

Sun-drenched [beaches](#), crumbling Portuguese mansions and all night, full-moon parties have made Goa a popular destination. But don't expect paradise. Resort hotels, Kingfisher umbrellas, [beach](#) peddlers burnt-to-red tourists compete for spaces on the beach.

REPORT
of the month



Mar 2006
Get Your Kits Out

Goa's southern beaches at Colva, Benaulim, Palolem get their fair share of package tourists and individual travellers, as do the northern beaches of Calangute, Baga and Anjuna, which are more crowded. In December and January, the high season, they are packed.

Goa has been discovered by the package tourists. But, it is still possible to find (almost) unspoilt beaches, where you can sit under softly whispering palm trees and watch the fishermen haul in their day's catch. With a rented bike you can escape the beach front mob and create your own private paradise a few km away.



Fully dressed women enjoy the Indian Ocean

Colva lies midway along the longest strip of sand in Goa: 26-km of sparkling white and emerald blue. Colva beach is alive from early November to late March. Azure blue skies and an average temperature of 30 degrees C (86 F) draws sun loving tourists in droves. December and January are the peak months when prices soar.

Colva means beach life but you can escape it every now and then. Margao is 30 mins by bus and the nearest town to make you feel what Indian cities are like: crowded, chaotic but utterly charming. Panjim is only 90 mins by bus, taxis are not much faster as the road is narrow. (read my report about Panjim for the sights)

During the monsoon from June to September only a trickle of tourists head for the beaches to enjoy the sunny stretches in between torrential downpours.

Colva is some 25 km south of Dabolim Airport. There are prepaid taxis or alternatively take the bus to Margao (about one hour), where you can hop on the Colva bus (20 mins). Along the route you soak up Portuguese atmosphere as you will pass many Portuguese mansion easily recognisable by their porches and red-tiled roofs.

Margao, the nearest town to Colva, is a [transport](#) hub. The Konkan Railway Station is 4 km to the south of the city centre and serves all stations between Mumbai and Trivandrum. The only flaw is that there are only two trains a day.

There is one ATM safe with a guard on duty

Favourite spots:

Colva's main road begins at the beach front roundabout and heads east into Colva village. Here you catch a bus to Margao, swap dog-eared paperbacks at Damodar's bookshop, or drink 'chai', a concoction of milk, tea and sugar.

This roundabout and the beach is my favourite place at the weekend. Busloads of Indian tourists arrive, mostly men. When you think that the beach is full, a few more squeeze in. No one notices that the beach IS crowded. Or perhaps they do, because everybody STANDS. Men with-rolled up trousers, women fully dressed, a party of giggling school girls venture into the sea



Young men stroll along the beach and stare at sun-bathers

Some men stroll along the beach, not because this is an healthy exercise but they want to stare at sunbathers. Goa is famous throughout [India](#) for the fact that women tourists are 'on show'.

Sunday afternoon the buses leave again. On Monday the beach is yours again. All you have to do is share with the other western tourists.

What's really great:



The beach ladies never adopt hard sell methods

The [Indian Ocean](#) at dawn: the sky an empty blue, the beach a sparkling carpet of white sand, brassy cries of jet-black crows disturbing the tranquil air. I can sit here forever and soak up the serene morning atmosphere, but that would be very boring and lonely so I am happy when the first tourists appear with the sarong-selling ladies in their wake.

The ladies are tenacious but never adopt hard sell methods. If you promise to buy on your last day, and a promise is a promise, they won't bother you more than once a day. This is to make sure that you won't forget them. And why should you, even if you don't need their

sarongs, necklaces, anklets or carved elephants buy some trinket from them before you leave. The money they earn this way, does make the difference for them.

If you have enough of your inactive beach life, walk to Benaulim (20 mins), quieter than Colva, or hire a pushbike. We liked this walk so much and went all the way to Mobor (15 km) and took the bus back.

Sights:

Margao is the nearest big city. (20 mins by bus). It is also known as Madgaon, and Goa's second largest commercial centre and an important transport hub. It doesn't abound in tourist attractions but its bustling streets are truly Indian and an eye opener for anyone who has spent too many days on the beaches.

I especially liked the many 18th century houses along Abade Faria Road (leading to the bus station). They were built by the Portuguese, have tiled roofs and wooden verandas. Some are still in very good condition. Don't miss the Old Market Square, dominated by the Baroque Church of the Holy Spirit and surrounded by a number of Portuguese-style house.



Bringing home today's catch

The Indian Ocean is superb especially late afternoon when the sun makes the surface flicker with a hundred different colours. There are just enough beach shacks to make the seashore lively. However, it's no longer the laid-back fishing village of twenty years ago. Frantic building is making the place into a 'resort in training'.

Accommodations:



Eddie's Guesthouse, right in the middle of the fishing community

Accommodation is not difficult to arrange on spec. If you arrive late in the day you may have to try several places as some [hotels](#) are pre-booked by [tour operators](#) and some of the smaller guesthouses tend to be booked up before the season starts by long-stay guests

We first stayed in:

White Sand [Guest House](#). Follow the sign to Longuinhos Beach Hotel. Some way up the road on your right you will see: Clinton Guesthouse. Follow this sign and White Sands is the second house on the left. It is a purpose-built block of eight rooms on two floors. Each room has its own veranda and the bonus is the mosquito net over the bed. It is good value at Rs 500 (€ 10)

Then we moved to:

Eddie's Guesthouse as we wanted to have ocean view. This guesthouse is right in the middle of the fishing village and close to Eddie's Place the last beach shack in northern direction. The rooms are smaller than in White Sand, but the view of the ocean makes up for it. At Rs 300 (€ 6) it is better value than White Sands

Nightlife:



Palolem, once paradise now tourist territory



There are no clubs. Instead a note about Palolem.

Palolem is 42 km south of Colva and can easily be visited on a [day trip](#).

Guidebooks tried to make me believe that Palolem is the ultimate tropical paradise. Whispering palm trees and a one-kilometre long crescent of sand, flanked by forested hillocks and black rock, tree huts to spend the night. It is true the crescent is a picture postcard, but the only tropical virtue Palolem lacks is that of quiet.

Guesthouses sprang up everywhere. The result is that they have swallowed up the remaining sandy patches between the palm trees. The seafront is one uninterrupted string of tree huts on stilts.

We did not go for a swim because a yellow streak floating on the sea showed that the sewage system could not cope with the influx of guests.

Hangouts:

Buying and consuming alcohol is no problem in Goa. Follow the weekend crowd and you will end up in the liquor shop, with a wide choice of foreign strong drinks and beer. Kingfisher, Belo and Sandpiper are all Goan and taste different from European beer, slightly sweeter.

All restaurants and beach shacks serve alcoholic drinks. Boomerang is a bar and looked very inviting, but we didn't go in as alcohol and a hot climate don't go very well together. It is in northern direction, follow the sign Longuinhos Beach Resort. It is on your left with lots of twinkling lights.



Fishermen watched by the omnipresent crows

Nightlife tends to wind down early in Colva. Shops along the main road close between 7.30 am 8 pm. Restaurants stay open longer but by 10.30 pm it is pretty quiet everywhere.

Other recommendations:

Every Wednesday you can go to the Anjuna flea market. It started off as a market organised by the hippies where they swapped books, sold home-made cakes etc. These days it is far more commercial. Nepali and Kashmiri handicraft hawkers sit next to lady seller from Rajasthan. The goods on sale are a bit disappointing as you can find the same in the souvenir shops in Colva.



This is the corner from where to catch a taxi to Anjuna

If you want to go it is best to take up one of the transport offers. On Tuesday every taxi owner will ask you if you intend to visit the flea market. Take the first offer, there is no competition in prices. I would not recommend to you to go by public transport as it involves taking too many different buses, which makes the trip almost endless

The all night, full moon, rave parties have diminished as the Government likes to see well-heeled tourists who can spend more rupees than the hippy crowd that invaded Goa in the seventies If you want to take part

you will have to go to Vagator or Gokarna in Karnataka

Restaurants:

For breakfast we liked dosa, a crispy, paper-thin rice pancake served with sambar, a lentil - vegetable curry, and coconut sauce. Masala dosa is a the same but with a filling of potato curry. Dosas are served either rolled up or as a pointed hat.

Colva's main street is lined with many more restaurants and so is the beach front.

The night market, in full operation at the weekend is right behind the parking lot at the beach front. Small stalls serve snacks like

bhel puri: a Mumbai speciality, small puris (kind of puffed bread) stuffed with vegetables.

We have one golden rule we stick to: we never eat meat or fish when in a third world country. Mostly it is impossible to tell if the meat and fish are fresh, the many power cuts mean that refrigerators are not reliable. During our two months in India we never had stomach trouble, and I attribute it to a vegetarian diet.

Published on Friday March 10th, 2006



Dosa, a crispy rice pancake in the shape of a pointed hat