

Brazilian Beaches



bay, stopping off at any number of deserted beaches on the many islands (allegedly 65) for a swim or snorkel. There are regular schooners for transportation, or better still, walk along the quay and choose your own fishing-boat for private hire. That way, you can stop off at the tiny rocky island of Catimbau for a fantastic seafood lunch. The view of Paraty from the sea as you return is truly magical.

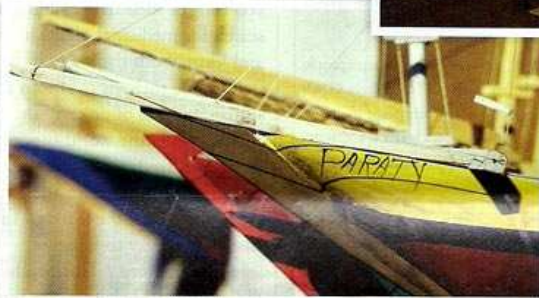
"This is an incredibly beautiful part of the world, with a spirit that's survived for centuries," says French photographer Richard Roberts, one of the many foreigners who came, was conquered, and stayed.

Originally an Indian village, Paraty became the main port for shipping gold from Central Brazil to Europe during colonial times. But constant threats of pirate attacks caused the gold export to be rerouted to Rio, and for a while, Paraty was almost forgotten. The only industries that thrived were *cachaça* (sugar-cane spirit) distilleries, some of which can still be visited today. In the early 1970s, with the completion of the coastal Rio-Santos highway, the town became easily accessible and was discovered by more travelers.

The historic center has the best accommodations. Pousada da Marquesa (pousadamarquesa.com.br) is a charming, converted colonial mansion, with period furnishings, comfy rooms, and a delightful patio garden. Sophisticated Casa Turquesa's (casaturquesa.com.br) elegant rooms have king-size beds, and there's a grand breakfast.

You can eat regally in Paraty. Refugio, by the quay, serves delicious seafood dishes (such as *camarão casadinho*, a local specialty made from two giant shrimp with a spicy roast manioc filling). Elegant Porto has exquisite meat dishes with a uniquely Brazilian flair and epicurean desserts. In the evening, head for Margarida Café, a 19th-century converted coffee warehouse with live Brazilian music and the best local *cachaças*.

Paraty is reachable from Rio and São Paulo by regular bus or, more comfortably, by regular or chartered van direct from your hotel or the airport (paratyours.com.br). Perhaps best of all, Paraty is only an hour and a half from Ilha Grande. Combine the two for a fascinating introduction to the wonders of Brazil.



clockwise from top left / Trancoso's lush, paradise-like shoreline; Vida Sol e Mar's comfortable furnishings and spectacular views of Praia do Rosa; colorful fishing boats for hire in beautiful Paraty

Ilha Grande / Only a couple of hours south of Rio, this nature lover's haven is a mountainous island covered in dense tropical rain forest, with sandy beaches and coves, interspersed with rocky cliffs and small fishing villages.

If you can't make it to the Amazon, Ilha Grande is a grand substitute: The Atlantic rain forest that covers the island is as rich in species as the Amazon. Trails through forests teeming with birds and other wildlife lead to deserted beaches and up the mountains, with cascading waterfalls on the way.

Brazil's third-largest island, Ilha Grande has 192 kilometers (119 miles) of coast, hiding 106 beaches, some with beachside kiosks serving freshly caught fish and shrimp. Throughout the island, there are dazzling views of the sea and countless smaller islands.

The away-from-it-all feeling is enhanced by the absence of cars (and banks). Transport is all by boat. You can hire yachts, sailing boats, kayaks, or fishing boats to reach more-remote beaches or to travel around the island. Ilha Grande is also popular with divers, who come as much for the sunken ships in the vicinity as for the abundance of sea turtles, seahorses, and neon-hued fish.

Ilha Grande owes its pristine condition to a shady past. Its status as the first quarantine station for would-be immigrants, then as a maximum security jail for political prisoners, had long scared off developers and travelers alike. Only in the early 1990s (with the implosion of the jail) did it become popular with travelers.

The picturesque village of Vila Abraão offers mostly budget lodging and several cheerful bars and restaurants.

The best accommodation is a short boat trip to seclusion: Saco do Céu bay, Coqueiro Verde (coqueiroverdeposadas.com.br) is a friendly hotel with cozy rooms, balconies overlooking the bay, and breakfast served in the lovely gardens. Sitio do Lobo, a miniresort perched on the cliffs, has elegant rooms and great sea views. Reachable by water taxi, Reis e Magos restaurant serves superb seafood in a romantic setting of verandas surrounded by tropical vegetation—accompanied by the best *caipirinhas* (a mix of sugar-cane spirit and fruit) and wines.

Island Travel (islandtravel.com.br) arranges transfers to regular or private van, then boat, from any hotel in Rio or direct from Rio's international airport. The winding ocean route is itself a treat, with great views around every turn.

Paraty / "A vision of paradise," is how Angolan writer José Eduardo Agualusa described Paraty during an international literary festival, referring as much to its friendly and colorful atmosphere as its superb natural setting.

A small, 17th-century colonial town situated midway between Rio and São Paulo, Paraty is indeed enchanting. Cobblestone streets face an island-dotted bay, with a backdrop of majestic forest-covered mountains. In the pedestrian-only historic center, the charming white and blue colonial houses with trellised balconies are amazingly well-preserved, housing a joyful variety of craft shops, artists' studios, cafés, restaurants, and bars.

There are nearly 50 fabulous beaches within reach of Paraty, such as blissful Cachadaço and do Meio in nearby Trindade, or forest-rimmed Fazenda. For sheer beauty, it's difficult to beat the experience of a boat trip around the



clockwise from above / Praia do Espelho's secluded shore in Trancoso; Southern right whale-watching in the waters off Praia do Rosa island; Paraty, a charming and picturesque colonial town between Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo

