

## VISIT THE MASTERS OPEN STUDIO TOURS WITH ARTISAN DESIGNERS OF KUTCH



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## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

Somaiya Kala Vidya, an institution of education for traditional artisans, offers open studio tours with its graduates in textile crafts including weaving, Ajrakh block printing, and natural dyeing. Expert traditional artisans of the desert region Kutch, India, educated in design and business, are well prepared to explain age-old concepts and skills, and show you their unique interpretations. Close interaction with these young masters provides an off-the beaten track experience in understanding living traditions.



## **BACKGROUND**

One of the unique aspects of India is the persistence of a broad spectrum of distinct cohesive rural cultures, expressed in craft traditions. Such expressions emanate from a shared understanding of the world, a shared identity, and an environment in which art is integrated into daily life.

Kutch is one of the richest regions for textiles in India. World renowned extra weft wool weaving, and intricate natural dyed hand block printed Ajrakh are two craft traditions for which villages dominated by artisans still survive.

Visiting artisans living and working in the back lanes of the villages, one can begin to understand the shared heritage of today's practitioners, and the subtle variations nurtured through design education. Today, artisan designers have styles as unique as fingerprints, while clearly maintaining their cultural heritage. The tour slows you down to look, appreciate and connect to the precious human quality of handmade art.



## **THE INSTITUTE**

Somaiya Kala Vidya, a division of Somaiya Vidya Vihar, based in Adipur, is an institution of education for traditional artisans of Kutch. Its mission is to preserve and protect traditional arts, and its strengths are a deep understanding of culture and arts, and a focus on the artisan. Somaiya Kala Vidya offers design and business education for artisans of Kutch using an approach based on existing traditions, and teaches a spectrum of others about rural traditions. Founder Director Judy Frater has worked with many artisans of the region since 1993.

Somaiya Kala Vidya's Advisory Board comprises master artisans of Kutch, and the faculty includes local and international teachers. The effectiveness of the institution is in the relevance of the education provided. Approaching education through a vital subject, the institute enables direct access to higher education and raises the capacity of artisans and the value of traditional arts. Somaiya Kala Vidya students have increased their market reach and incomes through good design. They have been honored with awards for excellence and invitations to participate in international programs.

The impact of design education on artisans has been recognized internationally as well as locally. In 2009, the Sir Misha Black Medal for Distinguished Service to Design Education was awarded to Founder Emeritus Judy Frater. The medal, likened to the Nobel Prize for Design Education, is awarded through an association of UK bodies. Somaiya Kala Vidya takes a token fee from the artisan students. Fees from the tours contribute to the operation of the institute.



## **THE TOURS**

Somaiya Kala Vidya, an institute of education for artisans in the desert region of Kutch, India, offers open studio tours of Bhujodi, a weaving village, and Ajrakhpur, a block print and natural dyeing village, focusing on the traditional essence and individual innovations of contemporary craft traditions of Kutch, for design and textile enthusiasts. The studios are all independently operated by master traditional artisans who have graduated from a design program.

The expected outcomes are that participants will

- \*understand a traditional aesthetic style
- \*experience a traditional social system
- \*understand the place of individual innovation
- \*experience the rich, subtle diversity of contemporary artisan designed craft



## **ACTIVITIES**

Visitors are provided with a map locating the home/ workplaces of participating artisan designers. They are free to explore the by lanes of the village for the morning. They join again for a traditional lunch in the home of a designated artisan designer. A common display of work from all participating artisan designers can also be organized.

### ARTISAN DESIGNERS

The participants are all traditional artisans who have graduated from SKV's design program—weavers, printers and dyers. Profiles of participants will be available when the dates of the tours are set.



### COST

Minimum 3 people are required for a tour. Cost for the one-day guided tour is **Rs. 2,900** per person. If groups are of 5 or more members, the cost per person is reduced to **Rs. 2,400**. Cost includes visits, guiding, lunch and tea.





## **ABOUT THE TRADITIONAL ARTS**

### **WEAVING**

Kutch weaving is practiced on a 4 treadle, fly shuttle pit loom. The specialty of the tradition is hand insertion of ornamental extra wefts, almost like embroidering. Traditional dhabla/ blankets used interlocking or tapestry wefts and hand shuttles.

### **BLOCK PRINTING**

Kutch block printing is largely done with resist, so that the pattern is light on dark. Substances including gum Arabic and lime, or mud and millet flour are printed on the fabric with wooden blocks. When the fabric is immersed in the dye bath, the colour cannot penetrate the printed areas. Typical patterns are complex, using two or three blocks to create the motifs. The most traditional fabric, Ajrakh, is printed separately on the back and front. Thus, registration is a critical skill.

### **NATURAL DYEING**

Traditional Kutch textiles were dyed with natural substances, including indigo, iron acetate, madder and pomegranate rinds. Natural dyes on cotton fabrics require mordants. So the process is multi-step and based on an understanding of chemistry.

