

Goa - my native place

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The Garden of Shepherds, Golden Goa and Pearl of the Orient are some of the eulogies heaped on this State. But it is a feeling of pride that one gets when one says Amchi Goa. It brings one so much closer to the nostalgia of home. It gives one the feeling of being intrinsically linked with a fun loving people. The very name Goa, spells sun, sea, sand and susegad (a feeling of tranquility, peace and harmony). It is a magical place with a charm of its own. Its picturesque splendor beckons one in a warm embrace. One cannot help but marvel at God's grandiose plan in forming this tiny state and equally fervent is the immense fervour of love towards Him. We can but assume that God is pleased.

The weather is pleasant from October to March. The monsoon sets in during June bringing with it joyful walks and dancing in the rain till September. The months of April and May witness nature pouring out its bounty. Fruit trees abound and the surrounding foliage boasts of the greenest greens you've ever seen. The beaches are a prime attraction for not only the natives but for all the thousands of visitors that visit each year just to bask in the sun or to avail of the healing properties of the sun and sea. The translucent shimmering waters skim the shore lines golden sandy beaches, whilst tall palm trees sway to the lilting music of the sea.

The aura of Portuguese rule is evident in the façade of homes and surrounding buildings. The state is dotted with a matrix of new and old, east and west architecture. The countryside is pocked marked with Latin type houses with red tiled sloping roofs, spacious gardens and intricately designed entrances.

This amazing state is a mere 3,702 square kilometers with a population of 14 lakh. More amazing is if you ask a tourist what he likes about Goa. He will, in all sincerity, tell you "the fish and feni"! However there are things other than the feni to intoxicate you. Look around at the numerous churches in typical Portuguese baroque style, with twin towers and belfry, that beckon the faithful to prayer. Every village

has their own chapel or copel as it is popularly called. And the feast day of the copel is such a grand affair in the village. The village elders' advice is always welcome on the cultural and religious customs that should be adhered to. The traditional mass is sung in gusto in voices of different hues, accompanied with violins guitars, trumpet, saxophone and whatever other instrument one is competent to play. Loud firecrackers herald the consecration and the end of the mass. The children delight in the fun, food and games that follow the traditional mass.

The carnival is the eye catching regalia that precedes the season of Lent. It is the occasion when Goa breaks out in a kaleidoscope of colour. Three days of merriment, fun and frolic greet the tourists and citizens alike. Three days of revelry, never seen the year around, is rampant with youngsters taking part in colourful parades, in costumes and fancy dresses and accompanying floats depicting interesting themes. It truly is party time. Once Lent starts the cigars and feni are put away till Easter Sunday.

The festival of Christmas is celebrated with great excitement. The midnight mass is packed to capacity by the faithful. Christmas day is truly merry with an array of foods and wine. The speciality is sorpotel and sannas. Folks visit each other to convey their good wishes for the festive season. Proud matriarchs show off their culinary expertise in the colourful tray of sweets that beckon every visitor to their home. Each home is decorated with shiny tinsel streamers, buntings, colourful sparkling lights, a Christmas tree and stars that say welcome and happy birthday Baby Jesus! There is lots of music and dancing during the season. For those who are unable to celebrate with a decent meal, soup kitchens come to their aid. These are run on the goodwill of the people who generously support the less fortunate ones.

Lots of other attractions keep the populace in high spirits. Like the feasts of Saint John, San Antone and Saint Francis. Saint Francis Xavier is revered as the saint of Goa as the incorruptible mortal remains of this missionary are enshrined in the Basilica of Bom Jesus. The Se Cathedral, in honour of St. Catherine, is the largest church in all Asia and is beautifully laid out in Portuguese-Gothic style, with Tuscan-Doric exteriors and Corinthian interiors. Visit any of the churches and one is transported back into time and an aura of holiness envelopes the visitor. Other places of interest that adorn Goa are the temples, mini zoo, deer park and bird sanctuaries.

The people live in complete harmony with each other be it Muslim, Christian or Hindu or from any other part of the world. If you're looking for a holiday, come to sunny Goa -- Amchi Goa -- where goodness is a way of life. You will fall in love. Viva la Goa. Viva!

Nicholas Candes