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# Tropical SOJOURN

Traversing the beach capital of India, Goa, amid the new normal

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Often referred to as the "Pearl of the Orient" in India, Goa was among the first states to reopen its borders for tourism when India started inching towards the revival phase last year. Tourism is key to the state's economy as 40 per cent of the population is directly or indirectly dependent on it.

Therefore, proactive measures are being frequently rolled out by Goa's government to speed up the journey towards full recovery. A case in point is the launch of "Coping with Covid-19: Survival and Revival of Goa's Tourism Industry" report that has been developed with the objective of not only reviving the tourism industry, but also strengthening the sector by eliminating pre-Covid issues in the beach-state.

The report estimated that the loss to the industry was expected to be ₹2,000 crore to ₹7,200 crore and potential job losses of 35 per cent to 58 per cent. "These statistics have helped significantly to plan ahead in our conscious effort towards mitigating the challenges posed by Covid-19 and further transforming Goa as the 'Sustainable Tourism Capital of India'", Goa's tourism board said in an official release.

Besides, Goa Tourism Policy 2020 also outlines well-thought strategies and objectives that aim to make Goa the "most preferred destination around the year for high-spending tourists by 2024" and "a world-class international tourism destination by 2030".

The policy covers valuable insights for the development of coastal tourism, culture and heritage, nature-based tourism, leisure and entertainment and MICE among others.

On the safety front, the state has created a safe retreat for visitors by way of the SMS form of travel — Sanitisation, Masks, and Social Distancing. The state received World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC) Global Safe Travels Stamp, further strengthening its position as one of the top travel destinations in India even in the post-Covid scenario.

Ritu Mehrotra, country manager, India, Sri Lanka and Maldives at Booking.com

**PICTURED:** An evening by a Goan beach

Hotels and restaurants are making alterations to offer a more carefree dining experience to guests

**PICTURED:** Calamari

says, "While 2020 was a difficult year for travel where travel dynamics evolved, it is heartening to witness optimism amongst Indians who have demonstrated their travel enthusiasm by booking and searching for domestic destinations and accommodations on our platform. Goa continues to be one of the top searched destinations by Indians travelling domestically and even more so during Christmas and New Year and we see this trend continue in the coming months as well."

Further elaborating on Goa's tourism demand, Sachit Wadhwa, co-founder, Book My Charters says, "Goa remains to be a top tourist destination in the country and we are witnessing a strong demand for private charters from Delhi, Mumbai and Bengaluru to Goa."

## GOING AROUND

Goa, as we know it, has no dearth of scenic viewpoints and tranquil routes. And to soak in these exhilarating sights, all that one needs to do is hire a bike/car, hop on a cycle or get into one of the flat-bottomed ferry boats for the ultimate Susegad way of travelling.

To further facilitate smooth commute across the tropical paradise, the state tourism board has launched GoaMiles, an app-based taxi platform. Services include city rides, booking tours, and airport transfers. Pay securely online and load balance in your GoaMiles account for cashless travel.

For a "greener" mode of transport, visitors can opt for B:Live that boasts being India's first electric bike tour. Take a breezy bike ride across the region and immerse yourself in the local culture, history and heritage of Goa. During the B:Live experience you get to enjoy authentic food, music, and art without leaving behind carbon footprints. The tours are led by Captains who offer valuable insights to travellers about the place and its people.

## REVAMPED DINING

Hotels and restaurants are making alterations across their F&B venues to offer a more carefree dining experience to guests who want to know what is being served to them, and how it is being served.

Sohrab J Parakh, director of marketing, W Goa says, "Guests across the board are becoming increasingly conscious of the food they consume. Chefs at hotels and restaurants have the added responsibility of being able to provide detailed information on the journey of each food item."

He further adds, "Our all-new beverage ambassador is working on a unique hot beverage infusion using immunity boosters such as turmeric, cinnamon, and ginger. Guests can look forward to some delicious beverage concoctions to be paired with our succulent desserts."

At ITC Grand Goa Resort & Spa as well, the F&B and beverage offerings are being re-engineered to suit the 'new normal'. Their "Grab & Go" breakfast service offers contactless breakfast experience in the room where the food is delivered to guests with no physical contact with the server. They also have the "Knock n Drop" time saver dining experience, delivered to guest in the privacy of their room, minus any contact with service associates.

### RESTAURANT HOPPING

From local fare to fine dining and its exquisite beachside hospitality, Goa's dining scene makes the place all the more special. Indulge in some authentic seafood at Calamari in Candolim. Prawn curry, recheado masala, crispy onion rings and calamari seafood platter are a few must-haves. The place has a great outdoor seating where one can enjoy a chilled beer by the beach.

Satiate your hunger pangs at Thalassa with some Greek and Mediterranean delights against the backdrop of the Arabian sea. We recommend their meat platter, grilled prawns, lobster platter, lamb burger, cheesecakes, and blueberry smoothie.

Just next to Thalassa, is Antares popular for its Australian cuisine. One can order their woodfire pizzas, bruschetta, and other charcoal grill options. Relax on one of their couches and enjoy your favourite refreshing cocktail while the sun sets for the day.

**PICTURED:** Heritage walks are organised to highlight Goa's culture

## MEET UP

With its strong hospitality-oriented lineage, impressive culinary scene and unique heritage, the beach capital of India sets the right tone for a sophisticated yet extravagant gathering. Adding to this is the great connectivity to the major metros of the country.

Elaborating on Goa as a MICE venue, Ranju Singh, complex general manager, Novotel Goa Resort & Spa and Novotel Goa Candolim says, "Goa remains the favourite leisure and MICE destination due to the easing of travel restrictions. We are hopeful that this will make way for the corporates and wedding segments to return back to Goa since, the appetite to go international is limited. Goa, a stress-free destination, is equipped with large banqueting infrastructure and also well connected with all major cities."

In order to further cement Goa's position in the international MICE arena, the state government has chalked out a few plans and strategies in the new tourism policy. This includes development of international convention centres along with marketing and promoting Goa as preferred destination for MICE and weddings in collaboration with industry members.

Mass events would be promoted, primarily during the lean tourist season. Additionally, new events that can become popular Goan attractions over time will be identified and promoted.

**The state government aims to promote mass events during the lean tourist season**

## EXPERIENCES TO CHERISH

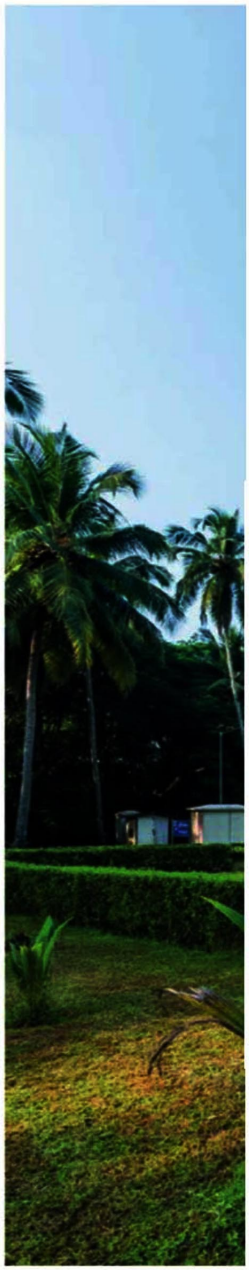
From water sports to heritage walks, Goa provides you with great indulgences.

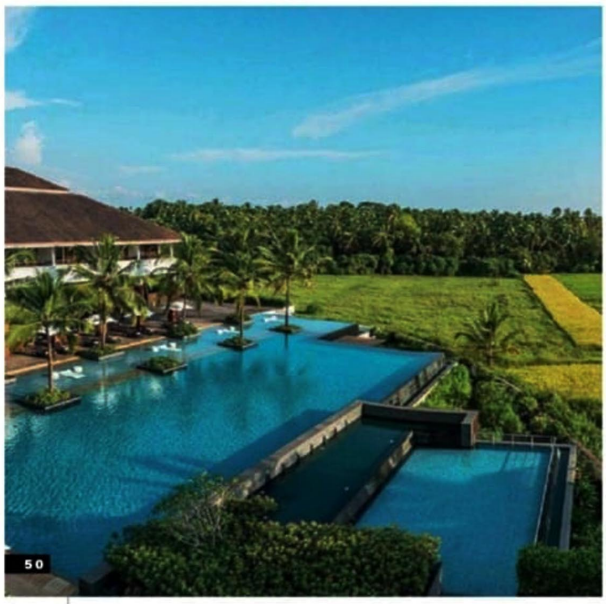
One of the popular water sports windsurfing is catching up in the state, and the best place to try out this activity is at Dona Paula. Another sport in Goa, which is much-loved by travellers worldwide is scuba diving. The rich marine life of Goa gives travellers an option to scuba dive and snorkel in sites such as Suzy's Wreck, Coral Garden, Bounty Bay, among others.

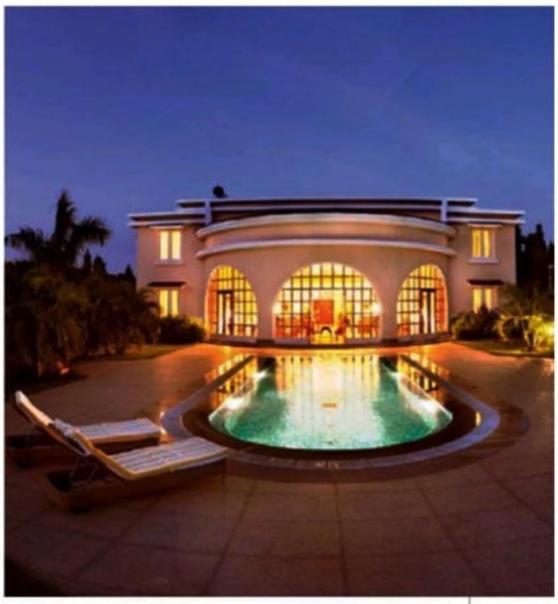
Adventure junkies are recommended to check out bungy jumping in Mayem Lake (north Goa), where they can experience an adrenaline rush by jumping off from a height of 55 meters.

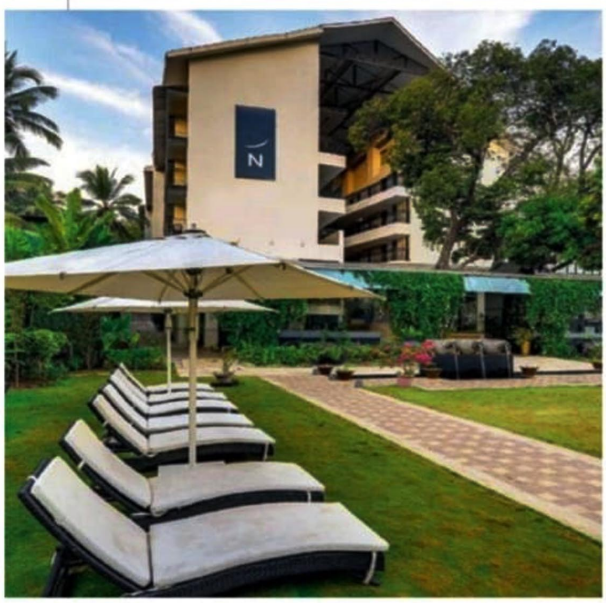
If you are looking to enjoy the beauty of the state from the sky, the Department of Tourism (GTDC), Government of Goa has tied up with Tiger Balloon Safaris to provide a one-hour hot air balloon ride. Here you can fly past through the state's beautiful fields, beaches, and hills from a peak elevation of 2,000 feet. A balloon can accommodate up to ten people per ride.

Apart from this, immerse yourself in the stories about old Goa's most historically significant buildings with The Old Goa Heritage Walk activity. It also lets you revisit some of the most fascinating facts during Portuguese rule.









**CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT:** Alila Diwa Goa; The LaLiT Golf & Spa Resort Goa; W Goa and Novotel Goa Resort & Spa

## WHERE TO STAY

### ALILA DIWA GOA

Located in south Goa's Majorda village, Alila Diwa Goa is about 20 minutes from the airport. The hotel is a popular venue for hosting weddings and corporate events. The property offers spacious guestrooms and suites with private terraces, overlooking the lush paddy fields. They also provide unique experiences including the Alila Masterclass that gives an opportunity to learn how to cook your favourite Goan cuisine with the hotel's in-house chefs. **alilahotels.com**

### GRAND HYATT GOA

Overlooking the clear waters of the Bambolim Bay, Grand Hyatt Goa ensures a tranquil yet luxurious experience amidst nature. Live "Grand" in one of their elegant rooms and suites such as Grand Executive suite, Grand Suite King and Presidential suite. Flatter your taste buds with authentic Italian food at The Verandah; Asian and middle eastern delights at The Dining Room or Indian delicacies at Chulha. Head to the Capiz Bar to enjoy fine wines, spirits and cocktails. The sprawling resort also houses an adventure park replete with exciting activities for all age groups. **grandhyattgoa.com**

### HILTON GOA RESORT

One of the latest addresses in Goa, Hilton Goa Resort features 104 spacious guestrooms, three F&B outlets, and a range of MICE venues. The décor of the property is enhanced by local Goan elements and accents. Check out @Saipe, the all-day dining restaurant, and Doce, the coffee lounge, or unwind at Coco with cocktails and Mediterranean-inspired menu. The resort is a one-hour drive from Goa International Airport; and popular Candolim and Calangute beaches are in close proximity. **hilton.com**

### HYATT CENTRIC CANDOLIM GOA

Situated on Main Candolim Road, Hyatt Centric Candolim Goa houses chic rooms and suites that capture the true essence of Goa. The property offers easy access to some key attractions of north Goa. The signature restaurant and bar, Grok serves delectable seafood, meat, and vegetarian delicacies and is a stunning venue for casual get-togethers with family and friends. Flexible event spaces are available for hosting business meets and private gatherings. **hyatt.com**

### ITC GRAND GOA RESORT & SPA

Located in south Goa, ITC Grand Goa Resort & Spa serves as an ideal stay option for leisure travellers who wish to enjoy a "relatively quieter" side of Goa. This village-styled resort offers direct access to Arossim beach. The accommodation categories include Lagoon View room, Pool View room, Lagoon View suite and Sea View suite with lap pool. A scrumptious Goan meal at Tempero is highly recommended. Guests can rejuvenate and unwind with a wellness treatment at Kaya Kalp – The Royal Spa. The resort has launched many interesting stay packages for the modern travellers starting from all-inclusive meal packages to 100 per cent back to romantic retreats, culinary breaks and Club ITC Rewards. **itchotels.in**

### NOVOTEL GOA RESORT & SPA AND NOVOTEL GOA CANDOLIM

Novotel Goa Resort & Spa and Novotel Goa Candolim have a combined inventory of 270 keys, and the properties boast multiple venues to host large and small events, keeping in mind safety and hygiene protocols.

Located just a few minutes away from the Candolim beach, Novotel Goa Resort & Spa makes for an ideal leisure destination as well. From the Zen inspired tranquillity zone and speciality restaurant Vero Cibo overlooking Candolim for relaxation or the vibrant lobby lounge Chy for work, the property has it all for your ultimate family holiday or workation. A host of experiences are available including scuba diving, snorkelling, sailing, kite surfing, kayaking and more for adventure enthusiasts. Mixology, baking or a cooking master class can also be organised here. **all.accor.com**

### THE LALIT GOLF & SPA RESORT GOA

The LaLiT Golf & Spa Resort Goa adorns a rich Baroque-Portuguese style architecture. One of the key highlights of the property is the international standard double-T-9-hole links golf course. The resort offers 263 rooms and suites along with luxury villas. From relishing the fresh catch of the day at Corta's to having light bites at Gazebo and seafood at Sea BQ, guests are treated to a well-thought F&B experience here. A variety of indoor and outdoor banquet and conference venues are available for large and small gatherings. **thelalit.com**

### W GOA

Located by the Vagator Beach, this chic Marriott hotel offers all things "young and fun" — be it a beach facing bar or its stylish yet vibrant interiors. The hotel offers 160 guestrooms and suites. Striking elements of Goa are incorporated into the design of the hotel. Some F&B options include The Kitchen Table for fresh local produce and The Spice Traders serving gourmet pan-Asian cuisine. Leisure facilities include a Clarins spa, 24-hour fitness centre, WET pool, and RockPool Lounge. **marriott.com**