

THAT TIME OF THE YEAR

If you've never been to Goa, go now; if you've been a regular, here is a reminder. By **Neeharika Satyavada**







TOP AND ABOVE: Vagator Beach, and Our Lady of Immaculate Conception Church in Panjim

Once a thriving port of trade, the city state of Goa has been the melting pot of cultures long before the British came to India. And it isn't just the beaches that make Goa such a tourist magnet for Indians and foreigners alike. Its vibrant culture, which is an eclectic mix of Portuguese and Indian, is what makes Goa, India's art capital. Historic forts and churches, lush green spice plantations, tree-lined avenues that boast of the trendiest boutiques and cafes, wooded hills, verdant islands – there is something to interest every kind of traveller.

Goa can be divided into the districts of North Goa and South Goa. While North Goa is known for its wild parties and crowded beaches, South Goa is for those looking for the quieter beaches to spend a lazy afternoon on. From Anjuna to Baga, every beach you have heard of is most likely in North Goa. With its swaying palms and rocky cliffs, the Anjuna Beach is a must-visit if you love chasing sunsets. Other popular beaches here

are Calangute, Candolim, Arambol, Vagator, Morjim and Miramar. It is, in fact, the Vagator Beach that featured in the cult hit, *Dil Chahta Hai*, with the three friends looking out onto it from the Chapora Fort. Though often overlooked, South Goa has its share of interesting beaches, too – from Agonda Beach that is home to nesting olive ridley turtles to Palolem Beach that hosts silent parties every Saturday night. Top things to do at the beaches of Goa include shopping at the many quirky boutiques and flea markets, unwinding at the coolest of shacks and turning it up a notch with water sports like parasailing and flyboarding.

The second most popular thing to do in Goa, after beach hopping is to see the churches and convents of Old Goa. The whole of Old Goa, which was once the old Portuguese capital, is a UNESCO World Heritage Site and rightfully so. For the churches and cathedrals built here right after the Portuguese came to Goa in 1510 were constructed with the view to inspire awe among the native Indians, so

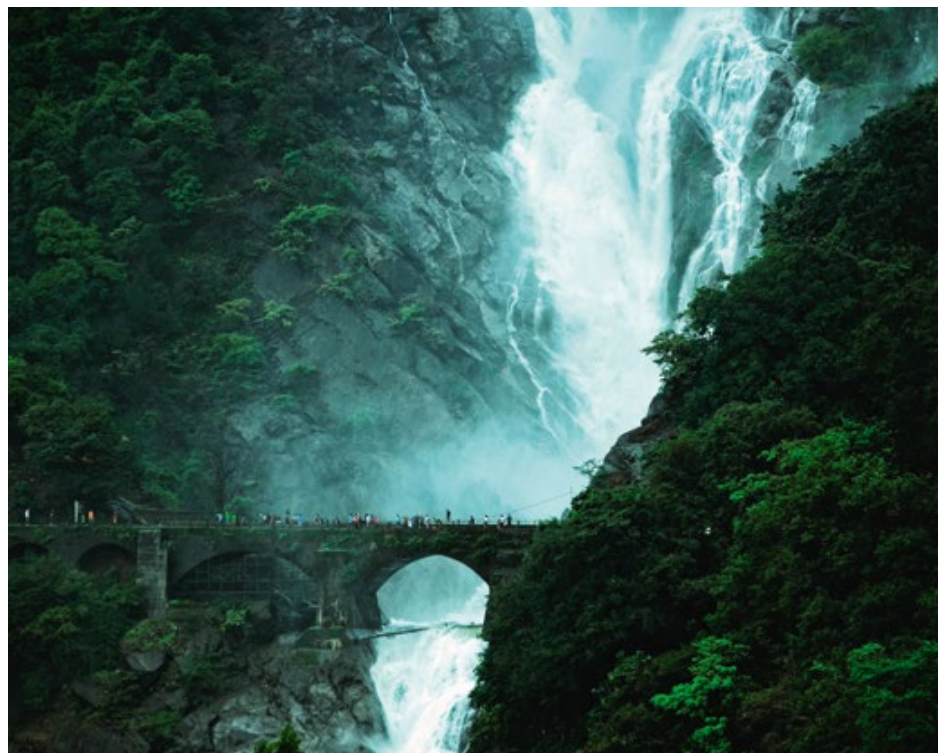


CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE: Basilica of Bom Jesus in Old Goa; Goa's Anjuna beach and Goa attracts some of the world's best DJs

that they would more readily accept Christianity. And their striking architecture varies from Portuguese-Gothic to Tuscan and Corinthian. The most frequented of these is the Basilica of Bom Jesus, which is also the mausoleum of Goa's patron saint, Francis Xavier. One can also take the Fontainhas Walking Tour while in Old Goa to explore the oldest surviving Latin Quarter in India and also the only living one in all of Asia.

Whimsical and colourful, this walk through narrow alleyways dotted with quaint cafes and galleries juxtaposed with charming old traditional homes in hues of yellow, green and blue is sure to transport you to another time right there in the middle of the bustling city of Panjim.

From being home to celebrated artists' such as Mario Miranda to established designers and prodigious writers of the day, Goa has always been the focus of creative minds of the country. So instead of stopping at buying that Mario Miranda print to take back, why not head to the Sunaparanta Centre of Art. For this not-for-profit arts initiative is more than just a gallery and cafe. Sitting in



CLOCKWISE FROM BELOW: One of Goa's many night markets; Dudhsagar Waterfall; parasailing at Candolim and spices at Anjuna flea market



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a quaint old Portuguese house, the Sunaparanta serves as a hub for Goa's cultural events and as a great resource for anyone seeking to delve into some art.

You cannot be in Goa and not eat seafood, local style! With just as many Goans frequenting it as tourists, Fat Fish in Calangute would be a good place to start your food trail. The Goan Fish Thali is a must-try here. Yet another favourite of the locals and celebrities alike is Martin's Corner and

the Exotic Seafood Platter here is the most sought-after dish on the menu. And if offbeat dining experiences interest you then afternoon tea at the Casa da Moeda is a great option, for this heritage building was originally Goa's Mint and currency was minted here a hundred and eighty-four years ago. One can book a session of high tea with a side of local Goan anecdotes by the hosts, a day in advance.

And if one tires of Goa's countless beaches and the adventure sports there, then a trek to the mighty Dudhsagar Waterfalls is a great way to explore the luxuriant green Konkan countryside. Cycling on the Divar Island where beautiful little Portuguese villas make for idyllic views of the Goan countryside, or a sunset boat ride on the Nerul river are also delightful ways to experience Goa, off-the-grid.