

Secluded anchorages abound  
along the Brazilian coast

# Brazil's COSTA VERDE

Sailing north on their newboat, a pair of cruisers  
stumble upon a true paradise

STORY AND PHOTOGRAPHS BY GORDON MOON

**They** arrive around mid-morning. A solitary motorboat cruises in, then two, then a dozen. Soon there is a steady line approaching over the horizon. They anchor stern-to along the beach, rafted up three, four and five rows deep. Soon the music starts, a jumble of competing rhythms. The nearby floating bar and restaurant compete for business, delivering drink and food menus as they buzz around from boat to boat. It's Saturday, and the Brazilians have come out to play.

We are anchored in Dentista Bay, near an island just south of Angra dos Reis (pronounced "Heis") located off the coast of the state of Rio de Janeiro. We'd been warned that the solitude we'd enjoyed the night before would likely be disturbed, but had come anyway to see how the wealthy Brazilians spend their weekends.

Cruising and living aboard our Antares 44i catamaran *Bella Luna*, we were the only sailboat in a sea of power boaters. But what really amazed the locals was the way my wife, Debbie, and I would clean our own boat. "What? You clean your own boat?"

## UNEXPECTED ADVENTURE

Before deciding to buy *Bella Luna* nearly four years ago, we never imagined we'd be flitting from paradise to paradise, and we often have to pinch ourselves to make sure we're not dreaming. We have always loved to sail and travel, but we never thought we'd begin our adventure in South America. We lived in Buenos Aires to watch as our yacht was finished and also toured the city and surrounding area. After that we set out learning how to navigate the chocolate brown waters of the Rio de la Plata while familiarizing ourselves with the intricacies of our new boat. Then, in the fall of last year—early spring in the Southern Hemisphere—we sailed 1,300 miles in eight days from San Fernando, Argentina to Angra dos Reis, Brazil.





Clockwise from top left: When it comes to partying, Brazilians mean business; you don't have to travel far, though, to escape the crowds; the author and his wife at the start of their journey north; the author on his way back from a local market

Angra dos Reis is located along Brazil's Costa Verde just south of Rio, and the surrounding bay is dotted with more than 360 islands. Ilha Grande, the biggest of these, is trimmed with pristine beaches and has emerald green tropical forests and paths leading to the mountainous interior. There are no vehicles on this 20-mile-long island, only a footpath that circumnavigates the perimeter. What continues to amaze me is that in all my years of pouring through endless subscriptions of sailing magazines, there is no mention of this jewel of a cruising ground.

With the predominant wind coming from the southeast, most of the anchorages are along the leeward side of the island. There are, of course, always exceptions, as we discovered while anchoring off the historic town of Abraao, the largest town and drop-off point for the ferries, when we were caught off-guard by "freak" 45-knot winds that suddenly funneled into the bay. With winds whipped up in a frenzy and an unoccupied boat dragging toward us, it was amazing how quickly we hoisted 150 feet of chain and an additional 250 feet of rode and hustled our way out to a more protected cove.

Fortunately, not all the anchorages are so dramatic. In fact, the majority are very tranquil, the water often dead calm, so that everything is typically about an hour's motor sail away.

Hopping from one harbor to another, we discovered the

charm of each bay—rich in history and culture and lush with vegetation and wildlife we had never experienced beyond the pages of the *National Geographic*. Dropping anchor, we began our exploration by jumping over the side into clear turquoise water teeming with wondrous sea creatures that we had easy access thanks to our onboard dive gear, which included a hookah system and compressor. School of dolphins often escorted us from one island to another, and the jungles ashore were home to colorful toucans and exotic orchids.

One time, anchored in the protected crystal-clear water off the small island of Ilha da Cotia, we spent a leisurely day



circumnavigating the island by dinghy, periodically plunging in to take a closer look at the life below the surface. Ilha da Cotia is near Paraty, a coastal heritage site, and the town's history dates back to the late 1600s when Portuguese colonizers discovered gold in the surrounding hills and built what became one of the most important port towns in Brazil. Slaves from Africa were brought in to work the mines and later the coffee plantations and sugar fields. With the gold came the inevitable peril of piracy, which ultimately led to the demise of the town.

The old town is off-limits to motorized traffic, and its cobbled streets were intentionally built below the height of the

high spring tide so that they would flood and get flushed clean once a month during the full moon. Today, thankfully, they use a mule and cart to pick up the rubbish.

Getting by in Brazil is relatively easy—most Brazilians are eager to practice their English, and provisioning is always a welcome adventure. The markets are filled with fresh fruit and vegetables the likes of which we never saw in our supermarkets back home—the avocados were the size of grapefruits!—and there was never a shortage of fresh seafood, which we bought directly from fishermen. Debbie quickly learned the Portuguese word for shrimp—*camarao*—and we would frequently kayak to their boats to buy heaps of lobster-sized specimens. Given that it is so close to one of the world's most populated cities, the area is astoundingly undeveloped. Lopes Mendes beach stretches along the southeastern part of Ilha Grande with miles of fine, white powdery sand nestled between lush tropical forests that can only be accessed by water or a rugged hiking trail. The deserted beach is a stark contrast to Rio only a few hours north.

Looking back on our time there, it's next to impossible to pick a favorite anchorage, although we did enjoy Sítio Forte, which was, of course, secluded and quiet. There is a small family-run restaurant there, identified only by a large grouping of white plastic stacking chairs. With the help of the government, the proprietors there have also laid a water line to a tap on a rock about 150 yards offshore. We first noticed it when we saw local fishing boats going there to take on fresh water. Later, we discovered we could do so as well—it was like having a bird bath in our anchorage where we could top up our tanks and wash our deck.

While we did meet up with a few other international cruisers, including those from Norway, Germany and Argentina, the only other North Americans we met were the crew of *Floridians Ona*, another Antares 44i on its way to the Caribbean—what are the odds of that? Actually, they're pretty good considering that all Antares cats, which are built in Argentina, are delivered in Buenos Aires.

The full-time cruising community is very small in Brazil, and most of the sailors we met were heading south, around the tip of South America to Chile. Clearly, Brazil is an untouched destination for many North American cruisers. How we found ourselves in Brazil still boggles our minds. Our decision to buy an Antares 44i, the support we got from the factory and the people we have met along the way all made this possible. We truly believe that if people knew the truth about Ilha Grande, they too wouldn't miss it for the world. \*



Gordon Moon is a retired police officer from Ontario, Canada. He and his wife, Debbie, recently completed their first full year of living aboard the 44ft Antares catamaran, *Bella Luna*