

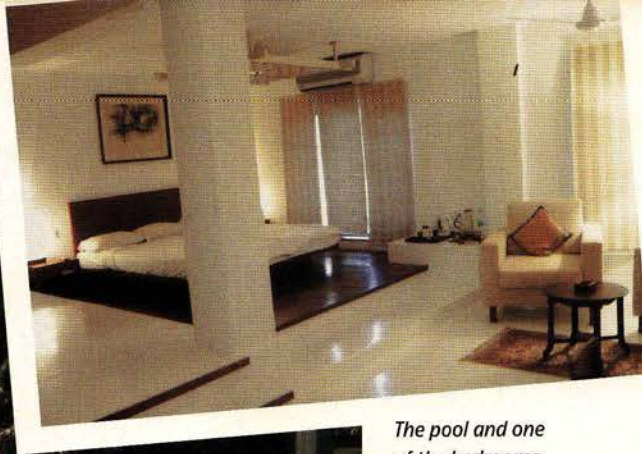
FAT TIE

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101 best hotels
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Travel Guide 2008





The pool and one of the bedrooms at Aashyana Lakhnapal

◁ beach shack for seafood and the only shop to buy Indian paper in Panjim. The house mixes antiques, modern European furniture, local art and family photographs. The bar is the back of a painted Indian lorry with a rack full of bottles of Haywards 5000. This booze is so strong that Simon jokes that if you can drink it, you get it for free. Book the Konnager suite – it has a great four-poster, a huge bathroom with a bath from the Royal Bombay Yacht Club and a balcony from which you can watch the world go by.

Moving beyond the hotels (if you can bear it), the architecture of southern Goa is fantastic. Old Portuguese palacios hide behind palm trees and tropical plants. The baroque cathedral and the Basilica of Bom Jesus in Old Goa are both weighty historical monuments, which must have struck awe into the locals (30 per cent of Goans are Catholics). You can also see a Portuguese influence in the icing-sugar façades of village churches. It is incredibly pretty.

A faded Portuguese charm oozes from the backstreets of Fontainhas, the old quarter of the must-visit capital Panjim. This really is the last bastion of Lusitanian culture in India. Here, old ladies in print dresses chat in Portuguese while leaning over the balconies of pastel-coloured houses. Pop into the Horseshoe for authentic tapas or stop by Hospedaria Venite for some excellent Goan seafood. The other reason people go south is to soak up some sun on the quieter beaches. Head to Zeebop on Utorda beach for hazy sunsets and cocktails (if you're still not relaxing, enjoy a hot-stone massage at the Kenilworth Beach Resort first), and for proper on-my-own time, make your way to Patnem or Agonda Beach, both blissfully off the tourist trail and only accessible by car or scooter.

Whether you want to live the high life or lie low, Goa's unique character hits you. Many Indophiles

Faded Portuguese charm oozes out of the backstreets

snub it for the more obvious delights of Rajasthan, Kerala and the big-gun cities – why go to India for a beach holiday when there is so much culture to be had? But herein lies the joy of Goa. It's about a laidback, Iberian way of life, mixed with the spirituality of the east – a seriously irresistible combination. The music floating out of the beach shacks fuses east and west. Local traders rub shoulders with European hippies in the markets. And in the glamorous Goa that's being enjoyed by the Hanbury sisters, Fran Hickman and Annabelle Neilson, you can eat vegetable soups drizzled in olive oil or opt for the spice of coconut curries. Unlike Ibiza, also colonised by free spirits in the Sixties, Goa's got soul. It's a hideaway that subtly reveals itself with none of the pomp and ceremony of royal India, but with all its charm and humour. No wonder shiny, happy people are making it the new hot-spot on their party map. □

UK reservations All hotels (except Soul Vacation) can be booked through i-escape (tel: 0117 942 8476; i-escape.com). Flights and Soul Vacation can be booked through Greaves India (tel: 020 7487 9111; greavesindia.com). **Rates** Vivenda dos Palhacos, double from £50, including breakfast. Soul Vacation, double from £63. Raj Angan, villa from £2,600 a week. Siolim House, double from £39, including breakfast. Elsewhere, villas from £546 to £1,200 a week. Aashyana Lakhnapal, villa from £3,129 a week.

Let's Goa shopping

Goa is teeming with funky shops and markets – perfect for picking up stylish Indo-western clothes, jewellery, local handicrafts and surprisingly good quality furniture. **Must-visits include:**

Sangolda, Chogm Road, Sangolda

This super-cool lifestyle shop was the first of its kind in Goa. Housed in a 200-year-old palacio, it is worth a visit for the building alone, never mind the furniture and trinkets. It was the brainchild of French stylist Claudia Derain and her husband Hari Ajwani (who own the trendy Nilaya Hermitage hotel in Arpora) and is great for gorgeous table linen, wood furniture and pretty baubles.

Saturday Night Bazaar, Arpora

Often known as Ingo's Night Bazaar, after the German expat who set it up, this is more chilled than the Wednesday Anjuna flea market. Traders are kicked out if they hassle tourists. Wares vary from rave clothes to Indian pop art, jewellery and excellent street food.

Sosa's, Panjim

This swanky little boutique just round the corner from the Horseshoe tapas bar sells funky kaftans and Indian designer clothes. A kind of Goan Matches.

Azulejos Workshop/Velha Goa Galeria, Panjim

If you want handpainted Portuguese tiles, head to the south side of St Sebastian Square and pop into Azulejos workshop or the smarter Velha Goa. There is the usual tat but it is also possible to find beautiful glass and brightly coloured tiles.