

Getting Started

The range of travellers who visit Goa, from first timers to package tourists to hard-core adventurers, is a testament to its widespread appeal and the relative ease of travelling here. Goa's size means that you don't have to stress about planning a route or slicing your days into units to see and do everything; if you don't like where you are, you can relocate to the other end of the state in a couple of hours.

Though Goa isn't as cheap as the rest of India, its range of facilities means that you can travel here on any budget; the only challenge comes during peak season when the crowds may force you to spend the occasional night in a pricier place.

Health and safety are considerations – as they are everywhere – but on the whole Goa couldn't be an easier place to visit.

WHEN TO GO

The best time to visit Goa is during the cooler months, from November to March. If you arrive in October, right at the start of the tourist season, you'll find the beaches pleasantly empty, but may also find that some of the facilities (such as beach shacks) aren't yet open for business.

April and May can be very humid, and swimming becomes less pleasant as the sea gets rougher. Some facilities may also be closed, as most beach shacks pack up after Easter.

Many Goans feel that the monsoon, which visits Goa between June and the end of September, is when the state is at its best. Parties and celebrations are held to welcome the rain, and the countryside turns lush and green almost overnight. In terms of tourism, Goa is virtually dead. Some guesthouses simply close up, and swimming in the sea is out of the question. The plus side to visiting at this time is that you will have the place to yourself at very little cost.

Without doubt the peak season for visitors to Goa is from 22 December to 5 January (give or take a couple of days on either side), and some people have been coming back annually for a decade or more. The massive influx of visitors allows hotels and guesthouses to charge exorbitant prices and many places are booked solid, but it's a great time to be in Goa. The weather is perfect, the place is buzzing and in typical Goan fashion there are parties most nights.

The high season covers the period from mid-December to late January (with the exception of the peak season over Christmas). The middle

DON'T LEAVE HOME WITHOUT...

- A light suitcase – there's so much to buy in Goa that you'll want space for shopping
- A light long-sleeved top in winter for slightly chilly evenings or early mornings
- A reliable padlock – it's an essential travel item for budget and even midrange travellers given that many guesthouses only offer a flimsy padlock for security
- A torch to navigate poorly lit streets
- Your driving licence (and copies) and sturdy closed-toe shoes so you can take in the countryside from the back of a motorcycle
- Shorts and tops of a respectable length

See Climate Charts (p213) for more information.

season, known in Goa simply as 'season', lasts from October to mid-December, and from February to June. The low season is from July to September.

The temperature throughout the year is fairly constant, varying from a maximum of 28°C or 29°C in July to a maximum of 33°C in May. Average minimums for the same months are 24°C and 26.5°C.

COSTS & MONEY

India as a whole is a very cheap country to visit. However, costs in Goa often depend on whether or not you're being charged as a rich foreign tourist. Some things seem ridiculously cheap: a haircut for US\$1, a vegetarian thali (traditional all-you-can-eat meal) for 50c, a one-hour bus ride for 30c or a packet of Indian cigarettes for 50c. But souvenirs, many hotels, petrol and imported goods will seem relatively expensive in comparison.

By staying in rock-bottom budget hotels or guesthouses, eating fish curry rice (fish in a spicy sauce served over rice) at local restaurants and not moving around or partying too much, it's possible to get by in Goa on Rs 250 (US\$6) a day. Outside the November to March high season, accommodation costs are substantially reduced. At the other end of the scale, staying at a five-star resort and living it up can easily cost US\$250 a day or more.

Most visitors will opt for a middle ground. On a budget, but allowing for clean accommodation, meals in cheap restaurants or beach shacks, the occasional taxi or motorcycle hire and a bit of nightlife, expect to pay US\$15 to US\$25 a day. If you're on a midrange budget – staying in a decent hotel with a pool, eating seafood in touristy restaurants, taking taxis everywhere and buying souvenirs – set aside perhaps US\$50 a day. If you're on a package deal with accommodation included, you should find that US\$25 to US\$30 is ample.

TRAVEL LITERATURE

David Tomory's *Hello Goodnight: A Life of Goa*, published by Lonely Planet, explores Goa's relationship with travellers over the ages. It is a lushly written book that's sometimes too heavy on description but ultimately paints an in-depth picture of Goa and what it has meant to travellers. If you're looking for reasons to go to Goa, Tomory delves deep into the state and transcends the hackneyed notion of Goa as a mere beach destination.

Chasing the Monsoon, by Alexander Frater, is an Englishman's account of a journey north from Kovalam in Kerala all the way to Cherrapunji in Meghalaya, one of the wettest places on earth, following the onset of the monsoon as it moves north across the country. Frater does pass through Goa, but it is his exploration of the monsoon and its effect on people that is the real journey.

Richard Burton's *Goa and the Blue Mountains or Six Months of Sick Leave* is the earliest travelogue that is readily obtainable. Originally published in 1851, this account of his journey through Goa and southwards to Ootacamund makes great reading. The book is interesting for the historical perspective but is also highly enjoyable because of Burton's irreverent sense of humour. This book, in a beautiful blue hardback edition emblazoned with gold, is widely available all over Goa.

Goa Freaks: My Hippie Years in India, by Cleo Odzer, is a fascinating insider's account of the hippy heyday in Anjuna in the 1970s. Odzer unapologetically details her 'freak' life, which she sustained through

HOW MUCH?

Entry to club man/
woman Rs 500/free!

20g chocolate Rs 5

10 cigarettes Rs 15

Sarong Rs 50

Shave Rs 40

See also Lonely Planet
Index, inside front cover

TOP FIVES

Best Beaches

The only generalisation you can make about visitors to Goa is that they all have some sort of interest in the beach. Beaches nibble along the entire coast of Goa, yet each is somehow different to the next.

- Palolem (p191) – the most popular beach in the south, and not saturated...yet
- Anjuna (p139) – chillum out at hippy central
- Arambol (p152) – kite-surf by day and retreat to cliffside guesthouses by night
- Vagator (p144) – small coves to enjoy before the parties begin
- Calangute and Baga (p126) – wall-to-wall sun beds and sun seekers

Top Markets

Markets are microcosms of the colour and contradictions of Goa; the image of Indian tourists buying pastries from German vendors is as Goan as that of fishermen selling their daily catch.

- Anjuna flea market (p141) – from humble hippy beginnings to a veritable carnival of infamy
- Ingo's Saturday Nite Bazaar (p129) – the best restaurants bring their offerings to the outdoor tables, and local fire-twirlers demonstrate their talent
- Mackie's Saturday Nite Bazaar (p129) – a rival of Ingo's, Mackie's is more of a low-key event but with live music and outdoor bars set by the Baga River
- Mapusa market (p137) – traders come from all over the state to hawk their wares here
- Siolim markets (p150) – drink sugar-cane juice at the Chapora River market and watch women prying mussel shells apart with impressive skill, or head to St Anthony's Chapel at the crack of dawn to enjoy the flash market that appears each Wednesday

Favourite People-Watching Spots

Half of the experience of Goa is the other people who have come to experience Goa – this tiny state accommodates an enormous array of people.

- Chapora (p144) – immerse yourself in crowds of hippies and clouds of chillum
- Anjuna (p139) – watch English package tourists buy souvenirs from the hippies who never left
- Ingo's Saturday Nite Bazaar (p129) – pull up a bar stool and wonder at the origins of the eclectic passers-by
- Colva (p180) – get up early and grab your camera to witness fishermen bringing in their morning catch
- Calangute and Baga (p126) – gawk with camera-toting Indian tourists at touts and foreign tourists

Gita Mehta's *Karma Cola* is a good account of the natural healing culture that pervades Goa and a comically cynical account of the quest for enlightenment in India.

INTERNET RESOURCES

India in general, and Goa in particular, is very Internet savvy and you'll find countless excellent websites devoted to Goan travel, activities, culture, history, news and trance parties.

Findall-Goa (www.findall-go.com) Up-to-the-minute website detailing what's happening around Goa and where. Also has flight information and maps.

Goa Tourism (www.goatourism.org, www.goa-tourism.com) The state tourism body, the Goa Tourism Development Corporation (GTDC), has two sites. The latter is particularly useful.

Goa World (www.goa-world.com) This site has information on everything from history and culture to recipes and Konkani; it also has links to some 300 Goa-related sites.

Goacom (www.goacom.com) This is one of the best websites for information on Goa for both tourists and residents; it features a monthly webzine.

Herald (www.oherald.com) This is the site of Goa's top-selling English-language daily.

Lonely Planet (www.lonelyplanet.com) It's not that we're biased, it's just that there's no better place to start your Internet explorations. Here you'll find succinct summaries of travel destinations, postcards from other travellers and the Thorn Tree Forum.

drug-running scams. Her frank depiction of the drug scene is often confronting, but it is the character portraits she paints along the way that really linger.

Gregory David Roberts' *Shantaram* took the world by storm. This hefty travel tome is one man's account of his time in India. Set mainly in Mumbai (with detours to Goa), whether you like it or not this controversial 'fictional' work will stay with you long after you've read the final sentence and left India behind.

Not particularly about Goa but a fun Indian beach read nonetheless, William Sutcliffe's *Are You Experienced?* is a comical insight into the backpacker scene through the eyes of a reticent, insecure traveller.

Itineraries

CLASSIC ROUTES

NORTHERN HIPPY TRAIL

Two Weeks

Start in crowded **Calangute** (p126), checking out **Fort Aguada** (p120) and the fort at **Reis Magos** (p120). Immerse yourself in the manic nightlife of **Baga** (p126), and visit Ingo's Saturday Nite Bazaar in **Arpora** (p129). When the high prices become too much, relocate to **Anjuna** (p139), hub of hippy. Party the nights away and spend days recovering on one of the beaches at **Vagator** (p144). While you're in the area, join the densely packed scene in **Chapora** (p144) and head to **Mapusa** (p136) for some market action.

Travel to **Arambol** (p152), where you can sleep in a cliffside guesthouse, toss a Frisbee or learn how to kite-surf. On the way stop off in **Siolim** (p150) and drive slowly by the beaches at **Morjim** (p150), **Asvem** (p150) and **Mandrem** (p151).

Finally, head up through picturesque countryside to **Terekhol** (p155). For a real treat, relocate to one of Goa's finest hotels, located in the fort. Or choose a more budget option and enjoy near-deserted **Querim Beach** (p155).

From Portuguese forts to traveller hang-outs that were made infamous in the 1960s when the first hippies paved the trail, this 50-odd-kilometre journey takes you through the dizzyingly diverse worlds of north Goa's beaches.

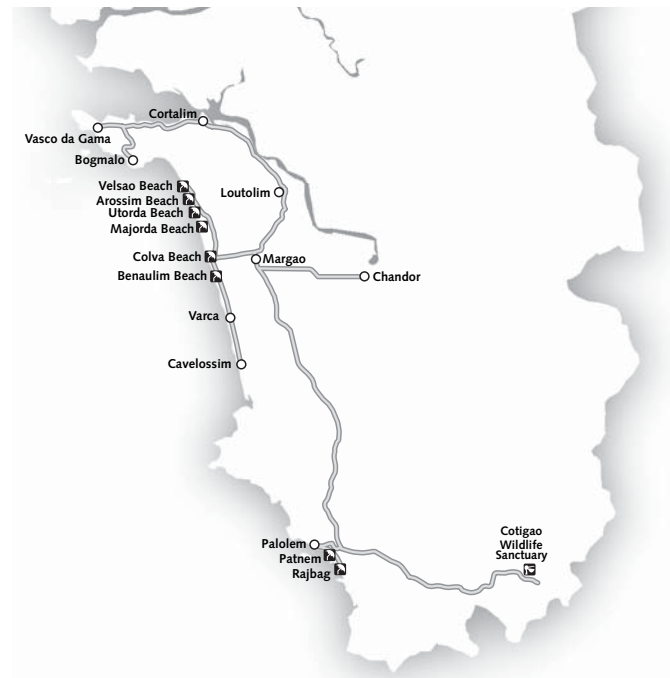


SOUTHERN SUN

Two Weeks

Get a feel for urban Indian life in the markets of **Vasco da Gama** (p177), or do a trip down to **Bogmallo** (p178) if you're interested in starting easy on a beach or getting right into it with a dive. From Vasco da Gama you can catch a bus to **Margao** (p161) and stay as long as you like, or jump in a bus or taxi and head to **Colva** (p180). Mix it up with the locals for a day or two on this beach or the quieter neighbouring beach at **Benaulim** (p185). Hire a scooter or motorcycle in Colva and travel up the winding northern road, stopping at the beaches of **Majorda** (p179), **Utorda** (p179), **Arossim** (p179) and **Velsao** (p179). Pick your favourite and stay for a couple of nights, enjoying the laid-back beaches and under-rated hidden restaurants. Head south again to explore **Varca** (p187) and **Cavelossim** (p187).

Hand in your motorcycle and head back to Margao. If you have the time and inclination, stay a while and do an excursion from here to **Chandor** (p167) for some colonial atmosphere, or to **Loutolim** (p166) for some ancestral exploration. When the beach calls again, move down south to **Palelem** (p191), one of Goa's finest beaches. Soak up the sun, the sand, the nightlife and the fine dining. If you get restless do a day trip to **Cotigao Wildlife Sanctuary** (p197). Also be sure to explore nearby beaches of **Patnem** (p195) and **Rajbag** (p196). If you're feeling adventurous, take a trip towards the border of Karnataka state and seek out some undiscovered beaches along the coast.



Take a detour off the 70km route from Vasco da Gama to Palelem to discover postcard-perfect Goa. Choose a town that suits and meander on a scooter along the surrounding coast.

ROADS LESS TRAVELLED

ANCESTRAL ADVENTURES, INLAND INTERLUDES Three Weeks

Spend some time in **Panaji** (p82) exploring the Goa State Museum and the Latin Quarter. The following day, explore the famous churches of **Old Goa** (p100) in the morning and the Hindu temples around **Ponda** (p110) in the afternoon.

If you're interested in doing an adventurous inland trip, make for **Dudhsagar Falls** (p116), Goa's highest waterfall. On your way back to Panaji, stop off at the **Bhagwan Mahavir Wildlife Sanctuary** (p115), and be sure to visit **Tambdi Surla Mahadeva Temple** (p116). If you don't want to do an organised tour, hiring a motorcycle or chartering a taxi will speed things up.

Next, basing yourself at a beach anywhere between **Candolim** (p121) and **Chapora** (p144), explore inland Bardez; from the coast head to Betim, stopping off at the fort at **Reis Magos** (p120), then drive up to **Britona** (p156), past **Pomburpao** (p157) and cross the bridge at Aldona to visit **Corjuem Fort** (p156) in Bicholim taluka (district). Head back to Bardez, and at Pomburpao catch the ferry to **Chorao Island** (p100). Cross back over to Bicholim and head to **Mayem Lake** (p159) for a leisurely lunch (or romantic overnight stay). Visit **Saptakoteshwara Temple** (p158) while you're in the area.

For the last leg, head south to **Margao** (p161). Base yourself here or at one of the nearby beaches. From here, check out ancestral Portuguese colonial mansions at **Loutolim** (p166) and **Chandor** (p167). Finally, set yourself up at **Palolem** (p191) for a week or so of sun and sand.

Get an overview of the many Goas over three weeks and 250km. Explore the historical landmarks of central Goa, relax on south Goa's beaches and throw in an adventurous trip through the jungle to Goa's highest waterfall.



TAILORED TRIPS

TO MARKET, TO MARKET

Go on a Goan-style shopping tour. Start in Panaji with the **New Municipal Market** (p96) and wander down to the more atmospheric **Municipal Market** (p96) to drink chai amid the blur of bargaining. Step it up a notch with some upmarket shopping at the boutique shops of 18th June Rd.

In north Goa, base yourself at Candolim, Calangute or Baga and take a day trip out to sophisticated **Sangolda** (p135) to purchase a piece of colonial grandeur.

On Wednesday, take a deep breath and launch yourself into the chaos of the **Anjuna flea market** (p141), where the hippy days of old collide with everything that typifies Goa today.

For untouristy laughs, head to manic **Mapusa market** (p137) on Friday. Also, visit **Siolim** (p150), where crustaceans are sold along the Chapora River each morning and St Anthony's Chapel bursts to life every Wednesday morning as fresh-produce vendors pour in.

On a Saturday night in Arpora head to **Ingo's Saturday Nite Bazaar** (p129) and **Mackie's Saturday Nite Bazaar** (p129), which both layer on the atmosphere in a bid to win your preference.

Down in south Goa, where things still operate at a laid-back pace, take in the atmosphere of the **covered market** (p164) in Margao.



HOLISTIC HOLIDAY

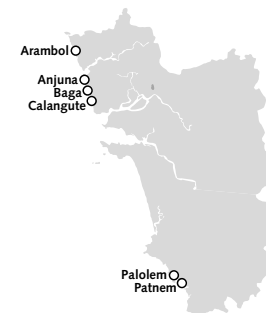
Goa has long been a holistic holiday destination of choice. Natural healers, yogis and masseurs from all over the world are here, and it's worth rubbing shoulders with (or having your shoulders rubbed by) them.

Yogis staying in Anjuna should spend some tranquil time at **Yoga Magic** (p142) or visit the **Purple Valley Yoga Centre** (p140) for casual classes. As well as yoga classes, **Healing Here & Now** (p141) offers foot reflexology, naturopathy and colon cleansing for the more dedicated holistic holiday-maker. If you're interested in staying further north, book into the **Himalaya Iyengar Yoga Centre** (p153) in Arambol.

You can partake in an Ayurvedic massage or treatment through the **Ayurvedic Natural Health Centre** (p128) in Baga, which uses qualified Ayurvedic doctors. Or you could immerse your self in the upmarket Ayurvedic world of **Pousada Tauma** (p128) in Calangute.

In Palolem, the **Palolem Ayurvedic Centre** (p192) offers Ayurvedic oil massages, and **Blue Planet** (p192) boasts massages and masseurs from all over the planet.

Spend a week or so at **Bhakti Kutir** (p193) at Patnem Beach to fully ensconce yourself in nature and natural healing. Or you could simply hang around the beach and look for signs advertising yoga, reiki, Bowen technique, t'ai chi...



Snapshot

Goa is unlike anywhere else in India – or the world for that matter. When the Portuguese left in the 1960s, everyone else arrived; the hedonistic hippies rolled up to build their brave new worlds on Goa's northern beaches, and India suddenly had a church-studded state to administer. The picture today is different only because Goa has learnt to embrace and enhance this diversity.

The extent to which Goa should be adopted and adapted by India remains a topic of conversation. There are still factions (albeit largely ignored ones) that campaign for the liberation of Goa from Indian 'occupation'. But the majority of the population is content to reinforce its Goan identity through the proud belief that while Goa is a part of India, it is also distinct from it.

NGOs battle to keep Goa free from the economic ills of the rest of the country and the social ills of the rest of the world. Meanwhile, the hippies who came in search of a remote paradise have left an indelible mark. The drugs they brought are still around and rave parties occasionally erupt. Furthermore, free love led to offspring who had Anglo ancestry but who were born and bred in Goa. And the diaspora continues to grow; there are children in Goa today whose genes are German or Japanese or American or English, but whose back yard is the beach and whose playground is the trance parties that their parents frequent. Yoga centres tout 'Yoga for Children' on their schedules, and roadside stalls sell preteen hippy wear.

Many of the hard-core hippies snub the influx of backpackers and package tourists (a trend they contributed to when their infamous lifestyle became a tourist attraction in its own right), but many are dependent on the tourist dollar to sustain their (one could say hippy-critical) lifestyle. Local Goans are similarly stuck; a significant number of them rely on the tourist season to sustain them through the rest of the year, but they also partly blame tourism for the desecration of the coastline, the depletion of natural resources such as fish and water, and the corruption of Goan youth through the introduction of drugs, promiscuity and AIDS.

In 1990, the state attracted 834,081 tourists. A decade later that annual figure had risen to 1.38 million. There are grave concerns about the economic implications if the boom ends, and there are grave concerns about the environmental and social implications if it doesn't.

These issues of economics, environment and identity have been pushed to the forefront of the Goan psyche today. As the government attempts to replace the budget traveller with the resort tourist – a move that would bring in more dollars, but not necessarily put them in the hands of more people – there is increasing discontent among the Goan people that politics continues to be fought on religious and caste lines, with ideology often taking a back seat to economics.

The challenge facing Goa is a new slant on an old struggle: that of reaping the benefits of foreign influence while protecting and promoting Goa's own distinct identity.

FAST FACTS

Population: 1.34 million

Income per capita:
Rs 34,000

Largest town: Vasco
da Gama (population
97,000)

Religion: Hindu 65%,
Roman Catholic 30%,
Muslim 5%

Size: length 105km,
width 65km (you can
drive from end to end in
less than two hours)

Literacy rate: 82% (65%
nationally)

Number of tourists annu-
ally: 1.38 million (12% of
tourists to India)

The Authors



MARIKA McADAM

Marika is a lawyer who has spent the last few years travelling and writing in a bid to avoid practising law. Her quest has taken her to various parts of the globe, including the Indian subcontinent, where she penned her first Lonely Planet guide. After a short stint in East Timor volunteering for Lawyers Without Borders, and a longer stint in Melbourne as a Lawyer Without Employment, Marika headed to another former Portuguese colony – Goa.

Marika is the sole author of the 5th edition of *Bangladesh*, and has contributed to *Bluelist* and *The Lonely Planet Guide to Experimental Travel* (as if there's any other kind!).

My Goa

There's a reason north Goa has been done before; all the colour and contradictions of Goa are here. My Honda Kinetic has the heart of an Enfield and all the horsepower of a bicycle; it was born for this ride. Leaving the hippy heartland of Anjuna (p139), the coast road takes me through a montage of changing countryside and cultures. I pass fishermen in Siolim (p150) and Russians in Morjim (p150) as leather-clad bikies pass me. After an intermission at Arambol (p152) – a rendezvous point for global free spirits – I eventually find myself at the spot where the Arabian Sea meets the Terekhol River. A ferry takes me to the holiday holy grail of Terekhol Fort (p155) and its resplendent views southward over the expanse of Goa.



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LONELY PLANET AUTHORS

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