

It wasn't planned to be, but dining turned out to be one of the highlights of my four-week trip to Brazil in January/February. But, first things first. The night time flight approach to Rio has to be the most beautiful of my life (except perhaps in different ways the west coast flights up to Seattle along the volcano peaks of the ring of fire or the approach to Kathmandu with the Himalayas spread before you at your altitude!). So, maybe my most beautiful urban approach. Rio looked like an exquisite diamond necklace with the black areas (mountain peaks and water bodies) creating an intricate pattern among the diamonds – the city lights.

I spent my first night in a convenient modern hotel at the airport after traveling Royal Air Maroc Paris to Casablanca to Rio. RAM's Brazil service was perfect for my desired itinerary as their return flight is from Sao Paulo where I planned to end the visit and continue onwards to Agadir from Casablanca.

Brazil is a big country, about the same size as continental USA so a lot of flying was involved. Most of the internal flights were on Gol which had recently joined the Air France/KLM Flying Blue network so I even earned unanticipated miles!

In Rio I stayed in the Lapa neighborhood which suited me perfectly as it was easy to walk to the "Place de Paris", anchored by the Municipal Theater (1909) and other buildings modeled after



late 19<sup>th</sup> C Paris, followed in the 1920's by the development nearby of handsome movie theaters. I was also close to the streetcar which traverses the remains of the Arcos de Lapa, the aqueduct built in 1724 to bring water down to the city from the forest of Santa Teresa, which in 1896 began to service that neighborhood whose Victorian homes with spectacular views are gradually being restored.

My

first night I did a walking tour of Lapa, which our guide described more correctly as a pub crawl. But I got to know the area, still boasting vibrant music nightlife, especially Samba, and was introduced to the national drink, the caipirinha made from cachaca, which is distilled from sugar cane, often with flavors added such as coconut, pistachio, etc. I also ate Brazilian food (portions are huge!) at Nova Capela and traditional snacks (fish croquettes, pao de queijo- balls of cheese stuffed tapioca bread-, and batter fried shrimp) at Adega Flor de Coimbra together with their self-produced wine. This eatery is right across from the famous



215 tile steps of Chilean-born artist Jorge Selaron whose love of Rio encouraged this work which he said would never be complete until he died, which he did in 2013.



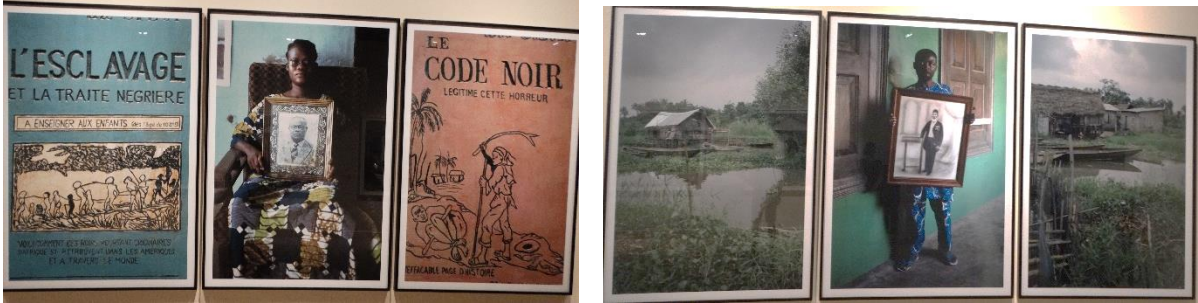
Brazilians are not big wine drinkers preferring cachaça and beer, of which there are many good domestic brands with enticing names like Antartica, Skol, Brahma, Bavaria. On the hot summer days an ice-cold beer went perfectly with lunch, although drinking the water of a coconut was also popular and refreshing.

Our hotel was adjacent to one of the buffets that are everywhere in the country. There are two formats, either a fixed price for all you can eat (beverages separate) or you have your plate weighed at each trip to the buffet and pay as you leave. There was always a wide selection, usually including feijoada, the national meat and bean stew, and often a churrascaria – a grill station with a variety of meats always including sausages.

Breakfast was also interesting because in addition to the standard cold cuts, eggs, breads, fresh fruit (pineapple, watermelon, papaya and melon or mango), there were always three or more cakes (like our dessert cakes) plus often a flan. The Brazilians seemed always to opt for some cake portions.

I enjoyed a temporary exhibit at the Bank of Brazil cultural center called Out of Africa celebrating the African roots of a significant portion of Brazil's population. (About 3.6 million

slaves were imported from Africa to Brazil between 1550 and 1850.) I especially appreciated Beninois photographer Leonce Raphael Agbodjelou's work. The pieces exhibited speak to the history of his native Porto-Novo (now Benin's capital) which was a major port for exporting slaves.



I am a street-art junkie and took hundreds of photos of street art. I will share only a few with you! But this is an art form that seems to be exploding. At home I find new art virtually every day as I walk around Paris.





A narrow alley, Travessa do Comercio in the heart of the central business district is set up daily for food and drink by a long strip of

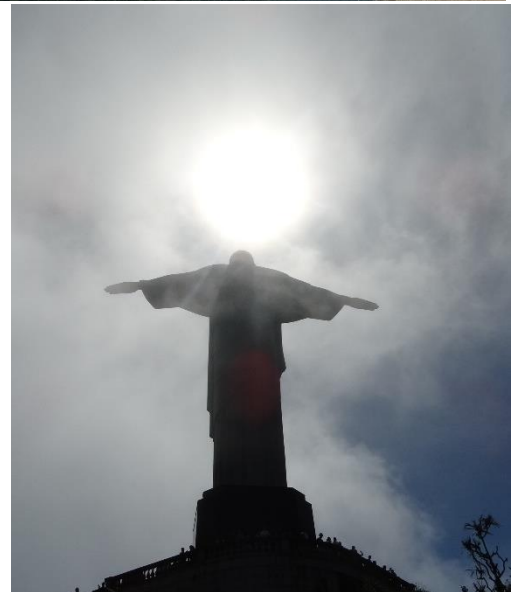


restaurants.

The trip was during the rainy season for most parts of the country but between showers we were very lucky to have one clear morning when we took the cog train through the national forest of Tijuca up to the Cristo Redenter. Interesting to me to see what I know as “jackfruit” which I remember from the Philippines, and reminded me that I am in the tropics!



Sculpted in France, Cristo was inaugurated in 1931 to mark the centenary of Brazil's independence. The views from the 2300' peak offer a sweeping panorama of the city.



At the origin train station we benefitted from the practice common in virtually every line we were in throughout the country, a preferential line for elderly or handicapped people! And on the Metro people did actually get out of the priority seats to let you sit. Which is indicative of what we found everywhere we went – truly friendly, helpful, Brazilians. And although very few speak English, those who did were especially willing to step in and be helpful.

We stopped at the Copacabana Palace Hotel on Copacabana beach just for the experience of a drink by the pool and sipped a coconut on Ipanema beach. We did the beginning of the Favela Museum walking tour where a volunteer group has created an open-air museum by painting 27 building fronts with the story of the Pavao and Cantagalo neighborhoods. The route was too steep for us to handle and the rules were very interesting. Absolutely no photography, not of buildings or people. This favela on the hill above Ipanema and Copacabana beaches is one of the smallest with a population of about 25,000. They have established special trade schools to give the youth a route towards a life outside the favela.

After three days in Rio we embarked on the MSC Musica, a cruise ship accommodating ~3000 passengers. On board for six days starting and ending in Rio were 2500 Brazilians, 300 Argentinians, 21 English speakers, 40 French speakers plus other miscellaneous! You can imagine the energy as this was one of the final weeks of summer vacation and just before Carnavale. The good humor was infectious, the nightly shows of Las Vegas quality, and we could even understand a lot of the humor of the Brazilian-speaking husband and wife MC's. Brazilian is way more sing song than the Portuguese I heard in Portugal and I gathered each has to work at it to understand the other. Many of the service staff were Indonesian and did not speak Portuguese so they were happy to converse with us in English.

As we were leaving Rio we had great views of the city's new Museum of Tomorrow, opened in 2015.



A large bird which seemed to me to be an Albatross followed us most of our first day. The V shape of the wings seemed to match, but I could never find an Albatross photo where the legs extended so far.

The ship's captain and chef are Italian and the food was excellent, of varied cuisines and with wide choices. We did choose, however, on our three shore days – Buzios, Salvador de Bahia and Ilheus, to eat locally. I had never been on a “big” cruise ship before and had such a good time that I have booked a future Latin American cruise with MSC. She is long, and the evening entertainments in her theater were super professional.





The first stop was Buzios, just up the coast from Rio with hills and 27 beaches. Lots of cariocas (people from Rio) are moving there with either primary or secondary residences.





The town became an attraction after Brigitte Bardot and her Brazilian boy friend visited there in 1964. The former President, Juscelino Kubitschek de Oliveira, who spearheaded creation of the capital, Brasilia, also spent some time here. There are sculptures of both along the beach by the same sculptress who did the three fishermen in the main harbor.



Salvador de Bahia did not disappoint, especially the Church and Convent of St Francis, constructed between 1708 and 1750. The inner walls and ceiling of the church are largely covered in gold and the monastery's Portuguese azulejos tiles bear the moral entreaties of Flemish painter Otto van Veen. Examples include "Virtue is the target of envy" and "Nothing is more useful than silence".





Salvador's buildings are colorful, vibrant music abounds, and the markets are filled with the distinctive artisan products of this region.

Unfortunately, many of the buildings are currently closed for restoration but there was plenty to fill a day just in the historic center. Here I first learned of one of Brazil's most famous authors, Jorge Amado, whose works are widely translated. However, we were told that many of the "facts" in his historical fiction may not be so factual at all. But he certainly captures the unique spirit of Bahia with its many African-

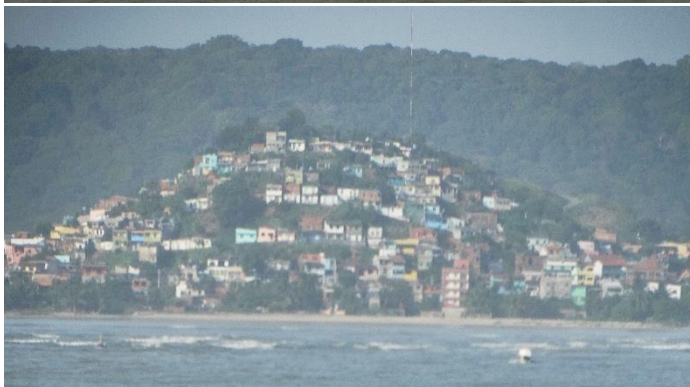




origin religions, especially Candomble with its mystical spirits (Oxala). I have subsequently read a few of his books.

Just down the street from the Amado Foundation House is the blue Igreja Nossa Senhora de Rosario dos Pretos, built by slaves in the 18<sup>th</sup> C as they were not permitted in the church of nobles, clergy and landowners (which they had also built!). The King of Portugal donated the land for the church.

The next stop was Ilheus where we did a walking tour. This was where many of the wealthy rubber barons built their homes during the heyday of rubber in the early 1900's. We lucked out by having as our guide a young man who was home for the summer working as an English-speaking guide but who was headed back to university in Brasilia the day we were scheduled to be there so we hired him to be our tour guide for our day there.





Ilheus was the birthplace of Jorge Amado and his house is open as a museum complete with a display of images of many of the Orixos/Oxala.



birthplace of Jorge Amado as a museum complete with a

This is also a center for schools for the Bahian traditional martial arts known as capoeira, dating



back to the early slave period. One other attraction is the former brothel, known as Bataclan, which is now a tourist venue for food, entertainment and the flavor of historic Ilheus. They display a good selection of historic photos in the boudoir of the former Madame.

The Cathedral was only built in the 20<sup>th</sup> C but when I arrived at the end of mass I experienced the exuberance of the worshippers' singing, accompanied by a small choir and guitars.



After a flight from Rio we visited Iguazu Falls on the border with Argentina and the Iquatu dam on the border with Paraguay. After a terrific morning at the bird park just outside the falls national park (I particularly loved the Macaws and the scarlet ibis, which I had never seen before). The plants were equally interesting and it was great to see “lobster claws” again.





We had lunch at the excellent buffet restaurant at the top of the falls where you can see the viewing platform on the Argentina side of the falls.



Then we walked part of the trail to see the extent of the falls, and finished the afternoon relaxing on the veranda of the Hotel Cataracta which, like the Palace Hotel in Copacabana, is managed by the Belmond group with whom I did the Royal Scotsman highlands train trip 2 years ago! Some statistics: there are 275 individual falls, across 3 km and 80 meters high, thus wider than Victoria and higher than Niagara, ironically, neither of which I have ever been to! From the viewing platform you

can get quite close and of, course, there is a boat trip at the bottom for the more adventurous.



The Iquatu hydroelectric dam was very interesting as it is a 50/50 joint venture between the governments of Paraguay and Brazil. It is not quite as large as 3 Gorges dam in China but produces more power because the Parana river flows all year long, unlike the Yangtze. The dam's output fulfills 86% of Paraguay's power needs which then sells the rest of its 50% share to Brazil, which together with its 50%, fulfill 15% of Brazil's power needs. The overall width of the installation is 9 km, but its reservoir is only the 7<sup>th</sup> largest in Brazil! This is a stock photo and



the sluiceways are open about 10% of the time. One interesting feature of the reforestation efforts is that each time an employee reaches 15 years of service a tree is planted in his/her name with a plaque. Since its 1972 construction many hundreds of such trees have been planted and a large number of the construction workers, many of whom came from Bahia, stayed on.

Next stop was Brasilia. Because we had our guide scheduled with an Uber driver for a full day tour, we hired a taxi for our first day to take us into the beautiful countryside of Goia State to a



quasi-colonial town called Pirenopolis. This proved to be fun as we saw old churches and colonial buildings that reminded me of Vinales in the tobacco growing





area of western Cuba. It is a popular weekend get away from Brasilia and has many Pousadas.

It is now populated by a wide variety of “hippie” – their words not mine - artists and craftsmen, many of very high quality. We noticed a lot of “rag rug” weaving in this region.



The restaurants mentioned in the guidebook were all closed either for lunch or summer vacation



but the local buffet was of course going strong!

One of the churches had been substantially burned in a fire in 2002 but its wooden altar has been



meticulously and beautifully restored.

Pirenópolis's annual Festado Divino Espirito Santa, celebrates Charlemagne's victory over the Moors. Sculptures around town display the knights and masked (bull head) mischief makers of the festival and two museums provide full coverage of this event.



Returning, we learned first-hand about Brasilia's traffic problem when one of the main roads into the city wouldn't reopen to inbound traffic until 8 pm. So, our driver took a circuitous route through industrial areas and the high-rise suburbs of Aguas Claras, Taguatinga and Ceilandia where most of the government and other workers live.







The urban planner was Lucio Costa, but the city is most closely associated with its principal architect, Oscar Niemeyer who designed the Congress buildings, Metropolitan Cathedral, National Museum and Ministry of Defense, all on the national mall, among others. Shopping malls were widely distributed, and also near the hotels. The stained glass above JK's tomb was created by French artist Marianne Peretti.



The “White House”, Palacio da Alvorada, is some distance out of town on the lake and was actually the first building completed.

The Cathedral is beautiful inside with its stained-glass ceiling constantly in motion from the sky beyond. Brazil is predominantly a Roman Catholic country, despite the presence of many other religions. This Cathedral, and several others in Brazil, are dedicated to Our Lady of Aparecida, considered the patron saint of Brazil.





The adjacent basin and surrounding area feature buildings of eclectic architecture, some



reminiscent of Lisbon. A nearby trompe l'oeil brightened the neighborhood.



Adjacent along the waterfront are three very large former warehouses which have been beautifully restored and now house many restaurants, shops and even a brewery. There is a stage suspended from the roof that slowly moves along the length of the building so everyone can be



entertained. We were tipped off that there would be traditional dance entertainment early on

Friday evening, which there was, and the same on the sunset boat ride we took a couple nights later.

On that ride we could see the real extent of the city with its additional high-rise neighborhoods, newly created port areas, and innumerable boats that are no longer seaworthy, many lived on!



Belem was founded in 1616 by Jesuits and was one of the first Portuguese settlements on the Amazon, exporting cacao, indigo and animal skins to Europe. The initial fort now houses a museum with a collection of the funerary pottery of the Marajoaras, whose island we would shortly visit.

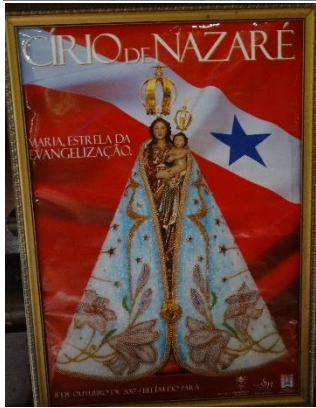


Following a bloody uprising early in the 19<sup>th</sup>C came the rubber boom which brought electricity, streetcars, telephones and the Teatro da Paz. Belem was considered a tropical Paris.

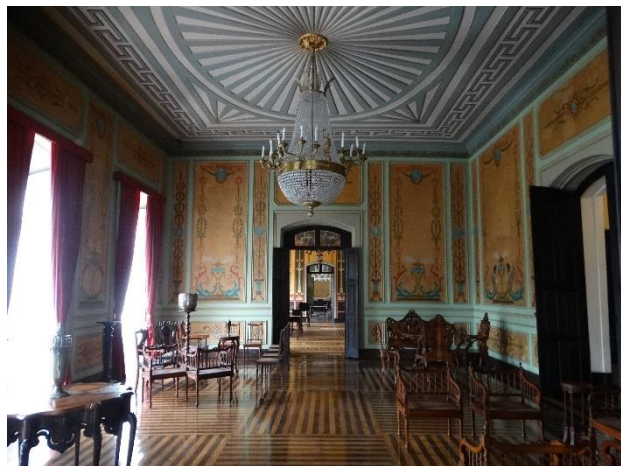
Belem is best known for its statue of Our Lady of Nazareth which was discovered in the mud of a riverbank where the Basilica now stands. Each October upwards of 2 million people come to join the procession of the statue (Cirio de Nazare) from the Cathedral do Sa to the Basilica. Both buildings are now beautifully restored.



Outside the Basilica vendors were selling clusters of multicolored ribbons, a Carnavale tradition, and they filled the fence in front of the Basilica.



There are some unusual high rises but my favorite building was the former Governor's house, Palacio Lauro Sodre whose rooms were redecorated in 1906, each with a unique theme.





By contrast, my favorite part of town was the narrow 13<sup>th</sup> of May street parallel to the waterfront and lined with fabric stores, plastics, decorations, etc. As we were there during Carnavale costumes were everywhere. Spiderman seemed to be big this year for the kids.



We were initially disappointed not to be able to tour the Teatro da Paz on Saturday as many venues continued to be closed through the weekend following the stated end of Carnavale. However, by chance we saw that there was going to be a free concert of the Amazonia Jazz Band on the one night we were back in town, celebrating the 140<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the theater. We were lucky to have hotel staff willing to secure tickets for us as we would be on Ilha de Maraja when they came available. Interestingly, the seats in the

theater are woven cane (seems sensible given the hot climate). Lots of elegance, as would be expected, and a great concert with even a set that was a tribute to the "Rat Pack".



There is a small botanical garden, and several other pleasant parks including the Place Republica.

The voyage to Ilha de Maraja was interesting. First a 1½ hour fast catamaran ride to the island’s port, Camara, where we took a pre-reserved bus about 25 km to Salvaterra.

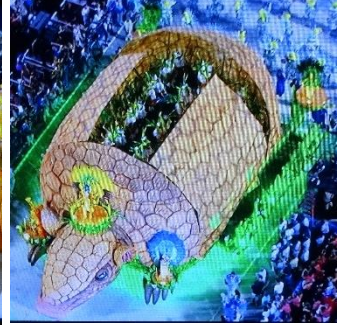


There we unexpectedly backed onto a ferry/berge that crosses the Paracauri river on which Soure the “capital” of Maraja is located.



The large tv’s on the catamaran, which was like an airplane cabin, were broadcasting both scenes from Carnavale in Rio, and segments of the winter





Olympics in Korea!



This sleepy town is most noted for the horses and buffalo roaming freely, the use of bicycles and buffalo-drawn carts in preference to automobiles, and the beaches, mangrove-lined river banks, and rice paddies. We experienced the wildness of rainy season.



On a vast private ranch we saw the buffalo wallowing in the shallows of rice fields.



Then we were treated to the cowboys bringing the buffalo calves into the barn.



There was traditional Majorian pottery on the porch and a welcoming pineapple mounted on the





chapel. Then we actually saw the scarlet ibis in the wild. This was a special treat as its habitat is only the coastal areas of the north and



north east of South America!



Soure is pretty much surrounded by water. There are a few interesting buildings, a market and some upscale restaurants, especially in the Pousadas (upscale accommodations).





The traditional pottery is still created and the workshop gives tours explaining the process of pottery making and the meanings of the symbols and masks.

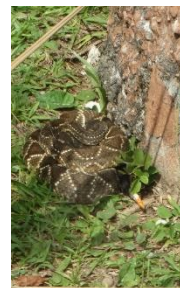
We had planned to take the slower “local” ferry back to Belem which looked like fun, but in order to be in time for the concert we had to take the catamaran again.

The next stop was Sao Paulo which we had planned to simply get a “taste” of with a full day of hop on hop off bus touring. However, as this was still the post Carnavale weekend, the bus wasn’t running due to lots of street closures for parades and final Samba competitions. The streets were crowded with people headed to the closed off areas. Many in “team” garb. Tutus were also popular.



Fortunately, the tourism office at Place Republica near our hotel was open. They gave us some brochures for tour operators and also confirmed that we did have to go out to the main bus terminal in order to buy our bus tickets to Paraty, which meant that we experienced the metro (free for seniors) and reconnoitered our logistics for the trip to Paraty and return to the airport. Many tickets can be purchased on line, but only if you have a national id number!

We ended up, however, with a better result than the hop on hop off bus. We had a seasoned driver/guide and in addition to an overview of the various neighborhoods we visited two highlights that I don’t think are on the normal tour. One is the Institute Butanto, a biomedical research center that is one of the leading producers of anti-venoms in the world. The grounds are peaceful and beautiful and many species of venomous snakes are viewable in an outdoor enclosure.





Our Lady of Brazil, a beautiful Portuguese church was our other special stop. Not only were the chapels and nave beautiful, but the women's bathroom could have been a high-end restaurant (although no decorated toilets like Café Pushkin in Moscow).



The monument to the Pioneers was installed in 1953, the 400<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the founding of



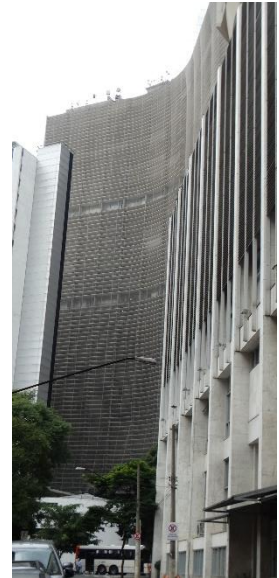
Sao Paulo.

Although densely high rise, there still remain intermixed some older architectural styles.



It also turned out that the famous wave-shaped Oscar Niemeyer apartment building, Copan, built in 1951 with 38 stories and the most apartments in one building in Latin America (1160), was right around the corner from our hotel, but under netting at the moment.

Sao Paulo is known as Brazil's food capital and we had only one night to experience that. We chose Tordesilhas because it was family run and featured traditional Brazilian cuisine. I had a crab appetizer and their version of the delicious seafood stew (moquecas).



From the air arriving in Sao Paulo the view of high rises for this city of 20 million people seems endless. As we took the bus northeast towards Paraty, we transitioned from high rise to large distribution centers and then to the dense, mountainous Atlantic Coastal Rain Forest. The trip takes several hours (two rest stops en route) because most of the time you are on switchbacks in dedicated national or state parks and forests. The mountains reach upwards of 9000', the road periodically descends to coastal towns, and then, eventually to Paraty where police were checking papers and we had a view across the harbor to the old town.





Paraty is another dream spot for foodies. Surrounded by beaches, with views to the mountains that descend to the coast, a canal and a river in town. The colonial historic district (with treacherous giant cobbles on the streets) has many fine restaurants as well as boutique shopping galore.





Banana de Terra might be the best fine dining restaurant I have been to in a long time and has a female chef. Again, I opted for a seafood main course which this time included pineapple. The waiter attentively frequently refilled the white wine in small quantities so that it would remain perfectly chilled.

I have finally confirmed that manioc, tapioca and cassava are all from the same yuca tree, just processed differently! In Africa it seemed as if the root was most often used pounded as a mashed-potato-like starch, whereas in Brazil it seems to be more often the base of various flours used in baking and as thickeners.

Other winners in Paraty are Bartholomeu, and Punto Divina whose home made gnocci is the most tender I can remember, with a lovely gorgonzola sauce. There are many more reasons to visit Paraty than food, including fabulous offshore islands, boating, surfing, etc. But this was meant to be the restful, pampering culmination to 29 days in Brazil. And it was!