



Palolem & South Goa

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Why Go?

South Goa, bounded to the north by the wide Zuari River and to the south by the neighbouring state of Karnataka, is the quieter, shyer sister of her older, party-friendly North Goa sibling. Though resorts have made it here too – uncharming Colva and package-holiday-friendly Cavelossim being the two biggest – the pace never reaches the frenetic levels of Calangute or Candolim further north, and resorts still peter out quickly into palm groves and paddy fields.

Along this stretch you'll still be able to find the beach solitude you're seeking, along with busy, beloved, crescent-sanded and easy-paced Palolem. The coast is punctuated with top-end five-star resorts which, for all their sins, have managed to keep the shoreline free from midrange concrete-block development. Inland you'll find some fabulous historic sights, bucolic bliss and Goa's most easily accessible wildlife reserve, making the south a redolent, rewarding and re-energising place to base yourself.

Best Places to Eat

- » Home, Patnem (p182)
- » Capo Nero, Colomb (p181)
- » Blue Whale, Mobar (p174)

Best Places to Stay

- » Micky's Huts & Rooms, Patnem (p182)
- » Casa Susegad, Loutolim (p158)
- » Park Hyatt, Arossim (p164)
- » Sevas, Palolem (p179)

When to Go

From November to February, the weather in Goa's balmy south is just perfect. Not too hot, a light breeze, cloudless days and warm evenings bring the bulk of the tourists to the area. If you want to embrace the crowds, festivities, and high, high prices (think double high-season rates or more) come for Christmas and New Year. If you prefer low-key, come in October or March, or brave the increasing heat of April and May, when tourist services are shutting up shop, but the monsoon is still to come.

Margao

0832 / POP 94,400

The capital of Salcete province, Margao (also known as Madgaon) is, along with coastal Vasco da Gama, the main population centre of South Goa and is a happy, bustling market town of a manageable size for getting things done. If you're basing yourself in Goa's south, it's a useful place for shopping, organising bus and train tickets, checking emails or simply enjoying the busy energy of big-city India in manageable small-town form.

Though the modern town favours commerce over culture, this wasn't always the case. Before the Portuguese conquests of the 16th century onward, Margao was a centre for both pilgrimage and learning, with dozens of Hindu temples and a library of thousands upon thousands of volumes. However, all traces were destroyed by the Portuguese, as Margao became absorbed into their 17th-century *Novas Conquistas* (New Conquests).

Today, it nevertheless makes for a nice wander, while its small Shiva temple, just south of the covered market, still attracts Hindus each evening, to light candles and incense, and leave offerings of garlanded marigolds and coconuts to the ever-popular god. If you happen to be in town towards Christmas, Margao's Christians also hold a large fair to celebrate the Feast of Our Lady of the Immaculate Conception around 8 December.

Margao's town centre, ranging around the Municipal Gardens, is quite small and compact, with its shops, restaurants, ATMs and covered market all within easy reach. To the north of town, the old Portuguese-flavoured Largo de Igreja district, with its Church of the Holy Spirit, is worth a stroll; about 1km north further is the main (Kadamba) bus station.

About 1.5km southeast of the Municipal Gardens is Margao's train station (also known as Madgaon train station), a main stop on the north-to-south Konkan Railway (see p233), which replaced the now-defunct Old Margao train station, just to the east of the flyover on the south end of town.

Sights & Activities

Church of the Holy Spirit

CHURCH

Margao's main church also comprises probably its most interesting attraction, first built in 1565, on the site of an important

Hindu temple. Before demolition started on the temple, local Hindus managed to rescue the statue of the god Damodara, to whom the building was dedicated. It was secretly moved to a new site in the village of Zambaulim, around 30km southeast, where there is still a large temple today.

However, the new church didn't last long and was burned to the ground by Muslim raiders the same year it was built. It was soon replaced and a seminary was established, but both were subsequently destroyed, again by Muslim forces, after which the seminary was moved to Rachol, to the northeast.

The present church, built in 1675, has lasted rather longer. It remains in use as a parish church and is finely decorated inside. The impressive *reredos* (ornamental screen) is dedicated to the Virgin Mary, rising from ground level to the high ceiling, made more distinguished by the gilded and carved archway that stands in front of it. The church doors are usually unlocked throughout the day, and access is via the side entrance on the northern side. Outside, in the centre of a dusty square, nowadays most often used for volleyball games, stands a 17th-century cross, atop a pedestal carved with images depicting the story of Easter.

Largo de Igreja

AREA

Largo de Igreja, the area around the Church of the Holy Spirit, features a number of traditional old Portuguese mansions, in various states of decay or repair. The most famous is the grand, 1790 **Sat Burnzam Ghor** (Seven Gabled House). Originally, as its name suggests, there were seven of the distinctive high-peaked gables, of which only three remain, though it remains an impressive edifice. Built by Sebastiao da Silva, private secretary to the viceroy, it sports an especially beautiful private chapel, dedicated to St Anna, and noteworthy for being the first private chapel in which a Goan family was permitted to privately perform Mass. Its upstairs salons are filled with a stunning assortment of porcelain, chandeliers, marble and damask. Though it's not open daily to the public, your best bet to arrange a visit is to contact the GTDC (p230) about a tour.

Monte Hill

AREA

Located about 500m southeast of Sat Burnzam Ghor and a fair climb up Monte Hill, Margao's only hill, **Mount Church** is a simple whitewashed building, faced by a