

# Curating Goa's Past

AN ETHNOGRAPHIC MUSEUM ON AN ORGANIC FARM IN GOA

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In South Goa's sleepy village of Benaulim is a unique ethnographic museum.

Goa Chitra is a gem worth exploring and engaging with, even though it is a stark contrast to the state's more popular attractions. Located in a villa on an organic farm, this museum is dedicated to preserving Goa's rich and rapidly vanishing agrarian heritage. It is the brainchild and endeavour of Victor Hugo Gomes an artist and curator. While he was involved in the restoration of old Goan homes, he was saddened to find that that implements, artefacts, and crafts representing hundreds of years of accumulated wisdom and history, were being ruthlessly junked all over the state. Goa Chitra is his attempt to save the tools, technologies, implements, and cultural heritage of Goa.

To begin with, the museum building has been reconstructed from materials salvaged from 300 demolished Goan houses. Inside, some 4,000-plus artefacts connect visitors

with the region's agrarian past. Each display has detailed notes—many accompanied by fascinating old photographs—explaining its features, how it evolved, and the folklore and ritual associated with it. For the urban visitor, the exhibits offer a glimpse of rural life as it once was. Viewing a wall adorned with the numerous implements necessary for coconut farming—ranging from slim, delicate iron picks to exquisitely woven baskets, or the array of tools and vessels involved in butter churning, or the beautifully crafted gear custom-made for individual draft animals—visitors come to realise the eco-friendly nature of an agriculture-based way of life.

Every artefact has been lovingly restored to highlight not only its utility but also the craftsmanship in its creation. Each is a work of art, a testimony to the symbiosis between functionality and aesthetics. The rich collection of storage items like baskets, stone jars, and beautiful wooden chests is



especially noteworthy.

From grain and liquid measures, to weights, scales, and tools of blacksmiths, masons, goldsmiths, and cobblers, the various rooms display a vivid picture of a rural community, anchored to an agrarian pattern of life and powered by interdependent skills. Everyday household items include diverse objects from minutely-crafted religious pieces that were unearthed from a domestic chapel, to an intriguingly shaped non-mechanical soda-maker and kitchen appliances from the pre-electricity era.

Goa Chitra goes beyond curating the past. It is a way for people to learn about their ancestors. Once outside, the learning continues on Gomes's sustainable farm where an old revived well is used for water, bio-gas and solar power are energy sources, and goats and duck wander around happily (*Open 9 a.m. to 6 p.m. daily; [www.goachitra.com](http://www.goachitra.com); 0832-2772910*). ■