

GOA, INDIA

*Christian landmarks,
spice plantations and beaches await
visitors to this former Portuguese colony*

By Katherine Rodeghier



Cows, revered in India, roam Goa's beaches at will. Popular Vagator Beach, a haven for hippies in the 1970s, is about 27 miles from the cruise port.

Cruise passengers on excursions to Old Goa may be forgiven a bout of geographical confusion. That massive white cathedral looks like it belongs in Tuscany. That richly adorned altar could be inside a church in Spain. The Moorish tiles and colonial architecture of houses would not be out of place in the suburbs of Lisbon.

But then a tuk-tuk auto rickshaw rumbles past, spewing fumes, and reality returns. This isn't Southern Europe, this is India.

For 451 years, Goa existed as a Portuguese colony on the Arabian Sea in southwest India. Explorers, traders and missionaries brought

European culture with them, leaving a presence that goes far beyond architecture. Unlike the rest of India, this tiny state's population of 1.5 million is 35 percent Christian. Christian families display crosses outside homes that might share a common wall with a Hindu neighbor who plants *tulsi*, holy basil, in a planter in his front yard.

And unlike some parts of a world suffering from religious strife, Goans get along. Perhaps the easy rapport comes from a laid-back attitude known as *susegad*, from the Portuguese word *sossegado* meaning peaceable or tranquil. This serene state of mind

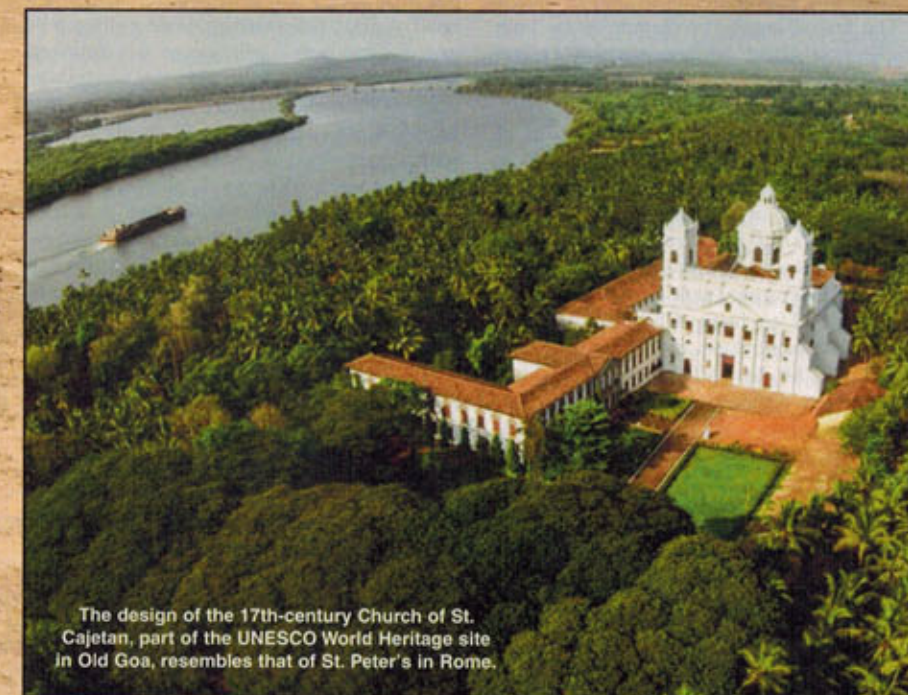
might also be why the Southern European practice of afternoon siestas continues here.

Visitors sense other vestiges of Goa's history with Portugal. They hear strains of fado in the music and taste tomatoes in Goan dishes. Most Indians follow a vegetarian diet, but some Goans eat meat, mainly pork, and fresh fish from the Arabian Sea remains a staple.

The Portuguese established their colony in 1510 after sea captain Alfonso Albuquerque sailed in. They stuck around until 1961, well after the British left the subcontinent, but it wasn't until 1987 that Goa became an official

state of India. Many people who live here still call themselves Goan, not Indian, as though they live in another country.

Goa averages about 30,000 cruise passengers a year. Twenty-nine ships called last year, and 40 are expected in 2017. The cruise port sits near the mouth of the Zouri River in Mormugao, or Marmagoa as the Brits called it. One of India's best natural harbors, it lies near the midpoint of Goa's 66 miles of coastline. The government awarded Mormugao the status of a major port in 1963, and it remains very much a cargo facility and India's leading port for the export of iron ore. The nearest town, Vasco da Gama, lies 2.5



The design of the 17th-century Church of St. Cajetan, part of the UNESCO World Heritage site in Old Goa, resembles that of St. Peter's in Rome.

miles away. Passengers won't find much to see within walking distance of port, so motorcoach excursions booked through cruise lines or tours arranged individually by taxi are the way to experience Goa.

Old Goa, the former colonial capital and a UNESCO World Heritage site, is the most popular destination and lies about 19 miles from port. A bustling city in the 16th century, it nearly vanished after waves of cholera epidemics forced the Portuguese to move the capital to Panaji, or Panjim. A mile-long strip of monasteries, cathedrals and churches remains, most designed by Portuguese and Italian architects in styles ranging from

Renaissance to Baroque.

The final resting place of St. Francis Xavier, Goa's patron saint, lies inside the Basilica de Bom Jesus, meaning "good Jesus." Built by the Jesuit order beginning in 1594, it became the first church in Asia to be named a minor basilica. The three-tier facade of the Baroque building rises 61 feet and contains columns in Doric, Corinthian and Ionic styles. Of the more than 300 churches the Portuguese built in Goa, it's the only one not whitewashed. A zealous Portuguese conservationist erred in stripping off the lime plaster in the 1950s, causing the brown stone exterior to erode with each suc-

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Lime plaster was stripped from the Basilica de Bom Jesus, leaving the stone exposed to the elements.

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Continued

cessive rainy season.

The layout inside the church seems both simple and grand with a wooden ceiling replacing the vaulted original. The main altar, with gilded reredos (screens) and statues of the infant Jesus and St. Ignatius of Loyola, is flanked by two altars devoted to St. Michael and Our Lady of Hope.

But the tomb of St. Francis Xavier, one of the founders of the Jesuits along with Ignatius of Loyola, draws the most attention. The king of Portugal sent Francis Xavier to Goa in 1542 to bring Christianity to the colony. His work done, the missionary continued east; he died off the coast of China, where he was buried and his remains covered with quicklime. When the body was exhumed—twice—it showed no sign of decay. A miracle was declared, and the body

was returned to Goa.

A Tuscan duke engaged a Florentine sculptor to fashion a mausoleum in marble and jasper, paying for the tomb in exchange for the pillow that had lain beneath the saint's head. A glass-sided casket inside a silver reliquary offers only a glimpse of the shrunken body, missing the right forearm, which was removed to a church in Rome, and a toe that local lore says was taken by an overly zealous worshipper. Precious stones that once decorated the tomb were pried off over the centuries, but bronze plaques depicting scenes from the saint's life remain. The largest crowds gather at Bom Jesus on December 3, the saint's feast day. Once a decade an exposition honoring him takes place, and his body is taken from the tomb for public veneration. The last exposition was in 2014-15.

Next door to the basilica stands the Jesuits' Professed House, a two-story whitewashed structure where the order planned its missions. Completed in 1589, it predates Bom

Jesus but was partially rebuilt in the 18th century to replace a section damaged by fire.

Old Goa's other significant church stands across a main road, its massive white exterior gleaming under the tropical sun. Construction of Se Cathedral, one of the largest churches in Asia and bigger than any in Portugal, took 90 years beginning in 1562. Corinthian columns adorn a facade that would not be out of place in Tuscany. The main altar is dedicated to St. Catherine of Alexandria with paintings depicting her awaiting execution and being carried by angels to Mount Sinai. Chapels flank both sides of the 250-foot-long nave. One contains the wooden Cross of Miracles originally erected by shepherds on a hillside and moved to the cathedral after Christian Goans reported seeing visions there. The



The main altar in the Basilica de Bom Jesus has a gilded reredos (ornamental screen) with a statue of St. Ignatius of Loyola.

faithful place their foreheads on the cross and offer petitions for the sick.

St. Francis Xavier baptized thousands of Goan converts at the cathedral's baptismal font. Some may not have gone willingly. The cathedral's Golden Bell, housed in one of two remaining bell towers overlooking what had been the city's market square, tolled during the trials of faith during the Goan Inquisition. Hindus were forced to convert to Christianity, their temples destroyed and rituals banned. Thousands who resisted were executed.

Old Goa's other notable buildings include a former convent containing an archaeological museum with Hindu statues, a model of a ship Vasco da Gama sailed to India and portraits of Goa's rulers. The 17th-century Church of St. Cajetan is modeled after St. Peter's in Rome. The decor of the Church of St. Francis of Assisi incorporates nautical motifs in its Baroque interior.

Those not interested in a religious or history excursion may want to head to one of Goa's many beaches. A strip of sand and pounding surf may seem the same world

over, but in Goa beach lovers find a few differences. Cows, revered in India, wander the beaches at will, their curved horns framing idyllic scenes of palm trees and surf. Women in brightly colored saris stroll the sand, approaching sunbathers reclining under beach umbrellas to hawk scarves and jewelry or offer a massage or manicure.

Rocky outcroppings divide North Goa's most popular beaches, Anjuna and Vagator, about 27 miles from the cruise port. Havens for hippies in the 1970s, they were the scenes of all-night rave parties but now draw visitors on package tours from Russia and the UK as well as families on getaways from Mumbai and New Delhi. In South Goa the beach closest to cruise ships is Bogmalo at 9.5 miles. It has facilities for water skiing and scuba diving. At Benaulim Beach, 22 miles from port, cruise passengers can buy a day pass for access to the luxury hotel Taj Exotica.

Several of Goa's many spice plantations are open to visitors, welcoming them with herbal tea before a tour of the grounds, lunch and often an elephant ride. A popular shore excursion throws in a boat ride on the Cumbarjua Canal for crocodile sightings.

Guides at the Tropical Spice Plantation explain the cultivation and medicinal properties of spices grown there: pepper, nutmeg, cardamom, cloves, coriander, allspice. A buffet lunch includes the traditional Goan fish curry, and servers offer samples of *kaju feni*, a lighter version of the cashew liqueur made from the apple of the cashew tree. Full-strength feni has an alcohol content of nearly 43 percent, and a small bottle makes an unusual souvenir.

More serious shoppers visit the market in Margao, Goa's second-largest city, located 17.5 miles from port. Vendors sell Hindu sculptures, bright fabrics, wood carvings and other handicrafts. The spice market might spark the imagination of home cooks.



An elephant ride may be part of the tourist experience at the Tropical Spice Plantation in Goa.

Cruise line shore excursions visit Dudhsagar Waterfall by four-wheel-drive vehicle into the foothills of the Western Ghats mountain range. The cascade divides into three main channels as it plummets nearly 2,000 feet. Elephant rides often are part of the package. Birders take excursions to the Dr Salim Ali Bird Sanctuary, where more than 400 species of local and migrating birds perch among the mangroves on Chorao Island. The sanctuary lies within walking distance of the Mandovi River ferry crossing, 20 miles from the cruise port.

Passengers with an interest in architecture have several options in addition to excursions to Old Goa. Sri Manguesh Temple, the most visited Hindu temple in Goa, dates back more than 400 years. Observers see Christian influences in its tower and Muslim style in its domed roof. It is dedicated to a reincarnated version of Lord Shiva. Visitors must remove their shoes, and women must cover shoulders and midriffs.

Fort Aguada envelops a peninsula at the mouth of the river leading to Old Goa. The Portuguese built it in the 1600s and named it for their word for water, *agua*. Sailors completing long ocean voyages happily quenched their thirst at the fort's fresh water springs. A four-story lighthouse was added in 1864.

Panaji, the capital of Goa since 1843, has plazas lined with palm trees, colonial architecture and whitewashed churches. St. Sebastian Chapel's life-size crucifix once hung in Old Goa's Palace of the Inquisition. At Our Lady of the Immaculate Conception, Portuguese sailors gave thanks at the end of a long voyage to the colony. Today's voyagers might be content with a stroll along the Latin Quarter's narrow streets. Balconies hang from villas, their red-tile roofs accenting brightly painted walls in yellow, green and indigo. At welcoming cafes, visitors would imagine they're somewhere in Lisbon, if not for the tuk-tuks and ladies dressed in colorful saris strolling by. **CT**



Se Cathedral was constructed over a period of 90 years and is one of the largest churches in Asia.

KNOW BEFORE YOU GO

Cruise Lines That Call: AIDA, Costa, TUI, Norwegian, Regent Seven Seas, Celebrity, Oceania, Azamara, Silversea

Documents: Cruise passengers need a visa in addition to a passport.

Weather: October to February is best with highs around 82 degrees. March to May is summer season with highs around 97. June to September is the rainy season.

Language: India has 22 official languages. The most commonly spoken in Goa are Konkani, English, Hindi and Marathi.

Money Matters: Currency is the rupee. ATMs are available in large cities. Credit cards may not be accepted at small businesses.

Getting Around: Shore excursions are generally by motorcoach. For independent excursions, negotiate a price for taxis without meters. Taxis used by locals are black and yellow; white tourist taxis may have more comforts, such as air-conditioning. Arrange for an English-speaking driver to stay with you throughout your excursion because locating a taxi at your destination may be difficult. Drivers often promote themselves as guides. Guides approved by the government carry an identity card.

For More Information: Contact Government of Goa, Department of Tourism, goa-tourism.com.



Fort Aguada takes its name from the Portuguese word for water. Sailors drank from its springs.