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# JetWings

## The Arts. Special Issue

### **AN ART ODYSSEY AROUND EUROPE**

10 extraordinary paintings  
that should be on your  
must-see list

### **TIMELESS ARTS OF RAJASTHAN**

Blue pottery, usta art,  
jadau jewellery,  
and more

### **SCISSOR HANDS OF SWITZERLAND**

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## TIMELESS ARTS OF

# Rajasthan

The traditional arts and crafts of Rajasthan have stood the test of time and are much sought after even today.

TEXT AMI BHAT

**W**hen a monochromatic desert gets punctuated with vibrant colours of deep-rooted culture, you know you have reached the picturesque state of Rajasthan.

Stretching beyond the realm of the walls of Rajput palaces in the state, Rajasthani arts and crafts are found across the wares in the local markets. Practiced over generations, these art forms are widely sought by both connoisseurs and tourists. Each of these captivating forms has its own story to tell – one from its origin to the present day – a tale that renders it timeless. We take a look at a few such crafts...

**Jet Airways operates direct flights to Udaipur, Jodhpur, and Jaipur in Rajasthan from multiple Indian cities.**







## HANDICRAFTS



### BLUE POTTERY FROM JAIPUR

A pleasing contrast of blue against the rosy walls of the Pink City greets you as you stroll along the Nehru Bazar. From urns and small key rings, to door knobs and lamps, the blue pottery of this city lends a classy look to every niche that it occupies.

Blue pottery was introduced to Jaipur in the 17th century by Maharaja Sawai Ram Singh II. The conspicuous absence of a traditional potter's wheel in its making makes this style of pottery unique. Traced back to the Mongols, this art can be still observed in the mosques and monuments of Central Asia. The craftsmanship travelled with the Mughals to Delhi. It was soon embraced by the enterprising Jaipur artists, who, with their unique touch, made it an inseparable part of the Rajasthani culture.

Fashioned from dough of fuller's earth, quartz, and a local gum called *gond katira*, the blue pottery ornaments are moulded in a pre-prepared POP cast. Cut and trimmed to shape, the raw artefact is polished to a uniform texture before it is baked and glazed in a slurry of quartz, refined flour (*maida*), and water.

An astonishing facet of blue pottery is the fact that the traditional designs of animals and birds continue to be painted by hand, making each artefact exclusive.

**Top left and right:** A mix of traditional and contemporary designs painted on myriad forms continue to make blue pottery relevant.  
**Right:** Pencil sketch of a Bikaner Miniature Painting.



### BIKANER MINIATURE PAINTINGS FROM BIKANER

Ever notice the small traditional paintings on the book covers of literature on Indian heritage? The tiny mythological figures might seem like a regular painting until you examine them under a magnifying glass. That is when you realise that there is more than what meets the eye. The details of each hair strand or the texture of the robes escape the naked eyes in these Rajasthani miniature paintings.

The Bikaner Miniature Paintings is one of the prominent schools of this art. Popularised owing to the Silk Route, this miniature art made its way from palm leaves and parchments, to even walls of Rajput havelis and palaces. Today, these paintings command a minimum of a five-figured price.

The subject of Bikaner miniature paintings is generally mythological figures or scenes from traditional Rajasthani life. Some of the present-day paintings, by renowned local artists such as Mahaveer Swami, even have a beautiful fusion of traditional and modern life.

The actual tale of the Bikaner miniature



Courtesy of Neeja.com; Ami Bhat





**Left:** The corridors and palaces of Junagarh Fort look resplendent in Usta Art.

**Below:** Gold embossing and hues of red and green are the standout features of Usta Art.

paintings lies in its creation. The art involves the use of a variety of brushes and tools such as conch shells along with gemstone and natural stone colours. Crushed into a fine powder, each stone is converted to tiny colour pellets with a solvent. This preparation is a month-long annual process. Once the artist's imagination is converted into a pencil sketch, it is transferred onto a parchment that is covered with paint using cowrie shells. The monocoloured design is brought alive with brushes of various makes and thicknesses. The selection of brushes and the artist's craftsmanship is central to the fine details on the painting. Each painting takes anything between three months to over a year for completion. Commissioned by the royals, the rich and famous, Bikaner miniature paintings, today, have found a place in their elite homes.

#### USTA ART FROM BIKANER

The gilded rooms of the maharajas of Bikaner in palaces such as in Junagarh Fort have never failed to dazzle visitors. The green and red floral patterns embellished with gold all across create a grandeur, radiating the typical Rajputana aura. This is the renowned Usta Art of Bikaner.

This Persian art form came from the courts of Akbar to the talented artisans of Bikaner, who with their traditional touch blended it into their



own art form. The use of gold foil in Usta Art renders it precious – so much that the royalties across Rajasthan had it etched on their walls, mirrors and other decor.

The trademark of the Usta Art is the gold embossing created over a smoothened surface. In the initial step, the favoured red, blue and green colours are applied on a pre-prepared canvas. For the next phase, the artist imparts an embossed effect with a traditional paste of jaggery, glue, and clay. The final touch of the Usta masterpiece is the gilding over the embossed designs, creating opulence reminiscent of the nobles.





## OTHER NOTABLE RAJASTHANI ARTS

- **Wood carving:** This age-old craft was popular during the royal rule for home decor such as screens, window carvings, etc. Wood-carved souvenirs can be found all across the state.
- **Puppet making:** Painted wooden or cotton puppets are quintessentially Rajasthani.
- **Other painting styles:** Under the aegis of Rajasthani or Rajput painting, a variety of Rajput art schools developed. Phad, pichvai and kajali paintings are some these.
- **Textile making:** Leheriya and bandhani textiles are synonymous with the state. These tie-dye techniques evolved in Rajasthan and its spillover is visible in the neighbouring state of Gujarat.



## JADAU AND MEENAKARI JEWELLERY

A visit to any museum in Rajput palaces will allow you a glimpse of the elaborate jewellery used by the aristocratic women. From elegant neckpieces called Rajputi Aad that begin at the neck and extend to the chest to dainty earrings, these traditional ornaments showcase the time-honoured art of meenakari.

Yet another Persian art brought by Maharaja Man Singh of Amber, meenakari involves a string of artists. A blueprint created by the *chitera* (designer) is converted to a cast by the *sonar* (goldsmith). The master of a metal stylus, *kalamkar* (engraver) takes over this plain cast and creates delicate patterns on it. Passed onto a *meenakar*, the design acquires a splash of metallic colours which is then baked and fused into the metal. Finally, in the hands of a *jadai* or the stone setter, the coloured jewellery piece is embedded with precious or semi-precious gemstones.

Meenakari art maybe Persian in its origin, but its seamless blend into the ancient *jadau* (studded) jewellery making process makes it uniquely Rajasthani. Original *jadau* pieces had gemstones inserted into the ornaments when they were in a semi-solid form. The meenakari work complimented this jewellery making art with its colours and designs. With the fusion of the two cultures, came in the signature Rajasthani jewellery that even today is making waves across the world. ■

**This page:** *Jadau* and meenakari jewellery make for beautiful traditional adornments.



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## QUICK FACTS

### UPCOMING EVENTS

- August 13–14, Jaipur: Mainly a women's festival, Teej celebrates the bounty of nature and arrival of monsoon with various rituals.
- October 18–November 5, Kota: At the Kota Adventure Festival witness various events such as parasailing, rafting, wind surfing, water skiing, rock climbing, angling and rural excursions.
- November 15–23, Pushkar: Pushkar Fair (Pushkar Camel Fair) or Pushkar Mela, as it is locally known, is an annual week-long camel and livestock fair.

### FOR MORE INFORMATION

Log on to [www.tourism.rajasthan.gov.in](http://www.tourism.rajasthan.gov.in)