



OLINDA

It is hard to capture the essence of the world's fifth largest country in one small article. Brazil dominates the continent of South America with its sheer size and contains a vast diversity of cultures and landscapes. On my last visit to this diverse country I focused my attention on a less well known corner of this alluring land.

Driving south, you pass miles of stunning beaches and dolphins playing in the bays

The northeast of the country was the point of entry for the slaves who were shipped across from their homeland of Africa in the 16th century and it is their influence that remains strong in today's society, music, religion, cuisine and festivals. The state of Pernambuco lies in the heart of the northeast and I arrived in the state capital of Recife, (a loud and bustling city with few charms if I am being honest) before heading to its near neighbour, the beautiful town of Olinda. This town is a little colonial gem of Pernambuco that cannot be missed. Its name reputedly comes from the utterance of the first Portuguese sailors to arrive - 'O Linda!' meaning 'Oh beautiful!' as they laid eyes on the rolling hills where the town is now situated.



RHIAN AND BUGGY

You feel as though you have gone back in time as you walk along the cobbled streets, down narrow alleyways and past the charming houses of the town. There is a church around every corner and small plazas to relax in on every block. Its origins date back from 1532 and thanks to being made a 'Patrimônio

A Corner of Brazil

Rhian Williams, our Brazil specialist, recounts a recent trip to a lesser known part of this immense country

de Humanidade' by UNESCO in 1982, has been well preserved. I stayed in a small pousada steeped in history and culture called the Pousada Do Amparo, which is hidden away in the back streets of Olinda. This restored manor has only eleven rooms, each with its own unique decoration. It made the perfect place to stay in such an inimitable little town.

My journey then took a turn to the south, heading towards the small town of Porto de Galinhas (meaning 'Port of Chickens'). The road took me through endless sugar cane plantations which covered every inch of the countryside as far as the eye could see. Cashew nut sellers lined the sides of the roads as we passed through small towns



FERNANDO DE NORONHA

and the locals chewed on the copious amounts of sugar cane available to them. The town gets its interesting name from the clandestine role it played in the last days of the slave trade in Brazil. When a shipment of doomed cargo arrived the announcement was made that a new batch of fresh chickens had arrived in port. All the traders in 'the know' headed off to purchase the new

Up to the top of the dune we went and then the sand disappeared and we plunged down the other side.

arrivals. Nowadays all that is left of this once central trading place is a sleepy little town in the middle of hundreds of kilometres of white, sandy coastline. You can escape to an exclusive resort or stay at a small, character hotel and enjoy the delights of the town. Buggy is the main way of getting around here, which is fantastic to drive along the beach as long as you steer clear of the turtle nesting sites. The local fishermen use the traditional 'jangadas', little sail boats which you can take a ride in yourself out to the natural swimming pools in the reef. At low tide the pools are full of an array of tropical fish that gather round you as you enter the pool with your mask and snorkel.

While in Pernambuco province you must not miss out on the chance of going to the island of Fernando de Noronha. The small archipelago lies

approximately 345 kilometres from the Brazilian mainland and is truly a diver's or snorkeller's paradise (but if you do not enjoy either the beauty of the island is for all to see). Only one of the islands is inhabited and here you can stay in a local home converted into a pousada or one or two slightly more exclusive pousadas. Declared a Marine National Park in 1988, the seas



PRAIA DA PIPA

here are home to a large variety of marine life. Sadly I only had time for a day trip around the island, which was well worth doing, especially as it took me to Praia Dos Sanchos, commonly known as 'the most beautiful beach in Brazil' (and there are a lot to choose from!) Here I went snorkelling and immediately saw a turtle casually swim past. The sub-aquatic world revealed Parrot fish, leopard rays gliding gracefully by, moray eels and hundreds of brightly coloured red, blue and yellow fish whose names I don't know! Above the sea I was surprised to see Red Footed and Nazca Boobies which

previously I had thought only existed in the Galapagos. The time went too fast and it was soon time for me to leave this remote paradise in the Atlantic Ocean.

The flight back to the mainland took me to the state of Rio Grande Do Norte which is a huge adventure playground in the sand. The city of Natal, known as the Cidade do Sol and Cidade das Dunas (City of sun and dunes) has fairly recently sprung out of the sand dunes as the capital of the state. It is a small, friendly town with laid back locals who enjoy a relaxed pace of life in the perennial sunshine. The state is covered in sand dunes that sometimes reach up to fifty metres high. I took a trip up to the tiny town of Genipabu, somewhat hidden in the dunes, for an adrenaline rush buggy ride with a fearless Brazilian. The tiny buggy sped up the side of the dunes as I clung on with white knuckles in the back looking almost vertically down the slope. Up to the top of the dune we went and then the sand disappeared and we plunged down the other side, it was like the largest natural rollercoaster in the world! After so much excitement it was time to relax with a caipiriõa, (a must try Brazilian drink made out of sugar cane liqueur, lime juice and ice), in a hammock by the pool enjoying the cool sea breeze.

Pipa is the perfect place to do this. Driving to the small town to the south of Natal you pass miles of stunning beaches and dolphins playing in the bays. Around Pipa there is the Praia do Amor (the Beach of Love) which is a good surfing beach, turtle nesting areas, and mangrove swamps full of crabs (a delicious local delicacy) and tiny seahorses. The fishermen enjoy telling the story that seahorses have only one partner for life and are very careful not to disturb them in the fear that they lose their mate and then stay lonely for the rest of their lives. Such a sentiment is typical of the Brazilians - they are wonderfully kind and friendly people who derive so much pleasure from their country and its sights and sounds, and delight in sharing it with the visitor. I can't wait for my next trip back.

Travel File

Brazil is a huge country and well worth several visits, however, if you only visit once we can tailor a 16 day trip incorporating Rio, Iguacu, Salvador, Olinda and a beach stay from £2,250 per person. For further details please call Rhian on 01869 276 225.