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INDIA'S 'LITTLE PORTUGAL'



At just an hour's flight from Mumbai, Goa attracts plenty of tourists to its spectacular beaches, but it also has a fascinating heritage worth exploring. **Murli Menon (left)** explores the coastal state's capital, Panjim, which is home to a colourful Unesco-protected Latin Quarter that provides a window into 19th century Portuguese living.

The Fontainhas Latin Quarter is the central attraction of Goa's capital city, Panjim. Flanked by the Ourem creek to the east and Altinho hills in the west.

The centre of activity is Unesco World Heritage Site Fontainhas Street, which locals still refer to as 'Little Portugal in Goa'. The Portuguese ruled Goa for almost half a millennium after first invading the

region in 1510. It was only won back by India after a 36-hour battle in 1961.

The Fontainhas neighbourhood was founded by Portuguese aristocrat Antônio João de Sequeira, who set up a series of coconut plantations here. However, in the early 1800s, due to a plague outbreak in Old Goa, the Portuguese government headquarters was shifted to Panjim. As a result, this area was transformed into

the residential area for Portuguese administrative officers and staff.

The Unesco protection was introduced in 1984 with efforts in place to maintain its enchanting centuries-old architecture. The Old Town can only be explored on foot. Walking through the winding lanes here transports you to Portugal of the 1800s. Large European-style houses stand side by side. They are



coloured from bright yellow through ruby red to cobalt blue seem to jostle with each another for space. The bright paint jobs are given an annual touch-up after the June to September monsoons here, a rule that has been adhered to since the time of the Portuguese occupation.

Colourful streets

Other distinctive design touches include the intricately designed iron railings and red tile roofs. Most homes also have name plates on the wall hand painted ceramic tiles that are decorated with intricate, colourful artwork.

Popular selfie spots for visitors include a red well with two pillars each topped with a ceramic rooster and a rainbow-coloured set of steps.

The Portuguese heritage of the region is soaked into the candy-coloured streets. For instance, Rua 31 de Janeiro (31st January Road) is named after the day when Portugal got independence from Spain on January 31, 1640; and 18th June Street is named after the day in 1946 that

marked the beginning of the end of Portuguese rule in Goa.

Any visit to Goa will be incomplete without visiting the old-world charm of this Portuguese heritage. It will give you real insight into the origins of the laidback 'Susegad' lifestyle the state is renowned for. Derived from the Portuguese word sossegado, it has come to sum up the relaxed attitude towards life that is said to have existed historically in the former Portuguese territory.

February is the best time to visit when the Fountain Festival takes

Other distinctive design touches include the intricately designed iron railings and red tile roofs

over the old town. Tourists from all over the world visit here during this time to enjoy local Goan culture and art. Locals turn their houses into art galleries and homestays during this festival.

It's also worth walking to the top of Altinho Hill, which will give you breathtaking views over the Latin Quarter and one of its most imposing buildings, the tangerine-hued Maruti Hindu Temple. At the base of the hill, you'll find the Phoenix Fountain, a beautiful natural spring that dates back to the Portuguese era and which it is thought the town of Fontainhas gets its name from.

A Portuguese-style grand home in Fontainhas Street



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