



Enjoying a sunset dip along one of south Goa's gorgeous beaches. Opposite: An intricate Hindu temple detail at Anjuna Beach, in north Goa.

G L O R I O U S
GOA

This idyllic Indian getaway, bordering the Arabian Sea, is home to powder-soft beaches, whitewashed churches and fragrant spice farms.

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India's smallest state, a palm-fringed crescent with a Portuguese accent, is arguably its most enchanting. Curled along the country's lush western coast, Goa was once a thriving Spice Route colony that in its heyday, in the early 1500s, had a population larger than Lisbon's. After Portugal ended its 450-year occupation, in 1961, Goa became a hippie haven, synonymous with beachfront raves and the backpack brigade. But it's currently in the midst of a more sophisticated transformation, drawing millions annually for its ocean adventures, spiritual sanctuaries and unflappable allegiance to all things *susegad*—a local term that traces its roots to the Portuguese word *sossegado*, or “quiet.” The word captures the state's affinity for easy living. Here we present a weeklong itinerary that you can follow in its entirety or adapt for yourself. Whether you're wandering the old city's Baroque basilicas, touring a cinnamon plantation or lounging on a gleaming stretch of the 63-mile coastline, it's hard to get enough of sun-speckled Goa, or its homegrown calm.

To get around, you can rely on the region's comprehensive local bus network, hire a taxi (your resort can help you arrange this) or hail the humbler alternative: an auto rickshaw. Bicycles are also readily available for rent in most Goan towns.

DAY 1: Historic Heart

Start with a healthy dose of the past: a **Heritage Walking Tour** excursion (*Panjim Inn; E-212 31st January Rd., Fontainhas; 011-91-832-222-6523; tours, from \$7.50* a person*) to the brightly colored Latin Quarter in the state capital of

Panaji, which is also sometimes known by its English name, Panjim. Goa's colonial history is palpable in the cobblestoned alleys of Fontainhas and São Tomé, lined with mango trees, wrought iron balconies and terra-cotta rooftops. For a break, duck into **Gallery Gitanjali** (*182 31st January Rd., Fontainhas; 011-91-832-242-3331; gallerygitanjali.com*), which doubles as a café and exhibits abstract oil canvases by a rotating cast of Indian painters, in addition to a sizable collection of Scandinavian art. If you're craving more history, make your way to Old Goa, the region's ancient center (a 20-minute drive from Panaji), complete with beautifully preserved convents and churches. Highlights include the UNESCO-certified 400-year-old **Bom Jesus Basilica** (*Old Goa Rd., Bainguinim; 011-91-832-228-5790*), where a silver casket contains the mortal remains of St. Francis Xavier, and the grand **Sé Cathedral** (*Velha*). End the day with an hour-long evening cruise on the Mandovi River (*Santa Monica Jetty, Avenida Dom João de Castro, Pattoo Colony, Panaji; sunset cruises, from \$3 a person*); Goan folk musicians will serenade you on board.

DAY 2: The Life Aquatic

Get your morning chai fix at **Mapusa Market** (*Mapusa; every Monday–Saturday; 8 a.m.–6:30 p.m.*) and its kaleidoscopic array of kiosks, which hawk everything from Goan pottery to homemade pickles. Nearby Anjuna is the site of countless party shacks, including the renowned **Curlie's** (*near flea market, Monteiro Vaddo, Anjuna; 011-91-955-247-1720; curliesgoa.com*), a two-story seaside wonderland that's a restaurant, an inn, a shopping mall and a dance club. But if you're looking to skip the swarms, go 20 miles north to **Arambol Beach**. Follow a winding road dotted with souvenir stalls and you'll end up at a curvy shore with gentle waves and easy access to **Arambol Sweet Water Lake**, a cliff-side launch-

From top: Brilliant tiles spotted on a Heritage Walking Tour in Panaji, the capital of Goa; ancient religious relics in Old Goa, just 20 minutes away; vibrant textiles on offer at Margao Market. Opposite: A fragrant Goan culinary spread.

pad that's perfect for paragliding (*independent operators are scattered among the shacks on Arambol and along neighboring Kalacha Beach; a 10-minute flight, about \$25*). Or opt for a surfing lesson—beginners are welcome too—courtesy of the international team at **Surf Wala** (*Bag Dando Rd., near surf club, Arambol; 011-91-962-300-1810; surfwala.com; 1.5-hour lessons, from \$35*), where instructors give classes in English, Japanese, Russian and Hindi, among other languages.

DAY 3: Au Naturel

Keep the outdoor adventures going with a biking trip to **Fort Aguada**, a 17th-century Portuguese bastion (the location for many a Bollywood movie scene), one of Goa's largest forts, on Sinquerim Beach—about 10 miles from Panaji. The rugged red laterite landmark, which was built to keep out Dutch invaders, is named for the freshwater spring it once housed. Book a guided tour through **Goa Nature Trails** (*011-91-703-097-3005; goanaturetrails.com; trips, including a helmet and light refreshments, from \$30*), a reliable Candolim-based operator offering a three-hour mountain-bike outing that takes in a succession

of fishing villages and the **Church of St. Lawrence**, perched on a hilltop and dedicated, appropriately enough, to the patron saint of sailors. The company also leads an hour-long guided kayaking trip along the backwaters of Nerul, a sleepy hamlet with a prawn hatchery and a cluster of charming riverside bungalows.

DAY 4: Spice It Up

No trip to this former Spice Route hot spot is complete without a plantation excursion. At **Tropical Spice Plantation** (*A-14 Arla Bazar Keri, Ponda; 011-91-832-234-0329; tropicalspiceplantation.com; admission and lunch, \$6*), in central Goa, after being welcomed with a wreath of fresh flowers, you'll learn about the many medicinal benefits of your lush surroundings—home to black pepper, cardamom, nutmeg, vanilla, cinnamon and coriander plants—on an engaging 45-minute tour. It's followed by a hearty Goan buffet lunch of fish curry, fried potatoes and vegetable *pulao* served on banana leaves. On your way back to Panaji, consider a stop at the pretty **Mystic Meadows** (*Rajnaragar, Pisgal Priol, near Khedekar*



*Prices have been converted to U.S. dollars.

EAT

Mum's Kitchen

Almost all the recipes at this cozy Goan joint—ranging from clams sautéed with coconut and coriander to a tart vegetable stew and disks of steamed rice cakes—are sourced from home cooks across the state. *854 Martins Building, DB St., Panaji; 011-91-982-217-5559; mumskitchengoa.com; dinner for two, \$30**

Bomra's

Reservations are strongly recommended at this collection of chic palm-thatched huts, where you'll be treated to chef Bawmra Jap's modern spin on traditional Burmese fare (he's a Myanmar native), such as steamed snapper with lemongrass and slow-cooked, cashew-crusting pork belly. *247 Fort Aguada Rd., Candolim; 011-91-976-759-1056; bomras.com; dinner for two, \$50*

Lila Café

Linger over a cappuccino or two at this rustic breakfast spot, where crowd-pleasers are the flaky croissants (baked in-house) and chili-and-cheese omelets. *Tito's White House, Calangute-Arpora-Siolim Rd., Anjuna; 011-91-832-291-4687; lilacafegoa.com; breakfast for two, \$15*

Longinhos Bar & Restaurant

One of Goa's oldest restaurants, this 50-year-old Margao mainstay, which began as a Portuguese military canteen, now serves up regional seafood favorites, like fiery prawn curry and stuffed crabs. *Opposite Municipality Office, Luis Miranda Rd., Margao; 011-91-832-273-9908; lunch for two, \$10*

*Estimated meal prices do not include drinks, tax or tip.



Industries, Ponda; 011-91-832-298-5174; bcogoa.org; admission, \$1.50), a fledgling butterfly-and-bee conservatory run by a budding wildlife painter, and the **Shri Shantadurga Temple** (*Verem-Nerul Rd., near Chamundeshwari petrol pump, Verem; shreesantadurga.com*), an 18th-century shrine dedicated to the Hindu goddess of peace—and a vibrant example of Indo-Portuguese architecture.

DAY 5: Southern Hospitality

To spend a day on Goa's more serene and soft-spoken side, head south. Begin with a visit to the **Goa Chitra Museum** (*St. John the Baptist Church Rd., Mondo-Waddo, Benaulim; 011-91-832-657-0877; goachitra.com; admission, \$3*), artist Victor Hugo Gomes's extensive ode to Goan history, crammed with 4,000 regional objects, including farming tools, kitchen utensils and rare pottery. You can stock up on souvenirs at **Margao Market** (*Gandhi Market Rd., Margao; Mon.–Sat., 8:30 a.m.–9 p.m.*), a series of stalls in south Goa's capital city where you can sift through spices, soaps and household goodies. For a dip, there is no prettier perch than **Palolem Beach** or its slightly smaller neighbor, **Agonda Beach**. Declared one of the safest swimming spots in Goa, the former is a picture-perfect bay and a worthy kayaking and paddleboarding destination.

DAY 6: Bird's-Eye View

You can hop on a morning ferry from the Ribandar jetty (about halfway between Panaji and Old Goa) for the 15-minute ride to sleepy Chorão Island and its main attraction: the **Salim Ali Bird Sanctuary** (*Chorão Island, Panaji*). Here you'll find yourself amid kingfish-

ers, purple herons, white egrets, woodpeckers and cormorants, among other feathered folks. If the tide is high, boatmen, whom you'll spot near the ferry landing, can take you on a canoe tour of the mangrove-heavy isle (1.5-hour ride, about \$10). Come evening try your luck at the **Deltin Royale** (*Noah's Ark, RND Jetty, DB Marg, Panaji; 011-91-869-859-9999; deltin.com; admission, from \$37 a person, including a buffet dinner, unlimited drinks and playing coupons*), a plush four-decker casino cruise—India's largest offshore gaming complex—with Vegas-inspired entertainment shows.

DAY 7: Meditative Magic

Soak up Goa's signature *susegad* spirit in Mandrem, a northern fishing village turned hideaway. As the region's unofficial yoga and Ayurveda headquarters, the town and its laid-back beach are the backdrop to the **Ashiyana Yoga Center** (*Junas Waddo, Mandrem; 011-91-985-040-1714; ashiyana-yoga-go.com*), a picturesque retreat and spa nestled among swaying palms. Drop-in yoga classes are available. Or indulge in a relaxing treatment at the highly rated **Shanti Ayurvedic Massage Center** (*Junas Waddo, Mandrem; 91-880-620-5264; one-hour massages, from \$45*), where you can choose from options like warm-oil and herbal-powder massages, spa pedicures and henna tattoos. Wrap up your day at **Molly's Beach Shack Restaurant** (*Molly's Nest, Mandrem Beach; 011-91-787-575-0217*), where you can sip a sundowner, sink your toes into the sand and gaze at a fiery sunset as you bid your Goan holiday a reluctant farewell. 🍷

Opposite, clockwise from top left: At a rural Goan mosque; exploring Panaji's art scene; a palm-fringed slice of Goa's southern coast; Yashodan Heblekar, of Mystic Meadows, holds his painting of a white-breasted kingfisher; a woman prepares the daily offering at Margao Market; one of Anjuna Beach's colorful temples; an elephant at the Tropical Spice Plantation.



STAY

RCI® AFFILIATED
RESORTS IN GOA
INCLUDE:



Royal Goan Beach Club— Royal Palms 3594

Pools, palm-lined walkways and flowers give the colonial-style accommodations an elegant vibe. *Vasvaddo, Benaulim 403 516*
MEMBER REVIEW: "We felt right at home."

Royal Goan Beach Club—Haathi Mahal 4129

The health and fitness center features a sauna, steam rooms and a spa. *Cavelossim, Mabor, Salcette 403 731*
MEMBER REVIEW: "Prompt and friendly service."

Royal Goan Beach Club at Monterio 3820

Just a 10-minute stroll from Baga Beach, one of the most picturesque in Goa. *Arpora-Baga Rd., Calangute, Bardez 403 516*
MEMBER REVIEW: "The swimming pools are well-maintained."

For complete member reviews (as member reviews have been condensed) and additional resort listings, visit RCI.com or call 800-338-7777 (Weeks) or 877-968-7476 (Points). Club Members, please call your specific Club or RCI telephone number.

NON-RCI AFFILIATED RESORTS

Cidade de Goa This alcove-laden hideaway is 10 minutes from Panaji, Goa's capital. It has five restaurants, two pools, a casino and an Ayurvedic spa. *Vainguinim Beach, Dona Paula; 011-91-832-245-4545; cidadedegoa.com; doubles from \$180 a night*

The Lalit Golf & Spa Resort Uninterrupted Arabian Sea views and the state's only championship golf course are perks at this property, a combination of 255 suites and 10 villas. *Raj Baga, Canacona; 011-91-832-266-7777; thelalit.com; doubles from \$145 a night*

Vivanta by Taj—Fort Aguada Portuguese accents fill 145 rooms at this beach hotel, on the site of a 16th-century fortress. *Sinquerim Rd., Candolim; 011-91-832-664-5858; vivantabytaj.com; doubles from \$150 a night*