

A full-page background image showing a sunset over the ocean. The sun is a bright white circle partially obscured by dark clouds on the horizon. The sky is filled with orange and yellow light from the setting sun. The ocean in the foreground has small, dark blue waves with white foam, reflecting the orange light from the sky.

Biodiversity Of Goa

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Better known for its history, culture, sand and its nightlife, Goa's unacknowledged position in the biodiversity world has its own reasons to be in the sun due to its rare combination of natural circumstances scarcely seen around the world.

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Spanning a realistically insignificant area of 3700 sq. kms or twice the size of the popular Tadoba Andhari Tiger Reserve in Maharashtra, Goa plays host to about 5% of the world's avian species! The tiny state is part of World Heritage and world's hottest Biodiversity Hotspot – the Western Ghats, and features habitats as diverse as coastal mangroves, grasslands, sandy coastline, coral rich waters, and moist deciduous forests. In terms of biodiversity, the February 1999 issue of the National Geographic compares Goa to the Amazon and the Congo Basin for its rich diversity.

The undulating yet unforgiving Western Ghats make it an ideal home for many species of birds and animals and also provide a corridor for migration. The mountain range extends for a total of about 200 kms in Goa of their total length of 3702 kms. The broadest expanse of forests along the Western Ghats is in Goa and the adjoining Karnataka state. The coastal areas towards the west provide the tropical backdrop. The average annual precipitation is over 500 mm along the Western Ghats and

a little different elsewhere. The length of the dry season averages from 6 to 7 months. For all these reasons, the dominant vegetation is of the moist deciduous type.

Goa is endowed with over 1512 documented species of plants, about 500 species of birds, over 48 genera of animals and over 60 genera of reptiles. About 33% of Goa's forests belong to the Government of which 60% are in Protected Areas. But combining the private and government forests, the forest cover accounts for about 56% of the state. Goa has a magnificent range of flowering trees and plants which are seen all over the towns and villages in an amazing range of colours and sizes. During the period before the monsoons, most of these are in full bloom, lending Goa a magnificent look. Among the other trees that are found in abundance are the Banyan, the Peepal, Sisso or Myrtle, Karanj and Teak. In the denser forests, some of the unusual trees found are an evergreen variety of the Ashoka tree with peculiar saffron coloured flowers. There are also innumerable species of flowering plants including rare and endemic



Osprey
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Smooth-coated Otter
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Black-capped Kingfisher
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Indian Mugger
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orchids. The primary species of trees include Terminalia, Lagerstroemia (crepe myrtle), Xylia and Dalbergia (timber trees). The forest cover is so dense that the sunlight fails to penetrate the canopy, much less the forest floor.

Much of the woodlands in the sanctuaries adjoining the Western Ghats boast of impressively tall trees that reach up to 30 meters and whose branches obscure the sun. Most of the vegetation in this area is of the moist-deciduous type, interspersed with semi-evergreen and evergreen patches. Moving towards the coast, Goa houses 16 mangrove species and it has one of the best mangrove forests in the country. The Chorao Island (Dr Salim Ali Bird Sanctuary) in Mandovi river is one of the best mangrove forests and houses most of the species found in Goa. Cumbharjua

canal, which links the two biggest rivers of Goa - the Zuari and the Mandovi is also an area very rich in wildlife. Many species of Kingfishers, Crakes and other aquatic birds are prevalent here. Slaty-breasted Rail is a prized catch if one can get a sighting. And in addition, there are some species of reptile and crustaceans that make their home amongst the mangroves. These include Mudskippers, Fiddler Crabs, Crocodiles, Otters, Flying Foxes and Jackals.

Fern
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Moving on to the coast, the Olive Ridley Turtles head to the shore for their annual nesting routines. Morjim, Galgibag and Agonda beaches witness most of the nesting. Beyond the coast into the archipelago surrounding the Grande Island and the Bat Island, off the city of Vasco, are peninsular India's unique coral reefs. Coral reefs are among the most exotic spectacles of the seas. The reefs around Grande Island are known as a Fringing Reef (one of the three main types of coral reefs, the other two being Barrier and Atoll) and are found all around the island. The corals feed on the water and absorb the nutrients from it, while fish use them for food and protection. The average depth for corals around Grande Island is 4 to 8 meters. The main ones found here are called Table corals, Sea Whip corals, and Brain corals. They support about 18 species of exotic fish including Honeycomb, Moray Eel, Snapper, Butterfly Fish, Angel Fish, Parrot Fish, Cuttlefish, Damselfish, Grouper, Goatfish, Flatworm, Trigger Fish to name a few, and fauna such as Sea Urchins and Sea Cucumbers.

Coral Rosette
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