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On the walls of the hall of private audience of the Moghul Emperor Shah Jahan's historic red palace in Delhi is a Persian inscription, "If there be a paradise on the earth, it is this, it is this, it is this." More than 1,200 miles across the plains and mountains of British India from Delhi is the Portuguese possession of Goa. If Goa is not quite an earthly paradise, at least it is a place of scenic beauty, a home of friendliness and courtesy, and a store-house of rare war-time surprises.

After leaving the British India Customs station, Castlerock, the metre gauge train for Goa winds slowly down the western Ghats, each turn of the line opening up a glorious new vista of mountain scenery. The train jumps carelessly across Dud Sagor (milk falling) waterfall, which appears to start from the clouds, then meanders through dense tropical forests, coconut groves, and rice fields, to the shores of the Arabian Sea. Villages with their cottages with red tiled roofs appear clean and attractive. The friendliness of Goa begins to be apparent as soon as the train reaches the Portuguese Customs station, Collem, where khaki-clad officials wear silver stars on their shoulders, similar to those of American generals.

High Hospitality

One official could not have made us more welcome as he ordered for us a bottle of the finest wine at the refreshment room.

Even the discovery that one of our number was not a visiting consul, as he had imagined, did not dampen his pleasure at entertaining us. "In five minutes I will be able to speak to you in any language," he said in French. He did even in Australian. In the telegraph office at the port of Mormugao, which a few days ago received a record rush of business, uniformed officials could not have been more helpful-if somewhat prone to exaggeration. "Telegrams go like this," they would say with a snap of the fingers when questioned about the time of dispatch of messages.

In Nova Goa, capital of the colony, shopkeepers left their premises in charge of their assistants to place themselves at the disposal of the visitors for hours at a time. Hotel keepers were profuse with apologies if they were unable to supply all that a guest ordered. There is much to choose from in Nova Goa shops and hotels. There is only a handful of shops, but they are stocked with silks, elastic, silk stockings, English and American cigarettes, cosmetics, Australian tinned meat, asparagus, jams and fruits, raisins and sultanas, American sweet corn, English biscuits, mustard, sauces, tea, French olives. Canadian salmon, and Portuguese sardines. Similarly in the hotels there are wines and champagnes from Portugal, brandies and liqueurs from France, whiskies of dimly remembered brands from Scotland, and beers from Argentina. There is even a home-made coconut toddy on which the Goanese, if he has worries, can forget them for the equivalent of 6d.

There are no industries in Goa, so the colony has to import all its needs, except a few basic foodstuffs. Nearly half the rice supplies are imported. The colony is wise enough not to increase the cost of living by imposing heavy import duties. The Goanese do not make rapid inroads into the luxury imports because nobody has money to burn. It is a poor community with the income level lower than in British India. The average clerk receives about 40 rupees (about £4) a month. A man is comfortably off in Goa on an income of 100 rupees (about £10) a month.

The cost of the administration of the colony with its 600,000 inhabitants, is only about £65,000 a year, the Government's revenue coming mainly from Customs duties and taxes on businesses. There is no income tax, but a small war-time tax was imposed recently.

Goa exports coconuts, peanuts, cashew nuts, and a little teak. Half the country's income is derived from remittances from natives living abroad where opportunities are better. About 65,000 Goanese live outside Goa, 40,000 of them in British India, employed as musicians, cooks, waiters and seamen. Nearly every Goanese can read and write. There is either one or two schools in every town and village. The Shrine in-the Church of Bom Jesus in Goa. Under the canopy is the tomb of St. Francis of Xavier.

The colony claims literacy of 90 per cent. Each village has a State school, and usually a church school as well. Both types of schools are free. In the church schools music is an important subject. The population is about equally divided between Christians and Hindus. The Christian peasant wears only two articles of clothing a loincloth and a felt hat.

In her colonisation of Goa, Portugal made no compromise with the Indian form of civilisation.

Nova Goa is the only sizeable town in the colony. Far more westernised than any city in British India. Nova Goa was built by the Portuguese as a Latin town, with winding, narrow streets, balconied and shuttered buildings. Paintwork is faded on nearly all the buildings, but from many balconies hibiscus and other flowers lend touches of vivid colour.

From Nova Goa buses with brass bodies ply to outlying villages. Many of these buses, after crossing from the island of Panjim on which Nova Goa is situated, pass through Old Goa, seven miles from the capital. Most of Old Goa is in ruins, but a cathedral built in 1523, and a nearby church built in 1594, containing the silver casket of St. Francis Xavier, are still in use.

The Maternal Hand

The number of Portuguese in Goa is only about 200, all being officials, military officers, and their families. Portuguese officials usually remain in Goa for four years. In the administration of the colony, the Governor-General is assisted by a council, partly nominated and partly elected, but politics really do not exist. Portugal administers Goa with a firm maternal hand, which the Goanese appear to find quite satisfactory. The enervating climate alone is not conducive to excessive political or other activity. Although the present food shortage in India is making the Goanese peasant realise that he must get more from the colony's rich soil, life is allowed to pass placidly in the towns. Even crime is almost non-existent in Goa.

A lone place of entertainment in Nova Goa is the movie house. Portuguese and better-class Goanese usually spend their evenings at home or in the houses of friends, playing bridge or mah jongg, and sipping wine. Some men folk spend their evenings at a club, but hotel drinking is frowned upon.

The sympathies of Christian Goanese are definitely pro-Allied. This little neutral part of the world now has a permanent reminder of the war in the form of four Axis ships scuttled in Mormugao Harbour. Only the superstructures are showing. If Goa is the reverse of progressive, it is still a charming haven, not only from war, but also from many inhibitions of the outside world. - *Courtesy The Sydney Morning Herald*