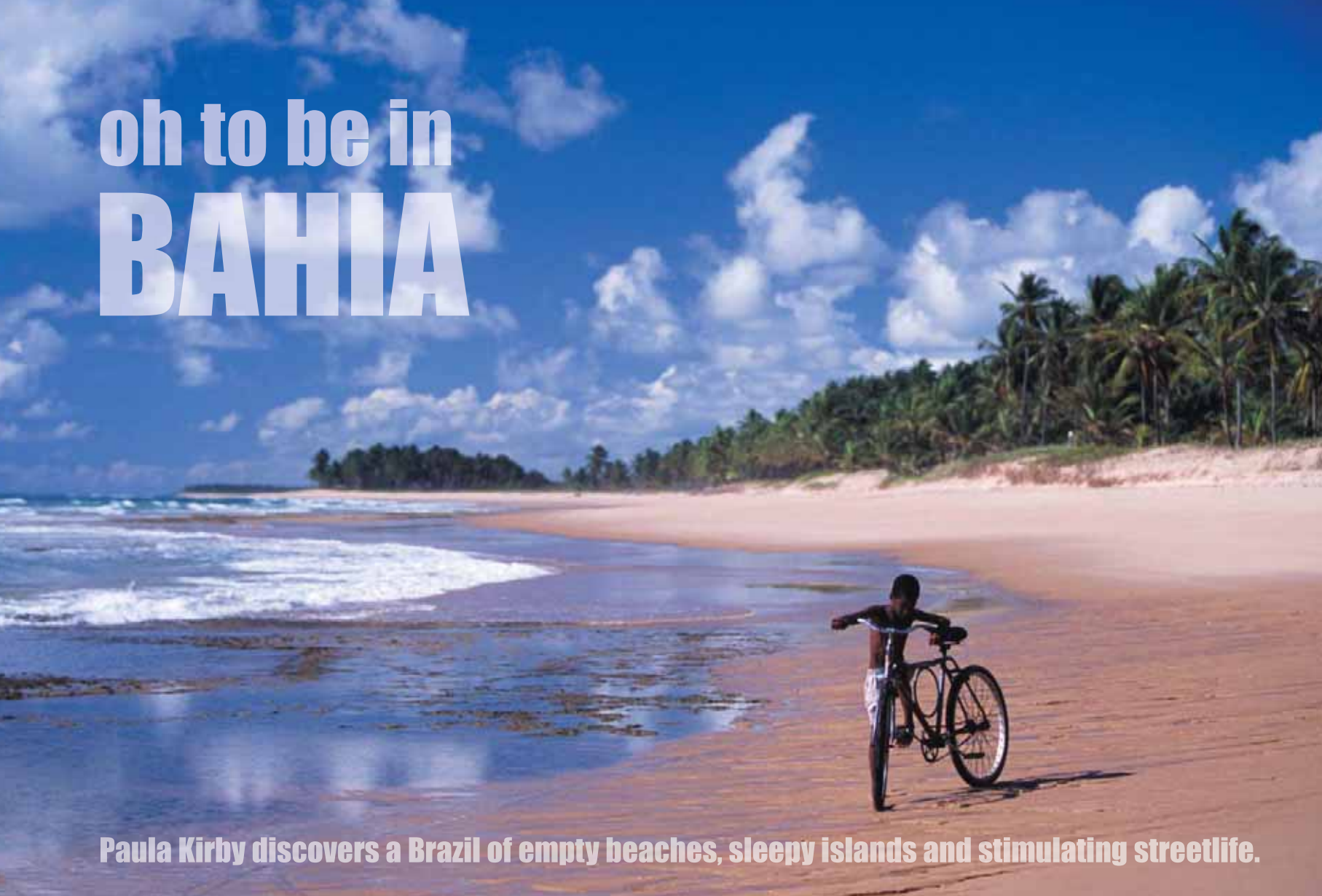


oh to be in BAHIA



Paula Kirby discovers a Brazil of empty beaches, sleepy islands and stimulating streetlife.

Boipeba Island

Consider Bahia. This region is larger than the whole of France but still little visited, and after exploring some of its 932 kilometres of coastline, lovely inland scenery and numerous islands and peninsulas I think I might have found a perfect mix of Brazil's best attributes.

Salvador da Bahia, the region's capital, is a vibrant city that buzzes to the beats of the traditional forró dance. It contains striking colonial architecture and is home to the candomblé religion, a mixture of beliefs inherited from African slaves, tinged with Catholicism. Whilst not a rich city, the people here have an intense sense of *joie de vivre*, with streetlife revolving around music and above all having fun. A highlight of Bahia is the cuisine and in Salvador I would highly recommend the traditional dish of moqueca, a seafood stew made with coconut milk that I would defy any "foodie" not to enjoy!

Moving on from Salvador I went to explore the Marau peninsula, staying at the five-star Kiaroa resort with its beautiful rooms and deserted golden beach. I also enjoyed the Txai resort, near Itacaré, with its chic swimming pools, contemporary rooms and wide range of activities in the local area, making it very easy to be as busy

or as lazy as you wish. For those hoping for an even more remote experience, the Fazenda da Lagoa, an hour south of Ilhéus, is a paradise with seven kilometres of beach accessible only by guests and locals. Here the stars at night were so bright I felt like I had just walked on to a film set.

Continuing my journey along the coast I visited the pretty town of Trancoso, with its charming hotels and restaurants, and finally reached my furthest destination south, the tiny fishing village of Ponta do Corumbau. Notoriously difficult to get to, it is either a four-hour drive from Porto Seguro or a 40-minute light aircraft flight. I went by road, and would highly recommend taking the plane! My favourite property in this area, Tauana, was designed by its Portuguese architect owner and has spacious bungalows with indoor and outdoor showers and sea views. The welcome is warm, the vegetables organically grown on the property and the décor a delight. Remote it certainly is, but this is the perfect place to escape the rest of the world for a short while.

I left the beaches behind me and headed inland to the national park of Chapada Diamantina, for this is a place that I had long wished to visit. Chapada Diamantina abounds in natural beauty

and is a heaven for outdoor pursuits such as hiking and swimming beneath waterfalls, and though it used to be mined for diamonds the real jewels are the interesting geological formations and conglomerate rocks. The friendly town of Lençóis makes a great base, with its charming coloured buildings, cobbled streets and central square, and there are some great accommodation options here.

The final destination on my trip was the island of Boipeba. South of Morro de Sao Paulo, this well-kept secret can only be accessed by plane or a four-hour four-part journey of road, ferry, road (again) and speedboat. However you arrive at this sleepy island you will find the journey worthwhile, with little to do but swim and snorkel or amble round the small simple towns that take you back in time to Brazil as it once was. I stayed at the lovely Pousada Santa Clara, where the rooms are tastefully decorated and the main emphasis is on great food and the importance of forgetting the fast pace of the world outside. Ending my two-week trip here, I understood just how much this lesser-visited part of Brazil has to offer.

Paula Kirby
Brazil Specialist



Chapada Diamantina National Park



Colourful houses of Lençóis



Pelourinho district, Salvador



FACT FILE

A 12-night trip to Bahia, including return flights, costs from £2,500 per person. This includes four nights in Salvador, including a city tour, four nights in Lençóis with excursions included in the area, and four nights on the island of Boipeba. Please call Paula on 01993 838 606 for details.

