

North Goa



North Goa has the most developed, dynamic and diverse coastline of the state. Candolim and Calangute, by far the most tourist-populated beaches, are lined with hundreds of beach shacks, hotels and restaurants. Further north, Anjuna and Vagator Beaches are home to hippies and the curious folk who wander through to meet them and to dip their toe into the melting pot of subcultures and alternative lifestyles that have permeated here. North of the Chapora River are the quieter beaches of Morjim, Asvem and Mandrem, which are taking their time to develop individual character. Further north still is Arambol, which in recent years has provided respite for party people seeking refuge from the more saturated southern beaches.

The high point of the week is Wednesday, where tourists, local foreigners and traders from all over the country converge on the atmospheric Anjuna flea market. Saturday night is also a big event; the night bazaars of Baga and Arpora attract everyone, making for an eclectic and therefore quintessentially Goan experience.

Head away from the hype to the less discovered inland areas of Bardez, Pernem, Bicholim and Satari, and you will find villages, farmland and a scattering of temples that have retained their authenticity despite all the morphing and mayhem of the coastal areas. Whether explored on a motorcycle or just enjoyed from the beach, this region of Goa must be experienced.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Shop at **Anjuna flea market** (p141) till the sun goes down, then head to a happening beach shack
- Grab a cliffside guesthouse with a balcony overhanging the ocean at **Arambol** (p153)
- Sample local cuisine and purchase items from all over India at the **Saturday night markets** (p129) of Arpora and Baga
- Spend a night on the town with kids from Britain and Bombay in **Baga** (p134)
- Immerse yourself in the surreal world of **Goan parties** (p148) in Anjuna or Vagator



PANAJI TO FORT AGUADA

Reis Magos

A classic Portuguese **fort** and **Reis Magos Church**, dedicated to St Jerome, make the small village of Reis Magos worthy of a stop on the way to the beaches. It's not difficult to appreciate the importance of the site that this fort occupies, as it offers protection at the narrowest part of the Mandovi River. The fort was built in 1551 after the north bank of the river came under Portuguese control. It was rebuilt in 1703, in time to assist the desperate defence against the Marathas (1737–39), during which the whole of Bardez, with the exception of the Reis Magos and Aguada forts, was occupied.

Although Reis Magos had the distinction of never being captured by the enemy, it was occupied by a foreign army in 1799 when the British requisitioned both it and Fort Aguada in anticipation of a possible attack by the French. After the British withdrawal in 1813 the Reis Magos fort gradually lost importance, and was eventually abandoned by the military and converted into a jail. It's not open to the public, but it's still worth coming up here for the excellent views.

The little church standing below the fortress walls is made all the more attractive by the imposing black bastions that loom above it. The first church was built in 1555, shortly after the fort itself. A seminary was later added, and over the years it became a significant seat of learning.

Only the church remains, with its steep steps up from the road and fine views of the Mandovi River from the main doors. Outside the church, the lions portrayed in relief at the foot of the steps show signs of Hindu influence, and a crown tops off the façade. The interior of the church is impressively colourful and contains the tombs of three viceroys. Reis Magos is the scene of a colourful **festival** on 6 January, when the story of the three kings is recreated with young local boys acting the parts of the Magi.

Buses run regularly between Betim and Candolim or Calangute, so coming from either direction you can be let off at the Reis Magos junction and then walk the short distance to the church and fort.

Nerul & Coco Beach

Coco Beach is a lot quieter than other nearby beaches and affords a great view

across the water to Miramar and Panaji (Panjim). One thing that has contributed to the relative quietness of Coco Beach is the fact that there are no water sports here; local fishermen successfully brought an end to them after complaining that the commotion had a negative impact on their livelihood.

In recent years, there has been an increase in the range of accommodation available.

Albert's Odyssey (☎ 0832-2401518; r Rs 500) is a great place to stay. Rooms have lots of storage space and hot-water bathrooms. Albert's also organises boat and fishing trips and turns out good food. If you can't find a room here, staff may be able to suggest another place nearby.

Behind Nerul church, **Bai Tereza Beach Camp** (☎ 9890694138/58; www.goabeachcamp.com; 1-/2-/3-/4-person tent incl full board Rs 1300/2200/2900/3600, 1-/2-/3-/4-person tent incl breakfast Rs 795/1190/1385/1580) is a newly established Danish-run camp consisting of iglooesque tents on the far end of the beach, which is probably the most secluded point you can get. Meals are provided by the Danish chef, and the bonfire is lit at night. There is a young and international vibe to this place, though the high prices keep it a tad exclusive.

Fort Aguada

Standing on the headland overlooking the mouth of the Mandovi River, Fort Aguada (Map p122) occupies a magnificent position, confirmed by the fact that it was never taken by force. This is a very popular spot to watch the sunset, with uninterrupted views north and south. The motivation for building the fort came from the increasing threat of attacks by the Dutch, among others, and work was commenced in 1612.

The fort covers the entire headland, and the river was once connected with the seashore at Candolim to form a moat, entirely cutting off the headland. One of the great advantages of the site was the abundance of water from natural springs on the hillside, which meant that the fort became an important watering point for ships; the spring also led the fort to be named Aguada (*água* is Portuguese for 'water'). The British occupied the fort in 1799 to protect Goa from the French.

Today the main point of interest is the bastion that stands on the hilltop, although

when compared with the overall area surrounded by defences, you realise that this is only a fraction of the fort. The buildings below the bastion on the waterfront now house the state prison, but the old bastion on the hilltop can be visited. In the main courtyard of the fort are the underground water tanks. These huge echoing chambers indicate just how seriously the architects took the threat of a long siege.

The **old lighthouse**, which stands in the middle of the fort, was built in 1864 and once housed the great bell from the Church of St Augustine in Old Goa before it was moved to the Church of Our Lady of the Immaculate Conception in Panaji. Unfortunately, at the time of research they weren't letting anyone up to the top.

Nearby, the **new lighthouse** (adult/child Rs 5/3; ☎ 4-5.30pm) can also be visited; cameras are not allowed inside.

A short way to the east of the bastion is the pretty **Church of St Lawrence**, which also occupies a magnificent viewpoint. The Church was built in 1643 to honour St Lawrence, the patron saint of sailors.

South of the church and at the end of the road is **Aguada Jail**, which houses a number of Westerners, mostly on drug charges.

To get to Fort Aguada you can ride a bike or motorcycle or take a taxi along the 4km winding road that heads east from Sinquerim Beach and loops up around the headland. It's an enjoyable motorcycle ride, with good views along the top of the headland. By bicycle there's a steep initial climb, best done in the early morning. Otherwise there's a steep 2km walking trail to the fort that starts just past Marbella guesthouse.

CANDOLIM & SINQUERIM

☎ 0832 / pop 8600

Candolim Beach and Sinquerim, the beach immediately below Fort Aguada, are now almost entirely the domain of the package-tour companies, although independent travellers can still find some relatively cheap rooms here, especially outside the peak season. Sinquerim Beach is a small curve of sand dominated by the five-star Taj Holiday Village and Aguada Hermitage. For the past couple of years the *River Princess*, a grounded tanker that no-one wants to take responsibility for, has sat forlornly about 500m offshore.

Candolim Beach is a clean, straight stretch of sand running north to Calangute. It's a little quieter, with fewer beach shacks, and tends to attract a slightly older crowd, as well as the few travellers who find Calangute and Baga too busy and Anjuna and Vagator too much of a scene.

Orientation & Information

The main drag, roughly between Sinquerim in the south and St Anthony's Chapel in the north, is lined with souvenir shops, restaurants, hotels, travel agencies and places to make phone calls or read email. **Davidair** (☎ 2277007; www.com2goa.com) is a reputable travel agency specialising in flights out of Goa and organised tours.

There are numerous currency exchanges offices and travel agencies where you can change money and get cash advances on credit cards. HFDC (near Acron Arcade) and UTI Bank (near Dona Alcino Resorts) have ATMs, and you can change cash and travellers cheques at the State Bank of India. A useful multipurpose place is Arhana Complex (often called the Elephant Shop because of its carved elephants); on the main road, it changes money at good rates, provides tourist information and sells a wide range of carvings and souvenirs.

The post office is near the north end of the village.

Activities

BOAT TRIPS

John's Boat Tours (☎ 2497450, 9822386050, 5620190) has earned its good reputation by providing a decent service, and through a BBC plug that it has milked for all its worth since. It has dolphin-watching trips (Rs 795) and boat rides to the Anjuna flea market (Rs 395), and also does a tour through backwater mangroves (Rs 995). Its dolphin trips operate with a policy of 'no dolphins, no pay'. There are also overnight trips on a Keralan houseboat (Rs 4000). John's is now branching out with 4WD tours covering Dudhsagar Falls (Rs 995) and spice plantations (Rs 850). John's also arranges fishing and snorkelling trips. There are numerous booking agents around town.

DIVING

There is a **Goa Dive Center** (☎ 9822157094; ☎ 4-9pm) operating out of Candolim, where you