

Created by: Debra C. Argen

## Sao Paulo, Brazil (English Version)



Brazil is definitely a paradise with its verdant jungles, pristine beaches, beautiful people, phenomenal cuisine and rhythmic music.

Whenever I think of Brazil, the song "Two Tickets to Paradise" by Eddie Money always comes to mind. For me, Brazil is definitely a paradise with its verdant jungles, pristine beaches, beautiful people, phenomenal cuisine and rhythmic music.

Although I once lived in Rio de Janeiro, no, I was not the Girl from Ipanema, (I lived in URCA); I fell in love with the São Paulo beaches and coastline many years ago. Since then, every year my husband, Edward, and I travel to Brazil to celebrate the New Year with friends in the beach city of Itamambuca. North of São Paulo, this beach city is in the Mata Atlântica, (Atlantic Jungle), which extends from the Amazonas to along the coastline of Brazil; it is a special place where the mountainous jungles come down to kiss the sea. Long stretches of pristine, white, sugary sand beaches, azure seas and lush green mountains, complete the ambience.

One of my favorite annual daytrips is to the historic port city of Paraty, located north of Itamambuca, with our friends, Elóia Maria and Cândido Gonçalves. We began our day under a bright blue sky, which teased and hinted of the warmth of the day to come. As we drove along the scenic coastline, the sky suddenly darkened, and we were downcast with the thought that a summer rainstorm would mar our plans. I told our friends not to worry, that I would do my sunshine dance, and as we rounded the corner of another steep turn, out came the sun! Did my dance help? In Brazil, there is such a state of mysticism, that it is often best not to question a good thing when it happens. We arrived in Paraty under sunny skies, and enjoyed our excursion through the cobblestone streets lined with artisan craft shops and restaurants, reflecting the colorful past of this once important port city. This historic city is a combination of new and old, from the hack carriage rides to the Dive Shops that promise an underwater paradise.

After wandering the quaint streets, stopping on occasion to purchase a souvenir or two, we decided it was time for lunch. We found a delightful restaurant, **Café Paraty**, Rua do Comércio, 253, Centro Historico, [www.cafeparaty.com.br](http://www.cafeparaty.com.br), which has been serving up excellent food and live music for over 20 years. The restaurant was large, airy and deliciously cooled by ceiling fans. We started off with fresh exotic fruit juices &ndash; pineapple with mint, passion fruit and açerola. Although the menu was extensive, we selected the Linguada com au Molho do Camarão (Filet of Sole with a Shrimp and Tomato Sauce), which had a sauce that perfectly complemented, without overwhelming the flaky fish, and the Linguado au MaracujÃ; (Filet of Sole with a Passion fruit Sauce), since I am a firm believer that you can never have too much passion in your life, which proved to be a slice of heaven on a plate. The sole was delicate, flaky and buttery, enhanced by the sweetness of the passion fruit and the added texture of the passion fruit seeds. Although both dishes were excellent, everyone agreed that the Filet of Sole with Passion fruit was the hands-down favorite. This charming restaurant was improved even more by the music of **Joca Freire**, [jocafreire@hotmail.com](mailto:jocafreire@hotmail.com), a São José dos Campos, SP native, and talented guitarist/singer. He has 2 CDs out, and we selected 1 to take with us entitled, *A Flauta Que Me Roubaram*. After listening to the CD, we were sorry we didn't take both of his CDs with us, before leaving Paraty.

Since no trip to the Mata Atlântica would be complete without a trip to a waterfall, we stopped at Cachoeira da Cobra, (Snake Waterfalls), for a cool dip and to play in the waterfalls. Although it is tricky to find, no marked highway signs for a waterfall, once you leave the highway, you travel by a dirt road up a very steep and bumpy hill. After you park your car, you enter a very narrow trail and hike down through the jungle to reach the waterfalls. On my first trip there I was very concerned about coming across a snake, but I learned through experience that I had less to worry about snakes, then about the many biting insects that also flock to the waterfalls. Such is the price for paradise; arm yourself with insect repellent before going to any of the waterfalls. Hiking through the jungle is an experience in itself and really conjures up Tarzan and Jane imagery, with tall trees laden with vines and bromeliads, enormous philodendron and giant ferns. A steep descent, and suddenly you see the rushing waterfalls, and the water "slides" over the smooth, slippery

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rocks, which makes the hike worth the effort. On a hot day, a waterfall is the perfect place to play.

Itamambuca beach is a beach-lovers dream: long stretch of white, sugary sand beach perfect for strolling, or people watching, as well as having great waves for playing or surfing. Having an adventurous spirit, (I have downhill-skied, I have water-skied, and I hold the title of Dive Master in Scuba), I decided to take a surf lesson on the last day of the year. Although my friends offered to teach me, thank you Ramon and Moara Sacilotti, I thought it was best to take lessons at a Surf School. Fortunately, there is a wonderful surf school in Itamambuca, **Escola Zecão de Surf**, [www.zecao.com.br](http://www.zecao.com.br), owned by Professional International Surf Champion, José Carlos Maciel Rennó, nicknamed Zecão. The school has been teaching tourists and natives alike to surf for the past 7 years. The school provides hour-long one-on-one lessons, which allows for student success. I readily signed up for my 1-hour lesson with Zecão's wife, Adriana Menezes de Souza Pereira, then went home to change into my "surf clothes": a borrowed surf shirt from Ramon, and surf shorts from Moara. I was ready for my lesson &ndash; at least I looked the part anyway! Not even a budding surfer yet, I already had an entourage - Ed as my cameraman, Moara as my photographer, and my 2 "fans" Lucas and Kaóma Paiva. Although the school has several excellent instructors, I was lucky to have Zecão himself as my instructor. Zecão, an Ubatuba native, lived in Hawaii for 2 years, and has professionally competed in Hawaii, Indonesia, California, Tahiti, Fiji and Japan. When he is not teaching surf to tourists, 2 days a week he teaches underprivileged children to surf.



My lesson began, as he first put me through all the moves on the sand that I would need to learn to do on the surfboard. Over and over I practiced each move, with the thought that soon I would be in the water. Although I could execute well enough on the sand, could I do it in the water? It was finally Showtime! Off I went into the waves with my surfboard securely lashed to my leg, with Zecão teaching me to navigate the waves by pushing down on the surfboard and jumping into the air each time a wave came. Finally, we reached our destination, and now it was time to remember all that I had learned. Zecão held the surfboard steady for me, and told me it was now time to get onto the board. "Wait, wait, wait" he cautioned, and then suddenly I heard him yelling to me to "stand up, stand up!" So I did, yes, I really did! Amazing, I was standing! I felt my heart leap in excitement, I did it, I did it, and then I fell down into the waves! I thought I was done with my lesson, but Zecão told me it was time to do it over again. Again, onto to the board, wait for the right wave, then "stand up, stand up!" This was becoming intoxicating! Over and over I repeated getting back on the surfboard and riding the waves, until my hour was up and I was exhausted, but thoroughly excited at having made my surf conquest. I finished my lesson just in time to go to my friends' house, take a shower, and get ready to celebrate the New Year. Thank you Zecão, for helping me to realize a dream! I cannot wait to return next year for another lesson!

After 2 weeks it was time to leave Itamambuca and head south to the island of Guarujá. Sporting fabulous tans, Ed and I, along with Regina and Gilberto Sacilotti, Jr. checked into the **Casa Grande Hotel Resort & Spa**, Avenida Miguel Stefano, 1001, Praia da Enseada, Guarujá 11440-530, SP, Brazil, [www.casagrandehotel.com.br](http://www.casagrandehotel.com.br). This fabulous 268-room resort, built 32 years ago, is located directly across from the beautiful beach, Praia da Enseada. The Casa Grande Hotel Resort & Spa has it all, even its own heliport. Looking for a quick weekend jaunt, it is conveniently located 45 miles from São Paulo, or by helicopter, it is a mere 28 minutes from the São Paulo airport, or just 15 minutes from Avenida Paulista in São Paulo.

From the minute we checked in, we knew we had found a very special place. After a quick check-in, we were shown to our rooms, 210 and 212, which were connected by a very large living room to create a 2-bedroom suite, with a welcome fruit basket to greet us in each of the bedrooms. Room 212 was large and

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airy, with a view of the pool and the ocean. It had gleaming hardwood floors, a white wood ceiling, a king bed, a sofa, coffee table and 2 sitting chairs, Internet connectivity and 2 telephones. There was also a lovely drop-leaf table, perfect for in-suite dining, along with a desk and chair to write out postcards to those unlucky enough not to have joined you on your trip. The room had a very large Philips television, a Philips combination DVD/video/CD player, as well as a Philips FM clock radio and alarm clock. Large enclosed wardrobes, an in-room safe, as well as a well-stocked mini-bar completed the room. Guests are pampered in the large marble bathroom, with robes, a make-up mirror, double raised bowl sinks, walk-in shower, deep garden tub, hair dryer and enclosed toilet and bidet. The bathroom had another telephone and an abundance of separate lighting, to create the right lighting whether relaxing in a bubble bath, or shaving. Room 210, was almost identical to room 212, with the exception of being a little smaller, and without the sofa. Outside of both bedrooms were floor to ceiling mirrors to ensure that you looked great.

The large living room was truly wonderful, with another large screen Philips television, a Philips combination DVD/video/CD player, 2 sofas, a large round dining table and 4 chairs, marble powder room, and a hidden and well-stocked mini-bar. The pièce de résistance though was the large verandah that overlooked the pool and the ocean. It was the perfect place to read the morning newspaper sitting in the lounge chair, or at the table in one of the chairs.



Although it was difficult to leave our suite of rooms, the hotel beckoned, and we went to answer the call. The hard part in choosing what to do, is that there is so much to do at the Casa Grande Hotel Resort & Spa. First, there is their location on the beach, and then there is their large swimming pool, 5 restaurants, nightclub, many bars, professional tennis courts, lighted soccer field, volleyball court, fitness center and Spa! Not enough? Then factor in their children's program and playground, their Home Theatre where they show movies, their Art Exposition with rotating Brazilian artists, and shopping complex located across the driveway from the hotel during high season. If that is still not enough, guests also have discount guest privileges at a 9-hole golf course, just 5 kilometers away. Of course, sometimes the best activity is just relaxing in one of their hammocks or sitting out by the pool, and having the waiter bring you fresh fruit, a cold coconut juice or a tropical drink.



We began our evening over cocktails in the **Lobby Bar** listening to piano music. The bar has an extensive cocktail menu, so we decided to try the house special, the Casa Grande, a delightful combination of Vodka,

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Blue Curaçao and Sprite, the Enseada, a refreshing combination of Prosecco, Pineapple Juice, Peach Liqueur and Grenadine, and our old favorites, Kir Royales. After we quenched our thirst, it was time for dinner.

Since the hotel is noted for its excellent restaurants, we made a reservation for their Thai restaurant, aptly named **Thai**, located across from the hotel on the Enseada beach. Mr. Paulo Roberto Cupertino, Operational Manager, was responsible for the conception, as well as for the recipes for this outstanding restaurant. The Thai theme is created from the minute you enter the thatched roof restaurant, which was even more apparent on the night we went there, when there was a monsoon-like rainstorm. Despite the rain, Thai professionals, Jailton do Santos and Celia, made our experience at Thai a night to remember.

We celebrated with another exotic cocktail, Cha Phraya, which consisted of Gin, Cointreau, Lime Juice, and Orange Juice and served over ice, which was refreshing, but with a definite kick. For appetizers, we selected the Poo Jha, (Crab Dumplings with Thai Spices). The crab dumplings were fried balls with a crispy exterior and tender crab filling inside, and served with a wonderful dipping sauce.

For our entrees, we selected the Ikan Bali Colo Colo, (Grilled Fish Filet with Fresh Tomatoes, Onions and Indonesian Spices), the Khai Phad Met Ma Muang, (Sautéed Chicken with Cashew Nuts), and the Kaeng Phet Kung, (Thai Red Curried Shrimp and Mango). Our meals arrived looking like Thai masterpieces, and one bite assured us that we had made the right menu choices &ndash; absolutely delicious! The fish was perfect, the chicken was delectable, especially with the added texture of the cashews, but the large, succulent shrimp with mango in a spicy curry sauce was our favorite! We savored every last bite wishing there was more!

For a perfect ending to a sensational dinner, for our desserts we selected the Es Krim Asam Jambu Bji Cabe, (Tamarind Ice Cream with Guava and Chili Comfit), and the Es Krim Kelapa Kapang, Coconut Ice Cream with Toasted Peanuts and Ginger Comfit). It was a toss-up between which ice cream we liked better; the tamarind ice cream, which had exotic fruit flavors combined with the spiciness of the red peppercorns, or the coconut ice cream, which was refreshing and also a perfect blend of flavors. Thai is definitely on our list of "Must Return to" restaurants.

**(Please read our Chefs' Recipes article in this edition for some incredible recipes from the restaurant, Thai.)**

The next day we started with breakfast at the hotel's restaurant **Chiabata**, where we sat outside on the large verandah overlooking Enseada beach. The sumptuous buffet breakfast consisted of exotic fresh juices &ndash; watermelon, papaya, pineapple and orange juice, as well as scrambled eggs, ham, bacon, and sausages. There was a fruit table laden with papaya, watermelon, honeydew, kiwi, carambola, figs, pineapple, and grapes. There were cheeses, ham, pão de queijo (the little cheese rolls), croissants, sweet breads, cakes, toast, cereal, and yogurt. After a very filling breakfast, it was definitely time for some exercise.

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Regina and I took our exercise in the form of a walk along the scenic Enseada beach, and then later through the hotel grounds roaming through the exotic gardens, created by Roberto, Executive Gardener at the hotel for the past 32 years. The gardens are truly spectacular with many varieties of flowers and trees, including hibiscus, frangipani, orchids, palm trees laden with green coconuts, and an unusual tree called a Pândanos, which has seeds that look like pineapples on its branches.

Although there is a wonderful thatched-roof, glass-walled fitness center with personal trainer on-duty and state-of-the-art equipment overlooking Enseada beach, but Ed and Gilberto decided to head to the pool for their exercise. At the pool, the Fitness Instructor first led them through extensive stretches and exercises, then recruited them to go on a fitness walk along Enseada beach, then up into the hills and back again. To help them cool down after their walk, they joined in the Pool Aerobics. After a really great workout, it was time for them to relax by the pool with some fresh fruit. Regina and I had other plans for them though!

During our walk around the hotel, Regina and I decided we should experience the hotel's Spa, **SpaMed Guarujá**, [www.spamedguaruja.com.br](http://www.spamedguaruja.com.br). SpaMed Guarujá provides a full spectrum of both health and beauty programs for hotel guests, as well as offering a day Spa program. Whether you are looking to lose weight, relax, or just find your inner beauty, SpaMed has something for everyone.

We decided on esthetic treatments, and made appointments for a facial for myself, a relaxing Massoquioprática massage for Regina, and Gommage for Ed and Gilberto later that afternoon. Were they going to be surprised! In keeping with the SpaMed theme, we decided to make a reservation for lunch at the **Spa Diet** restaurant. We spoke with nutritionist, Luciana Valente de Oliveira Lima, who explained that the restaurant also sells prepared frozen meals, so that guests can continue their nutrition program once they return home. Lunch at Spa Diet proved to be tasty, nutritious and satisfying. We began our lunch with passion fruit juice, unsweetened of course, with artificial sweetener available, but forget about sugar. Our balanced lunch consisted of a green salad and slice of tomato, with dressing in a separate bowl on our plate. There were 3 choices for entrees, either filet of chicken, or filet of beef with broccoli, or a vegetarian entree. Regina, Ed and Gilberto selected the beef, and I selected a vegetarian choice of broccoli with shaved ricotta cheese. Our entrees were actually quite plentiful, with very tender, thinly sliced flavorful filets of beef, and well-seasoned broccoli. For our dessert, we were rewarded with a large, plump and juicy plum.

In keeping with the Spa mentality, we took an after lunch walk, exploring more of the hotel, and found that there were billiard tables and table tennis available. Enough of a good thing though, we decided to go and take a little nap out by the pool before our Spa treatments.

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After 2 weeks of playing in the sun, yes, I did use sunscreen, and a hat, and sat under an umbrella, but a girl's got to play, not to mention swim and surf, so it was definitely time for a facial. Sonia, my Spa professional, and I decided upon the perfect treatment for my sun-drenched skin. In addition to a skin cleaning, which would provide my skin with a deep cleansing, helping to purify, hydrate and oxygenize my skin, I would receive a hand and facial hydration, and we also decided that I should try the *Dibitron Face*, known in Europe as the *Time Machine*! This ingenious Italian equipment introduces a new era into esthetic treatments, or so it claimed. It is used to tone the facial and neck muscles, smoothly massaging them 21,600 times during 30 minutes. It is said to eliminate toxins, provide nutrition to the tissues and help the blood circulation and lymphatic system, creating a luminosity of the skin. It claimed, in other words, a lifting effect without the scalpel &ndash; I was ready to try it!

Sonia had me lie on the massage table, which was a wonder in itself, as it gently rolled and massaged my back, as she worked her magic on my face, neck and arms with her lotions and oils. My face was first cleaned with her "magic wand", and then more magic began to happen. A cool lotion was applied to my face, then a special paper cloth mask was applied, and then finally the "*Time Machine*" was fitted to my face. The machine applied pressure to my forehead, face, throat and neck. While the machine was busy working on my face, Sonia gently massaged lotion into my calves, each arm and hand. After thirty minutes, it was time for Sonia to remove the machine and for me to see the results! My skin glowed with radiance, and my neck appeared much smoother. I felt pampered and well cared for. Did I really look years younger? Who knows, but I felt that way! I couldn't wait to hear how Regina's massage, and Ed and Gilberto's Gommage treatments went.

When I returned to the suite, Regina had already returned and was relaxing on a sofa. She loved her 40-minute relaxing Massoquiopratica massage, as her Spa professional Midori, carefully worked out the tension in her body. As for Ed and Gilberto's Gommage treatment, they too, loved their treatments with Marta. Gommage, an exfoliation of the skin, is done by manually applying salts and essential oils to the body, to eliminate dead skin cells. It also eliminates toxins through a sauna, followed by a Scottish shower. They enjoyed the experience, but Ed joked that that he felt like a giant Margarita during the salt and oil massage, and Gilberto said that he felt like he was being prepared for a churrasco (Brazilian barbecue).

Obrigada, (thank you), SpaMed, Sonia, Midori and Marta, for incredible Spa treatments. Does SpaMed make house calls? I may not be able to wait until I return to the Casa Grande Hotel Resort & Spa and SpaMed for another Dibitron Face treatment!

After another great night at the Casa Grande Hotel Resort & Spa, and another filling breakfast at Chiabata, we took one last look at the ocean, and then it was time to leave this little bit of paradise and head back to São Paulo. Back in the city, we went to stay with friends, Gicelia and her son, Marcelo Pascon for a few days before we headed back to the US.

São Paulo is a great city, with many things to do, and Gicelia knows about all of them! There are excellent restaurants, wonderful museums, Saturday antique markets, stone shopping and of course, shopping in general. Since our time in São Paulo was limited, high on my list was shopping for some of the stones that Brazil is famous for, so we headed to **Minerais do Brasil Ltda**, Avenida Dr. Abrahão Ribeiro, 740 &ndash; Barra Funda, [www.lpminerais.com.br](http://www.lpminerais.com.br). The store had an entire first floor dedicated to large-scale amethysts, citrines, agates, and rose quartz, among others. The second floor sells stone tables, ornaments, and precious and semi-precious stones and jewelry. I had a hard time restraining myself from taking one of everything!

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High on Ed's list was CD shopping, so we went shopping with Gicelia, Renata Sacilotti, and her 3-year old son, João Ibêre to the mall, **Shopping Higianopolis**, Avenida Higianoplis, 618 Arco 326. This mall is a multi-level shopping wonder, with upscale stores, restaurants, as well as a movie theatre. **Siciliano S/A**, a combination music and bookstore, became one of Ed's favorite stores for CDs, and the man really stocked up! (Read his articles in **Music Scene** on Brazil music.)

As for me, I enjoyed shopping at **Verano**, where I just had to buy 2 pairs of the most adorable shoes that were calling out my name &ndash; loudly, and of course, 2 handbags to match! I also stocked up on great summer sweaters at **Filomena**. João Ibêre had a great time exploring the many toy stores, and coercing us to buy him a toy or two with his adorable smile. Shopping works up an appetite, and lunch at **Ráscal Pizza & Cozinha**, an upscale restaurant, with its varied menu, was the perfect choice. Even João Ibêre, usually a very picky eater, ate heartily! Loaded down with our many shopping bags it was time to head back to the apartment.

Marcelo was waiting for us when we returned, armed with a newspaper with movie times. He wanted us to go and see the movie, *The Last Samurai*, so later that evening, we went back to **Shopping Higianopolis** to the movie theatre. Marcelo, who hates shopping, made sure that we arrived just before the movie started, to ensure that there would be no last minute shopping!

On our last evening in São Paulo, we met with another group of friends, Gregorio, Ana and Emi Chaparro, for dinner at a great Italian restaurant, **Casa das Massas**, Pacaembú, Rua Tupi, 610. This quaint restaurant serves ample, and excellent pasta dishes, and was a great choice for sharing a relaxing evening with friends.

We went to the airport, and fell asleep on the plane dreaming of our favorite places in São Paulo, especially the beautiful beaches! Alas, it was time to head back home. Don't worry, we'll be back again in December &ndash; if not before!

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