



LA PLAGES: Enjoy French flavours by the beach. (Below, right) Lozano, one of the owners, hails from Provence.

PHOTOS BY STEVEN SHALOWITZ

It's St Tropez in rustic Goa

Chill out in this chic hideout on India's west coast

Former MediaCorp Radio Gold 90FM DJ Steven Shalowitz is on a round-the-world journey after leaving Singapore. This week, the Chicago resident hangs out at Kate Moss' favourite haunt in Goa.

MY TRAVEL planning is simple. I read my guidebook on the plane flying to my destination then toss it out once I land.

My plans are usually made at the last minute, after I listen to suggestions from locals or other travellers.

And so it was for my stay in Goa.

After spending my first day on Anjuna beach, I found myself without a lift back to my guesthouse.

As I began walking, a Japanese Gen X'er wearing a Guns N Roses t-shirt and sporting shoulder-length hair pulled up on a motorbike and offered me a lift to town.



GOA COLOURS: The vibrant shades of Panaji make it a boon for shutterbugs.

His name was Goto. I was glad his hair flew in my face as he sped along the road – I would have been too afraid to see what he had almost hit along the way.

Poor chap though, several days later I saw him at the market – his head bandaged, the result of a road accident. Nevertheless, he told me that as a professional photographer, he enjoyed shooting Goa's capital,

Panaji. The older residential district featured colourful houses reflecting the

city's Portuguese heritage.

He was particularly proud of his shot of a bald lady in a purple sari, which contrasted sharply with the green building behind her.

Goto was right on the mark. The next day, after seeing the body of St Francis Xavier in the Basilica of Bom Jesus in Old Goa, I made my way to Panaji and wondered why travel magazines didn't mention the vibrant shades of its superb colonial architecture.

I could understand why Goto was so taken with the city's narrow lanes and off-the-beaten-path feel. I left Panaji more than satisfied.

The following day, I headed for La Plage – French for The Beach, which sounded like the ideal hang-out for a weary traveller.

Located in Goa's north, on Ashwem Beach, La Plage is like something out of a 1960's Brigitte Bardot movie – vintage St Tropez sans the former film siren.

A stunning beach dotted with simple wood-and-canvas recliners



fronted La Plage's main attraction – an airy white-washed bungalow with gauzy curtains that lent it a breezy and homey feel.

While relaxing in the shade with a mint lassi, I was joined by Serge Lozano. He, along with Florence Tarbouriech and chef Morgan Rainforth, opened La Plage.

The trio from Provence spent the past nine years dividing their time between France and India, managing not only La Plage, but also Le Restaurant Francaise in the Goan town of Calangute.

With Rainforth leading the charge in the kitchen, La Plage's three daily meals plus snacks echo Provençal cuisine – with a hint of local inspiration. The black sarong and tunic-clad waiters add a dash of sleekness to the presentation.

While independent travellers stumble upon La Plage, Lozano mentioned it had become a regular meeting place for expats living in Goa and A-list celebrities from farther afield.

Indian fashion designers and Bollywood headliners including Malini Ramani and Ayesha Julka have enjoyed a day in the sun at La Plage while the likes of Kate Moss and Jade Jagger (Mick's daughter) have found calm here away from the paparazzi.

Private and quiet, La Plage is a welcome break from the tie-dyed and package tourist set which descend on Goa during the northern hemisphere's wintry months.

With the sound of lapping waves mixing with French jazz, and supermodels-in-training for eye candy, I had no regrets about ditching that guide book.

SUDOKU plus

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The rules are easy. Fill in the grid so that every row, every column, and every 3x3 box contains the digits 1 through 9.

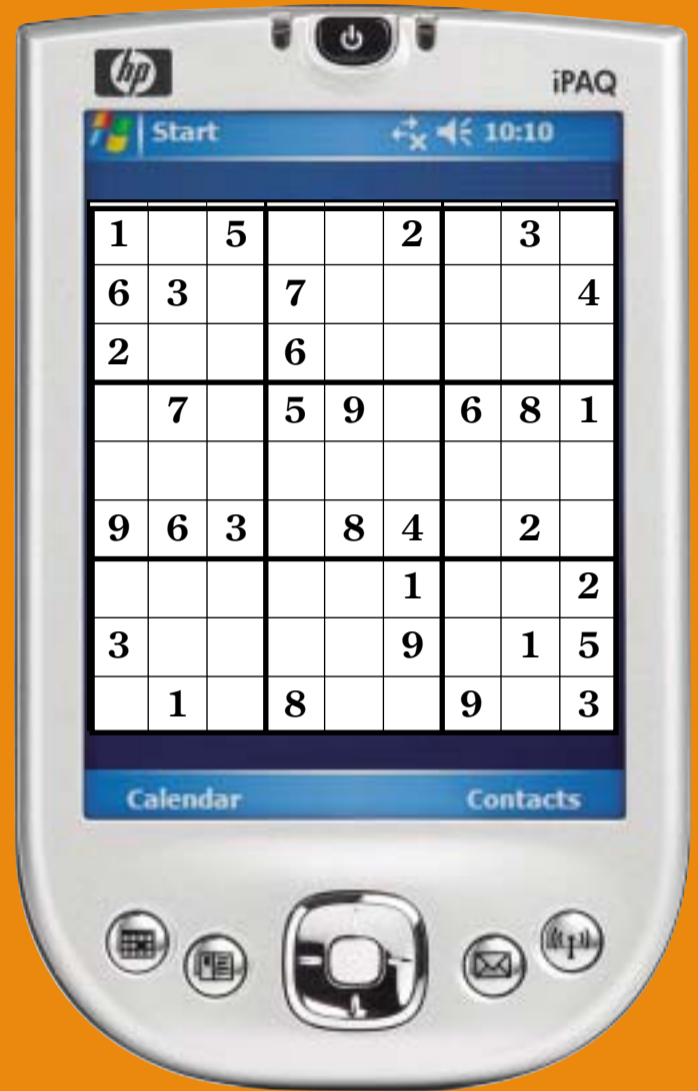
YESTERDAY'S SOLUTION:

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3	7	6	9	5	8	2	4	1
9	1	2	6	3	4	7	8	5
8	5	4	2	7	1	9	3	6
2	4	9	8	6	5	1	7	3
5	3	1	4	9	7	8	6	2
7	6	8	1	2	3	4	5	9



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