

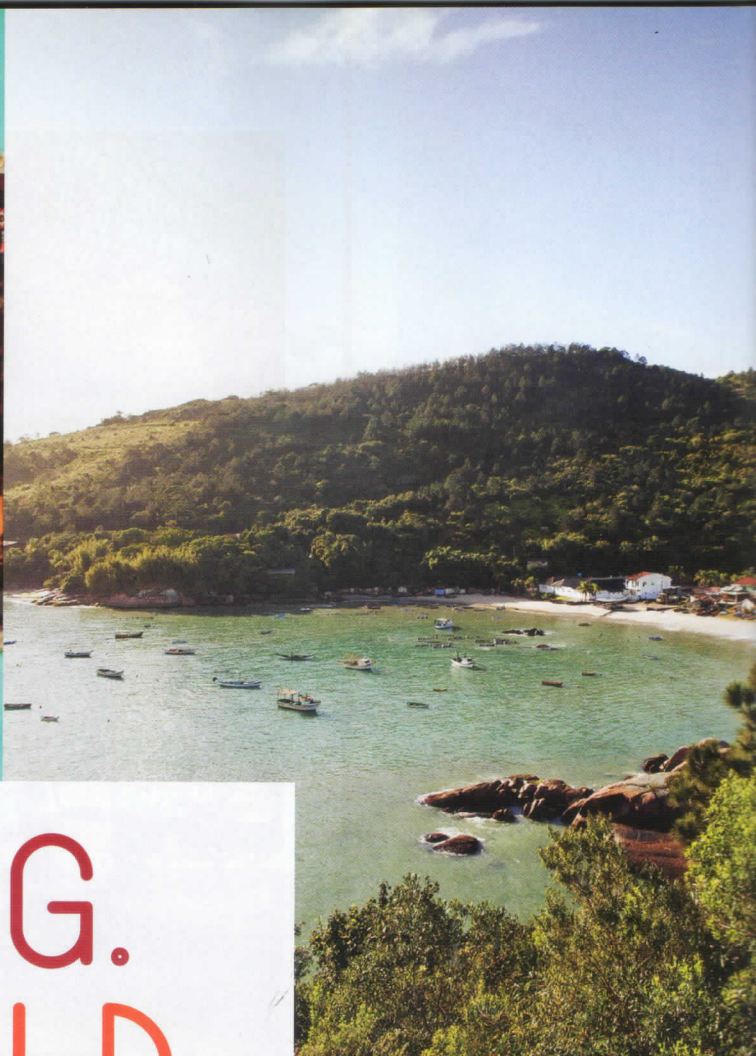
# VIRTUOSO LIFE

SAND & SEA ISSUE

\$5.95

## SEEK THE SUN

BRAZIL FIJI CAPRI  
MEXICO PHILIPPINES  
JAMAICA AUSTRALIA  
COSTA RICA HAWAII



# BIG. BOLD. BEACHY.



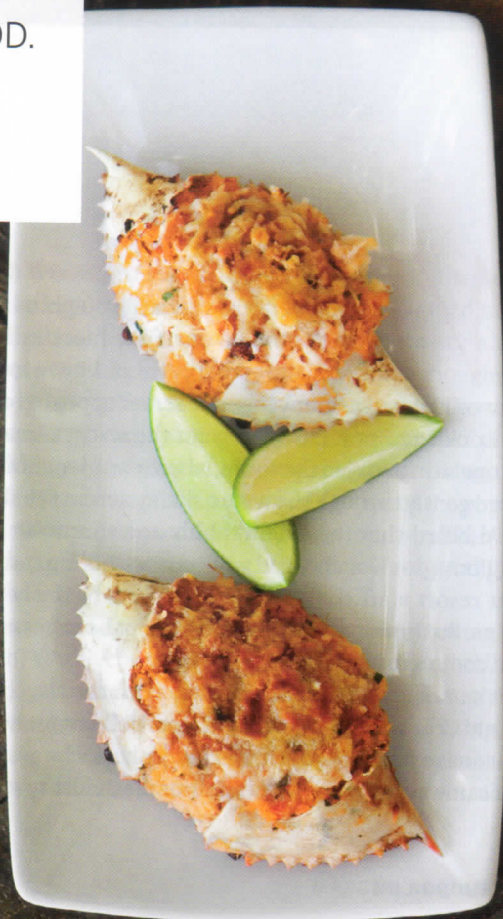
Clockwise from top left: Laila Assef at her Trancoso shop, a Ponta dos Ganchos view, Bahia boys, Kenoa cornucopia, a Ponta dos Ganchos snack, Estrela d'Água's beachfront, Trancoso's Casa de Gloria restaurant, and local flora.





WITH 5,000 MILES OF  
COASTLINE, A BOOMING  
ECONOMY, AND A GOOD-TIME  
VIBE, **BRAZIL** HAS SANDY  
RETREATS FOR EVERY MOOD.

BY JENNI AVINS  
PHOTOGRAPHY BY LUIS GARCÍA





**WE'D** BARELY STARTED OUR LUNCH when the dolphins appeared. It was our first meal in Brazil, and as a forkful of limy avocado and tender prawns hovered near my lips, our server appeared at the table.

"Look!" She pointed out toward the resort's small private island, a stone's throw from the shore, where two giant bottlenose dolphins arced gently through the water, slicing across the shimmering cove. We'd heard that the emerald hills and turquoise inlets surrounding Ponta dos Ganchos hid golf courses, hiking trails, and reefs, and that resort staff could arrange a sailing to the nearby Bay of Dolphins. But now it seemed that might not be necessary. The dolphins had come to us.

It's undeniable that Brazil's star is on the rise, between the 2014 World Cup, 2016 Olympics, and recent economic boom, but the best reasons to visit the Southern Hemisphere's largest country remain the same as they've ever been: Brazilian culture – the people, food,

music, and art that create the country's colorful warmth – and some of the world's most beautiful beaches.

With nearly 5,000 miles of Atlantic coastline, it's nice to have some trip-planning help, which is where Brazil's Matueté came in. Virtuoso's connection in Brazil, Matueté suggested a journey from south to north that included beachfront stays in the states of Santa Catarina, Bahia, and Alagoas, with a requisite few days in Rio de Janeiro. As any good travel advisor will tell you, Brazil's regional culture and landscape vary as greatly as those of the U.S. In the south, Santa Catarina's rolling green farmland and cooler water provide the backdrop (and ingredients) for a more European mood. To the north, African influence prevails in Bahia's music and cuisine, and there's no occasion too small for a live band and a little dancing. Farther afield in northeasterly Alagoas, nature preserves, waterfalls, rain forests, and white-sand beaches make for a remote, tropical escape. And, of course, you'd be remiss not to spend time in Rio – which has a few famous beaches of its own.



Left to right:  
Santa Catarina  
color; Florianópolis;  
and a view for two,  
breakfast, and a  
suite at Ponta  
dos Ganchos.

## STOP 1 PONTA DOS GANCHOS EXCLUSIVE RESORT, GOVERNADOR CELSO RAMOS, SANTA CATARINA

**Guest register:** Seclusion-seeking pop stars (Beyoncé and Paul McCartney have stayed here) and couples on romantic retreats.

**When to go:** For warmer, longer days, visit during North America's winter months. Then again, in August and September southern right whales breed off Santa Catarina's coast.

**Tip:** Ponta dos Ganchos' beach is peaceful and protected; surfers should head to Mole and Joaquina beaches in Florianópolis.

When we arrived at Ponta dos Ganchos in the early afternoon, a golf cart carried us down a winding wooded path, past outdoor massage platforms and a lounge-laden lawn. Privacy and relaxation were obviously paramount, but the resort also offers excursions and activities. My boyfriend, Ryan, and I had heard about the charms of Florianópolis, Santa Catarina's capital, on an island just an hour's

drive south. Ryan wanted to visit a traditional *cachaça* distillery, which produces the local sugarcane-based liquor; I imagined market stalls with indigenous basket weavers and Portuguese-style lace makers. But as we opened the door to our bungalow, the thought of leaving the room – let alone the resort – suddenly seemed ludicrous. One of the lush, modern living space's windowed walls opened onto a private deck with a wedge-shaped infinity pool overlooking the bay. Flowers floated in a Jacuzzi on an enclosed section of the porch, and a sauna and shower designed for two made for a spalike welcome. Although the bed looked tempting after our overnight flight, we opted for lunch instead.

We descended to Ponta dos Ganchos' restaurant, overlooking its tidy private beach, where couples read in the shade of umbrellas, sharing plates of oysters and sipping the sweet water from green coconuts. After watching dolphins cruise past (a rare sighting, it turns out) while we nibbled appetizers, we tucked into plates of grilled octopus and *picanha*, a traditional Brazilian top sirloin, with



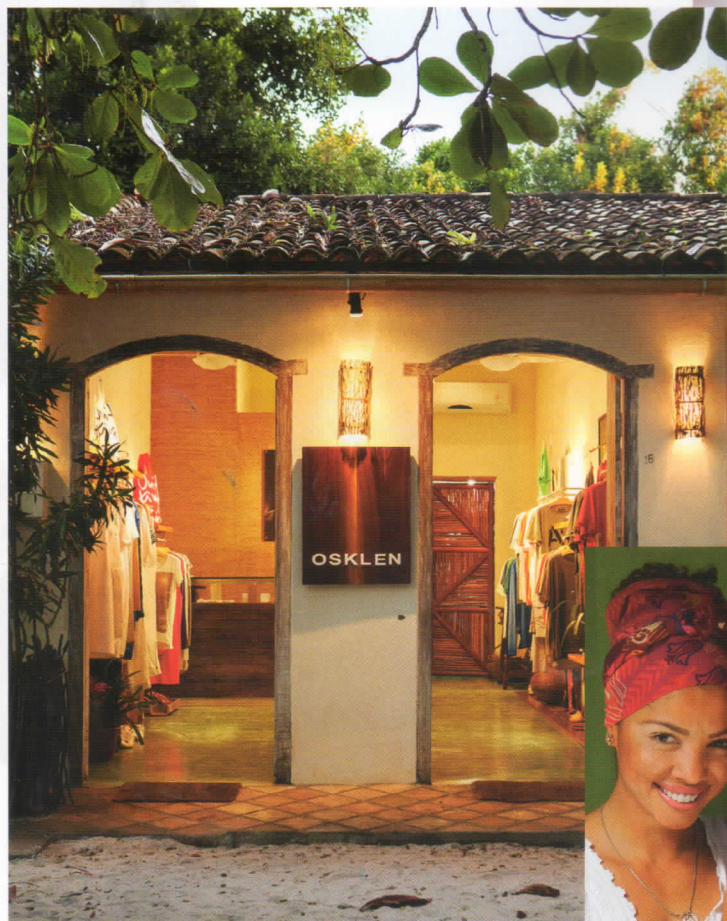
Clockwise from top left: Ponta dos Ganchos beach; Estrela d'Água dining; Trancoso shopping, locals, and treats; and Ponta dos Ganchos paddling gear at the ready.



smoky black beans (the resort's own organic garden supplies many of its ingredients). After lunch, we napped in the shade while the water lapped at the sand, and woke when the afternoon shadows grew long. Nearby, a wooden rack held canoes and two stand-up paddleboards – like giant surfboards covered with rubber grip tape. We grabbed the boards and waded into the warm, shallow water, hoisted ourselves on top, and gingerly stood up with our paddles. In the calm cove, it was easy to balance as we paddled along the rocky coast. Nearby, a waiter carried two torches across a footbridge to Ponta dos Ganchos' private island – preparation for a romantic dinner.

The next morning, I slipped out of a glass door onto our deck and dangled my toes in the plunge pool. As the sun warmed the cloudless sky and multicolored buoys bobbed in the bay below, I reconsidered the day trip to Florianópolis once again. Why leave our own private paradise? I posed the question over breakfast – a parade of fresh juices, pastries, omelets, and finger sandwiches. Looking out over the red-roofed fishing village abutting the resort, Ryan took a bite of brioche and agreed.

After a few hours of lazing on our private deck, alternately sunning and plunging in the pool, it was time for a little activity. I hadn't played tennis in years, but Ponta dos Ganchos' easygoing environment seemed to invite such "Why not?" moments. So I dialed reception, and within minutes a golf cart whisked us up a hill, where we strolled onto an impeccable red clay court with two rackets and a



basket of fresh tennis balls. We worked up a sweat, then meandered through the groves of fruit trees that supply the resort's restaurant, past the helicopter pad, and back down to the beach for an afternoon dip.

It didn't take us long to get the rhythm: reading on our deck, dining at the beach, walking the shady trails, and admiring neighboring villages by boat, with a local fisherman as our guide. Our final evening at Ponta dos Ganchos, after massages in hillside tents, we wrapped ourselves in terrycloth robes and headed back to our bungalow. That night, we stayed in our bathrobes and ordered room service.

## STOP 2

### POUSADA ESTRELA D'ÁGUA, TRANCOSO, BAHIA

**Guest register:** Well-to-do, beautiful bohemian types with an affinity for Caribbean flair.

**When to go:** From December until Carnival in February or March, Trancoso fills with revelers seeking a smaller party than those in Salvador and Rio. For a quieter scene, go in March.

**Tip:** If you're doing capoeira, Brazil's martial art, in the grass at sunset, be sure to cover up or wear mosquito repellent.

Bahia is known for its *alegria*, a spirited happiness bolstered by some of Brazil's liveliest music, cuisine, and beaches. When the coolest Brazilians crave fun in the sun, many head straight to Trancoso, a

sixteenth-century settlement turned holiday outpost – picture East Hampton, south of the equator. Estrela d'Água embodies the spirit: A self-contained inn with sprawling lawns and beachfront pools, it's located ten minutes east of town (close enough to walk via the beach, but far enough to feel removed). Brightly painted bungalows decorated with quilts, rattan furniture, and ceramic statues have private pools and pillow-filled pagodas.

The night we arrived in Trancoso, our driver stopped on a cobblestoned street and directed us toward the *quadrado*: a grassy plaza surrounded by small stucco galleries, shops, and restaurants, where lanterns twinkled in windows and trees – the center of the town's nightlife. When we commented on its calm vibe to a British shopkeeper, she said that between December and February the *quadrado* is packed shoulder-to-shoulder. In April, we could have thrown a Frisbee clear across it. We hit the shops, trying on sporty cover-ups and metallic sneakers in Osklen, and chatting with Laila Assef, an artist who creates whimsical chandeliers from recycled plastic bottles. Rather than the bass-bumping Trancoso clubs we'd heard about, we found O Centro Cevicheria, a tiny bar where a guitarist and drummer played acoustic Brazilian classics.

The next morning at breakfast, we helped ourselves to fresh papaya and *sonhos* – soft, sugared doughnuts filled with guava jam. Beyond Estrela d'Água's lounge-bordered pools, the Atlantic stretched out, turquoise beneath a brilliant blue sky. We ventured down to the



From left:  
Bohemian trap-  
pings at Estrela  
d'Água; a cool-off  
cocktail; Praia do  
Espelho beach;  
and breakfast  
bites, the lobby,  
grounds, and  
exterior at Kenoa.



sand for a walk, and as Ryan observed the attire of passing Brazilians, he regretted (maybe for the first time in his life) not owning a Speedo. We remedied the situation at Richard's, a boutique on Estrela d'Água's grounds, and returned for some swimming and sunning – male thighs included.

Because Brazil's African diaspora was concentrated in Bahia, the state has a distinct culture. Dishes include ingredients such as palm oil, peanuts, okra, and dried shrimp; the *orixas* (spirits) of the Candomblé religion often appear alongside Catholic saints; and in the capital city of Salvador, people practice capoeira – an Afro-Brazilian hybrid of martial arts and dance – in the street. Our contact at Matueté suggested we give it a shot, and we gamely agreed.

That afternoon our instructor, a fit Brazilian with a short Mohawk, arrived. Soon, with his patient instruction, we rocked back and forth on Estrela d'Água's lawn, attempting the occasional spin or kick. The verb used for capoeira is *jogar*, “to play.” After an hour, grass-stained, laughing, and happily tired, we understood.

Although it was tough to imagine a better beach than the one directly in front of the resort, Matueté had recommended Praia do Espelho, about an hour away by car – along with lunch at Restaurante da Silvinha. So the following morning, our driver narrated as we bumped through a buffalo reserve, an indigenous village, and a

slice of the Atlantic rain forest, before pulling up to a vast crescent-shaped beach. Green cliffs rose above the sand, and a chocolate-colored river ran lazily into the ocean. We found a secluded section where palms reached over the beach and snorkelers kicked above reefs in the distance.

At lunchtime, we walked to Silvinha's, a small stone kitchen with a green and turquoise terrace beside a stream. Strings of small wooden birds hung along the veranda's edge, their little propeller tails whirring in the warm, steady breeze. As we sipped icy beers and crunched anise-tinged flatbread on the porch, the smell of garlic wafted out of the kitchen, where Silvinha tended a wood-burning stove. Soon, several bowls spread out on the table: fish in a clove-flecked ginger sauce sprinkled with bright cilantro, chunks of warm pineapple with mint and chili, cucumber salad, plantain puree, candied mango, passion-fruit sauce with garlic and honey, and – of course – outstanding beans and rice.

The town of Trancoso may be known for its celebrity visitors and chic nightlife, but our favorite nocturnal setting was the beach



directly in front of Estrela d'Água. There, the only stars we saw were scattered across the night sky.

### STOP 3 KENOA EXCLUSIVE BEACH SPA & RESORT, BARRA DE SÃO MIGUEL, ALAGOAS

**Guest register:** Honeymooners and nature lovers for Kenoa's remote, rugged setting; surfers for its great waves and complimentary boards.

**When to go:** Alagoas is warm and sunny year-round, with occasional rain between May and July.

**Tip:** You're close to the equator here, so slather on the sunscreen (Kenoa provides a fantastic Brazilian variety in its rooms).

After a postarrival snooze at Kenoa resort in the remote northern state of Alagoas (I was flying solo now; Ryan had to head home before I did), I pulled open the curtains to see the early-morning clouds had cleared. On the villa's patio, a little stream trickled

into a plunge pool, and just beyond, the ocean roared. Sunlight streamed into the suite, illuminating the framed grass skirt over the bed, the sitting area's cowhide rug, and the skylit bathroom with its interior garden. Kenoa's Portuguese-born owner, Pedro Marques, who grew up vacationing on Alagoas' white-sand beaches, teamed up with Brazilian architect Osvaldo Tenório to make the most of the resort's extraordinary location, sandwiched between a nature preserve and the Atlantic Ocean. Kenoa's rustic design melds with its surroundings and includes ecologically conscious touches such as solar panels and energy-efficient lighting.



### RIO WRAP-UP

 Rio-based Frescobol Carioca's hometown-inspired linen towels come in colors such as bright orange Pepê (for Rio's kite-surfing beach) and purple-and-white Fasano (for the hotel hot spot). From \$145, [www.fbcollection.com](http://www.fbcollection.com).



## tip

"Arrange for a guided bike ride along the trail from Trancoso to Itaquena, the area's biggest beach, which is accessible only by foot or bicycle. There are great landscape photo opportunities along the way!"

— Chadi Nammour,  
travel advisor, São Paulo



From left:  
Kenao's pool, Ala-  
goas sugarcane  
fields, and fresh  
oysters from Vila  
da Palateia.



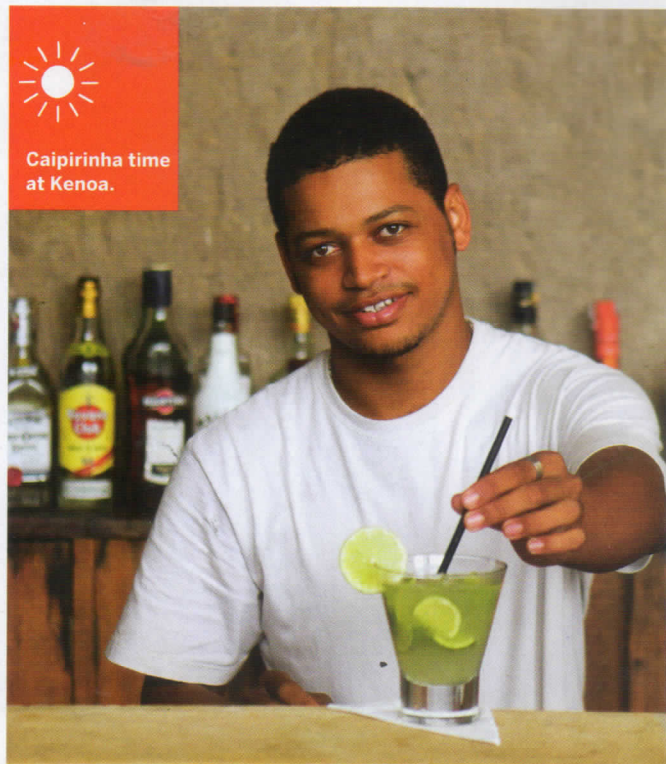
Later that day, a local guide drove me through vibrant green hills of sugarcane, Alagoas' primary source of income. Below were the unspoiled waterfalls, beaches, and reefs that attract tourists in search of natural refuge. After a ten-minute drive, I followed the guide along a dirt path beneath towering palms and mango trees to the mouth of a stream. There, Sebastiana and Josuel, a mother-son team and members of Vila da Palateia, the local subsistence-seafaring community, waited in two wooden canoes. As Josuel paddled me down the stream, Sebastiana floated alongside us, pointing out blue crabs and burgundy-branched mangroves. Eventually we reached a wide sea-fed lagoon with several white posts sticking out of the center, where we hitched up our canoes. Sebastiana's is one of about 50 families who cultivate oysters in the area; the posts marked underwater oyster beds. She pulled a piece of black plastic webbing from below the surface and plucked out a shell. With impressive speed, she scraped it clean, pried it open, and passed it to my guide, who had spread out limes, chopped chilies, olive oil, and locally produced

honey on the canoe's bench. The smooth, mild, freshly shucked oysters needed no adornment, but as Sebastiana continued to shuck, I sampled them every which way, especially savoring the combination of chilies and honey.

Back at Kenao that evening, with a little daylight left, I settled into a chair at the edge of the rooftop lounge. Below, crisp white daybeds and chairs spread out on the lawn, and marigold-colored lounges lined a pair of infinity pools – all dwarfed by the Atlantic and its whitecapped waves just beyond. As I nibbled local cashews and sipped a caipirinha – cachaça, sugar, and muddled lime – owner Pedro Marques appeared at the rooftop lounge. Seeing my snack, he asked if I'd ever tried *piña*, another area delicacy. A bartender presented a piece of green, bumpy-skinned fruit with black almond-shaped seeds encased in yellow pulp. I took a little slurp; it tasted similar to a creamy, aromatic pear. "They're in season," Marques said, "and they make a delicious caipirinha." I took note for my next round – and my next visit.



Caipirinha time  
at Kenoa.



## SUNSHINE STATE

Plan a Brazilian breakaway.

### GETTING THERE LAN Airlines,

**TAM Airlines**, and **Delta** offer service to Rio de Janeiro from U.S. cities.

**GO** The well-connected team at **Matueté** can work with your travel advisor to craft a pitch-perfect Brazilian beach getaway, coordinating guided outings, hotel stays, car service, and domestic air arrangements.

### STAY Barra de São Miguel

At **Kenoa Exclusive Beach Spa & Resort**, in the remote northeastern state of Alagoas, the backyard is a **jungle reserve** and the front is the wide-open Atlantic. The spa, restaurant, and 23 suites and villas pair clean design with rustic touches. Decor includes Amazonian headdresses and repurposed railroad ties, and the restaurant features local fish and fruits. *Doubles from \$570, including breakfast daily and one massage for two.*

### Armação de Búzios

**Insólito Boutique Hotel**, a 20-room property, has theme-decorated rooms with furnishings by George Nelson, art by renowned Brazilians, and bright textiles against white surroundings. A two-hour drive east of Rio, the hotel adjoins Ferradura, one of Búzios' **26 beaches**. *Doubles from \$850, including a caipirinha on arrival, a fruit basket, breakfast daily, and one massage per person.*

### Santa Catarina

An hour north of Florianópolis, **Ponta dos Ganchos'** exclusive peninsula feels like another universe. Winding footpaths connect 25 bungalows with the beachfront restaurant, tennis courts, screening room, and outdoor spa. Fresh catch from fishing villages tastes best enjoyed from the resort's small **private island** – the ultimate corner table. *Doubles from \$855, including breakfast daily and a \$100 resort credit.*

### Trancoso

The vibe at **Pousada Estrela d'Água** is distinctly Bahian, which is to say, bright, cheerful, and easy-going. Go for **beachfront pools**, rolling lawns, 28 bungalows and suites, and, in nearby Trancoso, boutiques, restaurants, and bars that attract the jet set. *Doubles from \$445, including breakfast daily and a \$100 dining credit.*

Wilbert Das, former creative director of Diesel, developed the ten-room, **artisan-decorated Uxua Casa Hotel and Spa** on Trancoso's main square. Four of the ten "casas" occupy restored fishermen's homes; the remaining six surround a quiet garden. Other touches: a swimming pool lined with thousands of aventurine-quartz crystals, an earthy spa, and a blissfully bare white-sand beach (a ten-minute stroll away). *Doubles from \$485, including breakfast daily and a one-hour spa treatment.*

### Rio de Janeiro

The **Copacabana Palace's** regal white facade, soaring marble foyers, and sparkling chandeliers recall a Rio long past, when the hotel housed guests such as Marlene Dietrich and Orson Welles. Today, one of the city's largest swimming pools, the Hotel Cipriani Restaurant, 243 rooms and suites, and, of course, Copacabana Beach, keep the **grandeur and glamour** alive. *Doubles from \$735, including breakfast daily and a \$100 spa credit.*

Barely five years old, the 89-room **Hotel Fasano** is already a famous fixture on Ipanema's beachfront promenade. **Philippe Starck's** undulating interiors add to the hotel's sleek appeal. But it's the rooftop pool, where fit and fabulous guests take in 180-degree views of Ipanema and surroundings, that really dazzles. *Doubles from \$820, including breakfast daily and a \$100 spa credit.* VI