

Five relaxed days in Goa: forts, churches, spice farms and calmer southern beaches

Goa, Goa — The Pearl of the Orient

This itinerary threads together Goa's Portuguese-era heritage, a spice-farm and waterfall day, and the calmer southern beaches, keeping walks flat and drives short so grandparents and small children stay comfortable throughout. Three nights are based in the Candolim belt for easy access to forts and Old Goa, then the group shifts south to Benaulim for a quieter, family-paced finish around Palolem.

Suits: Multi-generational families and groups of friends who want culture, food and beach time without long transfers, late nights, or serious physical exertion.

What it costs, per person

Stay: Rs 6,600 · Food: Rs 3,900 · Local transport: Rs 3,800 · Tickets: Rs 2,175 · **Total: Rs 16,475**

Day 1 · Arrival and North Goa's coastal fort

Settling in, Fort Aguada, sunset by the sea

10:00 Airport pickup and transfer to Candolim

Take a prepaid taxi from the counter at Manohar International Airport, Mopa, to Candolim; agree the fare at the counter rather than with touts outside. The drive takes about 45 minutes on decent roads.

Mopa Airport to Candolim · 45 min · Rs 400

With family: Ask for a sedan or SUV if travelling with prams or extra luggage; prepaid counters are safer than negotiating outside.

11:00 Check-in and rest at hotel

Settle into the hotel, freshen up and let children and grandparents rest after the flight before heading out in the cooler afternoon.

Lemon Tree Hotel, Candolim · 90 min · Rs 0 · Same property, no travel needed

15:00 Fort Aguada visit

Walk the flat ramparts of this 17th-century Portuguese fort, see the still-working lighthouse, and take in views over the Arabian Sea. The whole loop is short and manageable in flat shoes.

Fort Aguada, near Candolim · 90 min · Rs 25 · Taxi/auto-rickshaw, 10 minutes, approx 150 INR

With family: Flat and shaded in parts; the old jail wing has uneven sections, so keep an eye on young children there.

18:00 Sunset walk and beach shack dinner

Walk along Candolim beach as the sun sets, then settle into a shack with chairs and shade for a relaxed dinner of grilled fish and a vegetarian thali option for anyone who prefers it.

Candolim Beach · 120 min · Rs 0 · Walk, 10 minutes, free

With family: Keep small children within arm's reach in the water even in shallow areas, and avoid swimming after dark.

Where to eat

Breakfast: Hotel breakfast buffet — Lemon Tree Hotel, Candolim (Rs 150)

Lunch: Simple thali and grilled fish — Vinayak Family Restaurant, near Fort Aguada (Rs 350)

Dinner: Grilled catch-of-the-day and prawn curry rice — Beach shack, Candolim (Rs 400)

Where to stay

Lemon Tree Hotel, Candolim, North Goa — Rs 1,600 a night. Reliable mid-range chain with a pool, close to Fort Aguada, and easy for families with children

Save a little: Use the airport's prepaid taxi counter rather than agreeing to a fare with drivers waiting outside; prices are fixed and usually lower.

Day total, per person: Rs 3,075

Day 2 · Old Goa's churches and a quiet river island

Portuguese-era heritage and village Goa

09:00 Basilica of Bom Jesus and Old Goa churches

Walk through the UNESCO complex of churches anchored by the Basilica, which holds the remains of St Francis Xavier, and the nearby Se Cathedral. The site is flat, shaded in parts, and easy for grandparents and children alike.

Old Goa · 120 min · Rs 0 · Taxi from Candolim, 25 minutes, approx 200 INR

With family: Basilica entry is free; the complex can get crowded by midmorning in peak winter months, so an early start helps.

11:30 Ferry to Divar Island

A short drive to the Ribandar jetty followed by a free government ferry crossing to Divar Island, a quiet spot with laterite Portuguese-era houses, old churches and paddy fields, with none of the mainland's crowds.

Divar Island · 180 min · Rs 0 · Drive 10 minutes (approx 50 INR) then free ferry, 15 minutes

With family: The ferry crossing is calm and short, suitable for toddlers and elderly parents; there are no ATMs on the island, so carry cash for lunch.

15:30 Fontainhas Latin Quarter walk

Wander the narrow lanes of Panaji's old quarter, with colour-washed Portuguese-era houses, small chapels and cafes, best enjoyed at a slow pace in the cooler late-afternoon light.

Fontainhas, Panaji · 90 min · Rs 0 · Ferry back plus taxi, 30 minutes, approx 150 INR

With family: Some cobblestone lanes are uneven; comfortable flat shoes recommended for elderly parents.

Where to eat

Breakfast: Hotel breakfast — Lemon Tree Hotel, Candolim (Rs 150)

Lunch: Simple village thali — Local eatery, Divar Island (Rs 250)

Dinner: Goan fish curry and rice — Viva Panjim, Fontainhas (Rs 500)

Where to stay

Lemon Tree Hotel, Candolim, North Goa — Rs 1,600 a night. Same base as day 1, keeps the group settled without repacking

Save a little: Divar Island's ferry is free for foot passengers, and the village eateries are cheaper than mainland restaurants, so make this the day's main meal stop.

Day total, per person: Rs 3,200

Day 3 · Dudhsagar Falls and a spice farm

Waterfall jeep safari and a shaded spice-garden walk

09:00 Jeep safari to Dudhsagar Falls

After an early drive to Collem, join the official sanctioned jeep safari into the wildlife sanctuary to reach the four-tiered waterfall. Only the official jeep or guided trek routes are legal and safe; book through the counter early since only a capped number of trips run each day.

Dudhsagar Falls, Collem · 300 min · Rs 850 · Shared taxi/tour van from Candolim to Collem, 2 hours, approx 700 INR round trip

With family: The jeep ride is bumpy on laterite tracks; not ideal for infants or anyone with back problems. Avoid the illegal railway-track trek, which has caused fatalities.

14:30 Spice Plantation, Ponda

A guided, shaded walk through cardamom, pepper, cinnamon and vanilla plants, followed by an unlimited Goan thali lunch included in the entry fee.

Spice Plantation, Ponda · 120 min · Rs 500 · Taxi, 45 minutes, included in the day's tour transport

With family: Flat, shaded paths suit grandparents well; adults can try a small cashew feni tasting if offered.

17:30 Return to Candolim and rest

Drive back to the hotel for a quiet evening by the pool after a long but easy day out.

Candolim · 90 min · Rs 0 · Taxi/tour van, 2 hours, already covered in the morning's round-trip fare

Where to eat

Breakfast: Hotel breakfast, packed if leaving very early — Lemon Tree Hotel, Candolim (Rs 150)

Lunch: Unlimited Goan thali (included in spice farm entry) — Spice Plantation, Ponda (Rs 0)

Dinner: Light dinner near the hotel — Candolim (Rs 400)

Where to stay

Lemon Tree Hotel, Candolim, North Goa — Rs 1,600 a night. Final night in North Goa before the shift south

Save a little: The spice plantation lunch is already bundled into the entry fee, so budget dinner light and skip a separate paid lunch stop.

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Day total, per person: Rs 4,200

Day 4 · Shift south: a cliffside fort and a calmer beach

Transfer to South Goa via Cabo de Rama

09:30 Transfer from Candolim to Benaulim

Check out and take a shared taxi south to Benaulim, checking in at the hotel before heading back out for the afternoon.

Candolim to Benaulim · 120 min · Rs 500

With family: This is the longest single drive of the trip; time it around a nap for small children.

12:30 Cabo de Rama Fort

Visit this cliffside Portuguese fort with ruined ramparts, an old church, and long coastal views, tied in local legend to the Ramayana. It is far less crowded than the northern forts.

Cabo de Rama, South Goa · 90 min · Rs 0 · Same taxi continues, 45 minutes, approx 100 INR extra

With family: Unfenced cliff edges and uneven laterite steps need close supervision with young children and caution for elderly parents.

17:00 Evening at Palolem Beach

Settle in at Palolem, a calmer crescent beach lined with shacks, better suited to families than the northern party beaches, for a swim before sunset and dinner.

Palolem Beach · 150 min · Rs 0 · Taxi, 30 minutes, approx 150 INR

With family: Swim only in areas near shacks with visible activity; currents can still be strong away from the calmer central stretch.

Where to eat

Breakfast: Hotel breakfast before checkout — Lemon Tree Hotel, Candolim (Rs 150)

Lunch: Packed or simple meal before Cabo de Rama, as village choices are limited — En route to Cabo de Rama (Rs 350)

Dinner: Grilled fish and prawn curry — Beach shack, Palolem (Rs 400)

Where to stay

Fortune Resort Benaulim, Benaulim, South Goa — Rs 1,800 a night. Quieter South Goa base with resort comfort, close to Palolem and Cabo de Rama

Save a little: Eat a proper lunch before heading to Cabo de Rama, since the surrounding villages have very few restaurant options.

Day total, per person: Rs 3,450

Day 5 · Nature walk, a secluded cove, and departure

Cotigao's forest trails and Butterfly Beach before flying out

07:30 Cotigao Wildlife Sanctuary

An early morning nature walk on short, flat trails with a watchtower, a good change of pace from beaches and churches. Best visited before the heat sets in.

Cotigao Wildlife Sanctuary, South Goa · 120 min · Rs 50 · Taxi from Benaulim, 30 minutes, approx 250 INR

With family: Trails are gentle and manageable for most fitness levels; confirm current entry fees with the forest department on arrival.

10:30 Boat trip to Butterfly Beach

A short boat ride from Palolem to this secluded cove with no roads or structures, reachable only by boat or forest trek.

Butterfly Beach, near Palolem · 150 min · Rs 750 · Taxi to Palolem jetty, 30 minutes, approx 250 INR, then boat, 20 minutes

With family: Better suited to older children who can manage a boat ride; toddlers may find it tiring. Insist on life jackets on the boat.

14:00 Lunch at Palolem

A relaxed final meal at a beach shack before the airport run.

Palolem Beach · 90 min · Rs 350 · Walk back to Palolem beach shacks, 10 minutes

16:00 Transfer to Dabolim Airport

Prepaid taxi from Palolem to Dabolim Airport in South Goa, a shorter run than to Mopa from this base.

Palolem to Dabolim Airport · 60 min · Rs 600 · Taxi, 60 minutes, approx 600 INR

With family: Build in a buffer before check-in, especially with young children or elderly parents in the group.

Where to eat

Breakfast: Hotel breakfast before the early start — Fortune Resort Benaulim (Rs 150)

Lunch: Fish thali or grilled catch — Beach shack, Palolem (Rs 350)

Dinner: Light snack at the airport if needed — Dabolim Airport (Rs 150)

Where to stay

Departure day, no overnight stay, South Goa — Rs 0 a night. Trip ends with an evening flight out of Dabolim

Save a little: Book the Butterfly Beach boat as a shared trip with other travellers at the Palolem jetty rather than a private charter, to bring the per-person cost down.

Day total, per person: Rs 2,550

Pack for this trip

- Flat, comfortable walking shoes for fort ramparts and church complexes with some uneven laterite stone
 - A light shawl or cover-up for church visits, where modest dress is appreciated
 - Reef-safe sunscreen, hats and rehydration sachets for midday heat, especially outside the Nov-Feb window
 - A dry bag or spare clothes if doing the Butterfly Beach boat trip
 - Cash in small denominations for Divar Island and village eateries, which often lack card machines or ATMs
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Stay safe

- Swim only where flags and lifeguards are present, and keep small children within arm's reach in the sea at all times
 - Avoid swimming altogether during the monsoon months (June-September), when the sea is rough and unsafe for children
 - Photograph any rented scooter or taxi before use to avoid disputes over pre-existing scratches at return
 - Forts like Cabo de Rama have unfenced cliff edges and uneven steps; supervise children closely and go slow with elderly parents
 - Avoid night travel on scooters, as roads are narrow, poorly lit, and shared with inexperienced riders
 - Only book the Dudhsagar jeep safari through the official counter at Collem; the railway-track route is illegal and dangerous
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Local courtesies

- Dress modestly when entering churches, covering shoulders and knees
 - Agree taxi fares before getting in, since meters are rarely used by tourist taxis and bargaining is normal
 - A polite, firm decline works well with touts pushing water-sports packages near the northern beaches
 - Hindi and English are both widely understood, so language is rarely a barrier even in villages
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If it rains

- Swap Fort Aguada or Cabo de Rama for the covered Basilica and Old Goa church complex, which stays comfortable even in wet weather
- Use the extra time in Fontainhas, where cafes and small heritage buildings offer shelter between showers
- Postpone the Dudhsagar jeep safari to a guided monsoon trek if travelling in the rains, since jeep routes can be suspended in heavy downpours
- Keep the Butterfly Beach boat trip flexible, as boat operators may pause trips in rough weather or high swell