



Goa

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Best Places to Eat

- » Upper House (p805)
- » Le Poisson Rouge (p816)
- » Thalassa (p822)
- » Seasonal beach shacks (all over)
- » Plantain Leaf (p816)

Best Places to Stay

- » Nilaya Hermitage (p816)
- » Mayfair Hotel (p804)
- » Marbella Guest House (p812)
- » Backwoods Camp (p810)
- » Dunes (p824)

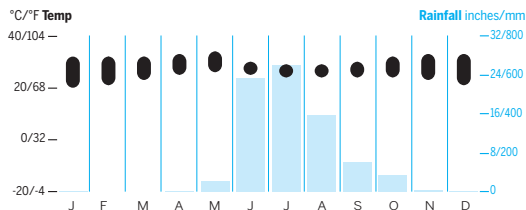
Why Go?

It's green, it's glistening and it's gorgeous: just three of the reasons why Goa has allured travellers for decades. Two million visitors come each year for the silken sand, crystalline shores, cocohut culture and *susegad* – a Portuguese-derived term that translates loosely to 'laid-backness'.

But there's more to discover here than the pleasure of warm sand between your toes. Goa is as beautiful and culturally rich as it is tiny and hassle-free, so you can go bird-watching in a butterfly-filled forest, marvel at centuries-old cathedrals, venture out to white-water waterfalls or meander the capital's charming alleyways, all in between lazy beach days (or weeks). Pour in a dash of Portuguese-influenced food and architecture, infuse with a colourful blend of religious traditions, pepper with parties, and you've got a heady mix that makes Goa easy to enjoy and extremely hard to leave.

When to Go

Goa (Panaji)



Early Nov The rains are over and the waterfalls are full – but the beaches aren't.

Early Dec Festivals galore and great weather, just before the high-peak prices and crowds.

Mar Carnival. Enough said.

MAIN POINTS OF ENTRY

Tiny Dabolim Airport handles all flights. Margao Railway Station is the state's largest and best connected, and Mapusa and Panaji bus terminals are your best bet for long-distance rides.

Fast Facts

- » Population: 1.5 million
- » Area: 3701 sq km
- » Capital: Panaji (Panjim)
- » Telephone code: 0832
- » Main languages: Konkani, Marathi, English and Hindi
- » Sleeping prices: \$ below ₹1000, \$\$ ₹1000 to ₹2500, \$\$\$ above ₹2500

Top Tip

Don't swim wasted! And stay away during Christmas and New Year's, when the parties are raging but so are the prices and the hordes.

Resources

- » Goa Tourism (www.goa-tourism.com) Good background and tour info.
- » Goa World (www.goa-world.com) General info on Goan culture.
- » Goa's English dailies (www.navhindtimes.in, www.oheraldo.in) For the news.

Food

Goans tend to be hearty meat and fish eaters, and fresh seafood is a staple, as is the quintessential Goan lunch 'fish-curry-rice': fried mackerel steeped in coconut, tamarind and chilli sauce. The good, genuine cooking can be hard to find in the tourist areas, but hunt around and you'll be rewarded with your best souvenir: memories of a stellar vindaloo (fiery dish in a marinade of vinegar and garlic) or *xacuti* (a spicy chicken or meat dish cooked in red coconut sauce).

DON'T MISS

There's little chance of missing the **beach** – it's spectacular and it's everywhere – but don't give in to the temptation to laze on it nonstop. **Yoga** is ubiquitous in Goa – in both long-course and short-class form – and even for dabblers, it's the perfect yin to beach-lounging's yang. Palolem has lots of **trekking** and even canyoning opportunities, and **birds, forests and waterfalls** are just waiting to be enjoyed inland. Goa has a fascinating **history** that also shouldn't be missed: set aside some time to explore evocative Panaji (Panjim), Old Goa, Quepem and Chandor.

Top State Festivals

- » Feast of the Three Kings (6 Jan, Chandor, p827) Boys re-enact the story of the three kings bearing gifts for Christ.
- » Shigmotsav (Shigmo) of Holi (Feb/Mar, statewide) Goa's version of the Hindu festival Holi sees coloured powders thrown about and parades in most towns.
- » Sabado Gordo (Feb/Mar, Panaji, p800) A procession of floats and street parties on the Saturday before Lent.
- » Carnival (Mar, statewide) A four-day festival kicking off Lent; the party's particularly jubilant in Panaji.
- » Fama de Menino Jesus (2nd Mon in Oct, Colva, p830) Colva's Menino Jesus statue is paraded through town.
- » International Film Festival of India (Nov, Panaji, p800) Film screenings and Bollywood glitterati everywhere.
- » Feast of St Francis Xavier (3 Dec, Panaji, p800, Old Goa, p807) A celebration of Goa's patron saint; once every decade (the next one is 2014), the saint's body is carried through Old Goa's streets.
- » Feast of Our Lady of the Immaculate Conception (8 Dec, Margao, p825, Panaji, p800) Fairs and concerts are held, as is a beautiful church service at Panaji's Church of Our Lady of the Immaculate Conception.