

A relaxed two-day taste of Goa: forts, churches and village life

Goa, Goa — The Pearl of the Orient

This plan skips the party beaches and instead threads together Old Goa's UNESCO churches, the pastel lanes of Fontainhas, two quiet forts and a slow river-island morning, with a spice-farm thali lunch thrown in. It is built for a family with children and grandparents, using a single North Goa base so no one has to pack and unpack, and keeping each day to a handful of unhurried, flat-walking stops.

Suits: Families with young children or elderly parents, and groups of friends who want culture and food alongside beach time rather than nightlife

What it costs, per person

Stay: Rs 6,400 · Food: Rs 1,500 · Local transport: Rs 1,150 · Tickets: Rs 525 · **Total: Rs 9,575**

Day 1 · Old Goa's churches and Panaji's Latin Quarter

Portuguese-era heritage, done at a gentle pace

09:00 Basilica of Bom Jesus & Old Goa Churches

Start at the Basilica, which holds the remains of St Francis Xavier, then walk over to the Se Cathedral and the smaller chapels nearby. Entry to the Basilica is free and the whole cluster is flat and shaded enough for grandparents and young children to cover comfortably.

Old Goa · 90 min · Rs 0 · Taxi or self-drive scooter from Candolim, approx 30 minutes, approx 150 INR per person shared

With family: Note the Basilica opens at 10:00 on Sundays instead of 09:00, so check the day of the week before setting off this early.

11:00 Fontainhas, Panaji's Latin Quarter

A short drive brings you to Panaji's old quarter of colour-washed Portuguese houses, narrow lanes and small chapels. It is entirely walkable and works well as a photo-and-wander stop before lunch, with cafes tucked into the lanes if anyone needs a break.

Fontainhas, Panaji · 90 min · Rs 0 · Taxi or scooter, approx 15 minutes, approx 100 INR per person

With family: Cobble lanes are uneven in a few spots; fine for children but elderly parents should wear proper shoes rather than sandals.

15:00 Reis Magos Fort

A smaller, restored fort across the Mandovi with a chapel, a small exhibition space and quiet river views, much less crowded than the bigger North Goa forts. It's a short, easy walk suited to a post-lunch slot when the group wants something gentle rather than another long stop.

Reis Magos, near Candolim · 60 min · Rs 0 · Taxi or scooter from Panaji, approx 15 minutes, approx 100 INR per person

With family: Closed on Mondays, so swap this day's order if your visit falls on a Monday, or replace it with extra time at Fontainhas.

16:30 Fort Aguada and sea-facing sunset walk

End the day at this 17th-century headland fort with its working lighthouse and sweeping Arabian Sea views. The rampart walk is flat and short, making it an easy last stop before heading back to the hotel for dinner.

Candolim / Sinquerim · 90 min · Rs 25 · Taxi or scooter from Reis Magos, approx 20 minutes, approx 150 INR per person

With family: Some fee structures for the old jail wing vary by source, so confirm at the ticket counter; the main rampart walk itself is easy for all ages.

Where to eat

Breakfast: Hotel breakfast buffet before setting off early — Lemon Tree Hotel, Candolim (Rs 0)

Lunch: Sit-down Goan-Portuguese lunch, fish curry rice or a vegetarian thali — A mid-range restaurant in Fontainhas or central Panaji (Rs 350)

Dinner: Grilled catch-of-the-day or a North Indian plate at a beach shack — Candolim beach shack (Rs 400)

Where to stay

Lemon Tree Hotel, Candolim, North Goa — Rs 3,200 a night. A reliable mid-range pool property close to Fort Aguada and within easy driving distance of both Old Goa and Panaji, keeping the family from needing to change

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hotels for a two-day trip.

Save a little: Book the Basilica-Fontainhas-Reis Magos-Fort Aguada loop as a single half-day-plus-afternoon taxi hire rather than four separate point-to-point fares; drivers usually quote a flat day rate that works out cheaper than four negotiated trips.

Day total, per person: Rs 4,625

Day 2 · Spice farm mornings and a slow river island

A quieter, greener side of Goa away from the beach belt

08:30 Spice Plantation, Ponda

A guided walk through cardamom, pepper, cinnamon and vanilla is easy underfoot and genuinely interesting for children, followed by an unlimited Goan thali lunch included in the ticket price. It is a shaded, low-effort morning that suits grandparents just as well as kids.

Ponda · 180 min · Rs 500 · Taxi or scooter from Candolim, approx 45 minutes, approx 300 INR per person

With family: Lunch is included in the entry ticket, so no separate meal cost needed for this stop; child tickets are cheaper at approx 300 INR.

13:00 Divar Island by ferry

Take the free government ferry from Ribandar or Old Goa across to Divar Island, a quiet stretch of laterite Portuguese-era houses, paddy fields and old churches with none of the mainland's crowds. It's a gentle wander rather than a sightseeing checklist, and a good way to slow the pace after a busy morning.

Divar Island, via Old Goa/Ribandar ferry point · 180 min · Rs 0 · Taxi or scooter from Ponda to the ferry point, approx 20 minutes, approx 150 INR per person; ferry crossing is free for passengers

With family: The island has no ATMs, so carry cash for any small purchases; the ferry itself is a short, calm ride that young children usually enjoy.

17:00 Evening beach relax

Head back to Candolim for a low-key evening on the sand, with shack chairs and shade rather than any planned activity, letting children paddle in shallow, flagged areas while the adults wind down before dinner.

Candolim Beach · 90 min · Rs 0 · Taxi or scooter from the ferry point, approx 30 minutes, approx 200 INR per person

With family: Swim only where lifeguard flags are visible, and keep small children within arm's reach; currents can appear suddenly even on calmer North Goa beaches.

Where to eat

Breakfast: Hotel breakfast before the drive to Ponda — Lemon Tree Hotel, Candolim (Rs 150)

Lunch: Unlimited Goan thali included in the spice plantation ticket — Spice Plantation, Ponda (Rs 0)

Dinner: Sit-down Goan-Portuguese dinner, prawn curry rice or vindaloo for the adventurous — Mid-range restaurant in Candolim (Rs 450)

Where to stay

Lemon Tree Hotel, Candolim, North Goa — Rs 3,200 a night. Staying put for the second night avoids repacking and keeps the return drive from Divar Island short before dinner and rest.

Save a little: Skip a separate dinner splurge and eat a lighter thali at a smaller Candolim eatery instead of a sit-down seafood restaurant, since lunch at the spice plantation is already generous and filling.

Day total, per person: Rs 4,950

Pack for this trip

- Flat, closed shoes for church and fort walks; cobbled Fontainhas lanes and laterite fort steps are uneven
- A hat, sunscreen and water bottles, since several stops (Fort Aguada, Divar Island, spice plantation paths) involve time outdoors without much shade
- Cash for Divar Island, which has no ATMs, and for small vendors and shack tips generally
- A light rain layer if travelling outside the November-February window, since sudden showers are common in the shoulder months

Stay safe

- Swim only where lifeguard flags are up on Candolim and nearby beaches, and keep small children within arm's reach; currents can turn strong with little warning
- Reis Magos Fort is closed on Mondays, so reorder Day 1 if needed
- Agree taxi fares before getting in, since point-to-point tourist quotes run well above the official meter rate; a day-rate hire for Day 1's loop is usually better value than four separate fares
- If self-driving a rented scooter, avoid night rides, insist on helmets for everyone including teenagers, and photograph the vehicle at pickup to avoid scratch disputes at return

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Local courtesies

- Modest dress (shoulders and knees covered) is appreciated when entering the Basilica and other churches
- Konkani and Marathi are the local languages, but Hindi and English work comfortably everywhere, including with taxi and shack staff
- A polite, firm decline works well with touts pushing water-sports packages near the busier beaches

If it rains

- Old Goa's churches and Fontainhas are both covered or easily done under an umbrella, making Day 1 largely rain-proof
- The Divar Island ferry and spice plantation walk are best postponed in heavy rain; swap in Fort Aguada's museum wing or a longer Fontainhas cafe stop instead
- During the monsoon (June-September), avoid the sea entirely for children and expect some beach shacks to be shut, so lean more on the church, fort and spice-farm stops in this plan