

Have It Your Way

There's a lot to see in a country with 4,600 miles of coastline and nearly half the landmass of South America. But whether you're into art, urbanity or the outdoors, you'll find something to love in this destination.

By SCOTT MITCHEM

Surf and the City: Florianópolis

Florianópolis's status as a hip destination is relatively new—but definitely not fleeting. The 200-square-mile island has always been the center of Brazilian surfing culture; it is now drawing visitors who don't own longboards with a rare mix of big-city convenience and raw nature. "Floripa" is a laid-back destination with a spirited nightlife and plenty of opportunities for outdoor adventure—without the security concerns that can plague Rio and São Paulo.



The capital of Santa Catarina state, Floripa is home to nearly one million people, though it doesn't feel like it, even in the center of downtown. The commercial district, or Centro, hugs a long bay punctuated by large stones that jut up from the water. It's a view well enjoyed by residents of the modern residential towers and hotels that line the waterfront. But not far off, vast portions of the island remain rugged, with rolling sand dunes, Atlantic rainforests and isolated beaches. Fishing communities and historic colonial villages surround many of the 42 beaches and Lagoa da Conceição, the large freshwater lake at the center of the island.

Florianópolis's increasing popularity has brought challenges—in particular the traffic that snarls up roads between Christmas and New Year's. The best time to visit is between early January and Carnival—celebrated here without the over-the-top pageantry that Rio is famous for. It is easy to fill a week bouncing between the many beaches and attractions, including 18th-century Portuguese forts, mysterious prehistoric stone carvings and out-island nature reserves. It takes a car and a lot of energy to see it all, so you may want to save a couple of days for splurging at Ponta dos Ganchos resort.

For more than a decade, Ponta dos Ganchos has been the area's only five-star lodging, located across Dolphin Bay from the island on a rocky, hook-shaped point that inspires its name. As part of a renovation last year, its expansive villas were outfitted with gray-water systems, green roofs and solar technology that takes most of the hotel off the grid. Santa Catarina's oyster farms are always within view, and are especially charming when being tended by local fisherman from their colorful boats. From about \$775 per night, pontadosganchos.com.br