

Goa: cliché or India's best-kept secret?

Spice plantations and tantalising food served on unspoiled beaches await discovery. Words *Liz Totton*

To many, Goa is a holiday destination of yesteryear, a cliché bringing to mind hippies and infamous full moon parties – the archetype to the modern rave. Few people know that India's charming seaside destination offers more. Perhaps its mysterious attractiveness is its best-kept secret.

Goa is not a single beach or party. It's a diverse state with more than 100km of pristine Arabian Sea beaches and offers much more to explore. If you scratch the surface, Goa reveals verdant hillsides, wide, rushing rivers that conceal 30,000-year-old human settlements and ancient temples, and undulating countryside that was irresistible to European spice traders. It is the combination of the lingering Portuguese influence and the state's raw beauty that make it so enchanting.

Many still visit for the parties, and North Goa still delivers. Tell your taxi driver to take you to Baga Beach. Here, you'll find cheap accommodation and cosy beach shacks that blast hits of the season while ravers party the night away on the sand in front of the ocean. Anjuna Beach is another popular spot. Relaxing chill-out music drifts out along the shoreline from the quirky beach bars by day, transforming by night into raves with partygoers filling dance floors that spill out onto the sand. Chai mamas set up tables across the beaches to sell all the snacks and



Anjuna Beach is an old-school favourite for parties

refreshments a clubber might desire into the small hours.

Arpora boasts a Saturday night market to end all markets. The atmosphere is electric. One can find everything from Indian beachwear and glittery bags to Kashmiri jewellery, scarves and trinkets in the tangled string of the thousands of stalls.

Technicolour wares and live music reverberate through the labyrinthine alleys mesmerising travellers and reminding them that they could be nowhere else but in India.

If R&R is what you seek, Goa has it. The beaches to the south of the airport, such as Cansaulim, Utorda, Benaulim and Colva, to name a few, are quieter and cater to families. They're home to luxurious western resort brands such as Kempinski and Park Hyatt, but you can find accommodation to suit every budget.

The Majorda Beach Resort (+91 832 668 1111) boasts a quiet, long stretch of beach where blasting music won't burst your eardrums. Instead, the sound of waves crashing as you retire on a sun lounger is all that fills your ears if it doesn't send you into an outright slumber. By night, you can have it all in the south. Parties are there too, but you can also find a nearby casual beach shack, which will meet your every need if they are simple: sandy feet, ridiculously inexpensive beverages, international cuisine and a lively crowd by the sea.

If you seek culture and adventure, Goa has that too. It's a small state and nothing is too far away. Fancy a remarkable waterfall? Goa has that. Are you a foodie? Visit a spice plantation to learn about how and where your favourite spices are grown and harvested. Architecture buff? Visit the Sé Cathedral, which is one of the oldest religious buildings in Goa and is

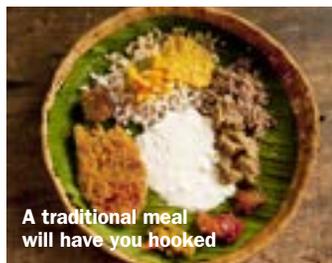
one of the largest churches in Asia, before admiring the fantastic views from the Dona Paula Jetty. Afterwards, sample a traditional Goan and Portuguese lunch at the O'Coquerio restaurant (+91 832 241 7344).

Be careful, though. The sumptuous food in Goa may render everything you savour afterwards dull. Tropical ingredients such as the ubiquitous coconut and local spices form the base of Goan curries, and the chosen ingredient for them is fresh seafood straight from the Arabian Sea.

If you have time, venture further south for idyllic lazing. Once deserted, most of Palolem is now considered on the beaten track, but its smaller neighbour, Patnem, a beach hamlet framed by rolling hills and palm groves, is an ideal place to spend a few days reading, riding the waves or just ambulating the long stretches of sand.

Discover a Goa that lies beneath the clichés of the '60s and then spread the word. Alternatively, you can just visit and keep one of the world's best-kept secret beaches to yourself.

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A traditional meal will have you hooked



Sé Cathedral



Browse Goa's thousands of market stalls

Need to know



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