

# GOA'S COLOURFUL LATIN QUARTER

EXPLORING FONTAINHAS IN THE HEART OF PANJIM IS YET ANOTHER WAY TO DELVE INTO THE MANY SECRETS OF GOA.

TEXT AND PHOTOGRAPHS  
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**I**t was on a recent visit to Goa when I was making some enquiries about some offbeat experiences that I discovered Fontainhas. This is a vibrant colourful area in Panjim and is the oldest Latin Quarter in Goa. It is known for its colourful Portuguese style homes that are best explored on foot.

In the 1800s when several headquarters of the Portuguese government were shifted to Panjim this became a residential area for administrators. Soon others began to make this locality their home. On entering Fontainhas, you are treated to a visual spectacle that has colours like blue, yellow, orange, green and pastel shades that manifest themselves on the exteriors of the homes. UNESCO recognized Fontainhas as a Heritage Zone in 1984.

The area itself has the Ourem creek on the east and Altinho hill on the west. Even the nameplates here are a delight, akin to a work of art. Do not miss the building where one wall is covered by Azulejo ceramic tiles (traditional coloured tiles used in Portuguese buildings). For a moment, you will be forgiven if you think you are in Portugal. Even the roads here are named interestingly with dates. The 31st January Road or Rua 31 de Janeiro was named after the independence of

Portugal from Spain. The 18th June Road was named to commemorate Goa Revolution Day.

Both Hindus and Christians live here and my guide pointed out that homes with the holy basil or tulsi plant belong to the Hindus. The chapel of St. Sebastian that dates back to 1818 is a beautiful building with a pristine white façade. Most of the Portuguese homes here are from the 18th and 19th centuries and are seen in narrow, winding roads that are interspersed with little cafés and bakeries and delightful stores.

All the houses are repainted after the monsoon each year. When you are here notice the shell windows made with sea shells, a typical aspect of the architecture. There is also a red wishing well with roosters here that is a favourite spot. Today the space is home to several art galleries. To pick up a nice souvenir head to the delightful store Velha Goa Galeria and you can buy traditional hand-painted, tin-glazed azulejos. Every year the Fontainhas festival is celebrated in February when the entire area transforms to showcase different aspects of Goan heritage with music and dance events. A visit to Fontainhas is a great way to see Goa off the beaten track and must be on your to-do list the next you visit state.

