Goa is a kaleidoscopic blend of Indian and Portuguese cultures unfurling along a virtually uninterrupted string of golden-sand beaches. Dive into the best of all the brilliance that Goa has to offer.

SIGHTS

Agonda Beach
Agonda’s beach is wide, quiet and picturesque, with a wildlife centre at the northern end protecting precious Olive ridley sea turtle eggs. For a sunset walk or a long lazy day, Agonda encapsulates romantic Goa at its very best.

Anjuna Beach
Anjuna’s charismatic, narrow beach runs for almost a mile from the rocky, low-slung cliffs at the northern village area down beyond the flea market in the south. When the tide goes out, it becomes a lovely – and often surprisingly quiet – stretch.

Basilica of Bom Jesus
(Old Goa Rd, Bainguinim, Old Goa)
Famous throughout the Roman Catholic world, the imposing Basilica of Bom Jesus contains the tomb and mortal remains of St Francis Xavier, the so-called Apostle of the Indies.

Braganza House
(Chandor)
Braganza House, built in the 17th century and stretching along one whole side of Chandor’s village square, is the biggest Portuguese mansion of its kind in Goa. Granted the land by the King of Portugal, the Braganza family built this oversized house, which was later divided into the east and west wings when it was inherited by two sisters from the family.

Dudhsagar Falls
Situated in the far southeastern corner of the Bhagwan Mahavir Wildlife Sanctuary, Goa’s most impressive waterfall splashes down just west of the border with Karnataka state. At 603m this is the second highest in India, after Jog Falls. The falls are best visited as soon after monsoon as possible (October is perfect), when water levels are highest and these cascades earn their misty nomenclature, Dudhsagar, meaning ‘Sea of Milk’ in Konkani.

Goa Chitra
(goachitra.com; Benaulim)
Artist and restorer Victor Hugo Gomes first noticed the slow extinction of traditional objects – from farming tools to kitchen utensils to altarpieces – as a child in Benaulim. He created this ethnographic museum from the more than 4,000 cast-off objects that he collected from across the state over 20 years.

Lakshmi Narasimha Temple
(Donshiwado, Ponda)
One of the most attractive and secluded temples around Ponda, this shrine is dedicated to Narasimha, or Narayan, a half-lion, half-human incarnation of the god Vishnu.

Patnem Beach
Smaller and less crowded than Palolem to the north, Patnem makes a quiet and friendly alternative. It’s backed by relaxed beach shacks and has lively surf, making it great for swimming some days and impossible on others, when an equally lively undertow is present. Its main beach road hosts a string of stalls selling the usual clothes, Kashmiri jewellery and trinkets.

Sé Cathedral
(Old Goa)
At over 76m long and 55m wide, the cavernous Sé Cathedral is one of the largest churches in Asia. Building commenced in 1562, on the orders of King Sebastian of Portugal; the finishing touches were made some 90 years later. The exterior is notable for its plain style, in the Tuscan tradition.

ACTIVITIES

Arambol Paragliding
(arabolgoa.com)
The headland above Arambol’s Kalacha Beach (Sweetwater Lake) is an ideal launch point for paragliding. There are a number of independent operators: ask at the shack restaurants on the beach, arrange a pilot, then make the short hike to the top of the headland. Most flights are around 10 minutes, but if conditions are right you can stay up longer.

Bramani Yoga
(brahmaniyoga.com; Anjuna)
This friendly drop-in centre offers daily classes from late November to April in ashtanga, vinyasa, hatha and dynamic yoga, as well as pranayama meditation.

Goa Muay Thai
(goamuaythai.com; Anjuna)
Morning and afternoon classes are designed with fitness and technique in mind rather than full-on Thai-style sparring, so are

Local knowledge

Held annually on the first Sunday and Monday after Christmas, Siolim’s Zagor Festival offers a glimpse into the peaceful coexistence of Goa’s diverse religious communities. Taking place on the Christian feast day of Nossa Senhora de Guia, the night-time festival blends Hindu and Christian traditions, centring on a small Hindu shrine near the ferry dock, which is believed to house Zagoryo, the village deity. Zagoryo is offered thanks during the festival by all Siolim families.
good for beginners. The boxing ring and gym at Titto’s White House sets up in November.

Surf Wala (surf.wala.com; Arambol) If you’re a beginner looking to get up on a board, join the team of surfers based on the beach just north of Arambol’s Surf Club. Prices usually include board hire, wax and rashie.

Top Picks

Eating

Fiesta (fiestagao.in) This is a cute beachfront bar with all-day dining, and fine dining by candlelight around the pool in the evening. Overseen by style queen Yellow Mehta, it’s a Mediterranean-style dining experience that starts with homemade pizza and pasta and extends to French-influenced seafood dishes and tiramisu.

Go With The Flow (gowiththeflowgoa.com; Baga River) Stepping into the fantasy neon-lit garden of illuminated white-wicker furniture is wow factor enough, but the food is equally out of this world. With a global menu leaning towards European and Asian flavours, this is one of Baga’s best dining experiences. Try some of the small bites (ask about a tasting plate) or go straight for the signature pork belly or prawn laksa.

Plantain Leaf (00 91 0832 277 8900; Almita III, Beach Rd, Calangute) In the heart of Calangute’s busy market area, first-floor Plantain Leaf has consistently been the area’s best pure veg restaurant for years, with classic South Indian banana leaf thalis and dosas, along with more North Indian flavours. Most dishes sneak into the budget category.

Pousada by the Beach (pousada-tauma.com; holidays@goaunlimited.com) This permanent beachfront restaurant is simple in appearance but the lunch-only menu is bona fide fine dining – the chef also oversees the upmarket Copper Bowl at sister establishment Pousada Tauma. The menu is uncluttered: a handful of expertly prepared Goan and seafood specialities.

Shimon (00 91 9011131576; Glenburnery St, Arambol) Just back from the beaches, Shimon is the place to fill up on great falafel or sabich (crisp slices of eggplant stuffed into pita bread with boiled egg, potato and salad). The East meets Middle-East sabich takes in a little bit of everything on the tempting menu.

Villa Blanche Bistro (villablanchegoa.com; 283 Dadem Church Rd, Anjuna) This lovely garden café is in the back lanes of Assagao. Salads, sandwiches, filled bagels and cakes are specialities, but you’ll also find Thai curry and German sausages. For an indulgent breakfast or brunch, try the waffles and pancakes.

Drinking

Cape Town Cafe (capetowncafe.com; Tito’s Lane, Baga) The most laid-back of the Tito’s venues, Cape Town has a street-front lounge bar, while inside music plays until late. Goan food is available.

Club M (marbelabeach.com; Marabela Beach Resort, Aswem) Holding sway at South Anjuna Beach, Club M is the premier venue on the north coast, with DJs cranking up from Friday to Sunday and other party nights.

Curleys (curleysgoa.com; St Michael’s Gobli, Arpora) Holding court at South Anjuna Beach, Curleys mixes a laid-back beach vibe with a sophisticated nightspot. There’s a rooftop space with views of the waves. Try and get up there in time for sunset.

Leda Lounge (00 91 0832 278 1458; Colva Beach Rd, Colva) Part sports bar, part music venue, part cocktail bar, Leda is Colva’s best late night hangout. Expect fresh mejillons, good food, and live music Thursday to Sunday.

Waterfalls, Spices, and Lakes

One of the best day trips you can make away from the coast in Goa’s far south is the winding 21-mile drive to the village of Netravali in search of an excellent spice farm, a mysterious bubble lake and jungle treks to hidden waterfalls. The ride out from Palolem alone makes this trip worthwhile, passing farms and the rolling forests of the Netravali Protected Area.

Tanshikar Spice Farm (tanshikarspicefarm.com) is a working, family-run organic farm with crops including vanilla, cashews, pepper, nutmeg and chillies, as well as bee-keeping. There are no tour buses out here and the amiable young owners give you a personalised tour of the plantation and nearby bubble lake. They can also offer guided jungle treks to nearby waterfalls. If you really want to feel the seriously, book an overnight stay in one of the excellent modernised eco-cottages with bamboo sit-outs, or a room in the Hindu-style house.

Near the spice farm (about 500m before the T-junction) the Netravali ‘Bubble Lake’ is actually the balking tank of the small Hindu Gopinath temple. Tiny streams of bubbles constantly bob up to the lake’s surface, appearing to get faster if you clap your hands close to the surface, constantly bob up to the lake’s surface. The other highlight of a day trip out here is the chance to see out a series of waterfalls reached by jungle hikes. Trails to the falls range from 45 minutes to three hours. You can ask for directions at Tanshikar Spice Farm.

From Palolem or Chaudi on the NH17, turn off at the Forest Checkpoint on the left hand side (before Cotiago Sanctuary) and follow the road for 18 miles to the T-junction, turn right and look out for the signs to Tanshikar.

Mandovi Cruising

From Panaji, Goa Tourism operates a range of entertaining hour-long cruises along the Mandovi River aboard the Santa Monica or Shantadurga. All include a live band and usually performances of Goan folk songs and dances. There are also twice-weekly, two-hour dinner cruises (8.45pm Wednesday and Saturday) and twice-weekly backwater cruises (9.30am Tuesday and Friday), which take you down the Mandovi to Old Goa and a spice plantation, then back past Divar and Chorao Islands. All cruises depart from the Santa Monica jetty next to the Mandovi Bridge.

Worth a trip
Sleeping

Alidia Beach Cottages ££
Best for digs with a pool
(00 91 08322279014)
Behind a whitewashed chapel off Baga Rd, this friendly place has Mediterranean-style rooms orbiting a gorgeous pool.

Dunes Holiday Village £
Best for beach holidays
dunesgoa.com
Pretty huts are peppered around a palm-filled lane to the beach. At night, lamps light up the place like a palm-tree dreamland.

Happy Panda £
Best for backpackers
(happypanda.in)
Traveller-painted murals cover the walls in this very welcoming, three-dorm hostel near the main village in Arambol.

Marbella Guest House £££
Best for architecture buffs
marbellagoa.com
This beautiful Portuguese villa is filled with antiques and wrapped by a peaceful courtyard garden. Rooms are individually themed.

Siolim House £££
Best for boutique style
siolimhouse.com
Elegant Siolim House is one of North Goa’s boutique treats, set in an old palace that was once home to the Governor of Macau.

Vaayu Waterman’s Village ££
Best for bohemians
vaayuceanadventures.in
This waterfront boutique spot has a soulful vibe fuelled by its café, art gallery, yoga and surf shop.

Further Reading
Pick up our India guidebook (£20.99), which has a chapter on Goa. The chapter can also be downloaded separately (£2.09) from shop.lonelyplanet.com.