



PHOTO: TUSHAR RAO

PHOTO: GUSTASP AND JEROO IRANI

New luxury in Goa is innovative, individualistic, and responsive to its cultural moorings. We explore three villas and hostelries, and a few experiences that will define the Goan renaissance for you.

## Goa's Luxury Retreats

Are you among those who mourn Goa's 'loss of innocence'? Do you scout for alternate beach destinations that remind you of the tropical paradise of the past: deserted beaches, bucolic farms, a rain-washed green expanse during monsoons, feasting on prawns or clams caught fresh that morning, or on a peaceful cruise down the Mandovi River on a wooden dhow?

You may never be able to recreate those simple times but parts of Goa, in their quiet way, have begun pushing back against the chaotic hordes in an attempt to create spaces that have the trappings of the destination old-timers once knew.

"You live in a bubble," says Sucheta Potnis, part-owner of Summertime: A Luxury Villa in Goa. "We move from one bubble to another, trying to ignore the large-scale destruction. But increasingly, you have several such bubbles—artisanal, exclusive, almost boutique-y. This is the second phase of Goan renaissance. Owners of luxury villas, which are given out on rent, try their darnedest best to stem some of the rot and decay that has set. The spaces they have set up offer both, beauty and privacy."

Potnis should know. She is among one of the early settlers in Goa, much like Ritu Nanda, who used to run a home boutique before restoring old Portuguese-style homes and selling them, architects Dean D'cruz and Gerard D'cunha, designer Wendell Rodricks, a Goa boy who worked in Mumbai before heading back home, and restaurateurs like Jamshed and Ayesha, who run a luxury boutique guesthouse called Capella, and J&A, an Italian restaurant.

Namrata Mathur, popularly known as Bambi—the guest relation officer at Ahilya by the Sea, says that the emergence of a vibrant art and literary scene, in form of new museums, art festivals, and music concerts has catapulted the state into a league of its own. Goa gives writers and film-makers, perfumers and artisans enough space to thrive in, without the pressure of living a stressful life.

New luxury in Goa is tucked away in quieter corners. Sharp witted hoteliers, lovers of everything boutique, artists, and chefs are cutting a creative swathe across the coastal state. If you want to explore the remains of a pastoral Goa, you have to head inland or beyond still-beautiful beaches like Morjim and Ashwem, and northern Goa's provincial clusters like Siolim and Assagao.

Sol de Goa, a secluded 21-room luxury boutique hotel designed by couturier Tarun Tahiliani, is located on the lush green banks of Sinquerim river and eschews the crowds that Goa has come to be known for. Anahata Retreat on Ashwem beach, a cluster of thatched-roof huts and Portuguese-style cottages run by Rishal Sawhney and his Spanish-Swiss wife, Angela, peddles yoga as its selling point. The property hosts L'Atelier, an Indo-French restaurant which serves vinegar-spiked Seafood Balchao topped by crème fraîche and a Grilled Kingfish with Papaya Salad.

We present, on these pages, three luxury retreats and a few experiences that will define the Goan renaissance for you. •



### Summertime Calangute's Hidden Nook

Photographs: Tushar Rao

Clockwise from above: Summertime is flanked by a pool and an outdoor pavilion; the Biblio chaise with shelves for books; hen sculptures from Bali; the Coral Suite in shades of white and pink

Goa's old hands, the people who knew the state before mining, unmindful tourism and its unsavoury reputation as India's "most liberated beach state" took a toll, will remember the beach as a peaceful haven. Today, Calangute packs in the hordes in all seasons. So it is difficult for me to believe that there is something pristine left in this part of Goa, until I turn into a quiet lane with two or three villas and a long stretch of shrubs and greenery. Even then, I am not prepared for what I see when I drove in through the unassuming gates, across a wooded track.

And there it stood on a remote hilltop, a Balinese-style villa, dappled in mellow winter sun, its glass walls reflecting light. Summertime, sheltered within verdant gardens and with views of paddy fields, is Sucheta Potnis and Hans Tuinman's love child. The two, for years, have run Odyssey Tours and Travels that offers tailor-made experiences in India. Summertime, says Potnis, has been a dream and "my retirement plan" whose time had come. "We were seeing rampant development in the area. We have a house here and also owned another patch of land. So we decided to build a villa on that land to protect Calangute's last green lung. I had always thought of building a Balinese-style villa. Most of the stuff you see in here has been brought on our travels in Indonesia. Some have been handcrafted by traditional Goan masons. And some of the furniture is by a Frenchman living in Pondicherry, who restores and reworks discarded heritage pieces." A delicious biblio chaise—a bespoke chair with a deep seat and shelves all around to keep books that guests can choose from—



PHOTO: DEEPAI NANDWANI







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**Clockwise from top-left:** The outdoor dining area; some of the objet d'art from Bali; the pavilion is a great place to watch birds

was painstakingly crafted in Goa from shavings of wood left behind after the construction of the villa. A sinewy light provides all the luminance you need to read.

The villa demolishes the tenuous link between the outdoor and indoor spaces. Balinese architecture—a centuries-old tradition that combines the island's abundance of natural materials and the fabled artistry and craftsmanship of its people—is informed by both Hindu and Javanese influences. While Summertime is Balinese in style, the roof is distinctively sloping Manglorean tiled. Days are best spent in the courtyard, which is dominated by a burnt yellow colour pavilion with an all-embracing view of trees that Potnis has planted: kokum, mango, teerphal, even African tulips. Landscape designer Shashank Vyas helped her create, what she calls, the fabulist "Jimmy Gazdar-style gardens", referring to that famous Goan baron who built a white mansion towering over the Aguada headland.

"I love bird watching," says Potnis one morning, while she scouts the forested Calangute skyline that seems to be visible only from Summertime. It is difficult to miss the birds or the bees: they are all across the villa grounds. The pavilion, overlooking a sparkling blue pool, is a wonderful nook to see the sun go down on those forested tracts.

Summertime is also characterised by beautiful verandahs, says Tuinman, because "we like to live our life outdoors." The villa, an all-glass structure, is punctuated by wooden slats for a 360 degree view of all that green gorgeousness. The dining table is placed in



the verandah for close-to-nature dining experiences. I love the little design accents and the villa's understated aesthetics: wooden ducks and hens sit within lit nooks in the wall; an old telephone lies in another corner; delicate paintings of birds by deceased artist and naturalist Carl d'Silva are on the walls; the suites and living spaces have amazing PandyMania lights forged from corn ears and tobacco leaves. The villa has soaring ceilings and a little green door at far end of the garden which doesn't lead anywhere, but makes me want to explore what lies beyond.

The villa has three suites. The Coral Suite, in shades of pink and white, is outfitted with a canopied four-poster bed, and bird



**Clockwise from top-left:** A patch of textile used as a work of art; the courtyard with the view of the pavilion; the secluded bathroom offers views of the grounds; quirky figurines at the villa

paintings by D'Silva. The aptly named Sunflower Suite, in colours of cheery yellow, features quirky ladybug and bunny figurines, floating bookshelves, and expansive views of the property.

I choose to stay in the Koi Suite at the lower level: a large room with an old-world fan, fine rugs, and, irresistibly, a Koi pond with Japanese Koi fish. On my second morning, as I sit down to read a book by the pond, I hear a loud splash. Do Kois jump? Ten minutes later, I hear the splash again! Sometimes, you also see monkeys who come in for the fruits in the winters and water in the summers. "They are welcome on the grounds till they stay clear of the villa," laughs Potnis.

Evenings are special at Summertime. As the sun sets beyond the green canopy, the villa's interiors are bathed in colours that mimic



the sky. The birds come to roost in their nests and for a while, all you hear is their dying cacophony. The Biblio chaise becomes my refuge.

The owners are wonderful hosts. They will leave you alone if you crave privacy, of which both are passionate advocates. I recommend that you ask them over to dinner at least on one evening; they have fascinating stories to recount. Summertime is run like a beautifully administered home. Chef Dinesh, who hails from Garhwal, is adept at rustling beautiful meals—Goan, Thai, Chinese, Burmese, and quintessential Indian fast food. Prakash and Vaibhav, the well-trained staff ensure that their service is discreet and quiet, appearing like genies when you need something. This holiday leaves me with a sense of connecting with nature, and with myself. •

*Summertime, 286 Boa Viagem Road, Calangute. Prices between 31 January and May: ₹36,000 per night, without taxes. The rates change during peak season • summertimegoa.com*

## Stepping Out

Who would want to leave this paradise and step out? But if you desire to explore Goa, there are several expeditions you can take. Sucheta Potnis and Hans Tuinman offer luxury cruises on their 42-foot yacht, Solita, which can hold 26 people on board without seeming crowded. You can charter it for a cruise out to the sea to spot dolphins and down Goa's secret backwaters, past quaint villages. ([solita.co.in](http://solita.co.in)). Goa has an eclectic dining scene, and among the restaurants Summertime recommends is Republic of Noodles in Candolim, for good quality Asian food; Tamarin ([tamarin-goa.rocks](http://tamarin-goa.rocks)), an outdoor restaurant in Calangute that serves both Mediterranean and Kashmiri cuisines; Palácio do Deão ([palaciiododeao.com](http://palaciiododeao.com)) in Quepem, a restored Portuguese mansion that offers a unique five-course Portuguese culinary experience; and Ritz Classic in Panjim that serves fabulous Goan food.