



The Perfect Beach

A sunset view of Ipanema beach and Two Brothers Peaks, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. ►

- 1 In **pursuit** of the perfect beach, travel writer Stanley Stewart heads to Brazil, where he discovers some of the world's most beautiful sandy escapes.
- 5 I'm standing on Rio de Janeiro's Copacabana beach, one of Brazil's—and the world's—most famous stretches of sand. As I watch life go by here in all its varied forms, I've come to realize that any understanding of Brazil really begins
- 10 on its beaches. In this vibrant, multicultural country, the beach is not just a place; it's a state of mind—a way of thinking and living. Rio alone, I'm told, has over 70 beaches, each with its own community: some are for
- 15 bodybuilders, others are for senior citizens, still others are popular with parents and children.
- But Rio's beaches are just the starting point for my exploration of Brazil's Atlantic coastline, which at more than 8,000 kilometers (5,000
- 20 miles), and with more than 2,000 beaches, is the longest in the world. Every Brazilian has

his or her own ideas of the perfect beach and is **eager** to tell you where to find it. I'm happy to take people's advice, but my **ultimate** goal is to find my own dream beach.

- 25 I head to a place said to have some of Brazil's best coastline: the state of Bahia in the northeast. Portuguese settlers established themselves at Bahia's present-day capital, Salvador da Bahia, in 1549. Over the
- 30 centuries, people of many races have arrived and intermarried here, creating a distinctive cultural mix, which influences Bahia's language, religion, cuisine, music, and dance.
- 35 I'd been told that one of Bahia's best beaches—Prainha—lies just south of Salvador, near the town of Itacaré. On arriving at Prainha's beach, I discover its golden sand lined by a row of perfect palm trees, moving
- 40 softly in the ocean breeze. Under the moon, silver waves roll onto the sand. As I enter the water, I have the feeling of swimming through moonlight. Prainha's beauty is **magnificent**—its perfect curves and graceful lines are like
- 45 something you might see in a postcard. But for me, it's a little too perfect. The beach I'm searching for needs to be a little wilder . . .

◀ Copacabana beach is one of the most famous beaches in the world.

I continue my search, heading north to one of Brazil's legendary beaches: Jericoacoara.

50 Twenty years ago, only a handful of people were living in Jeri. Today it's an international **destination**, considered one of the best beach hangouts in the world (especially if you like windsurfing). It attracts visitors from Tokyo
55 to Toronto and has grown from a small village into a lively little town. Despite the changes, Jeri hasn't been **spoiled** by tourists, mostly because of its **isolated** location—it's at least five hours from any airport.

60 Everyone in Jeri rents a beach buggy,¹ which comes with a driver. I tell my driver to take me as far along the coast as he can. We drive for three hours, finally arriving at Maceió, a fisherman's beach. Boats lie on their sides
65 while nets hang out to dry on lines between fishermen's houses. We eat on the beach and later rest in hammocks near the table. It's a great day on an amazing beach. *How can it possibly get any better?* I wonder. But I have
70 one final place to visit.

Of the many beach destinations in this country, there is one that all Brazilians hold in high regard—the islands of Fernando de Noronha.

▼ Lion Beach—one of the many beautiful stretches of coastline in Brazil's Fernando de Noronha.



More than a dozen beautiful beaches ring the island of Fernando alone, three of which
75 **rank** among the top ten in Brazil. The islands of Fernando de Noronha lie a few hundred kilometers out in the Atlantic. For years, people were **prohibited** from visiting these islands
80 because they were used as a prison and later by the army. Today the islands are a national park and UNESCO World Heritage Site, rich with **diverse** bird and sea life.

I visit a number of beaches on Fernando, but I
85 leave the best one for last. The beach at Praia do Leão is the perfect balance of sand, sea, and sky. The water is pale blue and warm, alive with colorful fish, turtles, and other marine² life; the sand is the color of honey. And in the rock
90 formations and strong winds that occasionally come in from the Atlantic, there is that hint of wildness I was seeking. Finally I've found the beach of my dreams. I dig my toes in the sand deeply and imagine I can hold on to this
95 place forever.

¹ A **beach buggy** is a small, open car with large wheels made for driving on a beach.

² **Marine** is used to describe things related to the sea.

◀ A surfer prepares to hit the waves at Prainha beach near Salvador, Brazil

