

[Is Goa Still the Rave?](#)

Category : [January/February 2001](#)

Published by Anonymous on Jan. 02, 2001

Is Goa Still the Rave?

Once the Muslims ruled, then the Portugese were in power, now the casual tourist has invaded Goa, but the government may still hold sway

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In October, 2000, a BBC report titled "Goa Shuns Backpackers" quotes Goan Deputy Chief Minister, Dayanand Narvekar, as saying, "We want wealthy tourists who can make a contribution to the state's economy." Narvekar echos a growing desire among Goan authorities to change the image of Goa from being "a hippie joint where acid parties and raves are the order of the day," as Claude Alvaris, a local journalist, publisher and environmental activist, told the BBC. At issue are the two main attractions for the casual tourist, Anjuna Flea Market and the racous, all-night raves (a "rave" is a dance party with trance-inducing music). Our special report gives a glimpse of what Goa stands to lose--or gain.

The Indian port of Goa is a place apart from the rest of the subcontinent. A former Portuguese enclave, it retains a heady and unique mix of Latin and Asian cultures and cuisines, lifestyle and architecture. Catholics, Hindus and Muslims live side by side. Buffaloes and zebus stand in for the traditional bulls at weekly fights, and Christian festivals are celebrated with traditional Indian exuberance, while Goa's laid-back atmosphere has made it an eastern mecca for old hippies and

young ravers from throughout the Western world.

Goa's idyllic winter climate, deserted beaches, cheap food and a pace of life approaching total stasis provided an unbeatable haven for hippies during the 1970s. Northern Goa, especially the vicinity of Harmal Beach, remains a travelers' enclave, and the community has become something of a tourist attraction for coach loads of weekend sightseers from Maharashtra. Many Indians are curious to witness firsthand the indulgent culture of the West but don't have the money to go overseas. They just go to Goa.

The weekly flea-market at Anjuna is a vibrant ecosystem of many cultural species. The market is held every Wednesday in a coppice of coconut palms between the rocky beach of Anjuna and the fallow rice paddies. It can be reached by road or by sea, since a few enterprising fishermen have begun to ferry people around the promontory from the neighboring beach of Baga. The market is said to have been started on Valentine's Day 25 years ago by an American hippie, Eddie Mazmaniam, as a small-scale fund-raising exercise. Transient Western travelers joined in to sell or barter Himalayan trinkets they had brought with them from their summer spell in Himachal Pradesh or Nepal. The Flea Market also serves as a safety net for partying tourists who run out of money. They come here to sell whatever they can so that they can stay just a little bit longer. There are many Indian vendors, but very few of them are Goan.

If you've just arrived at Anjuna market from a quiet Goan beach like Palolem or Benaulim, the effect is paralyzing. You

have probably, at one time or another, met someone from the many nationalities represented, or at least heard of the country; and you're likely to have seen most of the dress styles, either in real life or in magazines. The difficulty lies in finding a category of your brain that corresponds to a situation where all these things are in the same place at once. The problem, you realize, is that you were expecting a hippy scene, whereas the reality is nothing like it.

Sit under the tree where a local entrepreneur is making a killing on real coffee, serving the multitude from two espresso makers. You see a couple of flower people, the genuine thing, and feel reassured, because that's what you'd expected. There goes another hippy in the classical mold... but then you notice on his arm the tattoo of a dagger driven through a skull. Beside them is a stout man with camera and crewcut, wearing a Hawaiian shirt and open sandals over white socks; a young woman with hair plaited into ratstails, clad in a tight-fitting mauve Lurex ballgown so long that you can only just see the army boots on her feet; a man naked--even the head shaved--except for a small loincloth and a headband with a few flowers in it; a fair amount of grunge, modified punk and rasta.

Various currents of multinational exotica and mysticism, too, have pooled in the market. Signs on trees advertise the karate courses run by Martin, a highly competent Shotokan teacher with a club in Baga. There is Tai-chi, massage, yoga, shiatsu. and a huge banner, slung aloft between palms, announcing, with a cryptic hint of bewilderment, "Where Is My Buddha Tarot Palmistry?"

You are, you have by now realized, at the cutting edge of the Postmodern. The scene at Anjuna Market is not a point in the organic evolution of a particular ethos, but a composite of forms assembled from the debris of a dozen intercontinental subcultures, ancient, modern and futuristic.

Most startling--remember, you were expecting Haight Ashbury--is the absence of anything resembling the languid ethos of free love and the amoeboid group. There is scarcely even any physical contact between people. The reason, you feel, isn't conservatism but a combination of boredom and rejection, as if even biology were an outmoded atavism.

And the music: not guitars and plaintive harmonicas but the brain-deep electronic thud of rave. And as for the songs, no longer laments for flowers and the condemnation of war, but scarcely a human voice beyond the odd synthesized monosyllable and occasional disembodied phrases.

Tapes of the music are on sale--"Techno Trances," "Ambient Space," and so on. But better still, you can listen to it uninterrupted for twelve hours and more at the rave parties for which North Goa is becoming internationally famous. Many Europeans come to Goa expressly for the winter gatherings at Anjuna and Vagator. Upwards of two thousand people gather for the events.

There are drugs, but they're not as necessary as they were to the flower people--after a few hours of that sheer volume and that unforgiving rhythm your neurons are appropriately

reorganized without any need for chemical intervention. Two thousand monads dancing without a hint of flirtation, no apparent communication between them, linked as individuals to the music which they periodically face in an act of "Worshiping the Speakers"--Anjuna Market at prayer.

And what do the locals make of it all? Eyebrows are raised, but, amazingly, serious protests are not [until recently]. Children walk by the parties on their way to school, talking about football, and passing nuns don't even bother to cross themselves. The visitation by tourists is intense but brief; and after all, having seen so much presented to them and vaunted as eternal, it would be surprising if the Goans had not, by now, acquired the patience of a people familiar with the dynamics of transience.

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