



JUST BACK FROM: TRANCOSO, BRAZIL

Exploring Bahia's best kept secret –by Dianna Upton

APRIL 2011



Somehow I knew, even before arriving to Brazil, that Trancoso would become my favorite stop on my journey. In spite of spending 2 full weeks traversing Brazil's coastline and taking in such *tremendous* beauty all along the way – I was captivated by the idea of experiencing Trancoso. I wanted to understand how this simple village, founded by Jesuits in the 16th century could turn itself into a place where today artists, architects, chefs and designers from all over the world come to find inspiration.



Trancoso's heart lies in its "Quadrado" or town square where a small white church sits at one end. The Quadrado (now designated a UNESCO historic site) is the center of life in Trancoso where during the day one will find children playing soccer, couples strolling and horses grazing. Its grassy center is surrounded by dozens of traditional, brightly-painted one-story cottages. At night the Quadrado comes alive with these colorful cottages transformed into upscale boutiques, open-air bars and restaurants; the atmosphere illuminated by candles, torches, and colored lanterns hanging from mango and jackfruit trees.

My experience in Trancoso began in this area near the Quadrado at a charming boutique hotel **Pousada Etnia**. Located just off of the main road yet in the midst of a shady grove, the pousada offers privacy and tranquility with the life of the Quadrado only steps away outside its main gate (less than 5 minutes walk). The owners are interior designers Andre Zanonato and Conrado Tini – wonderful hosts who welcome you into their home and are happy to recommend the best restaurants, beaches and ideas for ways to spend your days here. Etnia means "ethnic" and its bungalows (there are only 8 of them) are each themed to reflect the owners' favorite places—from Goa to Kyoto to Marrakech and the Mediterranean. The bungalows are all spaced well apart one from another, so you can enjoy comfortable seclusion in this laid back yet stylish atmosphere. The breakfasts by the pool were excellent and I can still taste the pão de queijo (small round breads with a light cheese flavor), my favorite morning treat during my stay.



As if this charming atmosphere were not enough, a 10-minute walk from Pousada Etnia and the Quadrado will bring you to one of Brazil's most stunning beaches. I made this my next "home" to experience life right on the beach with a stay at the **Villas de Trancoso** owned by American expat Galen Briggs. The resort consists of five one and two bedroom luxury villas and a sixth four bedroom villa located within the Terravista Golf Resort just a mile down the beach. All of the villas are appointed with native Brazilian furnishings and beautiful woods against a backdrop of white netting and linens, colorful rugs, local art, and hand painted cushions. The grounds themselves are impeccably manicured and while the pool is small, it is the pristine beach of Praia dos Nativos (on which the resort has its own lounge and bar) where you want to spend your time.



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A short walk down this same unspoiled beach will bring you to another intimate resort. **Pousada Estrela d'Agua**, a one-time private residence of Brazilian singer Gal Costa and now a 28-room seaside escape. It is also a Relais & Chateaux property. The perfect resort for a family holiday in Trancoso, it sits right on the beach and also has two large gorgeous pools. The resort also offers a game room, gym and a TV room so there are lots of areas to keep children occupied if they are not on the beach or in the pool. The atmosphere is informal and friendly and the colorful paint in the rooms contrasts nicely with the natural wood tones through-out. The

quadrado is only about 1 KM away but because of the route itself being so uphill, it is not a place you easily walk to and the resort can easily arrange for a cab to take you on the very short ride.

I could have lingered at any of these beach resorts for a week or more but have to say that the new chic lodging that left an indelible impression upon me took me back to the Quadrado. **UXUA Casa Hotel** is the newest arrival to the Trancoso luxury scene. Uxua (pronounced U Shoo Ah) means “marvelous” in the Pataxó native Indian language and the resort is nothing short of just that! Each “casa” is different. Four casas are restored homes that sit directly on the Quadrado, while five others sit in a lush garden plus one that is an actual tree house! The casas were created by designer Wilbert Das (the former Creative Director for the Diesel brand) in collaboration with local artisans using traditional building methods, and incorporating Brazilian antiques and art. The Pataxó Indians live on a reservation just up the coast from Trancoso and their influence is evident through-out the property in its design which combines the indigenous with the modern and creatively fuses the indoor and outdoor living spaces. Uxua has two restaurants specializing in traditional Bahian cuisine. I was mesmerized by the swimming pool created entirely from 40,000 specimens of unique green aventurine quartz crystals, a native Bahian stone considered by many to have powerful healing qualities. Its beach lounge (a 10 minute stroll away) is spectacular and is created from old fishing boats that were found there.



Whether your goal is to perfect your kite surfing technique, practice the art of Capoeira (the traditional Brazilian martial-art/dance), kayak through mangroves, or relax as you sip your perfectly mixed capirinha – there is no better place to feel at home than in Trancoso. So why not discover for yourself the secret that “hippies” and Brazilians have known about since the 1970's and let Cox & Kings design *your* next “hippie chic” getaway.

To find out more about Trancoso and our journeys to Brazil, contact our resident Brazilian Ms. Renata da Silva at renata.silva@coxandkingsusa.com or call (1-800) 999-1758.