

Bahia



Boasting more than 900km of coastline and a rich culture spanning five centuries, Bahia is a state of massive proportions. With World Heritage-listed sites, deserted beaches, paradisaical islands and lively festivals throughout the year, there is much to discover.

Bahia's centerpiece is Salvador, where the jewel-box colonial old town has gilded churches, cobblestone streets and an incredibly vibrant Afro-Brazilian culture. Music and dance seem to be everywhere, with the powerful sounds of drum corps reverberating off old stone walls as capoeiristas battle against the backdrop of a 16th-century cathedral. Catching open-air concerts, Candomblé ceremonies and impromptu fests are ways to celebrate an evening.

Nearby scenic colonial towns such as Cachoeira have picturesque river settings and a long tradition of wood carving. Just short journeys north and south lead to pretty coastal spots such as the car-free island of Morro de São Paulo or lovely Praia do Forte.

In the south, the idyllic villages of Arraial d'Ajuda and Trancoso perch on hillsides near vast stretches of white-sand beaches. A fun, diverse crowd gathers at outdoor restaurants and bars, and there's a charming assortment of guesthouses. More off-the-beaten-track locales include the sleepy fishing village of Caraíva, the rustic island of Barra Grande, and Parque Nacional Marinho de Abrolhos, which is great for diving and whale-watching. Inland, the peaceful town of Lençóis, once a center for diamond-mining, lies amid breathtaking scenery, with waterfalls and rushing rivers setting the stage for hiking and exploring.

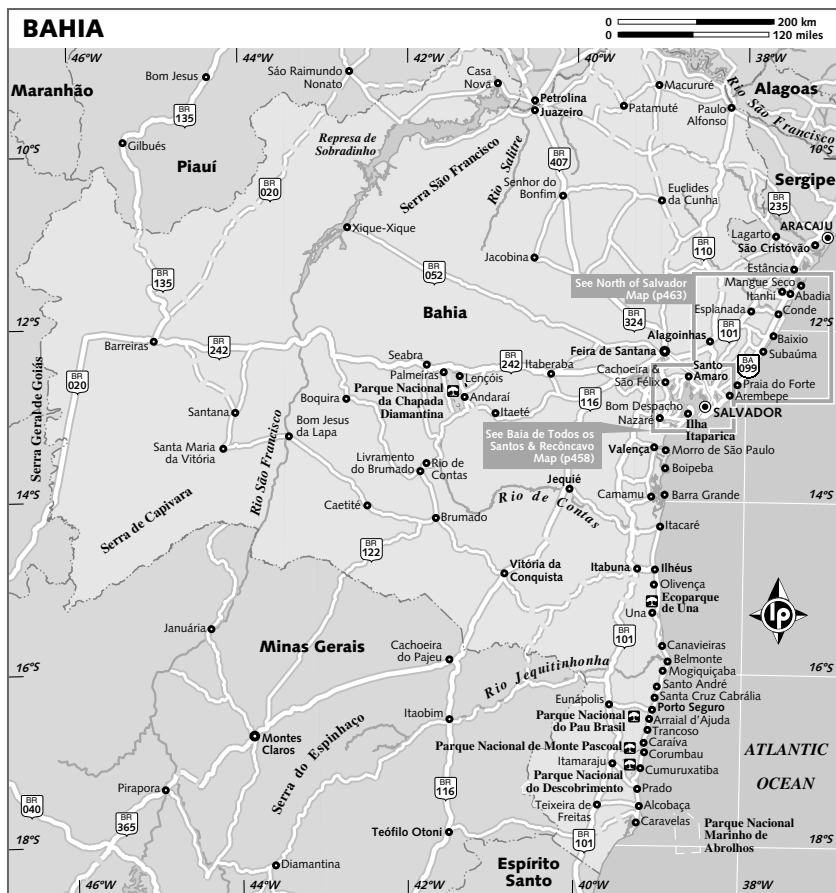
HIGHLIGHTS

- Follow the sounds of the pounding rhythms in **Salvador** (p437), Latin America's inspiring Afro-Brazilian capital
- Hike across dramatic plateaus and swim in fresh waterfalls in the magnificent **Parque Nacional da Chapada Diamantina** (p496)
- Island-hop by speedboat across lovely **Morro de São Paulo** (p467) and traditional **Boipeba** (p470)
- Linger at outdoor restaurants, take long coastal walks and join the beach fests at **Arraial d'Ajuda** (p484)
- Watch tiny sea turtles hatch outside of **Praia do Forte** (p463)



■ POPULATION: 13.5 MILLION

■ AREA: 567,300 SQ KM



History

Prior to the Portuguese arrival, the region known today as Bahia had a wide variety of ethnic groups scattered inland and along the coast, speaking dozens of languages. Many of the tribes were wiped out by the Portuguese, though some – like the Pataxó (see the boxed text, p489) – are still around today. The indigenous tribes practiced some form of agriculture, raising manioc, sweet potatoes and maize, and practiced hunting and fishing, while gathering fruits from the forests. Little else is known of the area's native population, who, for the most part, would disappear following the European arrival.

Portuguese sailors first made landfall near Porto Seguro in 1500, but it wasn't until one

year later – All Saints' Day (November 1), according to legend – that Italian navigator Amerigo Vespucci sailed into Salvador's bay and named it Baía de Todos os Santos. Two generations later, in 1549, Tomé de Souza returned under orders by the Portuguese crown to found Brazil's first capital, Salvador da Bahia.

To fuel this new country, the colonists grew sugarcane and later tobacco in the fertile *recôncavo* (region named after the concave shape of the bay) that surrounds the Baía de Todos os Santos. The Portuguese enslaved the indigenous people to work these fields, and when they proved insufficient, they brought over Africans in staggering numbers. From 1550 to 1850, at least 3.6

