

Goa has a rich repository of heritage houses, each with a multitude of stories and unique features. To mark World Heritage Day on April 18, NT NETWORK looks at how this heritage is being preserved and the challenges that need to be addressed



The Casa Araujo Alvares in Loutolim

## Living legacies

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Whether it is a 300-year-old tulsri vridavan, a grand sala filled with ancestral furniture, or the improvised cafe in a centuries-old backyard, each story affirms that heritage is not a relic, but a living legacy. In Goa, a state steeped in layered history and architectural richness, this year's World Heritage Day observance coincides with a significant development; the finalisation of the Goa State Heritage Policy 2025, a long-awaited framework aimed at preserving built and cultural heritage. Though still awaiting cabinet approval, the policy claims to be the first-of-its-kind in the country to offer protection to privately owned heritage homes and align with international conservation standards. But what exactly constitutes heritage? According to historian Prajal Sakhardande, heritage encompasses far more than old buildings- it is "the positive legacy of history", including both tangible and intangible assets—from temples, churches, homes, and civic buildings to crafts, cuisines, and traditional performances. He adds that heritage includes Goa's natural beauty too—its beaches, rivers, and forest. When it comes to defining a heritage building or home, official and academic interpretations align on several characteristics. The Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) and UNESCO broadly describe a heritage building as one that "possesses historical, architectural, social, or cultural significance, and is typically over 50 years old." According to the draft Goa State Heritage Policy, a heritage home is "a physical repository of architectural, historical, and cultural value, constructed using traditional materials and techniques, often passed down generations and contributing to the identity of a region."



At the Pai Raikar family home, the architecture and walls tell their own story - the house was originally lime-plastered, a technique they revived during restoration. Other changes have also been made - water availability at every point, active electricity connections, bath and washrooms, and almost every modern amenity.

### Heritage as enterprise

Some owners have turned heritage into livelihood. Founder of Carpe Diem in Majorda, Daegal Godinho operates his business from one section of his ancestral home, parts of which date back to before 1750. "It was a way of keeping the old house, lived in," he says. Godinho has preserved features like mother-of-pearl shell windows and hand-built cement floors while repurposing collapsing sections into a backyard cafe, stage area, and ceramic studio.

"Visitors often marvel at the solid wood doors, 'adambo' (wooden rods used to bolt the doors from the inside), and roof tiles," he says. For Godinho, heritage is not about freezing time but about allowing the past to breathe into the present. "All the old walls - mainly built of mud with laterite stone frames at doorway, etc. have been retained. The old tile roofs too. Certain walls have wooden 'hands' embedded in them where typically a large mirror would sit in the halls," he shares.

In Loutolim, Maendra Alvares runs the Casa Araujo Alvares Museum, a family home-turned-time capsule with a guided sound and light show that takes visitors through his family's history. "The ever-growing loss of Goan culture made the dream a reality," he says, adding that maintaining the house in its original state has been challenging but fulfilling. Today, the floors are still hand-tamped cement, polished over time by generations walking across them. The roof tiles were cleaned, not replaced, and the kitchen remains equipped with brass ladders, coconut shell cups, and earthen pots. "When visitors see it, they're stunned. It's not curated—it's lived history," says Alvares. Both Godinho and Alvares note how the experience of engaging with heritage deepens the community's appreciation and fosters tourism that is rooted in culture rather than commercialism.

### The tourism lens

From the perspective of the tourism industry, heritage is not just an asset—it is part of Goa's brand identity. "Goa's USP (Unique Selling Point) is the vibe that emanates from its culture, and its colonial architecture is a vital component of it," says president of the Travel and Tourism Association of Goa (TTAG) Jack Ajit Sukhija. He highlights Fontainhas, the Latin Quarter in Panaji, as a key example where heritage conservation has directly supported tourism. "The WelcomHeritage Panjim Inn was Goa's first and only classified heritage hotel by the Ministry of Tourism," he notes. Its sister properties—Panjim Pousada and Panjim Peoples—as well as the Menezes Braganza House and Sarah Fernandes House in Chandor, and the Figueiredo House in Loutolim, serve as cultural touchstones. While he acknowledges that integrating modern needs into old structures can be a "question for endless debates," Sukhija believes it is vital that these buildings remain usable and liveable, while retaining their authenticity.

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In terms of heritage architecture, Goa's legacy is vast and diverse. As historian Heta Pandit explains, the state is home to structures spanning the Kadamba period to the colonial era, including temples like the Mahadeo Temple in Tambdi Surla, churches in Old Goa, colonial mansions, freshwater springs, and civic buildings like the Adil Shah Palace and the old Goa Medical College. Heritage homes, she adds, are "built by Goans, for Goans, with Goan technology" and often date back to the late 19th and early 20th centuries. "They reflect Goan identity at a time when Portuguese power was on the decline," she notes.

### A house, a home

While there are instances of heritage houses falling to disrepair or being sold to outsiders, many houses continue to stand majestically, thanks to the owners, the quiet custodians who maintaining these architectural gems.

Airito Andrade, who lives in a 188-year-old home in Fontainhas, is the seventh generation in his family to do so. "I live as comfortably as anyone in a modern home," he says, pointing to the thick walls that keep the house cool, aided by strategically placed windows that allow cross-ventilation, and the careful blend of traditional design with modern amenities like air conditioning in select rooms.

The house is a repository of memory—from sacred artefacts to inherited furniture and Sunday lunches. "When it comes from love, you naturally want to maintain it," says Andrade.

Explaining the features of a typical Goan-style heritage home he says, "The balcao was always a threshold—between home and world." These covered porches were designed not just for shade, but for social life—encouraging community interaction. And the Andrade family continues this tradition.

"We sit here in the evenings, like our grandparents did, just watching the road, greeting neighbours," he says.

Inside, Andrade shares that the 'sala', the formal drawing room, has remained untouched. "There's furniture carved from age-old wood, inherited down generations. We've had to restore some chairs, but the design is unique—no two pieces are the same," he says. The layout prioritises airflow, and the oyster-shell windowpanes—made from the nacre of oyster shell, diffuse harsh sunlight into a gentle glow.

Down south in Benaulim, Omar Loiola Pereira shares similar sentiments when it comes to the connection one feels, living in a house that has stood over centuries. "Every inch and corner of the house has a story," he says, recalling school holidays, feasts, and birthdays that brought extended family together.

Pereira explains how heritage houses often have load-bearing walls, with high ceilings and wooden beam roofs that must be maintained with great care.

"Our house is over 200 years old. We've been trying to restore parts of the roof using traditional wooden rafters and Mangalore tiles, but it's hard to find artisans who understand

how these joints were originally fixed without nails," he says.

The courtyard, once used for storing coconuts and drying chillies, now lies partly overgrown. "My mother insists we keep it open," he says. "She says it's the breathing space of the house." In Neura, writer and artist Savia Viegas, returned to her ancestral home after three decades in the city. Today, she keeps its social life alive by hosting film evenings at the house. And while, she admits that change is imperative, she remains committed to preserving the key elements. The French-style windows, tall and shuttered, remain fully functional. The internal courtyard allows a column of light to fall into the centre of the house, while corridors lined with terracotta tiles connect rooms that once served entirely different purposes. "The old houses were architecturally designed to have a flow of space and the rooms opened out into each other giving scant regard to privacy. It also accommodated rice, coconuts, farm vegetables, and regal entertaining areas for the large families for gatherings. So births, deaths, weddings and coming-of-age parties all took place here," she says, adding that each family needs to encourage the younger inmates to use the old Goan house as a resource for good living. "My children have grown familiar with the spaces within the old house and are connected with the stories and events. Everyone has to do that if you care enough for your heritage and want to protect, not flaunt it," she says.

Manguirish Pai Raikar, who has converted the three-centuries-old part of his ancestral home into the Ramnath Krishna Pai Raikar Agricultural College, in Savoi-Verem, speaks with reverence about its architectural genius. The roof, sloping and tiled, is supported by thick rafters joined using traditional techniques, without a single metal fastener. The comparatively newer, two-century old part is where the full family still gathers during festivals and other occasions. "Each pillar in the 'chowki' is made from a single jackfruit tree," he says, marvelling at the carpentry skills of the Chari community, who were the artisans of woodwork in the past. For Raikar, the house is not just a structure but a community hub, a space for festivals, and a living repository of stories, rituals, and art culture. "The richer people of the village would patronise artists and thus promote art forms back in the day," he recalls. The first floor of the home was once also the community school, when education wasn't easily available in the villages. "Children from our village, and the neighbouring villages would come for Classes 1 to 4, in Marathi," he shares. The family also brought in teachers from out of the state. "Post Liberation, when the government started their primary school in the village, we stopped," he says.



The Pai Raikar ancestral home in Savoi-Verem



Ramnath Krishna Pai Raikar College of Agriculture, Savoi-Verem.