

## Goa Backpacking

### How to be a Solo Female Traveller in Goa

Six years ago, I was preparing to take a round-the-world backpacking trip by myself, starting with Goa in India. Boarding the plane, ticket in hand, my stomach flipped. I was going to Goa. For a month. By myself. What was I thinking? Friends had warned me it could be dangerous there as a lone female. But my time in Goa gave me some of my favourite travelling memories. Here is what I learned about how to be a solo female traveller in Goa.

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#### Perspective on travelling alone to Goa

Firstly, you need to know that if you are planning a Goa trip by yourself, there are many other people doing the same thing. Plenty of solo travellers visit **Goa**, as the area has been on the backpacking trail in **India** since its hippie heyday in the 1960s and 70s. And it's still popular today. According to TripAdvisor's 2018 Travelers' Choice Awards, Goa is currently one of the **top 10 destinations in Asia**.

So, going to Goa alone doesn't need to be something to worry about. When I arrived on my solo trip to Goa, I was expecting a big culture shock but that didn't happen. In the taxi when I first arrived in this western Indian state, I passed plenty of billboards in English, advertising the same sorts of things as at home, just like in **Thailand**. Generally, the area seemed to be much like any other beach resort in Asia. In Goa, the locals are well used to tourists, especially along the coastal resorts.



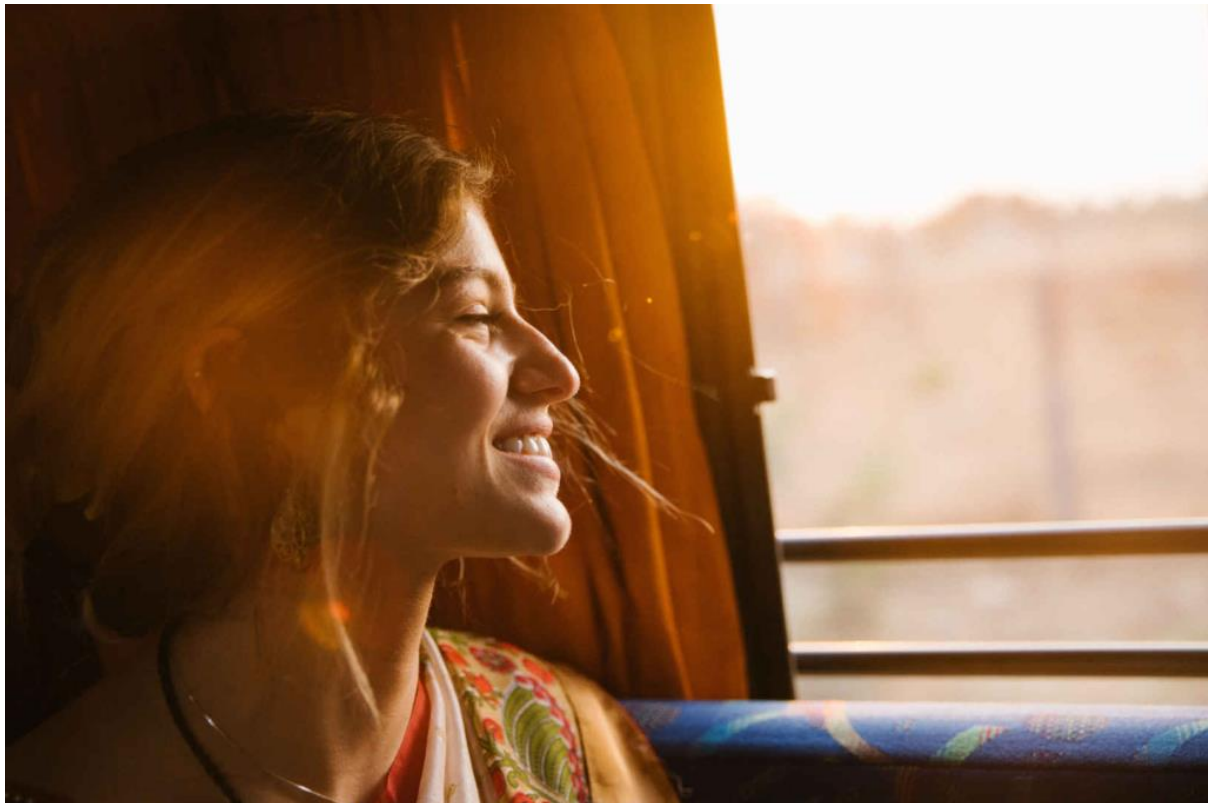
In fact, national and international tourism is Goa's primary source of revenue, making it India's wealthiest state.

Travelling alone to Goa can be a fun and rewarding experience. You are taking yourself completely out of your comfort zone and by taking a solo Goa trip you are opening yourself up to new experiences and meeting new people. Much more so than you would if you were visiting with a partner, friend or travel buddy. The weather is hot and sunny, the beaches are beautiful, the food is tasty, the people are friendly and the atmosphere is relaxed, so read on for more tips on planning your solo travel to Goa.

### **How to travel to Goa, India**

All foreign nationals entering India need to have a valid passport and visa. However, organising a visa to India can be a pain. The official website for information and to apply for an Indian visa is [here](#). Depending on what kind of visa you apply for, you may also need to find out the location of your nearest Indian Visa Application Center (IVAC).

The process is to [apply online](#), though the web form can be frustrating and you will need some patience. Unless it's an e-visa, you will need to visit your local IVAC on an agreed date. Here, you submit your application in person with the required documents including your passport, which they will keep for a few days to process your visa. You will need to have specially-sized photos taken for this visa application so make sure you bring cash so you can use their photobooth. The final step is the easiest one – receive your passport either in person from the IVAC or you can ask them to post it to you.



The nearest international airport for getting to Goa in India is the Goa International Airport (GOI). It is located in Dabolim village, close to the city of Vasco da Gama in the south of the state.

International travel routes for your Goa trip will usually connect via frequent daily flights to the Indian cities of Mumbai or Delhi. Airlines operating these routes include British Airways, Virgin Atlantic, Etihad, Cathay Pacific, Air India, Delta Airlines and Jet Airways.

### When to travel to Goa

The peak tourist season is between October and March. Outside of this period, many of the beach shacks are dismantled. Temperatures are high all year round but it's rainy season between May and September, with the heaviest monsoon rains hitting the state between June and August. It's worth considering any official travel warning advice for Goa before booking your trip and making sure you have all the recommended vaccines and anti-malarial tablets.



### Is it safe to travel to Goa alone?

As I mentioned earlier, while I was excited about boarding the plane for my trip I was also wondering, is it safe to fly to Goa? Friends had warned me about the Goa travel dangers, based on shocking stories they had read in the media. It's true that awful things have happened to tourists here, but unfortunately this can happen anywhere. Goa for solo travellers is absolutely fine, as long as you keep in mind the usual safety tips in Goa, just as if you were going anywhere on your own. Is Goa safe for tourists? Absolutely – as I've indicated above, Goa relies on tourism for its thriving economy so it's well geared up for it, there are many international tourists in Goa and many travellers visit alone.



If you or your family or friends are concerned about whether Goa is safe to visit for girls travelling alone, try not to worry. There are indeed unpleasant and scary rumours about women being hassled and worse by the men in India. However, I rarely had to fend off unwanted advances and, on the whole, everyone was polite and helpful. The majority of guest house owners I met – male or female – were kind and friendly, giving me local tips and advice. One even negotiated a good rate

for me with a local manicurist and henna tattooist, so I wouldn't be charged the much higher tourist rate. Generally, it's still worth being on your guard though while you're in Goa, like you would at home, to make sure you stay safe. Read on for my top Goa safety tips.

## Arriving in Goa

If you are visiting Goa alone, I would recommend booking in advance an airport transfer to your accommodation. The guest house owner can often arrange this for you.

If you prefer to take a government taxi that's fine, of course, and you will find a long queue of people right outside the airport, once you exit the baggage claim area. But after a long-haul flight and connections, it's reassuring to see someone holding your name when you arrive, especially as a single traveller in Goa. It's a relief to be able to avoid dragging your heavy luggage along the queue and simply relax as the driver already knows how to take you directly to your destination.

In my case, my first stop was Ashwem, an hour and 40 minutes' drive north from the airport. Here, I was staying at a fabulous **yoga resort** close to the beach, sleeping in a tipi under the stars (sadly this place is no longer there). The driver was kind and chatty, giving me insight into the local area. As we reached my destination, I was surprised and delighted to see a cow casually hanging out beside the road.



## Goa safety tips for solo female travellers

My Goa safety tips include bringing a padlock with you, so you have extra reassurance that the door of your room is secure. Bring a torch in case you need to get around at night, though as a single woman in Goa, it's best to find another traveller to go out in the evenings with if you can. Try not to conspicuously walk around with your laptop or other expensive electronic items, to avoid the attention of thieves. I swapped my smartphone for a basic flip-phone while I was out and about in India, just to be sure. More safety tips in Goa – and indeed when backpacking in India and other places – include being mindful of where you're storing your cash. Try not to carry large amounts with you and keep pockets of cash in different places, in case of the unlikely event one of your bags goes missing.

More important Goa travel safety advice concerns health and hygiene. It's fair to say that in the backpacker parts of Goa, standards of cleanliness are not always as high as in the Western world. Toilets may be squat toilets rather than ones you sit on – you will get used to this. There may not be any toilet paper or soap, so you may want to carry your own tissues and hand sanitiser to be on the safe side. On the plus side, despite the reputation of Indian food causing



stomach upsets, I had no issues whatsoever during my month in Goa. I only ate vegetarian food which may have helped.



The best way to have a safe holiday in Goa is to read a guide book, Goa travel blogs (like this one) and other informed and balanced travel advice before you go. Knowledge is power. This way, you can better understand the local culture and be aware of any potential dangers and scams. I also found this helpful to do ahead of my first solo trip to Thailand.

One recommended eBook for solo female travellers is called the [The Insider's Guide to Goa](#). Its 170 pages are filled with up-to-date, comprehensive information, as well as secret places to go, written by an American female expat who lived in Goa for five years.

### **What to wear in Goa**

India is a conservative country, so if you are a single female traveller in Goa, it's worth covering up a little more than you might in other beach destinations, to avoid stares. On one of my first days in Goa, I felt a little self-conscious about wearing a strappy vest and denim cut-offs. While this is a perfectly acceptable outfit in this part of India, I would recommend bringing a sarong to wrap around as a scarf or a skirt. It's also a simple way to shield your skin from the hot Goan sun or to use as a makeshift blanket if you're on the road. I have pale skin so I wrapped my sarong around my shoulders every day during my first week here, while I adjusted to the heat.

Other things to carry while travelling to Goa include a light long-sleeved shirt, a maxi skirt and relaxed trousers so you can stay cool, stylish and not worry about revealing too much. But, for the most part, you don't need to worry too much about what to wear during your solo travel in Goa, as it's more laid back than the rest of the country. You can wear a bikini to the beach without anyone blinking an eyelid. Plus, there are plenty of shops where you can buy beautiful locally-made clothing and jewellery at surprisingly good prices, so leave room in your bag for souvenirs.



I would also recommend you invest in a sturdy pair of hiking sandals, as you are likely to be doing a fair bit of walking, sometimes with your heavy backpack. In the above picture, I am wearing my trusty [Teva sandals](#), which come in a variety of colours and designs (mine are purple). I wore them constantly and never had a single blister.

Cheap laundry services are easily available in Goa, so you don't need to take as many clothes as you think. You can hand over your dirty items and receive them a couple of days later, clean and freshly pressed. After a few weeks, your clothes may develop small holes or look worn out, so don't worry if this happens – it's a good excuse to go shopping.

I took a simple ring to wear on my wedding ring finger, in case I felt hassled by guys as a solo female traveller in Goa. Guest house owners and restaurant servers did ask me a few times whether I was alone in Goa quite a few times. Sometimes I would say I had a boyfriend back home. But generally, I didn't feel like there was any bad intent behind the question, it was simply polite conversation – even if I felt sensitive about the topic. I'm pleased to say, I never felt the need to wear the ring.

## Managing your money in Goa

My top tip for **managing money** in Goa is to take cash with you – especially US dollars. Here, cash is king. Your credit card will not get you far, unless you've booked online in advance. Be to be prepared for a one mile walk to the nearest ATM, which may have a long queue or may not be working. If you have other currencies, preferably US dollars, you can usually find someone at a roadside kiosk willing to exchange it for Indian rupees. Plan well and don't get caught out without notes, as few places accept card payment.

You will need to keep your wits about you to avoid being overcharged. It's not unusual for rickshaw drivers and stall owners, especially in popular places such as the area's **famous night markets**, for foreigners to be told something is up to four or five times the real price, so be prepared to negotiate.



## Accessing the internet in Goa

Finding reliable internet access can be tricky in Goa. You will find WiFi in guest houses, bars and restaurants but the quality isn't always great. One of the first **guest houses** I stayed at in Goa offered WiFi, but the signal was poor, other than in the middle of the night. Quite often I would have to stand outside with my mobile phone to find the best place to pick up a strong signal. But WiFi quality varies from place to place and I would usually find somewhere where I could use my laptop. There are also Internet cafes available, though again the Internet speed often isn't very fast so don't rely on them to stream videos or download large files – you could be there a while.

## Where to go in Goa

Goa has a coastline stretching 63 miles (101 km), around a three-hour journey by car from top to bottom. If you are wondering where to travel in Goa, you could head north to Arambol and the popular beach resorts of Mandrem, Morjim, Anjuna, Baga, Candolim and Calangute. The other main places to visit in Goa is the south, closer to the airport, around Palolem beach and the nearby Agonda and Patnem. The southern beaches are generally quieter and less developed.





## How to travel in Goa

As there are many places to go in Goa, it's worth checking out the different transport options for travelling around Goa. Generally, you will find plenty of taxis, motorcycle taxis and rickshaws. You will need to check they will take you to your preferred destination, as sometimes they can refuse if they suspect they won't be able to pick up someone else from there. Also, it's best to negotiate a fee before starting your journey as they often don't use their meters. It can be a good option for an advance booking to places like the local **night markets**, especially if they agree to pick you up afterwards.

For travelling around Goa via public transport, there are local bus services offering a cheap fixed rate for frequent routes to most areas. For long trips in Goa or beyond in India, it's best to buy a ticket in advance from a local travel agency. Some of them are overnight routes, with basic flatbed compartments with curtains, where you can sleep. As you are on a solo trip in Goa, you will usually be allocated your own private sleeping area, while people travelling together are allocated doubles. One of my top travel tips for these journeys is, if you don't have a sleeping bag, you can stretch out a





sarong as a sheet and use your bag or a bundle of clothes as a pillow. Sometimes they serve snacks on the bus or they'll stop somewhere for a toilet break or a quick dinner, which is a nice way to meet your fellow passengers. At the end of your journey, the bus driver will tell you to alight for your destination but occasionally you may discover you are in the middle of nowhere. Once I was dropped off in a remote car park at 4am and another time, we were told to get off the bus at the side of a motorway. In both places, rickshaw drivers were ready to take bus passengers the rest of the way – for a fee of course.

For more flexibility, you may wish to hire a motorcycle. You will need to wear a helmet and be careful on the road, as drivers in India don't follow the same rules as in Western countries and accidents can happen. Car hire is also possible but usually not cost effective – it's better to book a taxi. When renting a motorcycle, find out the going rate from guest house owners and other travellers, otherwise unscrupulous salespeople may try and overcharge you. Another top Goa tip for travelling on two wheels is to keep your bag under the seat so you don't risk people trying to snatch it.

## Where to stay in Goa

If you're wondering, where should I stay in Goa, you have a few options. As mentioned, the best areas to stay in Goa are to the north and in the south. For me, one of the best places to visit in North Goa is **Arambol**, which has a charming hippie vibe. There are many cheap guest houses so you will have plenty of choice. To browse and book accommodation in Arambol click [here](#).



If you're on a Goa backpacking trip and you want a place to easily meet other travellers, you may be specifically looking for hostels in Goa. In North Goa, the best place to stay for nightlife is **Prison Hostel** in Anjuna, a famous party place, or you could try the nearby **Jungle Hostel** in

Vagator. For somewhere sociable but chilled, check out [Jamboree Creek Yoga](#) in North Goa's quieter beach resort of Mandrem. For many more hostel options, visit [Hostelworld Goa](#).

One of the best places to stay in Goa's south is [Palolem](#). South Goa is quieter and prettier than the north, and Palolem has one of the best beaches in Goa. You can look through budget accommodation options in Palolem [here](#). Highly recommended is [Dreamcatcher](#), which is sociable with a super-chilled vibe.



Unfortunately, theft can happen, even if you're staying near one of the safe beaches in Goa, like Palolem. If you choose to stay in a beach hut, make sure it is made with strong materials, it looks secure and has doors that lock. As mentioned before, you can bring your own padlock for extra peace of mind.

## Things to do in Goa

As you've come all the way to India by yourself, you're likely to be looking for the best things to do in Goa alone, besides just going to beaches and cafés.

A good thing to do is simply to explore the area around where you're staying. One day, I went for a walk north along the beach and that's how I discovered Arambol. With a host of [yoga classes](#), ecstatic dance sessions, art classes, live music concerts and [meditation workshops](#), there are plenty of fun things to do here, advertised on posters and flyers. Along with the daily [sunset beach parties](#) and the friendly people from around the world that are drawn to Arambol, I found many [reasons to love this place](#).



Arambol has a great street market where you can pick up all kinds of clothes and trinkets, as well as a host of restaurants, many serving vegetarian food. If markets are your thing, one of the best things to do in North Goa is to take a motorcycle taxi to one of the area's popular night markets. The one I visited was Goa's vibrant [Arpora night market](#), open every Saturday for all your hippie needs. This eclectic and vibrant place even has a bar, nightclub and entertainment. It's quite an experience – there's plenty to see and do. My top tip for here would be to divide by five any quote you're given on an item for sale. For some people it's a bit uncomfortable to barter, but it's all part of the fun, and expected in this part of the world.



If you are prepared to travel overnight, you can go on some interesting side trips in Goa and beyond into the neighbouring states of India. From Arambol, you can catch a local bus to the ancient city of Hampi in Karnataka. Even if you only have a day or two, historic [Hampi](#) really is a worthwhile stop as there are so many ornate temples and quirky statues to discover. On the first day I didn't know what to see, so I hired a tuk-tuk driver to take me on a tour. Then I spent a second day cycling around the route to see the sites in more detail. Most of the places are free to visit, while a couple, like the elephant stables and Lotus Mahal cost a small amount but are well worth it. You can read all about my trip to Hampi and see more photos [here](#).





While South Goa is slower-paced, you will find a range of **things to do in Palolem**, including **yoga classes** and silent discos. The neighbouring villages of Patnem and Agonda have some of the top beaches in Goa and much more serene than in the north. Agonda in particular is an incredible spot to watch the sunset. If you want to go swimming, try not to have too much cash or electronic items in your bag and, if possible, leave it somewhere people you trust can keep an eye on it while you go for a dip in the sea.

Side trips from here to places of interest outside of Goa include Gokarna, a popular Hindu pilgrimage destination in Karnataka, around three hours south of Palolem by bus. This place is popular with backpackers.

Further south, the state of **Kerala** is another popular backpacking destination. Even more laid back than Goa, it is so lush and beautiful it's known locally as God's Own Country.



## Goa nightlife

Since the 1960s, Goa has gained a reputation for being a party place, notably the psychedelic trance scene, and many people come here looking for nightlife. However, the government has been clamping down on noisy parties, so this part of India is not as hedonistic as it used to be.



If you are seeking the best beach in Goa for nightlife, the larger resorts in the north have more going on. As mentioned earlier, you can stay at party hostels where they will take you to all the most happening places in Goa. Over the years, the dance scene has gone more underground, so while there are lively beach bars, often the best party places in Goa are in remote private venues. The latest news is that the government is **banning consumption of alcohol on Goa's beaches**, so the parties will soon move completely inland. To find out the latest party agenda, check out [this website](#).

For nightlife in South Goa, local business owners have come up with an innovative idea to avoid residents complaining about noisy parties. Palolem is now known for its **silent discos**, in which partygoers wear headphones and can switch between two or three different DJ playlists to dance to. These silent discos get going in the early hours of the morning and are excellent fun for singles, as this unique experience creates a great sense of togetherness. Try **Silent Noise** at the south end of the beach, which takes place every Saturday night.





Women travelling alone will likely be wondering is Goa safe at night? There were times that I was alone at night and I instinctively kept alert of the people around me, but I never had any problems. It's a popular tourist destination after all and there are lots of expats here. I would usually stick to places close to my accommodation if I was going for dinner by myself. Once you make friends with other travellers, it's better to go out with them after dark. Keep an eye on your drink, like you would anywhere else in the world. Stay safe and have fun!

### Staying safe in Goa

The best thing to do if you are safety-conscious is to compile a list of emergency phone numbers and addresses in Goa. Note the contact details for your country's local embassy or consular, as well as any Goa safety advice on their website. They may also list addresses for local hospitals and doctors.

One of the first things I did when arriving in Goa was to get a local SIM card for my phone. You will need to fill in a form, so it's quicker and easier if a member of staff from your accommodation can help you. If you need to reach the police, dial 100. For emergency medical assistance during your trip, dial 102 and ask for an ambulance.





If you are referred to a medical facility for treatment, you will need to contact your insurance company as soon as you can, so you can be reimbursed for the cost. Lonely Planet recommends **World Nomads** insurance for backpackers.

In general in India, it's worth being prepared for surprises, as things can be a little

unpredictable. But it's part of the fun and will give you good stories to tell when you get home.

### **Enjoy being a solo female traveller in Goa – you will create memories for life**

As you can see, in Goa there is a wealth of things to see, do and experience. And eat! So much good food. And plenty of other solo female travellers just like you. Go(a) explore!