

# Espírito Santo



One of the best reasons to come to Espírito Santo is that so few other tourists will be joining you. Often completely ignored by foreigners due to its lack of high-profile attractions, the state nonetheless has several hidden treasures. It's an enjoyable place to mingle with Brazilians without the hype and higher prices of neighboring Rio and Bahia states.

In the north of the state is the idyllic little hideaway of Itaúnas, a tiny beach town literally buried in the sand dunes. Its attractions include the tranquil beauty of its natural setting and the frenzied nightlife that unfolds every summer when it converts itself overnight into the *fórró* capital of Brazil.

South along the coast, the beaches are more developed for family-style tourism, making them very popular with visitors from the neighboring state of Minas Gerais. Here you'll find low-key beach resorts interspersed with fishing villages, plenty of good restaurants and the happy summertime buzz of Brazilian social life.

Inland, Espírito Santo's mountains form an exquisite patchwork of jungled greenery and domed rocky outcroppings, the most dramatic of which is Pedra Azul, a bare mountain crag preserved in a state park less than 100km west of Vitória.

Even without all these scenic attractions, it would be worth visiting Espírito Santo just to eat. Seafood here is fresh and abundant, and local specialties such as *moqueca* and *torta capixaba* are famous throughout Brazil.

## HIGHLIGHTS

- See the sun rise over the dunes after dancing all night to *fórró* (popular music of the Northeast) in **Itaúnas** (p226)
- Enjoy **moqueca capixaba** (p228), Espírito Santo's tantalizingly tasty seafood stew, up and down the coast from Vitória to Ubu
- Hold on to that rope as you scale the steep granite face of **Pedra Azul** (p230)
- Watch a baby turtle make its way to the sea in **Parque Estadual de Itaúnas** (p225).
- Eat strudel and sip hot chocolate by the fire in the German-style mountain town of **Domingos Martins** (p230)



■ POPULATION: 15 MILLION

■ AREA: 43,910 SQ KM

## History

Colonized in the 16th century, Espírito Santo became an armed region to prevent gold from being smuggled out of Minas Gerais state. Coffee plantations, the prime source of income up until the 1960s, have since been superseded by mining and shipping. The capital city, Vitória, serves as headquarters to Garoto, Brazil's famous (and delicious) chocolate, as well as several chemical and agribusiness concerns.

## Climate

Not quite as searingly hot as equatorial Bahia, Espírito Santo can nonetheless get quite uncomfortable in the summer months, especially along the damp, low-lying seaboard. In the mountainous interior, daytime temperatures are pleasantly warm year-round, but can drop surprisingly close to 0°C (32°F) on winter nights. Rains are common, especially in the north, but rarely last long.

## State Parks

Espírito Santo has several lovely state parks. Up near the border with Bahia, the vast dune- and lagoonscape of Parque Estadual de Itauanas includes many kilometers of undeveloped beaches where sea turtles come ashore to lay their eggs. In the western mountains near Minas Gerais, the dramatic soaring granite outcrop of Pedra Azul forms the centerpiece of Parque Estadual da Pedra Azul. South of Vitória, the coastal lagoons and *restinga* (zone of low trees and shrubs that thrive in sandy, nutrient-poor soil) of Parque Estadual Paulo César Vinha demonstrate the potential for habitat preservation even at the edge of a major urban area.

## Getting There & Around

Vitória is the biggest city in Espírito Santo and as such boasts a domestic and international airport. Air service is offered to all major cities throughout Brazil and the rest of South America. A well-run bus service connects Vitória to Rio, São Paulo and other neighboring cities throughout Minas Gerais, as well as Bahia to the north. Regular buses also run up and down Espírito Santo's coastline.

## VITÓRIA

☎ 0xx27 / pop 271,000

Vitória doesn't have much to show from its colonial past and is often dismissed as being



aesthetically unappealing (despite having a lush backdrop of mountains rushing down to meet sandy beaches that's vaguely reminiscent of Rio). Export coffee and timber pass through Vitória's harbor, and the port at nearby Tubarão is the outlet for millions of tons of iron ore. But that doesn't mean Vitória is devoid of all charm. Local residents, known as Capixabas, are warm and friendly, and the city has a flourishing economy, which translates into many bars, universities, nightclubs, restaurants and hotels.

## Orientation

The remnants of old Vitória, built on an island just off the coast, are connected to the mainland via a series of bridges. The city's best beaches are Canto and Camburi to the north, and the renowned Praia da Costa to the south in Vila Velha. The teeming, modern **bus station** (☎ 3222 3366; Ilha do Príncipe) is located in the center of the old town (don't let the name fool you – it's not a separate island). Trains coming from Belo Horizonte (see p240) arrive at **Estação**