

## Goan Artisans Weave the Magical Handicrafts

By

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### Abstract

Goa the beautiful paradise on earth is not only famous for its pristine beaches but has managed to carve out a niche for itself in local arts and crafts. It is also an art-enriched state where every corner of the state speaks of dexterous fingers that create magical traditional handicrafts. The articulate craftsmanship speaks volumes of the artistic mastery, excellence and hard work of the Goan craftsmen. It will be apt to say that art runs in the Goan blood and is in fact, an intimate part of Goa's tradition.

The ethnic nature of Goan handicrafts is a unique aesthetic blend of Indian and Portuguese culture. Acclaimed worldwide for their excellent craftsmanship, the Goan artisans create an extensive range of exotic handicrafts. The Goan handicrafts are sold in various handicraft emporiums and major tourist spots.

### Keywords

Handicrafts, terracotta, Pottery, coconut craft, sea shells, woodcraft, brass and metal craft

### Introduction

The infectious charm of Goa besides the beaches also embraces the local intricately carved and decorated Goan handicrafts. Goa is home to various handicrafts. The art and craft of Goa is an amalgamation of Portuguese and Indian culture. Various art forms pertaining to different religious beliefs and lifestyles have mingled into one unique identity that has developed into Goan art. Goan art illustrates unity in the diversity of Goan heritage.

Local artists make excellent souvenirs from a wide range of materials infusing prolific intricate designs on various natural substrates like clay, terracotta, ceramics, coconut, wood, bamboo, brass, shells, etc. The Goan artists make excellent gift items for tourists, both domestic and international.

### **Major Handicraft Artforms in Goa**

Different categories of Goan handicrafts include terracotta and ceramic pottery, bamboo craft, Jute craft, brass and metal craft, sea shell craft, coconut craft, woodcraft, and Crochet and embroidery.

**Terracotta and Pottery:** The age-old craft of clay and terracotta is practiced even today in the traditional way with great passion in Goa. Terracotta pottery is one of the arts that continues to lend character to Goan homes. Each art piece is known for its artistic finish. Skilled Goan potters design attractive and beautiful utility cum decorative earthenware. Deep rich red colored terracotta pots of different shapes and sizes with variegated designs are popular with interior designers and adorn the interiors of houses.

Garden pots, ashtrays, candle holders, hanging pots, planters, hanging bells, decorative bowls with floral designs etc. are some of the examples of these traditional crafts.

Beautiful figurines of saints, Gods and Goddesses are created by talented Goan artisans. Skilled artisans create beautiful Ganesh idols for worshipping during Ganesh Chaturthi. The artisans are using eco-friendly biodegradable products like clay, natural fiber, vegetable dyes to create idols instead of plaster of Paris and other toxic paints.

**Bamboo Craft:** Bamboo craft is one of the oldest arts practiced in Goa. Mahars – a small community of people introduced the art of bamboo craft in Goa. It started initially as a utility-based handicraft catering to the needs of the farmers and fishermen for carrying, drying, and storing food grains and fish. The multi-purpose utility items designed and produced included ‘patio’ (baskets), ‘supli’ for cleaning rice, ‘valli’ (for washing rice and grains), mats and ‘dali’ for drying food grains. These items are still commonly used in Goa.

With the passage of time Goa became a major tourist hub and with this bamboo art started flourishing very well. The craftsmen started making decorative items in addition to utility items. The decorative items include flower baskets, flower pots, pen holders, pen stands, straw hats, magazine stands, handbags, bags, mats, chicks, lamp shades, trays etc. Today there is a great demand of bamboo products worldwide. Bamboo craft is now one of the major craft industries of Goa.

**Jute Craft:** Jute one of the cheapest natural fibres is widely used by craftsmen of Goa to design decorative things. Jute craft utilizes jute fibre to produce a wide range of utility and decorative items. This includes wall hangings, handbags, purses, shopping bags, mats, pot holders, purses, bottle holders etc.

**Brass and Metal Craft:** Goan artisans mold brass into various decorative items in different designs and shapes. The age-old tradition is still being followed by local artisans and surprises modern techniques in simplicity and beauty. Skilled artisans mold a wide variety of brass products such as lamp “samai” (a tree-like oil lamp with flower motifs), candle stands, temple towers, church bells, ashtrays, etc. Copper metal sheets are used to craft utility utensils.

**Sea-Shell Craft:** Goa famous for its serene beautiful beaches is a storehouse of colorful and attractive shell. In fact, these beaches are a shell collector’s delight. Goan craftsmen have been using these shells to make fascinating decorative and utility objects. Coasters, table lamps, ashtrays, pot holders, pots, mirror frames, jewelry boxes, spoons, chandeliers, shell curtains etc. made from shells have been cherished by domestic and international tourists.

Attractive sea shells have also been used in designing ornaments. Bangles, bracelets, earrings, necklaces, hair clips, saree pins etc. are some of the items designed with perfection using attractive shells.

The origin of shell craft can be traced to Portuguese rule in Goa. Goan architects used shells to adorn the doors and windows during that period. The present-day architects also use shells to give a Goan touch to the houses.

**Coconut Craft:** Coconut, the most popular ingredient in Goan cuisine is also a means of earning livelihood for Goan craftsmen. Dry coconuts, coconut fiber and shells are used to create remarkable utility and decorative handicrafts. Carving on hard coconut shell requires highly skilled artisans. The artwork from coconut shell is imperishable, high quality and eco-friendly. These salient features have led to the development of modern coconut shell handicraft industry.

The most popular items made from coconut are bags, candles, candle stands, soap stands, pen stand, purses, table lamps, flowerpots, liquor coconut shell bottles, coconut shell mugs, different idols, etc. Brooms prepared from coconut fibers are durable and last long. Candle stand smoothly crafted out of coconut and shaped like a single flower is a beautiful piece of craftsmanship.

**Woodcraft:** Woodcraft also known as ‘wood turning’ is a century-old art form. This ancient craft of the state came into prominence during the Portuguese time. The exquisitely carved rosewood and teak furniture are a treat to the eyes. One cannot resist falling in love with the beautiful intricate art of woodcarving. The designs carved are floral, animals, and human figures. Cradles, corner stand, a diverse variety of art pieces like idols of Lord Ganesh, jewelry boxes, coasters, fruit baskets, wooden fruits and vegetables, card holders, and bookshelves all in wood are some of the items crafted by skilled wood carving craftsmen.

**Crochet and Embroidery:** The traditional craft of crochet and embroidery has a very important place in every household in Goa. It was introduced in Goa during Portuguese period by the nuns of Santa Monica Church and convent. The magical work of the fingers can be seen in the delicate crochet work and fine lace embroidery. Table covers, bedspreads, tablecloths, pillow covers, hankies, coasters, garments, cushion covers etc. are made using these art forms.

## Conclusion

Besides offering spectacular beaches, Goa offers amazing handicrafts items to the tourist. Various types of art and crafts are a mirror of Goa’s perennial beauty. Art virtually runs in the Goan blood which is manifested in wide variety of arts and crafts. Goan handicrafts are truly amazing and admirable. A visit to Goa is incomplete unless you take back the

beautifully handcrafted exquisite souvenirs created by the skilled artisans. Next time you are in Goa, do not forget to pick up beautifully hand-crafted gifts for your near and dear ones.

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### About the Author

Dr. Aparna Pradhan, a doctorate in Zoology is an artist, freelance writer, author and a poetess. She is a bilingual writer. She has authored three books and has contributed in more than 35 anthologies. She has published articles in leading newspapers and magazines. Her poems have been published in International and National magazines, Hindi and English anthologies. She is the recipient of the Indian Women Achievers Award in Literature (2022), the Indian Women Achievers Award in Arts (2020) and the Annual Wordsmith Award of Excellence (2019, 2021, 2022).

