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# Goa's Fontainhas:

## *Little Portugal in India*

Story and Photos by Murli Menon

The anticipation of travel is almost like falling in love! You choose a destination and an adventure that makes your heart leap and your pulse race. When you arrive, you do not know how it will turn out to be—a casual flirtation, a torrid affair, a long-term relationship—or, if after all the planning and expectation, there just is no chemistry!

It's time to revel in the long history of Portuguese influence in the form of Fontainhas Latin Quarter, which stands still in pride with all its glory. It is the centre of attraction of the capital city Panjim. Flanked by Ourem creek in the East and Altinho hills in the west, Fountainhas still exudes Portuguese charm, and the radiance of old days seeps through like a newly formed bud kissed by the morning dew. It gets its name from the Fountain of Phoenix, the mountain stream located at the foot of Altinho Hills.

Fountainhas Street is a UNESCO World Heritage Site located in Panjim city, the capital of Goa. Locals still refer this street as "*Little Portugal in Goa.*" Fountainhas was founded by an aristocratic Portuguese gentleman named Antônio João de Sequeira for the purpose of coconut plantations. But, in the early 1800s, due to the spread of plague 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. It was recognized by UNESCO in 1984.

The walk through this street transports you to Portugal of the 1800s. Large, colourful, European-styled houses stand side by side like a fortress. Bungalows coloured bright yellow to ruby red and cobalt blue jostle with each other for space in this quaint Latin quarter of Panjim, which can only be accessed on foot. The streets are narrow and full of European styled bistros, cafes,



The post office at Fountainhas Street

and bakeries. Many heritage homestays, hotels, and lodges are scattered around Fountainhas street.

It is, indeed, one of the most visited places in Goa.

Breathtaking vibes of old cafes and bakeries, colonial charm of Portuguese buildings, art galleries, red brick wishing wells, old Portuguese churches, and old streets like 18<sup>th</sup> June Street and Rua 31 de Janeiro Street transport you back to the time of Portuguese influence.

Colonial architecture is one of a kind. Slate tiled roofs, dark wooden doors, white and blue tiled plaques, maroon-red and mustard-yellow houses are fascinating sights to behold at Fountainhas. A visit to Goa would be incomplete without visiting the old-world charm of this Portuguese heritage. February is the best time to visit, as it is a festive month. The Fountain Festival is held every year in February. Tourists from around 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.

Altinho Hill will give you breathtaking views of the Fontainhas Latin Quarter and the tangerine-coloured Maruti Hindu Temple. Don't forget to go to the Phoenix Fountain, another famous landmark at Altinho Hill.

The names of the narrow, cobbled streets also can be traced back to the Portuguese time in Goa; for instance, *Rua 31 de Janeiro* (31st January Road) is named after the day Portugal won 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.

Marvel at the old Portuguese houses that date back to the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. Painted in hues of green, pale yellow, and blue, along with red-tiled roofs, artistic doors, and overhead balconies, you'll instantly fall head over heels with the rows of traditional Portuguese houses and cottages that cover the narrow, winding landscape. One of the intriguing features of the houses and cottages in Fountainhas is that they are painted every year after the monsoons; it's a rule that is followed to this today.

One of the historic houses has a red-coloured wishing well with roosters erected on it. The well is no longer in use, but you can spend some quiet time there, enjoy the beautiful sights, and soak up the local atmosphere.

### How to get there?

#### By air:

The nearest international airport to reach Goa is at Mumbai. There are several options for Portuguese tourists to get to Goa from Mumbai. Goa (domestic) Airport at Vasco is about 40 kms away from Panjim. Goa is connected by direct flights from Mumbai, New Delhi, and Bangalore.

### Where to stay?

Laguna Anjuna Resort is an affordable place to stay by Indian standards during May-October, which is a low season. A standard double-room costs approximately 45 Euros (breakfast inclusive). Budget-conscious European tourists frequent this eco-friendly resort during this time of the year. The rooms are spacious and can comfortably accommodate a family of four (with extra beds). The bathrooms are comfortable, with hot water showers and mini bathtubs. Advance booking is recommended during February at Laguna Anjuna, a 60-minute drive from Panjim.

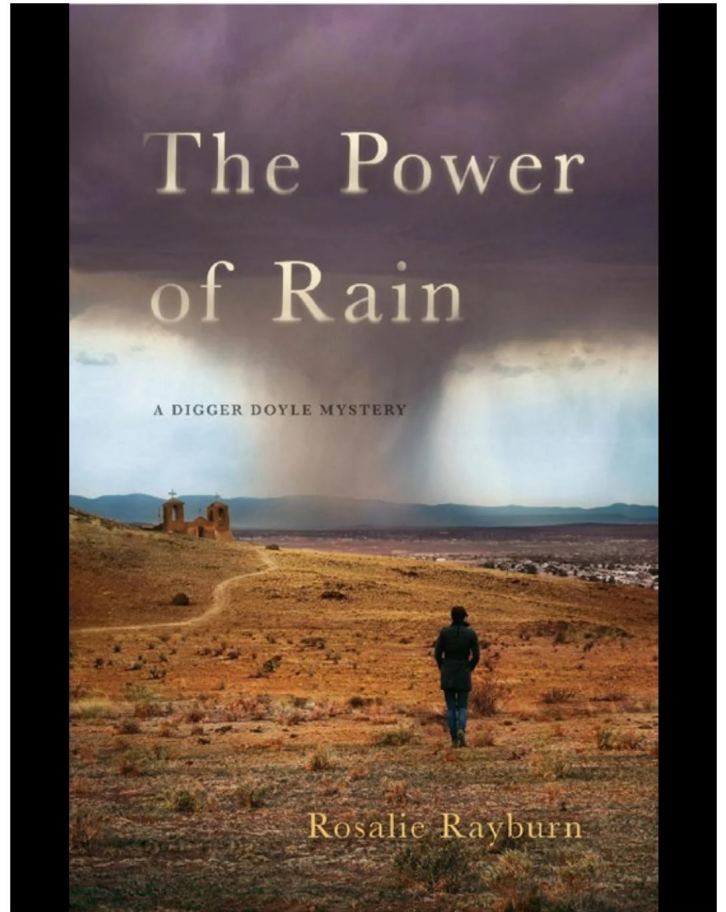
### Where to eat?

Several restaurants offering Indian vegetarian cuisine are in and around Panjim. Several makeshift, street-side stalls selling snacks are also found here. European style bistros and cafes serving healthy vegetarian fare are found at Fountainhas.



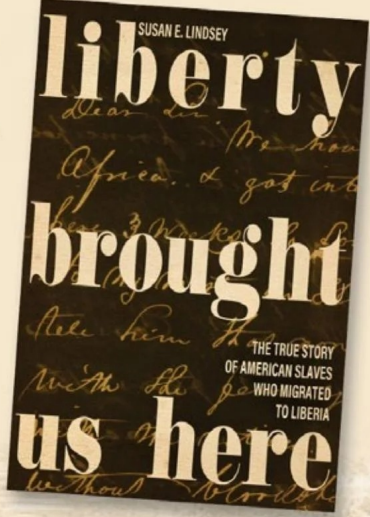
Murli Menon at a Portuguese-styled bungalow

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