

The world's most discerning travel title

# Condé Nast Traveller

SEE PAGE 63  
GREAT DEALS  
ON HOLIDAYS IN  
ASIA & THE  
INDIAN OCEAN

TRUTH IN TRAVEL

SEPTEMBER 2009 £3.80

Laidback luxury in Goa

## India in style



The wild beauty of  
**Montenegro**

**New York**  
Queens: the real deal

**Italy**

Admire the coast  
of the Cinque Terre

**PLUS**

- ★ Rural retreats  
in Britain
- ★ Foodie Sweden

Unpackaged  
**Mexico** Away from the crowds of Cancún



reads, and Tibetans selling heavy silver from Dharamsala. I offered the fragrant heaps of cardamom, and tea, and picked up gaudy, pocket-sized Ganesh, Karen badgered, remonstrated and in the local language of Konkani. Never did she lose eye-contact with her. 'This is loads of fun,' I said, squeezing the toy elephant into a carrier bag. 'Why start a haggle academy?' I popped off at an ATM in Calangute to dwindling stocks of rupees. This northern town still has a reputation as party central, and by the day the streets are busy with whining and women laden with plastic carrier bags on the roadside for buses.

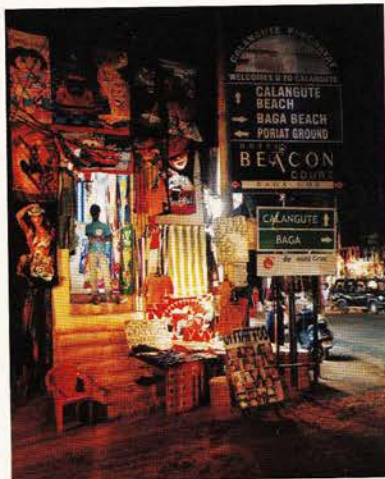
I stopped again, at Sangolda, to check out Hari Nilaya Home Collection, surely Goa's answer to the Aran Shop. Even hagglemeister Karen could not resist the carved antique cupboards, the woven baskets as light as silk, and the painted rice boxes within reach. But it was worth the stop to watch Gilbert's performance as saucers in utter contrast to the prices.

Heading south from Panaji, Goa's capital, we followed the banks of the Mandovi River. We continued our southerly journey towards Majorda. Gilbert pointed out fruit trees – mango, papaya – and delighted to tell me with tales of cobras. 'The cobra has the power in the eyes,' he said. 'If a snake's mate is killed, the cobra will kill the person responsible by looking into their eyes, then exact revenge.'

As we reached the district of southern Goa, the scene began to change. The roads narrowed and were flanked by coconut palms which flanked them, brightly lit houses – jade green, deep purple and blue – seemed to crouch in the shade. Piglets and chickens strutted. Finally we swung off the main road onto a narrow dirt lane and parked in the lush front garden of Vivenda dos Palhaços.

As I walked past ancient leather dentist's chairs and through the beautifully carved veranda, through the dining room where guests sat round a long wooden table, and arrived at the bar, a witty recreation of the back of a Tata truck. I was met by Indian-born Simon Hayward, who showed me to this seven-bedroom hotel with his sister, and basset-hound, Toby. The front section of the house, which has a sitting room and two bedrooms, dates from the 1920s; behind it is the older part of the house with earth walls, in which there are three double bedrooms. A tented room and a cottage called The Chummary lie beyond

*Continued on page 150*



Above, a shop in Calangute. Opposite, Anri's Place, a shack restaurant on Betalbatim Beach, just south of Majorda Beach



## GOING TO GOA: THE FACTS

### GETTING THERE

- **Greaves Travel** (020 7487 9111; [www.greavesindia.com](http://www.greavesindia.com)) offers 10-day tours to Goa from £1,759 per person, which includes all flights and transfers, a guide and accommodation at Panchavatti Guest-House Retreat, Fort Tiracol Heritage Hotel and Vivenda dos Palhaços.
- **Kingfisher Airlines** (0800 047 0810; [www.flykingfisher.com](http://www.flykingfisher.com)) flies from Heathrow to Goa via Mumbai.
- **British Airways** (08444 930787; [www.ba.com](http://www.ba.com)) flies from Heathrow to Mumbai. Then get an internal flight to Goa with Kingfisher or **Jet Airways** (0808 101 1199; [www.jetairways.com](http://www.jetairways.com)).
- You can also find direct charter flights: **Thomas Cook** ([www.thomascook.com](http://www.thomascook.com)) flies from Gatwick and Manchester to Goa.

### HOTELS

- **Panchavatti Guest-House Retreat**, Corjuem Island, Aldona (00 91 982 258 0632; [www.islaingoa.com](http://www.islaingoa.com)). Doubles from Rs8,000 (about £100), full board.
- **Fort Tiracol Heritage Hotel**, Tiracol, Pernem (00 91 236 622 7631; [www.forttiracol.com](http://www.forttiracol.com)). Doubles from €130, half board.
- **Vivenda dos Palhaços**, Costa Vaddo, Majorda, Salcete (00 91 832 322 1119; [www.vivendagoa.com](http://www.vivendagoa.com)). Doubles from about £45. One week's exclusive use of the whole house (seven rooms), from about £325 per night.
- **The Leela Kempinski Goa**, Mobor, Cavelossim (00800 4263 1355; [www.theleela.com](http://www.theleela.com)). Suites in The Club from about £385, including airport transfers, butler and laundry service.

### PRACTICAL INFORMATION

- The guidebook I found to be the best is **Footprint Goa** (£12.99).
- **Tipping** can be tricky. Ten per cent is the customary amount, if service is not included. Hotel and railway porters will expect about Rs50 for one piece of luggage, Rs200 for a full trolley. If you wish to tip your driver and guide at the end of your stay (I prepared envelopes of cash in advance), the customary amount is Rs300–400 a day for the guide, Rs300–500 a day for the driver.
- **DON'T MISS** A guided walking tour of Old Goa, a UNESCO World Heritage Site city in north Goa. Ask at your hotel about booking a guide. Go as early as possible in the morning to avoid the heat of the day.

# GOA NOW

Continued from page 115

the pool at the bottom of the garden, close to a big concrete table for alfresco meals, which is strong enough, I'm told, to withstand being danced upon.

The darkened cool of my room, named Madras, came as a relief. The only light came from two small windows in the roof and the open-air stone bathroom, which lay beyond heavy French windows made of tropical wood. Switching on a lamp, I flicked through the guest information folder. Under 'F', I read: 'Frogs get everywhere, especially bathrooms. They do not bite. Scream if you must and someone will come and save you.' Under 'H' was 'Haywards. Our family produce (now owned by some faceless multinational) – beer, stout, whisky – is available at the Lorry Back Bar. The woman's record for drinking Haywards 5000 is six bottles, the men's, eight, in a single sitting. Anyone beating the record, currently held by Australia, will get it free.' Deciding that it was a record

the Australians were welcome to, I retired early that night, after a convivial (if heavy) dinner of steak with masala mashed potatoes. Other guests, however, made nocturnal use of both the trampoline in the front garden and the swimming pool.

**I**N THE EARLY-MORNING COOLNESS, I borrowed a bike and pedalled to the beach and along wet sand, as fishermen pulled in their nets, to a shack known as Anri's Place, for coffee. I returned to Vivenda for breakfast with a British family on half-term holiday and an Anglo-Indian couple with toddlers in tow. Everyone else was still asleep.

Panaji is the place to shop in Goa, and so I arranged a day trip with Karen. With recommendations from Charlotte and Karen's inside track ('This is where my mother buys bedlinen... This shop opened when the Portuguese were still here...'), it was no wonder that I returned laden with smooth cotton sheets, handmade paper and gift boxes from Paperworks and beautifully packaged spices from The Bombay Store. I also called in at Goan fashion designer Wendell Rodricks' shop to check out his draped cocktail dresses.

My departure from Vivenda came too soon, and without having partied properly I could hardly claim to have done it justice. But my last stop was, at least, gratifyingly close. In less than half an hour, we reached **The Leela Kempinski Goa.**

Hankering after one's misspent youth is all very well, but there's a lot to be said for a stone-pillared lobby that evokes an ancient temple, sun-lounger service on the beach, an airy bar with giant sofas and whirring fans, plus a spa. And I didn't even have to

## 3 MORE TOP HOTELS IN GOA



### POUSADA TAUMA Calangute

Choose from 13 individual suites set around a small pool in a tropical garden filled with ginger flowers, birds of paradise and frangipani. Fashioned from coral-coloured Goan laterite stone on what had once been a coconut grove, the suites have rustic arches and earthenware roof tiles which lend the place a delightful air. The bedrooms are decorated with lampshades made from copper water jars

and traditional Portuguese tile-embellished furniture which owner Neville Proenca has collected with an expert and discerning eye; in the bathrooms are marble-topped washstands. The attention to detail is exemplary, and everything is well maintained. The restaurant is also particularly good, and behind it there's a secret garden and lily pond.

Pousada Tauma is a child-free hideaway off a busy road in Calangute, a short rickshaw-ride from the sea. There are lively bars and clubs nearby, and excellent shops on your doorstep (Casa Goa, for textiles, silverware and furnishings, is across the road).

About two kilometres away, on the coast, is a 700-year-old beach house which Proenca is currently restoring. Set in private gardens and with 40metres of

beach frontage, it will sleep at least six and will be available to rent from the beginning of next year.

● *Pousada Tauma, Porba Vaddo, Calangute (00 91 832 227 9061; www.pousada-tauma.com). Doubles from €154*

### TAJ EXOTICA

#### Benaulim

This beach resort caters specifically for families with children of all ages. There is an activity centre, a babysitting service and dedicated children's pool, plus bikes for hire



so you can get around the resort. Older kids will find two pool tables in the marble-tiled acreage of the lobby, and a putting green within the manicured grounds.

The main building has 39 deluxe bedrooms with views of the white-sand beach, and there are also 93 private villas with either two or four bedrooms (of which Sunset Villas with private pool are the most popular). Five restaurants serve Chinese, Goan and Mediterranean food, and the beachfront Lobster Shack specialises in amazingly fresh seafood.

Best of all, there is a choice of spas: Jiva in the basement and the restful, temple-like Taamra, an entirely separate Ayurvedic spa, with a resident Ayurvedic doctor, traditional neemwood treatment beds and a pavilion-like yoga area.

● *Taj Exotica, Calwaddo, Benaulim (00 91 832 668 3333, www.tajhotels.com). Doubles from Rs7,150 (about £90)*