

5 Great Places off the Beaten Track

Brazil boasts many instantly recognizable sights: the beaches of Rio, the dense jungle of the Amazon, the mighty Iguazu Falls and of course the Christ Redeemer statue, listed as one of the new 7 Wonders of the World.



There is however much more to this vast land of natural and cultural contrasts. Most of Brazil remains relatively untouched by international tourism, and a visit to some of the lesser known places can be a hugely rewarding part of a Brazil adventure. Here are 5 such places that are well worth including in your plans.

Fernanda do Noronha

This remote archipelago of 21 islands off the North East coast of Brazil is reached by air (daily flights from Recife and Natal). Fernanda do Noronha is a national marine reserve and has been awarded UNESCO World Heritage status. Great care has gone into managing the flow of visitors in order to minimize any impact on the pristine environment.

The beaches here are truly breathtaking – wild, white, clean, framed by rugged cliffs and lapped by brilliant turquoise seas. Spinner dolphins are a treat to observe off-shore; take a boat trip to see these acrobatic creatures in action. Visit between August and December for diving and snorkeling.

There are two sides of the character of Fernanda do Noronha; on the one hand the simplicity of some of the accommodation and the wonderful sense of freedom could suggest a bit of a backpacker feeling, yet there is no taking away from the feeling of luxury due to the sheer natural and wild beauty. It is a very special place and one that the Brazilian people consider their ‘jewel in the crown’. Many Brazilians dream of visiting this unique destination.

Chapada dos Veadeiros

This national park is around 3.5 hours from Brasilia and is the geographical centre of Brazil. It is an area of fascinating rock formations carved over the years by the fast flowing rivers. Chapada dos Veadeiros is also a magnet for mystics who are attracted by what they claim are special powers within the crystal soil (there are also many rumored UFO appearances here). The gems can be found in much of the soil here

and occasionally as you walk there will be a glint of light from a precious stone or crystal.



The best way to explore the park is on foot and there are many walks of differing lengths and levels of difficulty. You can enjoy day long walks among spectacular scenery far away from any town before a holistic massage, the perfect compliment for tired limbs. These are very popular in nearby San Jorge, thanks to its reputation as a place of energy and healing.

Chapada dos Veadeiros is a perfect place to escape the often hectic pace of the 21st Century and to get back to nature. One of the biggest surprises to us is that Chapada dos Veadeiros is still a well-kept secret!

Jericoacoara

Jericoacoara (or 'Jeri') is a small town on the north coast, around 4 hours bumpy drive from Fortaleza. Everything here is focused on the beach: football (of course!), people selling their wares, kite surfing and fisherman hoping to bring in the catch of the day. As the sun goes down, little carts arrive selling Caipirinhas as an outdoor concert gets going.

Jeri is not for everyone as the accommodation is very simple and it can be busy (loud) in the evenings, though there is a definite feel of being in a very 'real' Brazilian beach area. It's a 'hippy' and happy place and very free in spirit! The beach is the focal point and the big sand dune by the beach attracts almost everyone at sunset.

People walk the heights and sit and enjoy watching the sunset; some sand-ski from the great height in front of a very excited audience while others continue to enjoy the waves far below and keep kite surfing until the light disappears.

Minas Gerais

This was the scene of the world's first gold rush in the 18th century. What now remains are well-preserved colonial towns such as Ouro Preto, perfect for those with an interest in history, gemology or who enjoy taking pictures in a very photogenic location. The town of Triadentes, named after the leader who played a role in achieving independence for Brazil, holds a major food festival annually where some of the World's top chefs show their talents.

Minas Gerais presents the visitor a different side to this vast country and adds variety to a traditional

highlights tour. Minas Gerais has a well-deserved local reputation for excellent food. Meals are creative, fresh and plentiful using organic food – a real treat! It's a quirky area to visit and a real contrast to the popular images we see of Brazil. Guided tours are particularly recommended here as guides are often gemologists and can add a great depth to a visitor's experience.



Chapada Diamantina

This beautiful remote spot is around 6 hours by local bus from Salvador. Chapada Diamantina offers kayaking, horseback riding and excellent hiking. Turquoise waters can be found weaving their way through pitch black caves which can be explored by snorkeling with a torch light. Stalagmites and stalactites of enormous size can be found in hidden caves giving a cathedral like impression; venture further into the caves (with guide) by torch light and hear just the sound of water droplets and silence!

Chapada Diamantina is best explored from the small town of Lencois (pronounced len-soy-ss). Lencois is a tiny town built either side of a stepped waterfall that is wide enough to require a bridge and steep enough for the water to rush by in the wet season. The Hotel Canto das Aguas is built immediately alongside a stretch of the waterfall. Stay in a waterside room, and you'll have the rushing water as a lullaby to send you to sleep each night. The town is very friendly and the local people still remain fascinated with visitors, enjoying the chance to talk and exchange stories.

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