
April 9, 2006**NEXT STOP**

A New Generation of Pilgrims Hits India's Hippie Trail

By SETH SHERWOOD

AS a crimson sun sets over the Arabian Sea behind her, the British singer Helen Jones leaps onto the stage of the oceanside Cafe Looda, grabs the microphone and unleashes a fiery anthem to the crowd amassed under the thatched roof of the open-air bar.

"There ain't nothing like this in the real world!" she sing-shouts, flinging her strawberry-blond hair as an Indian-British-Iranian backing band called Sattva (Sanskrit for "righteousness") kicks out a wailing funk jam. The beer-drinking throng, which appears to include European rock chicks with nose rings, goateed Israeli beatniks, Australian Green Party voters and a miscellaneous coterie of hipster backpackers in every imaginable type of sandal, nods in rhythm as the music resounds along Anjuna Beach.

"Come to Goa! Change your mind! Change your way!"

There ain't nothing like this in the real world. Come to Goa. Change your mind. Change your way. It's hard to imagine a better jingle for this sandy strip of [India's](#) western coast, a venerable Catholic-Hindu enclave where American hippies came to turn on, tune in and drop out in the late 1960's, and where globe-trotting spiritual seekers, party kids, flag-wavers of the counterculture and refugees from the real world have fled ever since.

It's a place where the palm trees bear a strange fruit —fliers for crystal therapy, Ayurvedic healing and rave parties — and every road seems to lead to an organic restaurant or massage clinic. At the yoga centers, postures are manipulated by top Indian and international instructors. In clubs, where trance music is the favored genre, D.J.'s carrying myriad passports provide the mix. Bodies receive needle-inked adornments at skin-art parlors; minds seek enlightenment, or at least expansion, at many meditation clinics.

Foreigners have flocked to tiny Goa — whose statewide population of 1.4 million is about one-tenth that of Mumbai, 300 miles north — ever since the Portuguese established a Spice Route colony there in the 1500's. The port flourished into one of Asia's most splendid cities before disease, vice and trade competition sank its fortunes. (Its remains are still visible in Old Goa, a Unesco World Heritage Site near the current state capital, Panjim.)

The Indian Army seized Goa from [Portugal](#) in 1961. But new colonists, the Haight-Ashbury crowd,

soon showed up. Seduced by the same landscapes that appeared in Portuguese spyglasses centuries earlier — untouristed beaches, green jungle, dramatic cliffs — the former flower children traveled overland on "magic buses" from [Europe](#) and created in northern Goa a free-spirited, budget-friendly new world among the laid-back native Goans. The village of Anjuna became its wildly spinning center, with the quieter communities of Arambol and Vagator emerging as hemp-clad satellites.

Since then, each generation of global nomads has carved its niche: New Age devotees of the 1980's; global ravers and electromusic pioneers of the 1990's (who initiated a tradition of all-night beach parties and made Goa trance music a worldwide phenomenon); and the yogaphiles and Burning Man groupies of today. The result is the globe's most enduring and constantly adapting tropical getaway for alternative living. When the summer monsoon blows past, the world's fringes unite.

"Goa is a paradise that is accessible to one and all, in true Indian style: age, shape, color, size, planet," said Deepti Datt, a filmmaker who splits her time between Goa, Bombay and Southern California. Her restaurant and D.J. bar, Axirvaad (Sanskrit for "blessing"), was long a legend for its "lounge groove space temple" nights. (The restaurant, temporarily closed, will relocate in the Goan village of Tiracol next year.) Goa, she goes on, "is a happy playground for grown-ups."

On a Wednesday in November, a chain of minivan taxis and autorickshaws is disgorging bodies into Goa's most celebrated playground, the weekly Anjuna flea market. Started decades ago by Anjuna's hippie community (for whom it was a vital form of income), the humble local enterprise has mushroomed into a sprawling international affair. Many of the hundreds of closely packed stalls are now run by vociferous sari-clad Indian women in jingling jewelry, but the carnivalesque atmosphere has multiplied. "Look at my shop! Look at my shop!" they beckon, all smiles. "Sir! Sir! Sir! Sir! Sir!"

Navigating the come-ons is the latest wave of Anjuna's antiestablishment arrivals, from ponytailed Finnish rockers to cornrowed Iranian girls. Mixed within the throng is another curious species: middle-aged European package tourists. (The towns of Baga and Calangute, just south of Anjuna, have exploded into an Indian Cancún in recent years, troubling their northern neighbors.)

Stalls burst with carved Hindu deities, richly colored textiles and bins of pungent saffron and coriander. Indian women with syringes provide swirly henna tattoos. Indian men armed with thin sticks remove ear wax. A white-bearded Australian man passes out fliers for Reiki healing. "It's your pathway to God," he says.

Byzantium, William Butler Yeats famously said, was no place for old men. The market, with its hawkers proposing every conceivable good and service, is no place for weak men. He who balks at saying no risks emerging from the fray wearing pashmina scarves, sporting sequined slippers, smoking from a hookah and drinking from a coconut while trying to avoid being checkmated on a tiny sandalwood board held by a solicitous Indian salesman yelling, "Chess, Boss!? Chess, Boss!?"

"This guy's been following us for three hours," says a tattooed 20-something Briton named Gareth

Harrison, a five-time visitor to Goa, as he haggles for 20 wooden bracelets with an assertive Indian boy. The wails of snake-charmers' horns mingle with the smells of cow manure and burning incense. Finally, Mr. Harrison gets his price: 50 rupees, about \$1.10, at 22 cents to the rupee. "We started at 500," he says.

Sipping cold drinks at a makeshift cafe, a 30-ish couple from [Slovenia](#), Polona Volf and her boyfriend, Bostjan Mohar, survey the pageant. "We wanted to go to [Bali](#)," says Mr. Mohar, a special-ed teacher in a tank top and shorts. "But we saw a documentary called 'Last Hippie Standing,' so we changed our plans."

As midnight approaches, the \$5-a-night guesthouses empty and the sloping roads leading to the Paradiso nightclub fill with rented motorcycles and scooters. (Any innkeeper can arrange one with a phone call.) Their small headlamps appear from around curves, swerving through the blackness like fireflies as they pass low-lighted seafood shacks and Goan curry joints along the dark seaside roads.

A beacon in the sky explains the heavy traffic: a full moon. Decades ago, Goa's hippie settlers would hold beach parties on full moon nights. When the rave generation showed up, it appropriated and expanded the ritual, orchestrating D.J.-fueled blowouts in specially designated outdoor expanses like the famous Disco Valley. The tradition has waned, though full-on outdoor raves still occur, generally in December and January. Meanwhile, clubs like Paradiso and Nine Bar pick up the slack.

Constructed of mud and perched on a cliff overlooking the sea, Paradiso's vast three-tiered space has a grottolike prehistoric feel, complete with hobbit-worthy nooks. A large, blue-lighted statue of Shiva shines in a corner, his many arms extended as he dances his cosmic dance. Under the moon's and Shiva's glow, a Lollapalooza-looking crowd dances to the distinctive, deafening explosions of Goa trance music. Underpinned by a rapid-fire drumbeat and punishing basslines, the many layers of dark, minor-key synthesizers open cyclonic swells of sound. Strange snippets of speech, scarcely recognizable, float across the mix and fade.

Developed in the still-insular Goa of the 1980's, the scene's signature sound was intended as a digital-age descendant of tribal drumming, shamanistic ritual and druggy psychedelia. By the 90's, it began to catch the ear of some top international D.J.'s, notably the founder of Perfecto Records, Paul Oakenfold. Those impresarios' production skills and clout did much to transport Goa trance onto the international club circuit. Today, Goa trance parties and CD mixes abound worldwide.

For the far-flung disciples of Goa trance, a journey to Anjuna is a bit like a Christian pilgrim's trip to Bethlehem.

"I've been dreaming about coming here since I was 14," says Omri Lauter, a shaggy-haired unshaven Jerusalem native and trance music fan who looks to be around 25. The swirling crowds surround his cross-legged perch on the ground. "This is like an Eden."

"The only place I can compare it to is Ibiza," says the club's owner, Nandan Kudchadkar. He explains

that many of the D.J.'s he invites, who come primarily from [London](#), Scandinavia, [Russia](#), [Japan](#) and [Israel](#), try out their newest trance mixes here before recording them or bringing them to other sites worldwide. Anjuna's discriminating clubbers, he goes on, need constant novelty. "You can't repeat a track here for 15 days or people will shout and yell."

Come daylight, Goa's dedication to partying is matched by its dedication to the healing arts, the yang to the night's yin. At Purple Valley yoga center, rejuvenation might take the form of ashtanga poses or vinyasa flow exercises, two of the daily courses offered. The leading name on Goa's yoga circuit, the center has brought in pretzel-limbed luminaries from the globe's four corners, including the sometime teacher of [Madonna](#) and Sting, Danny Paradise.

But Goa's most authentic spiritual experiences require a taxi ride into the past.

Snaking south into the lush Goan countryside, the cracked asphalt roads out of Anjuna pass scenes of daily Indian life that seem a world away from the Birkenstock-trod paths behind: fires burning amid roadside shanties; little boys playing cricket in an overgrown field; elderly Hindu women walking barefoot with baskets on their heads; ancient peepul and banyan trees. The succession flickers quickly past the half-lowered window like film images carried by the warm breeze.

The heads seem to bow especially low upon entering the Basilica of Bom Jesus in Old Goa, the ghost town of Baroque edifices that was once the splendid seat of Portugal's Indian trade colony. The reason for their reverence lies in a deep alcove, where a fabulously wrought silver casket holds the remains of the most famous Western spiritual seeker ever to reach Goa's shores: St. Francis Xavier.

Dispatched on a missionary voyage to the East in 1541, St. Francis, a Spanish-born Jesuit, stepped off a ship the next year and found himself in a prosperous international metropolis larger than London. As one French traveler observed, Goa's boulevards were lined with "goldsmiths and bankers, as well as the richest and best merchants and artisans."

St. Francis journeyed all over the East, returning frequently to Goa before his death in [China](#) in 1552. His body was taken to Goa two years later. Today, Baroque churches, convents and cathedrals testify to the former splendor. Whitewashed, the spectral relics stand out against the green grassy expanses and encroaching jungle like a Catholic version of the Angkor temple complex.

A few miles farther south, outside the tiny village of Priol, the faith changes from Christian to Hindu. Wearing colorful saris and Madras shirts, Indian travelers carrying wreaths of orange flowers stream into the 17th-century Shri Manguesh temple and lay down their offerings. The air hangs with incense and quiet muttering. Old women selling bananas work the crowds outside.

According to legend, Shiva —Hinduism's supreme creator and destroyer — once played a game of dice against his wife, Parvati, and lost everything. Dejected and unburdened of his worldly things, he did what many have done since: he took refuge in Goa, on the spot of this very temple. Parvati eventually followed and beseeched him to return. He agreed, and they were reunited.

Shiva, you might say, came to Goa, changed his mind, then changed his ways.

WHEN TO GO

The season surrounding the summer monsoon, basically November to May, is the best time to visit Goa. The week between Christmas and New Year's is very popular — especially for the Anjuna rave scene — and hotel rates typically double or even triple. A visa, obtained in advance, is required for United States citizens.

GETTING THERE

There are no direct flights from the United States to Goa. The best option is to fly to Mumbai and get a connecting flight to Dabolim Airport in Goa. Air India was offering round-trip fares from Kennedy Airport in New York to Mumbai for \$1,041, including taxes and fees, for this month. Several discount Indian airlines operate between Mumbai and Goa, including Air Deccan (www.airdeccan.net), Spicejet (www.spicejet.com) and Jet Airways (www.jetairways.com).

GETTING AROUND

Hiring a prepaid taxi at Dabolim Airport (located in the city of Vasco da Gama) is the easiest way to reach Calangute, Baga and Anjuna, which are about 45 minutes north. The taxi counter (0832-254-1235) is just outside the baggage claim area and a bit to the left, on a traffic island. Expect to pay 640 rupees (\$14.35, at 50 rupees to the dollar) to these destinations.

As for addresses, most hotels, restaurants and shops don't have numbered street addresses as such, so always carry the most detailed map you can find. Taxi drivers can often (but not always) find places with only a name and a village.

WHERE TO STAY

Palacete Rodrigues, Mazal Vaddo, Anjuna, 91-832-227-3358. A centuries-old Portuguese mansion transformed into a guesthouse. A little dilapidated, but the staff is friendly. Doubles from 850 rupees. The lone air-conditioned room, a twin, is 950 rupees a night.

Guru Guesthouse, Anjuna Beach, 91-832-227-3319. Backpackers, bohemians and barflies will like this no-frills dirt-cheap hotel, which has a meditation area and an adjacent bar with sublime views of the Arabian Sea. Rooms from 250 rupees.

Pousada Tauma, Porba Vaddo, Calangute, 91-832-227-9061, www.pousada-tauma.com. This cluster of red templelike stone buildings is the fanciest boutique hotel in the Baga-Calangute strip. Guests can dip in the sprawling pool, undergo ancient ayurvedic treatments in the spa and dine on tasty local Goan cuisine in the highly regarded Copper Pot restaurant. Standard rooms cost 130 euros (\$159 at \$1.23 to the euro) to 370 euros a night (\$453) depending on the season.

WHERE TO EAT

Martha's Breakfast, 907, Monteiro Vaddo, Anjuna, 91-832-227-3365, is a shady patio serving robust and cheap meals that almost make taking your morning antimalaria drugs a pleasure. Offerings include American pancakes (65 rupees), banana porridge (45 rupees) and fruit lassis (from 35 rupees).

Hanuman Bar and Restaurant, North Anjuna Beach, 91-832-309-0442. The eclectic menu at this laid-back beach restaurant includes Indian, Chinese and even Israeli dishes. A meal for two, with drinks, will rarely run more than 400 rupees.

Britto's, Baga Beach, Bardez, Goa, 91-832-227-7331. A very mellow oceanside restaurant with a lovely view of the sea serves everything from full English breakfasts (180 rupees) to Indian curries and tikkas (80 to 140 rupees) to fresh seafood (300 to 700 rupees), notably pomfret, kingfish and tiger prawns (from 300 to 700 rupees).

Sublime Bistro, Baga River, 91-982-248-4051, showcases the skills of its chef and co-owner, Chris Agha Bee, who trained at the Culinary Institute of America. A daily shopper for produce at the markets in Mapusa and Calangute, he serves up dishes like crab-prawn cakes and grilled marlin on lentils in mustard sauce. A three-course meal for two costs around 1,200 rupees.

WHERE TO PARTY

Paradiso, North Anjuna Beach. Cover charge is 200 rupees.

Tito's, Tito's Lane, Baga, 91-832-227-9895. Cover charge, 300 rupees.

Mambo's, Tito's Lane, Baga, 91-832-227-9895. Cover charge, 200 to 300 rupees.

[Copyright 2006 The New York Times Company](#)

[Privacy Policy](#) | [Search](#) | [Corrections](#) | [XML](#) | [Help](#) | [Contact Us](#) | [Work for Us](#) | [Site Map](#)