

## Auriga's adventures in Brazil

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In "World Voyage Planner" Jimmy Cornell advises that to follow in the footsteps of the Portuguese traders, and to include Brazil in an Atlantic cruise it should take roughly 15 months to cover the expected 13000 miles. Sadly we did not have this long so we decided to do the trip in 10. Predictably, this has been a rush. We have loved passage making, but stops have been short and we rushed through the North Atlantic islands; Madeira, the Canaries and Cape Verde passing in a blur. Having crossed the equator and put 5000 miles beneath the keel we finally reached the South American Continent. A fascinating and challenging cruising ground and far enough from home to make return any time soon unlikely we relished the chance to explore a bit more thoroughly, and spent 3 months cruising from Recife to Rio and back again.

After a rest stop in Recife our cruise began in Salvador, the first capital of Brazil and Portuguese trading port. The historic Pelourinho makes for an interesting day-trip, although it is best avoided by night. A friend of ours was mugged and we felt very out of place and uncomfortable over a couple of evening drinks, with one bar owner ushering us away as what she hinted were a 'dangerous crowd' started to take an interest. Salvador is situated in a huge bay which makes for a sailors paradise. We made several stops along the Itaparica channel, navigating the shallows until their end, where, despite several attempts, conditions prevented us picking our way through the shifting uncharted reefs back out into the Atlantic. Christmas was spent at anchor in the bay, off the aptly named Ilha Bom Jesus. Fixing up a traditional Christmas roast was an adventure in itself and involved, among other challenges, swimming back to the boat holding a freshly acquired chicken aloft.

A little further South we entered Baia de Camamu. The mouth of the bay is made up of several islands and the sheltered channels and beaches between them make for beautiful anchorages, although the pilot book is a little out of date claiming tourism hasn't reached Camamu yet. On the New Year's eve holiday weekend the place was packed with local boats, although the parties were welcoming and we struggled to pay for a drink, having many thrust in our hands.

Navigation further up the bay, into the Rio Marau provided a greater challenge and after stopping in Marau, a trading town further off the beaten track, we continued into the uncharted waters of the upper reaches. Navigating required caution, using the sketch map offered by the pilot book. This uses

such non-traditional navigation marks such as particularly tall trees and colour changes in the cliffs to avoid the submerged rocks and banks. Eventually the palm trees gave way to mangrove swamp and we took to our inflatable kayak to travel the twisting lanes between the trees avoiding the hanging crabs and huge biting flies – reaching the tumbling cascades of the Tremembe waterfalls. We were glad not to cross paths with any floating mats of forest debris that are prevalent in the area can engulf yachts bringing snakes and spiders crawling on-board. A machete is advised for this trip!

A longer passage took us, via a welcome pit-stop at the pretty holiday town of Buzios, to Rio de Janeiro. Here we spent 2 weeks as tourists, seeing the sights and soaking up the Brazilian culture beneath Christ the Redeemer in one of the world's landmark cities. Arriving in the peak season berths in the only marina increase in price to around £100 per night for a 30 foot boat. Seeking a free anchorage was therefore necessary and after being yelled at in Portuguese by both an angry fisherman and soldier we moved from our first stop at an army controlled beach to a crowded local beach. Security felt risky. It is all but impossible to stop kids using the yacht as a diving board if you are not on-board and sadly turning our backs for a minute in a beach-side bar our kayak was stolen from the beach.

A short trip 40 miles West of Rio took us to Ilha Grande. A simply awesome cruising ground, and one of the most highly recommended sailing spots in the country. There are endless choices for anchorages, many indescribably beautiful and the reward of watching your yacht at anchor under tropical sun from a floating beach bar is all the sweeter knowing how far you have come from home. Exploring inland is delightful, this island is totally unspoilt by any motorised transport. We sadly were only able to enjoy a week before our schedule forced us to begin making passage back North.

Given the previous 1500 miles had been dead downwind and with assistance of a knot of current, it was time to pay for our easy ride and begin hacking back against both. The first leg was the hardest: fighting gales that build up around the headland to round at Cabo Frio, 100 miles East of Rio. It took us nearly 3 days to work our way through and we were nervous that if progress continued at that rate we would lose any chance for stops further down the line but mercifully the wind swung round to the East and we were able to lay Salvador in one tack. We made good progress North, although with the fierce current against us we had to detour well offshore and concentrate on sail trim to make progress. We were interrupted at regular intervals by heavy squalls that brought winds of 30 knots and rain so heavy they reduced visibility worse than thick fog. Nonetheless our spirits were not dampened and after

a crew change in Rio de Janeiro (Igor leaving and Giulia joining in his place) some longer passages provided opportunity for myself and Giulia to accustomise ourselves to sailing the boat together.

Hurrying North at a pace we stopped only for resupplying and to try and untangle ourselves from the web of Brazilian bureaucracy to obtain port clearance papers. This bought time for a final 5 day stop in Fernando de Noronha, a tiny archipelago and wildlife reserve 300 miles North East of Recife. What a place to end a season in Brazil! With tourist numbers strictly controlled the island is an unspoilt paradise, with some of the most spectacular scenery and beaches and teeming with marine wildlife. Entering the main anchorage a huge pod of spinner dolphins cavort and perform backflips all about the boat. Spending our days touring the island and snorkelling on the beach we swam with sharks, followed pretty green turtles through the reefs and shadowed huge stingrays just meters from shore. We watched parrot fish, box fish, tuna and barracuda and even swam amongst a shoal of mackerel as the seagulls dived underwater around us to pluck out their dinner.

Despite the distances involved we couldn't be happier with our choice of a cruise in Brazil. Fascinating sights and culture, and an array of good cruising. There can be challenges, especially for non-Portuguese speakers like ourselves as English is very rarely spoken. Yachting facilities are very limited compared with Europe or even the Caribbean. Many people worry about crime and security but despite the theft of our dingy I felt quite safe, and locals I spoke to tell me there has been a big improvement on this front in the last 5 years. Aside from the biggest ports we were almost always the only foreign cruising yacht, which is a shame as I think many more would find a wealth of delights to explore if they point South and journey across the equator.

