

GOA'S UNIQUE FESTIVAL OF FLAGS

NATIVE TO THE QUAIN T ISLAND OF DIVAR IN GOA, THIS MONTH'S BONDERAM FESTIVAL, SUPPORTED BY GOA TOURISM, IS A TREAT FOR TOURISTS.

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Located just 12 km away from Panjim, Divar island in Goa comes alive on the fourth Saturday of August every year when the Bonderam festival is celebrated there. The place can be reached by ferry from Old Goa as well as Ribandar. The name Bonderam revolves around the involvement of flags which in itself is an interesting story. Bonderam originates from the involvement of flags and Bandeira is the Portuguese word for the flag. Frequent disputes which occurred between two wards (section of the village) - Piedade and Sao Mathias - over property matters often led to bloody duels, and sometimes death. Subsequently, the Portuguese introduced a system of demarcation of boundaries with flags of various colours.

The rival groups, however, knocked down the demarcation flags sometimes with stones. Today, in a parody of the past, this is commemorated with a "Fotash" flight (toy weapon of bamboo stem) and berries are used as missiles in a mock fight between rival groups to knock down an offending flag. On the day, a carnival ambience is created. Each ward of the village has a float at the parade. Though sponsored by business houses, the floats have an unmistakable local flavour. Melodious music drifts from the village to mainland Old Goa - once the hub of Portuguese Goa - even before the crack of dawn on the Saturday.

At noon people begin trickling into the village. By the evening the



trickle is a deluge. An expectant crowd assembles along either side of the main throughfare of the village. The tempo is set by lads and lasses wielding "fotashes" engaging themselves in mock battles. The gaily coloured floats accompanied by colourfully dressed youngsters make a pretty picture. The festival, supported by Goa Tourism, begins close to noon and concludes late in the evening. It begins with a multi-coloured flag parade along with a brass band on the island. The Bonderam festival starts with a flag parade from the main Divar junction which is accompanied by the brass band and then the declaration of the "Bonderam" festival open. Once the festival is declared open, the entire island comes to life. Events like fancy dress competitions followed by the traditional float parade and performances by famous music bands of Goa occur all through the day. The fest is held in remembrance of the age old dispute between clans existing on the island during the Portuguese era. Hence the multi-coloured flags that demarcate the boundaries of the respec-

tive clans.

Divar being away from the hustle and bustle of the capital city is ideal to celebrate this festival held in remembrance of old territorial battles that took place on the island, mock skirmishes are re-enacted by boys and girls wielding fotashes (toy flags made with bamboo) and using berries for missiles. Divar village has six wards and each ward of the village has a float at the parade. The parade moves forward with the cheering spectators falling over themselves to see and applaud the passing ensembles. Each of these six sections of the parade has very distinct themes and music to go with it.

This is followed by a live band performance by the famous music bands of Goa. The parade is



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marked by joyous celebrations accompanied by loud music. There is a depiction of agriculture, fishing and rural markets, fitness, lifestyle, nature, environment, indigenous cuisine in the floats. The colourful floats depict scenes from a regular Goan kitchen showing famous

Goan Sausages, distilling feni and harvesting crops. The spirit and participation of the locals singing and dancing along makes the atmosphere full of joy and cheer making the event contagiously happy. The procession comes to a close towards late evening. This is a very popular monsoon festival in Goa and it draws huge crowds.