

of the BEST

GOA ACTIVITIES



1

EAT AT A BEACH SHACK

Many beaches in southern Goa, especially the resorts of Colva, Benaulim, Agonda, Palolem and Patnem, sport rows of picturesque shacks pressed into service as charmingly ramshackle restaurants. Behind them, palm trees and lush foliage hide the resorts and native monkeys and, at night, when the tables on the beach are lit up by candles, it looks and feels like paradise. The shacks serve super-fresh fish and vegetables made into spicy but not too hot curries; sweet coconut, onions, sour tamarind and ginger are likely to feature just as much as chillies. Preceded by a sundowner margarita (or the local hooch, feni, with lemonade), and accompanied by a local Kingfisher beer, this is as good as a holiday meal – and memory – gets.



2

GO BACK IN TIME TO OLD GOA

In 1542, the city of Goa Dourada (Golden Goa) was a key centre of the Portuguese empire in Asia. To visit Old Goa, as it's now called, is a surreal experience that begins as you approach; the dome and bell towers of St Cajetan, rising above the jungle canopy, look for all the world like something from Renaissance Europe. In the town's main square, a cluster of incongruous religious buildings centred around the Sé Cathedral – the largest church in Asia – make for a great day's exploration. Fuel up with a bag of the giant local cashew nuts before taking in the Archbishop's Palace, the Church and Convent of St Francis of Assisi, St Catherine's Chapel, St Augustine Tower, the Basilica of Bom Jesus and the monuments on Holy Hill.

3

EXPLORE A CLUSTER OF HERITAGE HOMES

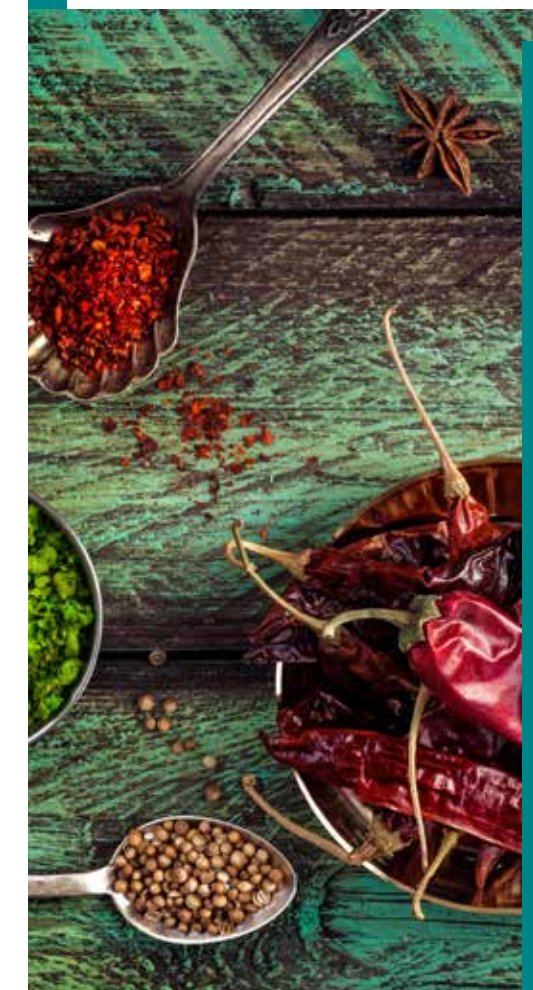
Portugal's architectural influence went far beyond religious buildings, leaving behind heritage homes with features such as oyster-shell windows, azulejos tiles and intricate wooden balconies. It's a treat to visit a couple of the most notable ones; the Menezes Braganza house in Chandor and, just six miles away, the Palacio do Deao in Quepem. The former is Goa's most famous stately home, a 17th-century, Portuguese-style mansion made up of two symmetrical wings that atmospherically illustrate the differing fortunes of the two brothers who commissioned it. The more diminutive Palacio do Deao, by contrast, is a vibrant, lived-in home that's a treat to explore – often with its current owner, Ruben Vasco da Gama – with whom you can share a traditional Goan lunch made by his wife, Celia, if you book a day ahead.



4

TRY A GOAN COOKERY CLASS

Given the Brits' love of curry, it's no surprise that cookery classes are so popular in Goa. They're offered all along the coast, but a perennial favourite is Rita's Gourmet Goa in Dabolim. In a gazebo in the garden, amid lush greenery dotted with pottery and stonework as well as plants and herbs used in her dishes, chef Rita Shinde leads a wide range of classes teaching tourists how to cook Indian and Goan dishes that take in dhal, curries and breads, plus sweet treats like serradura and creme caramel. The most popular option is the one-day cookery class and market tour, but if you get the bug, you can sign up for an eight-day Goan cuisine course and learn to cook 40 dishes.



India's smallest state is a pocket-sized, winter-sun paradise, says **Yolanda Zappaterra**

With a picture-perfect 65-mile coastline stretching along the Arabian Sea, and an interior made up of spice plantations and vibrant paddy fields intersected by rivers that are reminiscent of scenes from *Apocalypse Now*, the state of Goa is a laid-back haven of relaxed tranquillity.

Its coastline is the stuff of dreams, but away from the beach there are plenty of cultural and natural attractions to enjoy. All of which, combined with a hot and dry climate from November to March, make it a fantastic winter-break destination.

DESTINATIONS

WINTER SUN | GOA

5



NEED TO KNOW

☀ From November to March, Goa's climate is hot, dry and sunny. Temperatures average 30C during the day, dropping to about 20C at night.

✈ Tui operates weekly direct flights from the UK to Goa's Dabolim airport, with return prices from £530. Virgin Atlantic, British Airways and Air India fly from London to New Delhi and Mumbai. There are plenty of flights to Dabolim from here every day (journey times are two-and-a-half hours and one hour respectively).

🇬🇧 British citizens visiting India require a visa that can be obtained online at indianvisaonline.gov.in for \$25 from July to March, or \$10 from April to June, between 34 and four days before their arrival in India. Tell clients to give themselves plenty of time to go through the form and make sure they go to the correct website; there are cleverly disguised agents that add hefty fees.

HAGGLE AT THE MARKETS OF ANJUNA AND ARPORA

Every small town in Goa has its market, but the two at Anjuna and Arpora offer lots more than Instagram-friendly mountains of ruby-red chillies and exotic veggies. The huge Wednesday beachfront flea market at Anjuna is the more sedate and mainstream one (if either of them, with their musicians, hawkers and even fortune-telling bulls, can be called sedate), but both are great places to pick up souvenirs, from Rajasthani handicrafts to homeware and jewellery from Tibet and Kashmir. Want to avoid the daytime heat? Opt for the night-time Arpora market, where cooler temperatures, pretty lights and live music make for relaxed browsing of a wider range of tourist-friendly wares, until the market wraps up at about 3am.

6

TAKE A SCENIC TRAIN JOURNEY

India's 42,000-mile rail network is the stuff of legend, and a train trip is a truly Indian experience. But how do you decide which one to take? Try the three-hour ride from Vasco da Gama in Goa to Londa Junction in neighbouring Karnataka, which consistently pops up on lists of the best Indian railway journeys. With 90 miles of arresting scenery to enjoy and a lively mix of locals, tourists, commuters, snack vendors and staff on the train itself, it's a real treat for the senses. From the coast's beaches, the train heads inland to cross the thick jungle and wildlife sanctuaries of the Western Ghats, taking in dramatic valleys, waterfalls and the kind of winding, vertiginous climbs that make for great photos along the way – cameras at the ready.



WHERE TO *stay*

SAVE: LEMON TREE AMARANTE BEACH RESORT

Set on Candolim Beach in northern Goa, this boutique resort is as elegant as they come. Several of its 65 rooms are housed in a 15th-century Portuguese mansion, and they're designed to reflect its heritage.

Book it: From £120 per person for four nights with Cox & Kings, based on two sharing.

SPEND: BAYWATCH RESORT

The resort is notable for its location on tranquil Sernabatim Beach, near lively (but not too lively) Benaulim. The pleasant rooms are set around the pool, while a gym, spa and yoga classes add to the appeal.

Book it: From £726 per person for a seven-night package with Mercury Holidays, based on two sharing and including flights.

SPLURGE: THE LEELA

Southern Goa's five-star Leela (below) is such a stunner that in 2017, it made *Condé Nast Traveller's* list of the world's top 25 luxury hotels. Strung out across 30 hectares of lagoons and gardens at Cavelossim Beach, and backed by the Sal River so that you feel as if you're on an island, the villas are tranquil and secluded.

Book it: From £1,229 per person for a seven-night stay based on two sharing with The Goa Experience, including flights.



LAZE AWAY A DAY ON A BACKWATER CRUISE

No, we haven't mixed up our Indian states; Kerala's famous houseboats have been appearing in Goa for the past few years, and taking a trip on one is an unforgettable excursion. Just a couple of hours spent cruising the beautiful backwaters here on a sunrise, sunset or day cruise will give you an insight into traditional ways of life that are much as they were a century ago. But to really feel at one with your surroundings, the best trip is an overnight houseboat experience, which comes with a bedroom (with air con), a skipper and a chef who'll cook you a romantic fish supper. John's Boat Tours (johnboattours.com) is one of the oldest and best operators in the state.



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8

EXPLORE ONE OF GOA'S BEST SPICE FARMS

A winding drive into the rainforests of Goa's Western Ghats is a must, not least for the chance to explore one of Goa's spice plantations. A favourite is the award-winning organic and eco-conscious Tanshikar Spice Farm, which is less than an hour away from Agonda beach. Owners Chinmay and Gauri offer a variety of tours, and generally lead them themselves, but if you've got time, it's worth staying overnight in one of the plantation's traditional mud or treehouses, set in pretty jungle clearings planted with mozzie-repellent plants. As well as the informative tours, you'll have time to follow nature trails leading to waterfalls you can swim in, and to indulge in lots of homemade Goan cuisine.

PICTURES: Shutterstock

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THE CANCUN FAMILY RESORT

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PROSECCO OR
CHOCOLATE!

OASIS LOVES MEXICO... ARE U READY?
GRAND ALL INCLUSIVE. CANCÚN, MÉXICO. ★★★★★ PLUS

"I'm all about the kid-stuff: endless entertainment, family-friendly accommodations, child-centric restaurants and a Kids Club that's cool as can be. But I've got that pampered, indulgent side, too, as a visit to my Kin Há Spa shows - I always find plenty of fun-stuff for parents to do while the kids are having fun. I'm like my sister resort, Oasis Palm - but a bit more upscale, with the extra amenities you're looking for. I'm Mexican and proud of it: my dancing, dining and décor reflect the culture of Cancun, with my delicious Mexican food in the Cantina and lots of activities for everyone."

FABULOUS FAMILY FUN, THE MEXICAN WAY.

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