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# NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC TRAVELLER INDIA

## *Secrets of the* **NORTHEAST**

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# COLONIAL CHIC

A restored Portuguese house is a place of tranquil civility | By Mark Hannant

 FAMILY-FRIENDLY



**Hidden among the** coconut groves of Majorda, down a narrow and conspicuously unsignposted lane, lies a magnificent old Portuguese house. Vivenda dos Palhaços, converted into a boutique hotel a decade ago, is off the beaten track, but worth the effort. No one stumbles upon this hotel, which means the people who go, know what they're looking for. And what the intrepid traveller gets is peace and quiet, a glimpse of a bygone era of colonial circumstance served with a dash of bohemian spirit.

The hosts, siblings Simon and Charlotte Hayward, are children of the Raj, fourth-generation "Britishers" born and raised in India. Their forebears owned the Haywards brewery, and the hotel's bar—made from

the salvaged tailgate of a Tata truck—is stocked with bottles of super-strength Haywards 5000 beer. A sense of family pervades the house, an homage to past generations of the Hayward family. The walls are lined with faded photographs of horse racing at Calcutta, and summers in Darjeeling.

Each of the six bedrooms, named after a place of significance in the family's history, is uniquely furnished: some in colonial style with quirky touches, others more contemporary and unfussy. We've stayed twice in Konnager, the old house's master bedroom, with a sumptuous, high four-poster bed and space for extra beds for children. It has a balcony overlooking the front garden, perfect for a pink gin at sunset. The huge bathroom

has a beautiful wrought-iron bath and shower. Darjeeling, furnished in an eclectic art deco style, has a mezzanine for lazy afternoon reading. Ooty is clean and white with a splendid bathroom. The small pool is great for flopping about and there are loungers perfect for naps.

Communal eating is the order of the day—though not the only option. If you want anonymity or are vegetarian, Vivenda may not be for you. Meals taken leisurely around a huge 16-seater dining

table encourage familiarity with fellow guests. On the two occasions we've stayed, we shared the table with an eclectic bunch that included restaurateurs from north Goa, a chief of police and his crime-writer wife, visiting U.S. academics, journalists, photographers, painters, drop-outs, and dope smokers. Breakfast is served late. There's a daily set evening meal and an à la carte menu. Emphasis is on fish and meat and requests are usually catered to. Despite the ease of a lazy "at home" dinner make the effort to head 2 km away to Majorda beach to Zeebop, one of Goa's finest beach shacks. It's had a lick of paint and an upgrade in the last year. Nothing beats the fresh seafood and chilled beer with sand in your toes.

The Haywards have a fondness for basset hounds and Vivenda has three. The latest addition, Gigolo, can be quite lively. Simon will tie him up if there are children around but they remain a significant presence in the house. This a place of tranquil civility, an antidote to the hustle and bustle of south Goa's beach scene. ●

## THE VITALS

**Accommodation** Room rates vary. Ooty costs ₹4,400 (May-Sep), ₹7,250 (Oct-April), and ₹11,250 (19 Dec-5 Jan). Konnager, the largest room is ₹6,850/₹10,850/₹14,250 during the same seasons. The entire house can be rented for ₹31,300 per day (98817 20221; [www.viviendagoa.com](http://www.viviendagoa.com)).

**Getting there** Majorda is a 30-min drive from Vasco da Gama airport and 50 minutes south of Panjim. The beach is 2 km away.