

In recent years, some of Brazil's most glamorous sorts have been forsaking their traditional watering holes of Bahia and Angra for the more discreet charms of an island near the southern tip of the country. Santa Catarina—usually referred to by locals as Floripa, for the island's capital city, Florianópolis—is an easy hour or so flight from either Rio de Janeiro or São Paulo and boasts 300 square miles of ravishing beaches and luxuriant rainforests. For jaded Cariocas or Paulistas, its attractions go even beyond the natural splendors: There's nightlife and safety (the latter seems to be a major plus, considering the crime plaguing both Brazilian metropolises).

Now Americans appear to be catching on. Calvin Klein and musician Ben Harper were spotted there this winter. And one longtime frequenter, New York-based nightlife entrepreneur Jeffrey Jah, just opened a beach club as well as a nightclub. Perhaps Americans feel at home with the island's Southern California vibe, which emanates from the local surfing culture as well as a profusion of blonds.

Thanks to the heavy proportion of German settlers in the area, an uncanny number of women here tend to look like model Gisele Bündchen, who was brought up in nearby Porto Alegre and often holidays on the island. Contrary to popular speculation, most of the Germans who arrived were not Nazis on the run but immigrants in the 1820s who came at the behest of the emperor of the newly independent Brazil, Dom Pedro I. Since this part of his empire was also claimed by Argentina and Uruguay, Dom Pedro invited large numbers of German citizens to the sparsely populated area to serve as a bulwark against incursions. Thus, today, beer, sausage and sauerkraut are diet staples along with *arroz e feijão*.

Fortunately, the island's active lifestyle seems to keep everybody in shape. Floripa offers outstanding opportunities for all water sports: surfing,

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Brazil's New Beat

Sporty and sexy, Floripa is the beach getaway for posh Brazilians and ahead-of-the-pack Americans.

Photographs by MATTHIEU SALVAING

From left: Carnival celebrations; the village of Lagoa da Conceição; Carlos Miele's living room, with its indoor pool; a beach concession stand; strollers.

Brazil's New Beat

Clockwise from top right: A billboard featuring local girl-turned-goddess Gisele Bündchen; fashion designer Carlos Miele; views of Praia Mole, the island's best surfing beach.

kite surfing, sailing and diving. On dry land, there's also plenty to do, including something known as sandboarding. A favorite local pastime similar to snowboarding, it involves swooshing down the sand dunes that form a lunarlike landscape on the eastern side of the island. With excellent bike trails also available, it's no wonder that the island plays regular host to Ironman competitions.

For many visitors, the sporty life is the initial draw. São Paulo-born and New York-based fashion designer Carlos Miele started visiting in the mid-Eighties to surf. But like an increasing number, he was so taken with the island that he built a house there five years ago, an elegant glass structure smoothly integrated into the rainforest vegetation. In recent years, real-estate prices have been spiraling upward as more and more Brazilians look for second homes. Nice beachfront houses now run \$2 million to \$10 million.

"It's like Rio used to be 20 years ago. It's all easy-going and there are places where nature still is left untouched," Miele says. "Besides the beach, there are great restaurants and nightclubs, if you want that. And the people are the most beautiful in Brazil."

Miele's house is near the community of Lagoa da Conceição, which has a distinctly Malibu, rich-hippie vibe. Many of the island's 42 beaches have adjacent villages, and each seems to possess a distinct character. While funky inns with varying degrees of charm exist, no top-level hotels seem to be on the beaches yet. The most comfortable and central option—if not the most colorful—is the brand-new Sofitel in Florianópolis, a 15-story tower with well-appointed rooms. Although the capital is pleasant, it's fairly bland—largely consisting of modern glass high-rises—though it does have a small historic section with some genuine attractions, including a lively covered market. Located in the middle of the island, the city makes a good base for exploration.

If Lagoa da Conceição is the island's Malibu, the northern hamlet of Jurerê, with its opulent homes, is

its Beverly Hills. The neighborhood's newest hot spot is Praia de Cafe, a beach club and restaurant opened last December by Jah and some of his Brazilian partners. Relaxed but sexy is the operative style on the island as a whole, but here it reaches its purest form. On one February afternoon, girls with impossible figures dressed in the barest essentials saunter in from the beach looking like they are fresh from a *Sports Illustrated* swimsuit shoot. And indeed, at least one of them—Fernanda Motta, wife of Praia de Cafe's co-owner Roger Rodriguez—is. In fact, as she and a group of friends sit down to a lunch of grilled tambaqui, an exquisite white fish from the Amazon, her cell phone rings. A friend in New York is calling to say she just saw a bikini-clad Motta on a Times Square billboard advertising the latest *Sports Illustrated* issue.

According to her husband, Floripa is all about simplicity. "You can chill, party, eat well here. You just need a good boat and that's it," says Rodriguez. His partner Marcos Compos, flashing a heavy gold watch, adds brightly, "And nobody needs a bullet-proof car here."

When night falls, things kick into a higher gear. Jah and his partners also just opened km7, an Ibiza-style club described by Jah as "full-on," thanks to its light and sound systems and coliseum-style layout. There's even a separate entrance for VIPs, a rarity in Brazil. "But all the clientele are beautiful," insists Jah.

For those in the mood for a full-fledged rave, there is Warung, one of Brazil's biggest nightclubs, a 4,000-person space where world-class DJs spin. Unfortunately, it is off the island, and the drive across the bay bridge can take 90 minutes in traffic. But dedicated clubbers get around that. At dawn, choppers occasionally land on a field a few hundred feet from the doors, and then it's a 20-minute flight back to Floripa. After a nap, it's time to hit the sandboard, or whatever. "What I love about Floripa," says Jah, "is that it can go from chic to bohemian—and back—in 60 seconds." —JAMES REGINATO



FLORIPA 411

Where to sleep, eat and party on the island.

Sofitel Florianópolis

Brand-new five-star hotel in the heart of the city
Av. Rubens Arruda Ramos, 2034
5548.32026100
sofitelflorianopolis@accorhotels.com.br

Praia de Cafe

Croovy beach club offering excellent grilled fish for lunch, and even better people-watching
Avenida dos Merlins s/n 0
5548.32821325

D'Acampora

Finest cuisine on the island, serving Brazilian-European fusion fare (with several luxe hotel rooms due to open later this year)
Rodovia SC-401, km 30
5548.32351073

km7

New Ibiza-style nightclub, with "full-on" sound, lighting and party crowd
Estrada Daniela s/n, quadra 21
Lote 14, 16e
5548.30241099

