

Three unhurried days in Goa: Old Goa churches, spice farms and southern beaches

Goa, Goa — The Pearl of the Orient

This plan blends Goa's Portuguese-Goan heritage with its calmer, family-safe beaches, starting in Panaji and Old Goa, moving through a spice plantation and North Goa's forts, and ending on the wide, gentle sands of the south. It is built for a mixed-age group, older parents included, with moderate walking, shaded rest stops, and sit-down Goan meals rather than late-night shack-hopping.

Suits: Families with children or elderly parents, and mixed-age groups who want Goa's culture and food alongside beach time rather than a purely party-focused trip

What it costs, per person

Stay: Rs 11,200 · Food: Rs 2,750 · Local transport: Rs 1,880 · Tickets: Rs 1,600 · **Total: Rs 17,430**

Day 1 · Old Goa, Panaji and the Mandovi river

Portuguese-Goan heritage and river culture

09:00 Basilica of Bom Jesus and Se Cathedral, Old Goa

Start at the UNESCO-listed Basilica holding the remains of St Francis Xavier, then walk over to the adjoining Se Cathedral, one of Asia's largest churches. Both are within a five-minute walk of each other, so easy to cover together.

Old Goa · 75 min · Rs 0 · Taxi from Ginger Goa, Panaji, approx 20 minutes, approx 150 INR

With family: Flat, shaded courtyards inside, but stone floors can be slippery when wet; avoid the midday sun for elderly parents by going early.

10:30 Divar Island ferry crossing and village walk

Take the free government ferry from Old Goa (Ribandar) across the Mandovi to Divar Island, a quiet farming village with old Goan mansions and paddy fields and almost no tourist crowd. A gentle walk or short auto ride around the island shows a side of Goa away from the beaches.

Divar Island · 150 min · Rs 0 · Taxi 10 minutes to the ferry point, approx 50 INR, then free ferry crossing

With family: The ferry itself is flat and easy for wheelchairs or prams, but there is little shade on the island, so carry water and a hat.

16:00 Fontainhas Latin Quarter walking loop

Wander through Panaji's old Latin Quarter of narrow lanes, pastel-coloured Portuguese-era houses, and small art cafes. It is compact and flat, good for an unhurried evening stroll before dinner.

Fontainhas, Panaji · 90 min · Rs 0 · Taxi back to Panaji, approx 20 minutes, approx 150 INR

With family: Flat, walkable streets with benches and cafes for elderly members to rest between stretches.

18:30 Mandovi River Cruise with live Goan folk music

A relaxed 90-minute boat cruise on the Mandovi river out of Panaji, with live Konkani folk music and dance on board. Low-effort and comfortable for grandparents and young children alike.

Panaji riverfront jetty · 90 min · Rs 500 · Walk 10 minutes from Fontainhas to the jetty

With family: Onboard seating and restrooms available; a good sit-down evening option after a walking-heavy day.

Where to eat

Breakfast: Simple hotel breakfast or poi bhaji from a local bakery — Near Ginger Goa, Panaji (Rs 150)

Lunch: Goan fish thali or prawn curry rice — Viva Panjim, Panaji (Rs 400)

Dinner: Sit-down Goan-Portuguese meal, try sorpotel or bebinca — Mum's Kitchen or similar, Panaji (Rs 500)

Where to stay

Ginger Goa, Panaji — Rs 3,500 a night. Reliable, comfortable base close to Old Goa and Panaji sightseeing, keeping today's travel times short

Save a little: Skip a private taxi for the Fontainhas walk and combine it with the cruise jetty on foot; the ferry to Divar Island is already free, so the day's real spend is mostly the cruise ticket.

Day total, per person: Rs 5,550

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Day 2 · Spice plantations and the forts of North Goa

Food, forts and sea views

09:00 Sahakari Spice Farm guided walk and Goan thali lunch

A guided walk through pepper, cardamom and nutmeg plantations near Ponda, ending with a traditional Goan thali lunch included in the visit. Some plantations offer elephant interactions nearby, best skipped on animal-welfare grounds.

Ponda · 150 min · Rs 600 · Self-drive rental car or shared taxi from Panaji, approx 45 minutes, approx 200 INR

With family: Plantation paths are uneven and can be muddy after rain; sturdy footwear helps, and the lunch covers most vegetarian and non-vegetarian needs.

13:00 Fort Aguada and lighthouse

A 17th-century Portuguese fort at Sinquerim with sweeping Arabian Sea views and a working lighthouse, built to guard against Dutch and Maratha attacks.

Sinquerim · 60 min · Rs 0 · Drive approx 1 hour from Ponda, approx 250 INR

With family: The walk to the top has uneven stone paths and no railings in places; elderly parents should take it slowly and skip the very top if unsteady.

15:00 Chapora Fort

A hilltop fort above Vagator known for its appearance in Dil Chahta Hai, now mostly ruins but with strong views over the river mouth and coastline.

Vagator · 45 min · Rs 0 · Drive 15 minutes from Fort Aguada, approx 80 INR

With family: Short but uneven climb with no shade at the top; carry water and avoid midday heat with small children.

17:00 Vagator Beach sunset walk

A short walk down from the fort to Vagator's red-cliff beach, a good spot to watch the sunset without the crowds of Baga or Calangute.

Vagator Beach · 60 min · Rs 0 · Walk 10 minutes downhill from Chapora Fort

With family: Strong currents here, so this is a photo-and-walk stop rather than a swimming beach; keep children away from the water's edge.

Where to eat

Breakfast: Hotel breakfast — Ginger Goa, Panaji (Rs 150)

Lunch: Traditional Goan thali included in the spice farm visit — Sahakari Spice Farm, Ponda (Rs 0)

Dinner: Sit-down Goan seafood dinner, try fish caldeen or crab xec xec — Restaurant in Vagator or Anjuna (Rs 500)

Where to stay

Ginger Goa, Panaji — Rs 3,500 a night. Continuing base for the day's loop through central and North Goa, avoiding a mid-trip hotel change

Save a little: The spice farm lunch is bundled into the entry fee, so treat it as your main meal of the day and keep dinner light and simple.

Day total, per person: Rs 5,430

Day 3 · South to Palolem and the quieter beaches

Transfer south, cliff views and calmer beach time

09:30 Palolem Beach and morning dolphin-spotting boat trip

Check out of Panaji and drive south to Palolem's crescent bay, calmer and shallower than most North Goa beaches. Most mornings, local boats run short dolphin-spotting trips just off the coast before the day gets hot.

Palolem, South Goa · 180 min · Rs 500 · Drive from Panaji, approx 1.5 hours (70 km), approx 350 INR shared

With family: Palolem's shallow, calmer water is one of the safer beaches for children, but the boat trip can cause motion sickness for elderly members; those prone to it may prefer to wait on the beach instead.

13:30 Cabo de Rama Fort viewpoint

A cliffside fort with long uninterrupted coastal views and far fewer crowds than Aguada or Chapora. The interior is mostly ruins, so treat it as a viewpoint stop rather than a full sightseeing visit.

Cabo de Rama · 45 min · Rs 0 · Drive 30 minutes from Palolem, approx 150 INR

With family: There are no railings at several cliff edges; hold children's hands firmly and be cautious in windy weather.

16:00 Check-in and pool time at Lemon Tree Amarante

Drive to Utorda and settle into the resort's pool and beach access for the evening, a good wind-down after two full days of sightseeing.

Utorda · 120 min · Rs 0 · Drive 45 minutes from Cabo de Rama to Utorda, approx 200 INR

With family: Pool access is easier than the beach for elderly parents or very young children who need to avoid open sea currents.

Where to eat

Breakfast: Hotel breakfast before checkout — Ginger Goa, Panaji (Rs 150)

Lunch: Beach shack fish curry rice or grilled kingfish — Palolem Beach shack (Rs 400)

Dinner: Sit-down Goan-Portuguese dinner, try bebinca for dessert — Restaurant near Lemon Tree Amarante, Utorda/Majorda (Rs 500)

Where to stay

Lemon Tree Amarante, Utorda — Rs 4,200 a night. Pool and beach access in quieter South Goa, a comfortable close to the trip for families with children or older parents

Save a little: Skip the boat dolphin trip if travelling with very young children or anyone prone to seasickness, and use that saved amount toward the sit-down dinner instead.

Day total, per person: Rs 6,450

Pack for this trip

- Light cotton clothing plus one light layer for river cruise evenings
- A hat, sunscreen and reusable water bottle, especially for the fort and spice farm walks
- Comfortable closed shoes for uneven fort paths at Aguada, Chapora and Cabo de Rama
- A printed or digital copy of ID for hotel check-ins and any bike/car rental

Stay safe

- Swim only at flagged, lifeguarded stretches of beach and never let children swim unsupervised, even where the water looks calm; rip currents are Goa's biggest real risk
- If renting a scooter or car, insist on helmets for everyone, avoid unlit village roads at night, and photograph the vehicle's condition before and after rental
- Agree on taxi fares before getting in, especially outside prepaid counters at the airports or railway station
- Avoid late-night beach areas in Anjuna, Vagator and Baga with children or elderly parents in tow

Local courtesies

- Dress modestly when visiting churches like the Basilica of Bom Jesus and Se Cathedral; shoulders and knees covered is appreciated
- Bargaining is normal and expected at markets, but keep it good-natured
- Tipping 10% at sit-down restaurants is appreciated though not mandatory
- Locals are generally relaxed with tourists, but the usual caution around isolated beaches after dark still applies

If it rains

- Swap outdoor fort visits (Aguada, Chapora, Cabo de Rama) for the covered galleries and interiors of the Basilica of Bom Jesus and Se Cathedral
- The Mandovi River Cruise usually still runs in light rain; check with the operator on the day
- Sahakari Spice Farm's guided walk has covered sections and can continue in drizzle, though paths get slippery
- Beach time can be replaced with a slow Fontainhas cafe-hopping walk or a visit to Panaji's indoor market areas