

Salvador is on the east coast of Brazil, north of Rio, on about the same latitude as Darwin. It is warm, but not unbearable and not too humid. We had a large window in our hotel room with no screens and we had it open all the time; no flies and no mosquitoes. After a few days we did shut the window and turn on the air conditioner because of the constant noise from the crashing waves and the reception area which was just below our window.

The population of Salvador is around three million and most people live in either high rise apartments or in favelas. Favela is the Brazilian name for the shanty towns. They are either old houses or roughly-built newer ones built from large bricks (a bit like a cement block but made from clay). They often have no glass in the windows, but always seem to have washing hanging out of the windows and often have cable TV. Apparently the government has spent quite a bit recently on upgrading them, connecting sewerage, etc. They seem to build a bit and live in it and then gradually build extra bits on. The building work is very crude and I can now understand why earthquakes cause so much devastation in places like this – they would all collapse like a pack of cards.

Salvador has a much greater black population than the rest of Brazil. This is the port that the early slaves were brought to from Africa and many of their descendants still live in the area. A building near the sea front that now houses a craft market has a basement where the slaves were kept until they were sold. The main tourist area is called Pelourinho, which means whipping post.

The slaves were forbidden to practice their form of martial arts so they turned it into a dance. It looks a bit like kick boxing but the aim is not to hit the other person but to swing your leg over them while they crouch down, and it's all done to music.



The African slaves also developed their own religion, which is a mixture of Catholicism and their own beliefs (basically voodoo). Many of the Catholic churches have lots of gold everywhere, and the churches for this local religion have a mainly white altar. They also have a ceremony called Candomble, which is where the women chant and dance and often go into a trance.

It was Sunday when we arrived and there were lots of people enjoying the beach near the hotel. There is nothing else much near the hotel; it seems that it was built here just so that all the rooms could have an ocean view. I did go for a walk along the beach but unfortunately there was large amount of litter in the sea, lots of rocks and fairly steep dip at the edge of the water, so I did not go for a swim.



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A couple of times we caught a taxi to the old part of town which has fascinating narrow cobbled streets full of lots of churches, souvenir shops and ladies dressed in the traditional style. This includes a lacy off the shoulder top and a full skirt (sometimes with a hoop at hip height), this is usually white with a colourful head scarf and coloured waist band. In this area, tourists are constantly pestered by people wanting to sell jewellery made of wooden beads. Fortunately many of them know that Australia will not allow these into the country, so I just kept telling them – Australia, no - and most of the time it worked.

The old buildings and churches must have looked magnificent when they were built but hardly anything has been looked after and only a few things have been restored. Some of the houses are covered in ornate ceramic tiles on the front wall, but they have not been looked after. The two levels of the old city are joined by a set of four modern lifts and a much older funicular.

On the lower level there is a great market where we bought a painting (we thought that it would fit in the case, but it did not, so we took it off the frame and rolled it up.) The market prices were much cheaper than the prices in the main tourist area, so we bought a few other things too.



Our hotel was 5 star and provided very good service and a good restaurant. For a change we went to a restaurant in another hotel across the road. There were four of us so the first bottle of red wine did not go very far. When we tried to order another one, we found that they did not have any other full size bottles of red wine in the restaurant, so we had to have a half bottle (and there was only one variety available). Red wine drinking is certainly not big in Brazil! We had their local drink a few times, which is called caipirinha. It is a mixed drink made from fairly potent alcohol (from sugar cane) with sugar and pieces of lime. Caipirinha is a wonderful drink, but two is the limit or you will be under the table.

Graham was in Salvador for a conference in his field of biochemistry so it was great to catch up with friends from UK and Argentina. The conference brought together good company, good food and a variety of interesting experiences with alcohol.

One day when Graham was at the conference I caught a taxi into the centre of the shopping district. This is not a tourist area but where the locals shop. The streets are lined with deep shops with narrow street fronts. They have so much stock that it is difficult to move around. There are hundreds of stalls in the streets; on the footpaths and in some narrow pedestrian only streets. Some of these stalls had electrical goods and their connections were really dodgy. In the middle of all of this was a large very modern, very sterile, air conditioned shopping centre, which could just as well be in Australia. It had no character at all; I stayed there longer than I planned because I couldn't find the exit!

I bought a few bits a pieces without too much difficulty and then walked back to the hotel. I walked past some expensive apartment buildings and a yacht club complete with 50 metre swimming pool on the seafront; and this is all in the same city as thousands of favelas. That's Brazil.

Salvador apparently used to be quite run down, but has been cleaned up significantly to attract tourists. The street shown below is one of the areas that has had an overhaul; it is now looking great. We went into the church shown there and went on a tour which described all the ornate statues and paintings in detail ... all in Portuguese!

If you are contemplating a visit to Salvador then try reading the novel *Dona Flor and Her Two Husbands* by Jorge Amado. It is an easy read that will immerse you in the culture of this unique city.



The other thing about Brazil, wherever you go there are kids playing soccer. We saw them in several villages and here in the city streets. They all want to be the next Pelé.

