

# Travel

## The sound of silence



DANIEL WIEDMANN/SHUTTERSTOCK

KEVIN RAUB

**Sandy, can't you see?** One of the island's perfect, semi-deserted beaches, where the beauty can be absorbed in isolation

Hundreds of miles from mainland Brazil, **Kevin Raub** is seduced by the pristine archipelago of Fernando de Noronha

Surrounded by sea in the farthest reaches of Brazil's immense expanse, on the archipelago of Fernando de Noronha, origin-of-the-species moments come as part of the territory. Darwin's masterpiece might have been inspired in the Pacific's Galapagos Islands, but here amongst Atlantic swells, Brazil's Eden holds its own when it comes to miraculous moments – and the opening of a sea-turtle nest is perhaps the most awe-inspiring of them all.

The digging up of dozens of newly-hatched sea turtles too weak to surface through the sand themselves is a delicate business, and most of the time, Projeto Tamar, the Brazilian organisation dedicated to the conservation of the native

sea turtle, tries to keep the opening of a turtle nest a private affair. But inevitably, word gets out on Fernando de Noronha, where nests line the golden sands on Praia do Leão and the inner sea beaches. Keeping the public at bay, even with tourist numbers limited to an average of 700 per day, plays second fiddle to ensuring the baby green sea turtles make their way into the sea unharmed.

Located an hour's flight off the coast of Recife, 325 miles (525 km) as the crow flies from the Pernambuco coast, at South America's most northeasterly point, the stunningly beautiful archipelago is just isolated enough to ward off mass tourism,

while positioning itself as an ecotourism paradise.

It is one of only two places in the world where spinner dolphins live in great numbers; its green sea turtle population outnumbers its human population (around 3,100); and there's world-class diving to boot. When it was decommissioned as a former Brazilian military base in 1988 (and a penal colony before that), both of Brazil's environmental protection agencies (IBAMA and ICMBio) and Unesco pounced on the island in an all-out effort to preserve one of the last pristine paradises on earth.

The jewel in Noronha's crown is inarguably its beaches, all 16 or 17 of

them (which depends on who's counting), and every one of them is flawless. It's not that they are unrivaled worldwide – Bora Bora, Los Roques, Thailand and Bali all come to mind – it's that in comparison, they are shockingly devoid of both people and constructions. Take any of Brazil's top three most beautiful beaches, which are all here (Baía do Sancho, Baía dos Porcos, and Praia do Leão, as consistently voted by *Guia Quatro Rodas Praias*) plop them down in North America, Europe or Asia, and they'd be crammed with eager beachgoers. In Noronha, you feast on their beauty almost alone – the biggest miracle of them all.

Time spent here is decidedly no frills – which stretch of sand to sink into, or where to catch the sunset is likely to be the tallest order of the day. Noronha is a no cocktail-umbrella-style destination – marine park restrictions and

**As you swim over a lemon shark, or gaze out at one of Brazil's most magnificent sunsets over the island's iconic Dois Irmãos, Noronha's problems are easy to forget**

environmental concerns mean restaurants, *pousadas* and other establishments must work within a rigid framework, designed to preserve the marine ecosystem and keep the focus on nature. So where one might normally find a five-star overwater restaurant or a *pousada* opening onto the sands, Noronha is distinctly more minimalist: just the water and the sand.

Oh – and the diesel-guzzling buggies, the preferred method of transport here. Locals say they are necessary for navigating the unpaved secondary roads; but their choking up of route BR-363 with their diesel and dust seems at odds with the philosophy of the national marine park. (75 per cent of the archipelago falls under protected park status, including much of the inhabited main island). A little natural gas could go a long way here. The local power plant sucks up even more diesel, rather than harnessing windpower energy as it might – Noronha has one wind turbine, which was struck by lightning in 2009 and hasn't been fixed.

Recycling isn't quite what it should be, either; but you can't have it all. As you swim over a lemon shark or gawk at lobsters the size of Smart cars on a dive; or sip a caipirinha while watching one of Brazil's most glorious sunsets over the iconic Dois Irmãos – two volcanic breasts that pop out of the sea in front of Baía dos Porcos – Noronha's problems are easy to forget. It's what Noronha does right that you'll scribble on all your postcards.

There are no poachers here; but the odds are stacked against the sea turtles nonetheless. If they make it through the incubation period (local lizards love to dig up the eggs for a *snackzinho*), the poker-chip-sized babies make a break for the ocean some 30 metres off, with the wind slowing their pace and the waves tossing them around like house trailers in a tornado.

The journey takes about 20 minutes or so, but thanks to Projeto Tamar, the entire gaggle of babies reaches the water. They will only return – to the same beach on which they were born – some 20 years later to lay the eggs of their own offspring, the only time they will touch shore during their 80-or-so-year lives. And how they know to do that, Darwin or no Darwin, only Mother Nature knows.

**Getting there** The airlines **GOL** (0300 115 2121/voegol.com.br) and **TAM** have daily flights to Fernando de Noronha from São Paulo, priced from around R\$2,400 return.

## Island essentials

### Eat

**Mergulhão** offers stupendous views – something of a rarity; but this newcomer's charms don't end there. The restaurant's Mediterranean-Brazilian menu is one of Noronha's most innovative; and the *banana mil folhas* (flambéed bananas on a bed of tapioca and *doce de leite*) is almost as good as the beaches themselves. *Mergulhão*, BR-363, Porto (81 3619 0215). **Main courses** R\$37-\$84.

**Ekologiku's** is the home of the island's best *moqueca* – a savoury fish stew. The restaurant was founded by a feisty Baiana whose culinary know-how is still the backbone of the place, though it's now run by the team she trained. *Ekologiku's*, Estrada Velha Do Sueste (81 3619 0031).

**Main courses** R\$80-\$130.

**Varanda** offers top-value gourmet cooking by a professional chef. The crunchy shrimp risotto and crispy farofa are standouts. *Varanda da Ilha*, Rua Major Costa 259, Vila do Trinta (81 3619 1546). **Main courses** R\$39.95-\$57.95.



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### Sleep

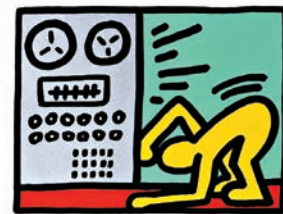
**Pousada Teju-Açu** offers the best value of the island's high-end options, with rooms surrounding an intimate pool area and an eco-sensitive slant that includes solar showers and sustainable wood. A London-trained manager keeps things ticking over. *Pousada Teju-Açu*, Estrada da Alamoia, Boldró (81 3619 1277/pousadateju.com.br). **Rates** doubles R\$1,035-\$1,116.

**Pousada do Vale** is tucked away down a lush, cobblestoned alley in the village, and gets high marks for good service and friendliness. The rooms are simple but with design-forward touches like *mantas nordestinas* (colourful throws). *Pousada do Vale*, Rua Pescador Sergio Lino 18, Jardim Elizabeth (81 3619 1293/pousadadovale.com). **Rates** doubles R\$684-918.

**Casa do Joab** offers simple rooms with a bonus: they are just steps from Conceição Beach – something no other lodging can boast. This is a local home rather than a formal hotel. *Casa do Joab*, Estrada da Conceição, Vila Italcable (81 3619 1267/dricaschmidt@gmail.com). **Rates** doubles R\$300.

# The Best of Rio

## Pop shop twenty years on



**Graphic detail** Bold and vital, Keith Haring's art is unmistakable

### Keith Haring's vibrant, colourful exhibition arrives in Rio

An unforgettable figure of the New York street art scene, Keith Haring was a 1980s golden child. Influenced by the underground graffiti art scene and by figures like Jean-Michel Basquiat and Kenny Scharf, Haring's road to fame started with his daubing New York's subway stations with images like his iconic radiant baby, and the barking dog.

Madonna was a fan, Andy Warhol his mentor, and Grace Jones his canvas, beautifully painted from head to toe in the cult movie *Vamp*.

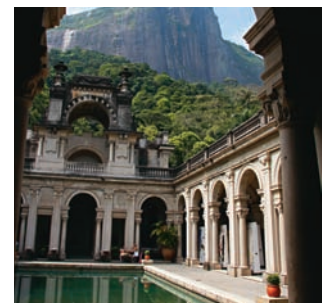
Haring was prolific, and his giant, colourful panels have travelled the world, from Amsterdam and Paris to Phoenix and the Berlin wall. Keith Haring died of AIDS twenty years ago, at the age of 31, with his final gift to the world of street art a mural painted on the back of St Anthony's Church in Pisa, Italy.

The current exhibition at Caixa Cultural, the largest collection to reach Brazil, selects some of his most representative and intimate work, the colourful 'Pop Shop' series, and the lesser-known Apocalypse.—*Chiara Rimoldi*

**Keith Haring – Selected Works** is at Caixa Cultural.

## Hidden gems Parque Lage

Parque Lage is one of Rio's lesser-known delights, its leafy groves dominated by a beautiful old palace, built in 1849 as a gift from Count Henrique Lage to his Italian opera-singer wife. The palace was renovated between 1920 and 1940, but its distinct, classical style was preserved. Lage Café, on the patio, is a lovely spot for brunch; and a walk in the lush park is a great energiser after a hot Rio day. There's even a secret path leading to the Christ the Redeemer statue, but be warned: it's a long and, at times, unsafe track, and venturing along it alone is not recommended.



PARQUE LAGE EM/PRESS IMAGE

**Parque Lage** is at Rua Jardim Botânico 414 (21 2538 1879/eavparquelage.rj.gov.br).