enjoy morning walk or cycling on the nearby forest trails and relax in the calm surroundings. A stay at the ashram can be combined with visits to the art and craft villages of Seraikela-Kharsawan for an authentic cultural experience.



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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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