

100 cobbled
ROADS
and a million footprints on my soul



Five offbeat ways to find bliss in the glory of Goa

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Flashback to freedom in Goa

100 days of lockdown. 100 days of blue skies, birdsong and window-facing workdays. 100 days of balcony greens, dewdrops and virtual events. 100 days of introspective solitude and small mercies. Occasional anxiety bouts and unexpected disaster-strikes. Largely #ThriveAtHome theme. And finally, a break in hibernation, thanks to an unavoidable errand. Covid-proof drive through almost-forgotten roads. Untrimmed bougainvillea bushes breaking free in joyous abandon. Expressionless masked mortals trapped in the safety of sanitised vehicles. Me: weighing the value of freedom on a leash...

Floodgates of flashback, familiar waves of wanderlust. Rewinding to pleasures of pure liberty...open roads, big skies, rolled down windows, impromptu stops and switched-off wifi. An unmapped windy route, wide-angle coastal views and dark cover of rain-swollen clouds. Airy linen, flip-flops, straw hat, zero makeup, messy hair. Memories of Goa done differently...



Fields and farmsteads

Digging deeper to immerse in the charms of Goa's rural reality and defining a new laid-back. No sunshades of swanky beachside resorts, no lively hipster vibes to break the bliss. Just an envelope of quietude and a stamp of silence. Catching the sun wink through dangling palm fronds on a secluded boardwalk. Spotting brownish hues on tight bunches of coconuts that suspend from tall trees. Slowly trailing locals who are hunched up on bikes on shady country lanes. Patiently waiting for the play of light and shadow at fences that guard yellow-and-green paddy fields. Staring at sturdy farmhouses that bake happily on emerald pastures under warm skies. Catching random reflections in village ponds. Eyeing women folk dry their laundry. Guessing the interiors of old houses surrounded by the thick green cover. Wandering in and out of spice and pineapple plantations, smelling the purity of organic produce and picking up wildflowers from bushes. Nerves relaxing even before the languor of afternoon seeps in.















Faith forever

Stumbling upon the hundreds of not-so-famous houses of God that dot the landscape. Noticing streaks and scratches on the blue-painted doors of a white-washed beauty. Getting closer to uncover the full glory of another that is protected by a fringe of palm trees. Studying the unusual domes and pillared balconies in one with a more elaborate design...making futile attempts to separate the blended influences. Waiting at moss-draped stairs that whisper age-old secrets. Imagining flying bouquet and peals of laughter at a lively wedding ceremony, where only emptiness lives now. Photographing the needle-thin steeples, trying to remember where you've seen something similar. Ogling at the minimalistic design sensibilities of the brick church poised on the roadside. Thinking of what it's called and why it isn't part of a travel brochure. Braking suddenly to soak in the contrast of the puritan white against the dull green of the river. Location, it seems yet again, changes everything. Too many to keep count...

























Formidable fort

With a name translated as ‘three wise men’ and a 500-year legacy as Goa’s oldest bastion of Portuguese rule, and all the trappings to tickle the curiosity of a history nerd. The GPS-guided trail winding through the Verem village and a nondescript parking spot on the Mandovi riverbank, are modest introductions. But the steep, cobbled mossy path up a shady hill...that’s where the magic kicks in. Surprises lurk everywhere in the un-fort like complex of Reis Magos.

Terracotta-roof structures that double up as galleries for artillery and ammunition displays, a well-stocked library flaunting vintage literature, eerie confinement rooms and Portuguese-era cannons reminding of maritime wars. Unexpected takeaway? A fabulous art gallery that pays tribute to quirky cartoonist Mario Miranda. And the climax? A deck with eye-popping views of Mandovi River, Arabian Sea and Panjim. Wait, is that an enemy ship in the distance?



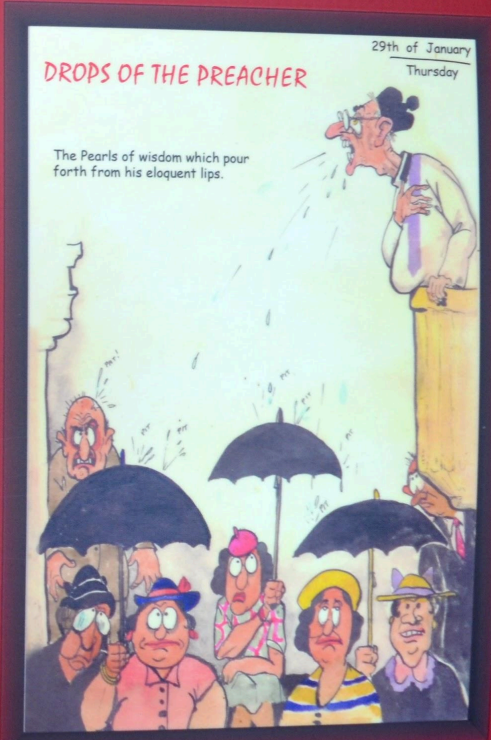














Reis Magos, Goa



Fabulous facades

Searching for rainbows on the ground at Fontainhas, Goa's cheerful Latin Quarter. Diving into delight piece of Portugal with an original Indian heart. Collecting pictures as souvenirs from every instaworthy lane of a unique UNESCO heritage zone. Ticking off colours from the vibrantly painted huddle of houses. Hunting for exotic descriptions...marigold, turquoise, crimson and lapis. Marvelling at the symmetry of potted plants in the streets. Admiring the decorative arched windows and intricate ironwork on grilled balconies. Noticing fine shell ornamentation and rooster statues inviting good luck. Staring at the fine handmade azulejo signboards outside houses and noticing street names prefixed 'Rua'. Uncovering interesting wall murals that mimic real life. Loitering, feeling the uninterrupted, slow rhythm of the centuries-old community. Continuing the mood in the hilly, leafy avenues of Altinho, where graceful mansions stand draped in shadows of coconut-laden front-yards and lovely garden fountains gurgle away in sultry afternoons.



















VIVENDA
GOMES PEREIRA







Forkfuls of flavours

Great gastronomy, topped with atmosphere setting. Mutton xacuti on benches under a terracotta roof overlooking a neighbour's garden. Coriander-rich chicken cafreal with a beach-view window watching paragliders. Pork Vindaloo with steaming rice on ornate chairs on a balcony cafe beside a vintage crockery cabinet. Succulent platter of prawn in a bohemian beach restaurant, toes sunk in sand, facing an iron gate mythically leading to the sea. Ravean Bhajlelo Chonak (fish fry) and Prawn Curry with poee (bread) in a homely Portuguese-era khanavats with earthen ware, spice grinding stone and floral tiled tables. Mackerel and murals to up the Goanesque quotient even more. A steaming cup of coffee in the courtyard cafe of an arts centre, just because the vibe is so infectious. Coconut, kokum, poee bread...could get so used to this cuisine and this city. Retirement plans. No, 'regular ritual' plans.





















A fabulous finale to conclude a glorious getaway. An easy couple of hours surrendering to the daily spectacle of nature at the shores of the Arabian Sea. Tracing the ebb and flow of curly, roaring waves. Outlining the deepening silhouette of the Aguada Fort. Getting goosebumps watching the live painting ceremony of blushing skies awash with roses, pinks, oranges, purples and navys. Tough to slip out of this Susegaad. Why even try?



















