



Excursions... Brazil

THERE'S LIFE AFTER CARNIVAL

by Michael Bennett

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Brazilians call Rio de Janeiro *cidade maravilhosa*, “the marvelous city,” and with good reason. Best known for hosting the world’s largest party—the pre-Lenten festival of Carnival from Feb. 9–12—Rio is a playground for the uninhibited, where exotic and excessive fun is the rule.

At times other than Carnival, life in Rio revolves around the sun and sand at such great beaches as the world-famous Copacabana and the posh Ipanema. Water sports are plentiful, and most beach-goers dip into the ocean to cool off from temperatures that can reach 100 degrees in the summer months (November to April). Other pastimes include sunbathing, playing volleyball or soccer (Brazil’s national sport), jogging and, of course, gawking at the beautiful people.

But frolicking on the beach is just a precursor to Rio’s legendary nightlife, which allows revelers to party until sunrise. Several of the world’s top entertainers, including Tina Turner, have performed their magic on stage in Rio. Dionne Warwick thought so much of the city that she decided to buy a second home in one of the city’s upscale neighborhoods.

For those seeking an escape from the big city, Armação dos Buzios, about a three-hour ride north of Rio, has become Brazil’s party capital. During the summer, the population of this small fishing village of 14,000 swells to more than 50,000. But once the crowds disappear, this quaint town is just the place for a romantic getaway.

Hotels in Buzios are in fact *pousadas*, small inns with a few dozen rooms. If you’re on a tight budget you can find rooms for around \$75 a night, including breakfast. Condos or suites with ocean views can cost \$200 or more.

Cars are not allowed on the stone-paved streets of the main village in Buzios, so it’s easy to enjoy the many boutiques and bistros one might expect of an upscale

resort town. Shopper’s alert: Many stores are closed mid- to late afternoon and don’t reopen until about 4 p.m. Bars and restaurants start to fill up at 9 p.m. and in some cases stay open until dawn. In Buzios, fish is the main course at most restaurants.

As in Rio, life in Buzios is all about sand and surf. The city has more than 20 beaches, each with a unique character. Buzios is one of the few places in Brazil where you might stumble upon a topless sunbather, especially on the more secluded beaches like Amores. Other beaches to visit are Ferradurinha, Azeda and Azedinha.

For a combination of culture and beauty, head to the Brazilian state of Bahia. Known by several names, including the “Soul of Brazil,” the “Africa of Brazil” and “Black Rome,” the capital city of Salvador de Bahia is said to be the most African-influenced city outside the mother continent. As residents of the first place in the Americas to import African slaves, the people of Bahia have maintained many of the African religious traditions, foods and dances that were practiced in 16th-century West Africa.

For instance, you might spot a *baina do acarage*—a woman who practices the ancient African religion of Candomblé. The *bainas* wear traditional white dresses with bell-shaped skirts and colorful headscarves depicting the spirit they serve. They are also known for their accurate fortune-telling and for casting and breaking curses.

Bahian cuisine is a combination of African, Portuguese and native Brazilian influences. One of the more popular foods is the snack *acaraje*—a hush puppy stuffed with *vatapá*, a spicy shrimp puree. *Moqueca*, stew seasoned with garlic, onion, tomato, coconut milk and dende palm oil is on the menu at many Bahia eateries.

Bahia’s 570-mile coastline is the longest in Brazil. More than 50 islands surround Salvador de Bahia. The largest and the most frequently visited is Itaparica, which can be reached by ferry or high-speed catamaran.

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Brazil’s official language is Portuguese. ▼ Many people in the tourist areas are bilingual (Portuguese and English). ▼ Crime is a big problem in Brazil. Watch your valuables. ▼ It’s customary to tip anyone who performs a service. ▼ U.S. currency is not accepted in Brazil. Exchange dollars for reais at the airport or hotel. (At press time, \$1 in the U.S. was equal to \$2.45 in Brazil.) ▼ Departure tax must be paid in reais as you leave the country (about \$36). ▼ Avoid drinking tap water. ▼ Bring plenty of sunscreen. Rio, Buzios and Bahia are in the tropics, and they get hot!