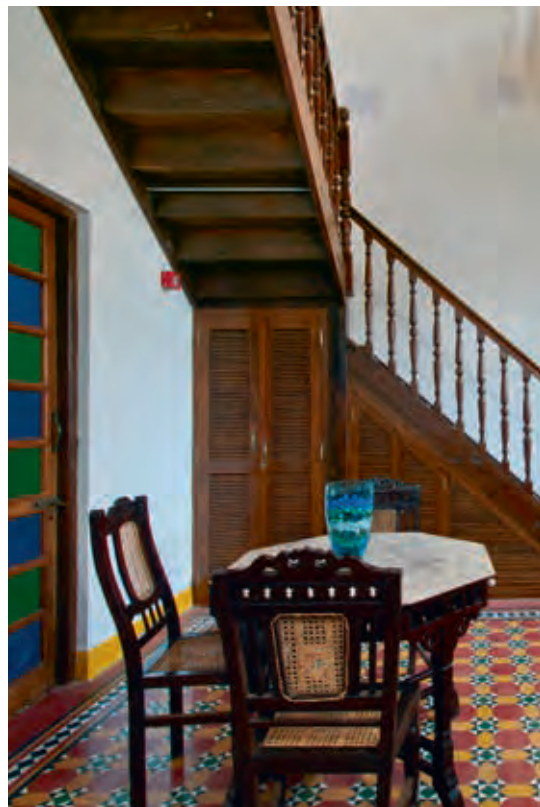


# THE BLUE HOUSE

VIEWS OF THE LATIN QUARTER AND TIPS ON EXPLORING PANJIM LIKE A LOCAL | BY AMRITA DAS



HERITAGE



CITY CENTRE



## THE VITALS

### Accommodation

Hospedaria has eight bedrooms spread over two floors. All rooms are air-conditioned, have free Wi-Fi, and electrical kettles. Rooms on the first floor have a balcony; the ones facing the road are best. The kitchen only serves breakfast, but some of Panjim's finest restaurants are a few minutes away. (95277 78884; [www.hadbgoa.com](http://www.hadbgoa.com); prices vary seasonally; doubles from ₹2,100-4,500 including breakfast.)

### Getting There

Hospedaria is in Panjim, 28 km/40 min north-west of Dabolim airport (taxi ₹700 one-way) and 40 km/1 hr north of Madgaon railway station (taxi ₹800 one-way). The closest beach is Miramar, about 7 km/18 min away.

Goa might be known for its laid-back *susegad* way of life, but I like my holidays filled with activity, especially in culturally rich Panjim. Which is why I like Hospedaria Abrigo de Botelho, a cheerful heritage guest house nestled in Fontainhas, the old Latin Quarter of Panjim. Run by the smiling Roy Botelho, the blue-coloured bungalow has all the warmth of Goan hospitality, yet the service is discreet and unobtrusive.

Every place worth visiting in Panjim is a comfortable walking distance from the hotel and Roy is well informed about the city's cultural and social events. So whether I wanted to catch a show at the Kala Academy or attend the Goa Carnival, all I needed to do was ask him. On my last visit, I walked along the Ourem River, through the inner lanes of 31st January Road to the snow-white Immaculate Conception Church (or Panjim Church). I wound my way through Fontainhas, photographing its colourful and timeless bungalows and afterwards, I attacked my Goan lunch with gusto.

Every corner in Panjim has a story to tell and Hospedaria is no different. According to documentation that Botelho found, the bungalow is 136 years old. It was in terrible condition when

he acquired it from the fourth-generation owners, but he took his chances and set about a four-year project in restoring the house. Botelho used previous experience in construction to ensure that the essence of the structure was maintained.

I am smitten with its high ceilings, mahogany panelling, and the Mario Miranda tiling in the bathroom. Miranda was one of India's finest cartoonists, known for his illustrations of quintessential Goan characters like buxom fisherwomen and goggle-eyed *poders* (bakers). On the ground floor is the dining room, which opens to a small garden with some more tables. This is where Hospedaria's guests begin their day with breakfast—a simple spread of eggs, cereal, one Indian dish like *upma* or *puri-bhaji*—and rest their feet in the evenings with many cups of chai.

My room's balcony overlooks a quiet, residential street that offers glimpses of everyday life in Panjim. One morning, I hear the church bells ring and see dressed-up crowds dispersing after Sunday Mass at St. Sebastian Church. It's moments like this that bring me back to Hospedaria time and again. It's close to all the sights I want to explore as a traveller, but makes me feel like a local. ●