

INDIA UNFOLDED · CITY EDITION

PANJIM

The Latin Quarter

No. GO-01 — RAJASTHAN COLLECTION · 32 PAGES

IN 60 SECONDS

A capital by default — the viceroy fled here in 1759 because Old Goa was killing him — with a sultan's palace on the waterfront, a Latin quarter painted by law, and six casino boats on the river: Panjim is the Goa that isn't a beach.

Forty thousand people in the city proper (Census 2011), and more azulejo and wrought iron than anywhere else in India will show you. Walk Fontainhas at eight with the low sun on the houses; climb the zigzag stairs of the Immaculate Conception; find the open-eyed crucifix the Inquisition left in St Sebastian's chapel; take the free ferry to Betim for Reis Magos fort. Know the rules: no Uber, helmets on scooters, no drinking on the beach. November to February.

Capital since

1843

a city by royal decree on 22 March; the viceroy had moved in 1759

Best months

Nov – Feb

Carnival is the four days before Ash Wednesday — c. 6–9 Feb 2027; the feast of the Immaculate Conception is 8 Dec

Give it

2–3 days

Fontainhas and the church; the palace, a ferry and a fort; the islands on a third

From the airports

30·43 km

Dabolim ≈ ₹1,000–1,200 by taxi; Mopa ≈ ₹1,500; no Uber or Ola

01 The Story, in Five Acts

I A SULTAN'S SUMMER HOUSE · before 1510

Goa was Kadamba country from 960, ruled from Chandrapur and then Govapuri on the Zuari until the Delhi sultanate's raids in the early fourteenth century. The Bahmanis followed, then Bijapur's Adil Shahs, who made the new port on the Mandovi — today's Old Goa — their second capital. Panjim was a fishing village with one building of consequence: the palace-fortress Yusuf Adil Shah raised at the river mouth around 1500. Albuquerque besieged it in 1510, took Goa in February, lost it in May, and retook it on 25 November with 1,680 men.

II THE SAILORS' CHAPEL · 1541–1600s

The fleets from Lisbon made Panjim their first port of call, and in 1541 a chapel went up on the hill for the sailors. Francis Xavier landed on 6 May 1542; his body came back from China in 1554 and lies in Old Goa's Bom Jesus. Across the river the Franciscans built Reis Magos church in the 1550s, the first in Bardez, and the fort above it in 1551. The Inquisition arrived in 1560 — housed at Old Goa, not here — and tried some sixteen thousand people between 1561 and 1774, sitting with one break until 1812; Panjim keeps one relic of it, a crucifix with its eyes open.

III THE CAPITAL THAT FLED · 1759–1843

Malaria and cholera emptied Old Goa — fifteen hundred people by 1775, in a city the chronicles put at two hundred thousand — and in 1759 the viceroy moved into the Adil Shah's palace on Panjim's waterfront, the seat of government until 1918. A Goan rich from Mozambique, 'Mossmikar', laid out Fontainhas around 1770 by the springs below Altinho; St Sebastian's chapel came in 1818. Viceroy Dom Manuel de Portugal e Castro gave the town its grid and, in 1832, a public library that claims to be India's oldest. On 22 March 1843 it was made a city — Nova Goa — and the paper caught up with the fact.

Stand here. Look for this.

Five things almost everyone walks straight past — where to stand, and what you're actually seeing.

1 The landings

Count them from the Municipal Garden: the eighteenth-century ramps zigzag up in matched pairs — the pyramid is theirs.

2 The belfry

The taller central tower between the two — where the 1871 bell hangs; ask to hear it before the feast-day Mass.

3 The white

The whole facade, against the coloured houses of the town — doctrine, not habit: white for the Immaculate Virgin.

4 The saint's chapel

In the south transept — Francis Xavier, who landed at Goa in 1542 and lies ten kilometres upriver.

5 The river side

Turn round at the top: the church faces the Mandovi, because the people it was built for arrived by water.

One more thing

Shoot from the Municipal Garden side at half past nine for the full pyramid of stairs in morning light, and again at dusk on 8 December when it is lit. Dress modestly inside; Mass times are on the board at the foot of the steps, and the feast fair spills down 18th June Road.

01 ARRIVAL

The river mouth before the city wakes

Miramar beach · Sunrise · 1x · landscape · 1x

Wet sand → family → Aguada

02 THE FERRY

Panjim from the Betim boat

The Panaji-Betim ferry · Morning · 1x · landscape · 1x

Rail → child → waterfront

03 THE FORT

Reis Magos from the foreshore

The Reis Magos foreshore · Morning · 1x · portrait · 1x

Family → church steps → ramparts

04 FONTAINHAS

31st January Road at eight

31st January Road and the lanes of Fontainhas · Morning · 1x · portrait · 1x

Lane → family → coloured walls

05 THE CHAPEL

St Sebastian's open eyes

Chapel of St Sebastian · Morning · 1x · portrait · 2x

Child → crucifix → window light

06 THE STAIRS

The zigzag from the garden

From the Municipal Garden side of Church Square · Late morning · 1x · portrait · 1x

Garden edge → stairs and family → belfry