

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 *forró* 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 *forró* (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: 3.1 MILLION

■ AREA: 46,184 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 Coffee plantations, the prime source of income up until the 1960s, have since been superseded by mining and shipping.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 Itaúnas 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 Camburí 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**

Ferrovária Pedro Nolasco (☎ 3226 4169), 1km west of the bus station in the mainland district of Cariacaca.

Information

ATMs for several banks are clustered together inside the bus station.

Bradesco (Av Jerônimo Monteiro 400) In the city center.

Main post office (Av Jerônimo Monteiro 310)

Net.Point Lan House (☎ 3222 2933; Av República; per hr R\$2.50; ☎ 9am-9pm) Offers internet and Skype access directly across from Parque Moscoso.

Tourist booths bus station (☎ 8am-8pm Mon-Sat); airport (☎ 3327 2031; ☎ 6am-midnight daily) There's a branch located opposite track 10 at the bus station and one in the airport arrivals area.

Sights CITY CENTER

The yellow **Anchieta Palace** (Praça João Climaco) is a 16th-century former Jesuit college and church. It's now the seat of state government, and the only part you can enter is the **tomb of Padre José de Anchieta** (admission free), 1534-97, the cofounder of São Paulo and an early missionary who was hailed as the 'Apostle of Brazil.'

Close by is the **Catedral Metropolitana**, with its neo-Gothic exterior and interesting stained-glass windows.

Teatro Carlos Gomes (Praça Costa Pereira) is a replica of La Scala in Milan. It stages national-caliber theatre and dance productions at very reasonable prices. Check with the tourist office to see what's currently playing.

Capixabas like to walk and relax in the leafy **Parque Moscoso** (Av Cleto Nunes), just west of the city center.

VILA VELHA

Across the river and south of Vitória sits Vila Velha, the first place in Espírito Santo to be colonized. Don't miss seeing the **Convento da Penha**, atop the densely forested 154m Morro da Penha. The panoramic city views are magnificent and the chapel (founded in 1558) isn't too bad either. It's a major pilgrimage destination – around Easter expect massive crowds all paying homage to NS da Penha, some climbing the hill on their knees.

BEACHES

Praia do Camburi, a 5km stretch of beach, is punctuated by kiosks, restaurants, nightspots and midrange hotels. Don't swim near the bridge – it's polluted there.

Praia da Costa in Vila Velha is the city's nicest beach. It has fewer hotels and restaurants than Camburi, but you can swim and bodysurf. Keep a close eye on the horizon – huge supertankers often pop up with surprising speed!

Sleeping BUDGET

Hotel Cidade Alta (☎ 3223 0653; Rua Dionizio Rosendo 213; s/d/tr R\$20/30/40) A decent hotel with affordable beds, the Cidade Alta is directly across from the cathedral in the so-called 'historic district.'

Príncipe Hotel (☎ 3322 2799; hotelp@terra.com.br; Av Dario L Souza 120; s/d/tr R\$36/56/84/105) Ugly as sin but extremely convenient, the Príncipe is a clean, well-run budget hotel just steps from the bus station.

MIDRANGE & TOP END

Our pick Ibis Vitória (☎ 2104 4850; www.accorhotels.com.br; Rua João da Cruz 385, Praia do Canto; s/d R\$99/119) One of the best values in town, this chain hotel sits right at the edge of the Triângulo das Bermudas, Vitória's nightlife hub, and is only a few blocks from Praia do Canto.

Pier Vitória (☎ 3434 0000; www.piervitoriahotel.com.br; Av Dante Michelini 321; s/d R\$179/199) Geared toward business travelers, the Pier Vitória is conveniently located on Camburi beach, only 10 minutes from the airport.

Mercure Pasárgada (☎ 3399 6500; www.accorhotels.com.br; Av Antônio Gil Veloso 1856; s/d R\$190/218) Right on the Praia da Costa waterfront in Vila Velha, this hotel feels like a splurge despite

its moderate price tag. It's got spacious, airy rooms and is supremely comfortable.

Comfort Vitória Praia (☎ 3041 9500; www.atlantica-hotels.com.br; Av Dante Michelini 1057; s/d R\$210/230) Also on Camburi beach, this place is as comfortable as the name implies, despite its bland exterior.

Senac Ilha do Boi (☎ 3345 0111; www.hotelilhadoboi.com.br; Rua Braúlio Macedo 417; s/d standard R\$265/300, luxury R\$290/330; ☎ ☎ ☎) For a real night of luxury, this is an excellent choice. It's located on top of a hill with fabulous views of the surrounding bay. The service is impeccable and the amenities delightful, especially the saunas.

Eating

Make sure you try the regional specialty known as *moqueca capixaba*, a savory mixture of local seafood stewed in an earthenware casserole dish.

BUDGET & MIDRANGE

Sabor Natura Restaurante (Rua 13 de Maio 85; per kg R\$12.90; ☎ 11am-3pm Mon-Thu, to 2:30pm Fri) A veggie-friendly self-serve place downtown that's very popular with students.

Padaria Expressa (☎ 3223 1091; Rua Graciano Neves 22; per kg R\$12.95; ☎ 11am-7pm) Just off Praça Costa Pereira, this is an excellent place to stock up on bread, cheese and snacks.

Saidera (☎ 3235 2687; Rua João da Cruz 241, Praia do Canto; drinks & snacks from R\$13; ☎ 6pm-midnight Mon-Tue, 6pm-2am Wed-Fri, noon-2am Sat & Sun) The outdoor terrace here is packed every night with revelers enjoying the cornucopia of drinks and snacks.

Caranguejo Gil (Rua João da Cruz 80; meals R\$20; ☎ 11-1am) As the name implies, you'll find plenty of *caranguejo* (crab) along with other local seafood at this restaurant opposite Bufalo Branco in the festive Triângulo area.

Partido Alto (☎ 3227 4086; Av Dante Michelini 797, Praia do Camburi; meals from R\$20; ☎ 11am-midnight) Another highly recommended seafood place on Camburi beach.

Churrascaria Gramado (☎ 3225 1311; Av Rosendo Serapião Souza 43; meals from R\$22; ☎ 11am-3pm & 6:30-10:30pm Mon-Sat, 11am-4pm Sun) Meat lovers with big appetites will love this place, the best *churrascaria* (restaurant featuring barbecued meat) in the city.

Moqueca & Cia (☎ 3227 6899; Av Dante Michelini 977, Praia do Camburi; meals R\$24; ☎ noon-midnight) Another great place for traditional *capixaba* seafood dishes.

