

## Preserving Goan heritage in Mumbai

# Khotachiwadi

A fragile sliver of lost heritage, Khotachiwadi is a tiny Portuguese village tucked away into the back lanes of Girgaum, in the heart of South Mumbai. To see is to believe!

words // Punita Malhotra



MAHARASHTRA

Mumbai ●

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India's hyper-paced, high-powered financial capital. Vibrant, vivacious city that never sleeps. Cosmopolitan, chaotic megapolis with a fascinating history spanning early Portuguese colonisation, British imperialism and one of the most incredible examples of land reclamation. From archipelago of seven islands to buzzing nerve-centre of business, Mumbai has morphed beyond recognition.

The existence of a land with palm-fringed woods, rich mango plantations, lush rice paddies and simple fishing villages in a city where skyscrapers struggle for space seems like a fantasy. Until one steps into the comforting shadows of one sleepy settlement that has survived miraculously, just a few metres from racing vehicles on the concrete outside. Welcome to Khotachiwadi, a Portuguese heritage village offering a slice of calm in the chaos of Mumbai.

### ECHOES OF A HERITAGE

'Khotachiwadi Pin 400004' announces a non-descript navy-and-white signboard suspended from a regular iron pole. There are no magnificent marvels ahead. Just a bunch of regular houses with regular people living regular lives. Except, the houses are anything but regular. It's a refreshing whiff of old Goa, minus the beach, starkly incompatible with the surrounding matchbox-Mumbai sprawl. Remnants of a bygone era, more than 100 years ago, when Dadoba Waman Khot leased this *wadi* (plantation or garden) to a bunch of East Indian Christians. Sixty five



A lane full of Konkan-Portuguese-style heritage homes in Khotachiwadi

precious Konkan-Portuguese-style heritage homes in the area have today been reduced to just 28 and there is still an ongoing threat of them being swallowed up by the high-rise contagion. Thankfully, since 1995, the neighbourhood has been upholding the label of a Grade III heritage precinct and is fiercely protected by the Khotachiwadi Welfare and Heritage Trust.

This is one web of narrow pedestrian walkways one wouldn't mind getting trapped in. Empty

lanes criss-cross every now and then, at awkward, obtuse angles. Nineteenth-century residential bungalows fill the gaze, in every direction one looks. The colours of the buildings are clearly the show stealers—there's cheerful blue, warm ochre, soft peach, lively green and even radiant red. But the love lies in the detail. There are hand-painted gates, timber-framed front porches, serene sit-outs and overhanging balconies with traditional external staircases. Elegant wooden balustrades to enhance the individual facades.

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#### HOW TO GET THERE

Vistara has daily direct flights to Mumbai from Delhi, Amritsar and Goa, along with convenient connections from other cities.

Delicate cast-iron grills to add to the timeless beauty. And sloping red-tiled roofs, for that universal old-world charm. Artistic appeal spills from each element.

From the tiny green garden patches to the sunlight streaming into the dimly-lit interiors, everything warrants a second glance. Black-and-white family photos adorn walls. Colonial furniture graces geometrical-tiled floors. Large creaky fans dangle from high ceilings. Vintage lamps throw shadows on tables and uncommon curios crowd narrow shelves. Each individual strand adds depth to the classic, quaint ensemble.

#### FROZEN IN YESTERDAY

Houses, houses and more houses to stare at. But one singularly noteworthy stop? The 200-year old 47G, home to celebrated fashion designer and Khotachiwadi crusader, James Ferreira. Hard to miss, hard to resist, part-art gallery, part-home with countless heirlooms and antique collectibles wordlessly narrating the nuances of the inimitable East Indian lifestyle. Added bonus? An upper-floor vintage-styled bed and breakfast, adorably tagged Brown Paper Bag.

#### A REAL TIME WARP

It's not just the houses, it's the culture that is different too. Living style influences architecture and



A wall mural in Khotachiwadi with distinctive Portuguese art influences

Image credit: Punita Malhotra

architecture influences living style—this old adage comes true right here in Khotachiwadi. In these neatly cobbled streets, one senses an unfamiliar sense of peace, so out-of-sync with the mad rush beyond. A pink shuttered balcony window peeks from behind a frothy palm and a bunch of fuchsia bougainvillea spills out uncontrollably. Bicycles, scooters and motorcycles lean against walls. Cats cross empty streets lazily in search of dark resting corners. Clean benches wait in shadows. Tall trees speak of bygone times when orchards filled the area. Small shrines and modest chapels stand side by side in harmony. This is where sleepy mornings trail into lazy afternoons, and friendly evenings slip into peaceful nights.

#### AGELESS FOREVER

A hole-in-a-wall chapel with an idol of crucified Christ makes a statement of sorts in bright red. A flamboyant graffiti on the outside wall, depicting Mary sitting on a lotus holding baby Jesus. The life-like facial glow, the intricately painted mosaic-like garment, and a surreal halo make for an exquisite three-dimensional effect. And a multi-hued background scattered with light-as-feather flowers and leaves creates a distinctive impact. The little chapel and the wall graffiti fittingly sum up the character of this little Portuguese village. Ageless and classic. In a city forever on the run, Khotachiwadi has managed to retain its unique character, nestled in its own time warp. Hopefully that will remain unchanged for a long, long time to come. ✨



#### VISTARA QUIZ

Question 2: What is the deepest point on Earth called?

Answers in the next issue of Vistara magazine.

Share your answers at [inflightmag@airvistara.com](mailto:inflightmag@airvistara.com). Two winners for each question will be eligible for prizes.



## EXPLORE THE CITY

The bustling cultural hub has many facets for travellers to explore



Head to Fort, a bustling cultural district. Start with the gothic masterpiece Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj Terminus, walk across the iconic Azad Maidan, dodging the dozen or so cricket games on at all times, and visit the National Gallery of Modern Art, famous for both art and architecture. Move on to Kala Ghoda and take a breather at one of the many cafes there. Shop here for clothes or collectibles or, if you're in the mood for some bargain book-hunting, head to Flora Fountain where book sellers stack mountains of paperbacks.

### VISIT

Escape to the Sanjay Gandhi National Park, a green oasis nestled inside the metropolis for a quick break. Its many attractions include jungle jeep safaris, trekking and cycling routes, adventurous prehistoric caves and a lake with rent-a-boat options.

Book yourself a private yacht at Colaba and sail for a few hours in tranquility with the setting sun casting the perfect golden glow over the Gateway of India and the glittering Mumbai skyline.

Try restaurants on Linking Road for Egg Benedict breakfasts and Singaporean crab and lobster lunches while a walk through the Bandra Kurla Complex will throw up many gourmet options from Greek, Italian, Thai and Cantonese. Wash it all down with fresh beer from the breweries here.

### EAT

Try Parsi delicacies like *Akuri* on toast (scrambled eggs), *dhansak*-rice (mutton and lentils with caramelised rice), and *patra macchi* (fish in banana leaves).

Tickle your taste buds with Malvani favourites like Barlela pomfret, Bombil fish fry, oysters and mutton *sukka* (spicy mutton). The eponymous Kolhapuri mutton and prawn Koliwada are perfect for those in the mood for red-hot food. The Gujarati *thaali* with its wide array of palatable vegetarian goodies is another option.



As fashion capital of India, Mumbai has its pulse on the latest flavour of the season. Head to Telon (Malabar Hill), Melange (Altamont Road) or Madison (Pedder Road) to get a lowdown on the latest fashion and accessory trends.

When travelling to the city of dreams, buying a Bollywood movie poster is a must. From authentic hand-painted classics to printed contemporary ones, Chor Bazaar has it all.

### SHOP

