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Travel

The Place to Be: Florianópolis, Brazil

PARTY DESTINATION OF THE YEAR



Parador 12, one of the stars of the vibrant club scene in Florianópolis.

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Jah, a former model and the impresario behind the New York City party spots Lotus and Double Seven. He opened Praia Café three years ago after he fell in love with Florianópolis.

As South American jet-set spots like Punta del Este in Uruguay lose their novelty, affluent Brazilians and in-the-know internationals have taken the party to Florianópolis and the 40-odd white-sand beaches of the 33-mile-long island that makes up much of the city. Caipirinha-soaked lounges, stylish beach bars and cavernous megaclubs have sprouted all over the island. Once a favored spot of the surf-world cognoscenti, Florianópolis, some 450 miles southwest of Rio de Janeiro, has emerged as Latin America's hottest new party destination.

Each beach has its own personality and crowd. Party central is Jurerê Internacional, a chi-chi resort on the north end of the island. Rife with sports cars, Gucci handbags and the occasional private helicopter, it is home to the Praia Café (Avenida dos Merlins; 55-48-3282-1325; www.praiacafedelamusique.com.br), where the parties go until 4 a.m.

Competing for the waves of deep-pocketed socialites is Parador 12 (Servidão J. Cardoso Oliveira; 55-48-3284-8156; www.eldivinobrasil.com.br), a Nikki Beach-like club that opened a year ago and is awash in Champagne served to bronzed bodies on white canopy beds.

PRINCE PIERRE CASIRAGHI of Monaco has paid tribute. The heartthrobs Ben Harper and Stavros Niarchos have partied on its beachfront dance floor. And on many Champagne-fueled nights, leggy models straight from the pages of Sports Illustrated and the Victoria's Secret catalog have perched on its billowing banquettes.

Never heard of Praia Café de la Musique? Don't worry. It isn't the latest poolside lounge in South Beach or some new members-only club in Manhattan. In fact, the club is in a resort well off the radar of TMZ and checkout-aisle glossies: Florianópolis in the southern reaches of Brazil. "It's a mixture of St.-Tropez and Ibiza but without the attitude and without the prices," said Jeffrey

Making the biggest splash is Pacha (Rodovia Maurício Sirotsky Sobrinho; 55-48-3282-2054; www.pachafloripa.com.br), part of a chain of megaclubs that opened a branch near Jurerê Internacional in November. According to one of the owners, Johnny Mansur, both Jack Johnson and Amy Winehouse are booked this year for Pacha's 15,000-seat outdoor concert area. To fill the huge 3,500-person club, Pacha has assembled an impressive roster of D.J.'s, including Roger Sanchez and Dirty South.

The surfer set, meanwhile, flocks to Praia Mole, a long strip of talcum-like sand and world-class waves on the island's east coast. Popular with wave riders, bikini girls and sculpted tanners, the beach is lined with oceanfront bars, notably the D.J.-fueled Barraco da Mole (55-48-3232-5585).

Inland, the boho-chic town of Lagoa da Conceição has become the choice for Brazil's artists, intellectuals and media types. Nixed in a colonial edifice and outfitted with vintage furniture, Confraria das Artes nightclub (Rua João Pacheco da Costa 31; 55-48-3232-2298; www.confrariadasartes.com.br) is the pulsating epicenter of Lagoa da Conceição's social scene.

Florianópolis's gay scene is thriving as well. Four years ago, the city began a gay pride parade, and in 2008 the first Brazilian-operated gay cruise, Freedom (55-11-3624-9007; mixbrasil.uol.com.br/mp/upload/noticia/8_119_67094.shtml) moored off Praia Mole for a major part of its route. During Carnival in late February, the Week, a gay nightclub in São Paulo, will operate an offshoot in the Praia Mole Eco Village hotel (Rodovia Jornalista Manoel de Menezes 2001; 55-48-3239-7500; www.praiamole.com.br).

With so many after-dark options to explore, concierge-style services have popped up to guide travelers through Florianópolis's nocturnal sprawl. **Nexus Surf** (www.nexussurf.com), for example, has expanded its surf school to include tours of the island's night life. And with the scene in constant flux, the outfitter even has a night-life director dedicated to tracking new openings. "Florianópolis night life blows away night life in L.A. or New York or anywhere else I've been," said the founder of **Nexus Surf**, **Hans Keeling**, a transplanted Californian. Formerly a corporate lawyer, he visited a few years ago and was instantly won over.

"Here you have the combination of Sunset Strip-style and Ibiza-style night life mixed in with the Brazilian proclivity for relaxing and having fun," he said. "I looked around, and I saw better beaches, better night life, more beautiful people and cheaper prices. It was a pretty easy decision."