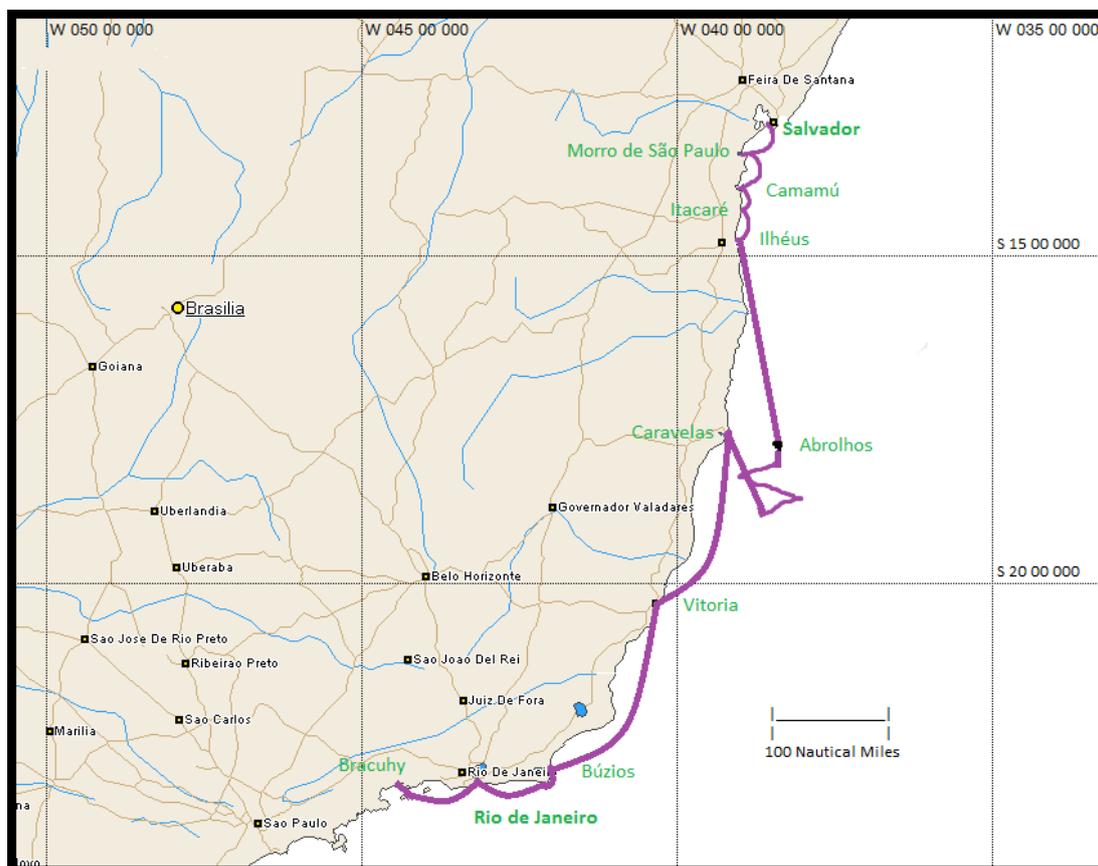


The Impossible Dream - *Mina²*'s Brazilian Cruise 2010

Tim Barker
2010



Mina², our Oyster 485, had had an epic 2009: after a cruise round the Aegean in the summer, we had sailed 2,000nm out of the Mediterranean before our first Atlantic crossing via Madeira, Tenerife, Western Sahara, Senegal (including a wonderful trip up the Sine-Saloum delta) and the Cape Verde islands. *Mina²* arrived in Salvador in Brazil in December. The cruise resumes in February 2010 as we head south down the coast of Brazil. As Maria, the Argentine Downstairs Skipper (the "DS") doesn't do long passages, she and the Upstairs Skipper had not seen each other for months. The following are extracts from the blog that was written on the trip:

16 February 2010. I was sitting on the bow of *Mina²* in the marina in Salvador last Friday evening when I saw an unusually fine example of Latin chic sashaying down the pontoon. 'Hell-lo' I drawled as she approached. 'Ding...dong. Fancy coming aboard for a drink?' 'You bet' she said in almost faultless English, 'I could murder a

gin and tonic'. This one was going to be a cinch, there was something disturbingly familiar about the easy way she chucked her luggage up to me, climbed up and swung her shapely leg over the pulpit. Having poured us both a stiff drink, my unease persisted until it all came flooding back; this was no common-or-garden South American beauty— this was none other than the Downstairs Skipper herself. I had seen so little of the DS over the last few months that I had completely forgotten what she looked like. It was the nagging that started the moment she had got the drink in her hand that was the giveaway. What bliss – we were together again at last.

Before we left the Bahia (bay) of Salvador we spent a couple of days exploring its upper reaches. Having weighed anchor after our first night in the Itaparica Channel, we went to witness the great Tororó Waterfall, trumpeted by the pilot book almost as one of the seven wonders of the world. This we couldn't miss. So we motored the few miles down the channel to witness the glorious sight of a tiny trickle of water barely dampening the side of a very small rock wall.

We turned tail, headed out of the channel and up into the Rio Paraguaçu, past the Ilha Francés and fell off the chart into the area excitingly marked "Uncharted". The river is wide and shallow apart from a narrow channel which we managed to negotiate without going aground too often. Some two miles upriver we swept round a bend and were greeted by the sight of a glorious baroque church on the shore of the river, surrounded by palm trees. It is extraordinarily beautiful. Now disused and destined, I fear, to fall into dangerous disrepair, Santiago de Iguapé (St James by the Water) was built by the Portuguese Jesuits at the turn of the seventeenth century. Tucked away behind the church is a small village whose inhabitants fish the river in dugout canoes and (I subsequently discovered) harvest oysters.



Santiago de Iguapé

This was the time of Carnaval when the world stops to party, dance, sing and drink. We had enjoyed Carnaval in Salvador enormously, but what we hadn't expected was

that even villages as small and simple as this have their own Carnaval, and here it was in full swing. Dozens of kids, some covered in ash and all in fancy dress ranging from groups of tutu'ed ballet dancers to ghouls with hideous masks and horns, were wandering around. When the van blasting music appeared, everyone went into a frenzy and paraded around the village square crushed around the van, all dancing. It was a fabulous manifestation of the joy of a small community celebrating Carnaval at its most simple. Brilliant and completely unexpected fun.



Carnaval at Santiago de Iguapé

The following day we had a very pleasant beam reach 40nm down the coast to Morro de São Paulo which is an up-market albeit very chilled out beach resort for the better-off Brazilian. The anchorage is slap bang in the middle of the route where dozens of tourist boats hurtle past between Morro de São Paulo and the next village up the coast, Gamboa. It is like being anchored in the middle of an aquatic motorway - noisy and not a little dangerous - so we left the boat for the evening lit up like a Christmas tree.

Once ashore, we found a delightful bar, set on a hill overlooking the lush vegetation of banana and palm trees and sipped caipirinhas as the sun went down. As I was taking a sip of the nectar through my straw, I couldn't help but notice another straw slip into my drink and drain the entire glass in one expert suck. It was the DS. 'You were drinking too slowly' she explained.

20 February. A couple of days ago I received an email from a good friend with some incredibly sad news. *'Thought you might like to know that Phil Archer died peacefully in his chair listening to his favourite music on Friday'*. This struck me like an arrow through my very soul. Dear old Phil. Here we are living our fantasy dream and meanwhile, back in Ambridge, real life continues with real tragedies. I was gutted, not least because I've not been able to get a strong enough mobile signal in these outposts of civilisation to download a podcast of The Archers Omnibus so I could share in the nation's grief.

But one can't mope forever so, moving on, back to paradise.

Having allocated a couple of days amongst the extensive islands inland from Morro de São Paulo and Gamboa, we made an early start to make our way to Cairú, the last navigable settlement upriver. Although only 12nm away over the ground, as we were punching a 2-knot ebbing tide it was 20nm through the water, and more than a 3-hour

slog. The pilot book waxed lyrical about Cairú as a “jewel of baroque architecture”. It was one of those “must-visit” places (but, granted, so was the great Tororó Waterfall). We discovered that, yes, some of the houses in the backstreets were examples of baroque architecture, but only three of them. It wasn't exactly Venice. However, the seventeenth century Franciscan monastery which is still operating and which is being painstakingly renovated was, indeed, a jewel.



The Downstairs Skipper on Paradise Beach - Morro de São Paulo

Friday morning and another early start, this time to head back out into the Atlantic to sail a further 35nm south to another big inlet riddled with islands – the Bahia do Camamú. Reading the pilot book, the entrance looked terribly tricky involving a tortuous route through rocks and shallows. Without the intricate buoyage system one would be doomed to be dashed on the rocks. Imagine our dismay to arrive to find all the buoys had gone – not one to be seen anywhere. However, with the use of a very detailed chart downloaded from the Brazilian Hydrographic Office website, we worked our way in with no problem.

An even earlier start today to catch the 0600 ferry to Camamú itself (it's too shallow to get there in one's own boat). The saveiro, an open wooden boat with benches down each side and which serves as a ferry here, was full of local Brazilians going to the Saturday market – mainly women and children. As we wove our way through the mangroves, one of the babes in arms got a little fractious so a comforting breast was produced to succour the infant. Being an English gentleman I averted my eyes. Soon, on the other side of the boat, another small child was demanding similar comfort from its mother and another breast was produced. In no time, breakfast was in full swing, so to speak, and there were so many breasts on display that there was hardly anywhere I could look for fear of potentially giving offence.

At 0730 we arrived at Camamú. It is a small provincial town, serving the island communities. After the obligatory hike up to the top of the hill to see the few so-called historic buildings, all of which were closed, we went to the market which was a

seething pit of feral commerce. There was the open market with all the fruit and veg, most of which were unidentifiable to us, and more bananas than I've ever seen in my life. Then there was the market building which was dedicated to dead animals and all they contained. I'm a healthy carnivore and I like my steaks rare but this was enough to turn even my stomach. Every constituent part of every conceivable type of animal was on display in all its gory glory. The final straw was actually outside the meat market where we saw a jaunty little lad straining every muscle to push a wheelbarrow in which were the seeping decapitated heads of two enormous cows.

The DS was almost throwing up. 'I know that seeing this sort of thing is an important part of cruising in distant lands, but I'm beginning to crave just a modicum of sophistication'.



Typical dugout canoe

23 February. After taking *Mina*² upriver to the village of Maraú which, being a Sunday, was absolutely deserted, we motored 10nm back to a perfect anchorage we had spotted on our way up.

The anchorage was all it had promised to be, located between two idyllic palm fringed islands. We stayed here all the following day and the only people we saw were a handful of fisherman drifting past casting nets from their dugout canoes.

We weighed anchor at 0445 just as the sky was beginning to lighten and headed out of the river back into the Atlantic. As dawn approached, the entire sky turned every hue of red and orange in a spectacular sunrise. Magical.

The reason for the early start was that we had to get to our next destination, Itacaré, a distance of 34nm, before high water at 1030. The entrance to Itacaré is tricky. The river entrance is almost blocked off by a large spit of sand and there is a narrow and not very deep gap between the rocky headland and the spit. A few feet out of position

and you would go aground on one or the other. So when on our arrival we happened to find a local fishing boat going in who beckoned us to follow him in, we willingly accepted the offer.

But the difficulties of getting in are more than rewarded by the charm of this place. Some of the best beaches in the world are along this coast and Itacaré has developed into a lovely laid-back resort, popular particularly amongst young surfers.



Sunrise off Bahia de Camamú

1 March. If we thought the entrance to Itacaré was interesting, it wasn't half as interesting as our exit. We wanted to get to Ilhéus in good time but couldn't leave Itacaré until there was sufficient water over the sandy shallows barring the exit. I thought we could probably get away with it shortly before half tide. We couldn't. As we headed towards the narrow gap, the water got more and more shallow until we felt the old familiar sensation of the boat rocking forward as the keel made contact with terra firma which gripped our keel like a vice. We were going nowhere.

I was scratching my head and waiting for the tide to rise further to a background murmur from the DS of 'Well that's a lesson learned. Now we're stuck for good' when, like a guardian angel, a local fisherman who was entering the harbour came to our aid. He showed us where the deeper water was and with this certain knowledge I gunned the engine and ploughed our way through the sand and at last we scraped over the bar and out into open and deeper water. Free at last.

We had to motor a good part of the 32nm to Ilhéus where we anchored in front of the charming thatched buildings of the local yacht club.

Later that day we were joined by Christine, Fernando and Michael, very close friends from Buenos Aires, who were to be with us for ten days on our passages down to Rio, some 600nm south. Christine knew she was prone to a bit of sea-sickness but had been persuaded by her family to arm herself with every sea-sickness remedy known to man and go for it, for this would be the experience of a lifetime.

We set sail the following morning for the first passage 185nm down to the Abrolhos Islands. Despite the light airs, the sea was lumpy. During the course of the voyage, and notwithstanding taking all precautions, Christine became quieter and quieter and greener and greener. Her relief at reaching the anchorage in Abrolhos was shattered when she discovered that the swell curling into the bay made the boat roll and pitch almost as much as it had been on passage. Everyone knows that the instant cure for sea-sickness is to sit under a tree, but no luck there either. The Ilhas Abrolhos is a Brazilian naval base as well as a national park and landing on the islands is forbidden and enforced. The look on Christine's face was one of tragic misery.



The barren Ilhas Abrolhos

The Ilhas Abrolhos were a bit of a disappointment as well. The archipelago, 30nm off the mainland, consists of four small islands, in all about 1 ½ miles across. Having been used to lush, jungle-like vegetation down the entire coast of Brazil, the completely barren landscape was, well, dull.

By morning the swell had diminished and everyone was feeling a little more human. Donning masks and snorkels, we slipped into the warm water and entered another world. Surrounded by turtles, and extraordinary fish of every brilliant colour, shape and size, it was like swimming in a tropical aquarium.

Above the surface of the water, the air is also full of exotica. Magnificent frigate birds, tropic birds and brown boobys glide majestically overhead whilst their young squat on the barren slopes of the islands waiting for their doting parents to bring back a morsel of regurgitated fish.

4 March. Our next leg was 200nm south to Guarapari. Having got forecasts of light to moderate winds from behind us for the whole duration, we were surprised to find ourselves battling into a F7 southerly, bouncing off 4 metre waves. We had two options: struggle on like this for another 36 hours or turn tale and have a much more comfortable sleigh ride with the wind behind us, and seek shelter in Caravelas 85nm to the north. We would be there in less than 12 hours. The choice was simple. We

arrived in Caravelas at dawn the following morning where we were holed up for a week as a couple of deep depressions made their way north.



Lumpy seas south of Abrolhos

After the trauma of her first two offshore passages, Christine was now agreeing with her family that this was indeed the experience of a lifetime, and a particularly ghastly one at that.

But there are worse places to be holed up: Caravelas turned out to be a small town with considerable charm with the streets lined with pretty, brightly painted houses. We made use of our enforced stay to visit nearby towns and beaches using the local bus network.

9 March. Sunday, and Christine and Fernando had run out of time, so we bid a sad farewell to them at the bus station with Christine's ambition of sailing into Rio harbour unfulfilled.

At last the forecasts moderated and, a week after our first attempt to head south, we swung out of the river into the ocean. At 1530 the following day we arrived in Vitoria and anchored off the Iate Clube do Espírito Santo. We were astonished by Vitoria. We had been expecting it to be rather rundown and industrial. But as we approached the city, enormous skyscrapers became visible, and hundreds of them. It was like approaching Manhattan. Set amongst attractive green hills reminiscent of Rio de Janeiro, Vitoria is a modern, wealthy, thriving city, the streets lined with upmarket shops and restaurants. What a contrast to the subsistence existence of the Brazil we had seen so far.

13 March. We were now behind schedule so after a day of sightseeing we weighed anchor and left Vitoria at first light for the 195nm passage to the fashionable resort of Búzios. The wind was very light, not sailable, so we motored – and motored, and motored. In fact apart from just half an hour of bliss in the middle of the night, we had

to motor the whole way. Nightmare. We arrived at 1000 the following morning and picked up a mooring belonging to the Iate Clube Armação de Búzios.

The yacht club has a novel policy about visiting yachts using their moorings and facilities. Unusually, no charge is made on condition that you spend at least R\$25 (£10) per day per head in the restaurant and bar. As the food was excellent, and the caipirinhas large and potent, this didn't represent any great problem.



Fishing port near Caravelas

Búzios is about two hours drive away from Rio de Janeiro and is a popular weekend and holiday beach resort for the smart set of Rio. Once a small but extremely picturesque fishing village, it came to prominence in the 1960's when it was adopted by Brigitte Bardot as her holiday location of choice. The village was transformed and so grateful are the locals at her having caused the instant swelling of their coffers, that the whole place is Bardot obsessed. Restaurant Brigitte, Bar BB, Rua Bardot, the shops are full of Bardot T-shirts and shopping baskets. There is even a life-size bronze statue of their divine heroine sitting on a bench where tourists queue up to be photographed snuggling up to her.

After the poverty-stricken subsistence communities which had been our sole visiting places since leaving Salvador a month ago, Vitoria and Búzios certainly were the little bit of sophistication that the Downstairs Skipper had been yearning for. Pretty as a picture, surrounded by numerous little coves with perfect beaches, it was a delightful change.

Michael had been wonderful company, when we saw him. He's like a dormouse and was seemingly capable of sleeping about 18 hours a day, waking briefly to entertain us with a succession of corny jokes. Living off a diet of water and dried biscuits he was also very cheap to maintain – a perfect guest really, and we were sorry to see him go.

The DS and I stayed on in Búzios for a further day. Our next great mission was to sail to Rio de Janeiro but in order to avoid a night passage (which the DS is not keen on when we're on our own) we decided to break the journey at a small anchorage 25nm south at Cabo Frio.



Typical fishing boats - sails are made from whatever is available

14 March. Cabo Frio (Cape Cold) is a large peninsular which juts 5 miles out into the South Atlantic Ocean. The Cape consists of high steep-sided mountains and the anchorage was reached by passing through a narrow gash in the rock. The pilot book referred to a safe and secluded anchorage off a sandy white beach. Sounds idyllic doesn't it? With the wind having been very moderate on our short 25nm trip from Búzios, we were surprised to squeeze through the gap to find a gale of wind blasting out. We could hardly stand on the deck to let the anchor go as the boat bucketed around in a steep chop. We let out a great deal of chain to ensure we didn't drag if the already appalling conditions got worse. The idea of swimming to the perfect sandy beach was laughable.

As darkness fell, a number of fishing boats entered the bay to shelter from the developing storm. Soon, our secluded anchorage was like Newtown Creek on a bank holiday weekend. One boat anchored, I thought, unnecessarily close to us. Lightning was flickering all around us. Anticipating a very early start we turned in at about 2100.

But after a couple of hours the DS woke me to report a boat was rapidly approaching us. It was the fishing boat anchored close to us. The wind had gone round through 180° and the wind had died to almost nothing – most of the time. About every 5 minutes, a catabatic wind – a williwaw – came screaming down the steep mountain in front of us and hit with the force of a runaway train – from 3 to 50 knots in half a second, lasted about a quarter of a minute, then calm again. In these conditions the boats were slewing around all over the place and this was causing the fishing boat to career towards us before being brought up short by his anchor rope. It was clear that a vicious cold front was passing over us and with cold fronts come rain. And rain it did – torrentially.

If williwaw sledgehammers, tropical rainstorms and out of control fishing boats weren't enough to cope with, a deep swell started to make its way into the anchorage. The boat started trying to roll its mast out. Probably swinging 35° each way, down below it was like being in a washing machine. Trying to get some much-needed sleep

ahead of our long passage the following day, the DS and I were doing impersonations of star fish – spread-eagled on the bed to stop ourselves from being tossed around like rag dolls. It didn't make for a comfortable, relaxed night.

By 0500 there was just enough light to make our way out and, without looking back, we left the loathsome anchorage to set off to fulfil the ambition of a lifetime – to sail our own yacht into the most spectacular harbour in the world – Rio de Janeiro!

15 March. Just after the Downstairs Skipper and I got married – only 31 years ago, but what seems like a lifetime – we visited Rio de Janeiro. I was captivated. Overlooked by the massive figure of Cristo Redentor, arms outstretched atop the Corcovado, planted amongst verdant mountains and surrounded by spectacular beaches with the evocative names of Copacabana and Ipanema, the entrance to one of the most beautiful island-dotted harbours of the world is dominated by the Pão de Açúcar, Sugarloaf Mountain. It is indescribably beautiful. I dreamed that one day I would sail my own yacht into Rio de Janeiro, the Cidade Maravilhosa – the Marvelous City. But it was a pipe-dream. One of those unachievable ambitions, it was the unreachable star.

But today, that dream came true. With tears in my eyes, with my best friend, wife and DS (all the same person) at my side, accompanied by Andy Williams belting out '*The Impossible Dream*', *Mina*² sailed my dream into reality as we coasted into Rio harbour.



The Impossible Dream - sailing into Rio harbour

19 March. The dream has been dampened a little not only by the torrential rain that has fallen solidly for the last two days, but also by the marina facilities in Rio. On the city side of the bay there are two marinas. The Iate Clube de Rio de Janeiro, which is the Brazilian equivalent of a combination of the Royal Yacht Squadron and the Hurlingham Club. Very luxurious with every possible amenity and in a prime position in the shadow of the Sugarloaf Mountain, it is also very exclusive, and they do not

welcome visiting yachts. Which leaves Marina Da Gloria. And glorious it ain't. We were ushered into one of their visitors' berths which is attached to a rickety pontoon. The smell of raw sewage is overpowering; the place is infested with rats, both dead and alive - the live ones running around on the rocky ledge just in front of the pontoon, eying up access routes to the boat, and the dead ones bloated, rotting and floating around the boat. Apart from loos and showers there are almost no facilities – not even a bar to sit in front of with a caipirinha whilst fashioning the next blog.

But what has more than made up for the disappointing weather and the even more disappointing marina facilities is the first social interaction we have had for a long time apart from the friends we've sailed with. We have several friends and relatives living in Rio and we've enjoyed a whirlwind of socialising and sightseeing in this wonderful, exotic city.

24 March. Notwithstanding the weather and the dreadful marina, we have had a brilliant few days in Rio, but it was time to move on. We sailed from the harbour to a delightful anchorage off a small fishing village, Itaipu, about 7nm away. As we arrived, a man in a canoe circled us like a shark. Once the anchor was down he introduced himself as Bruno from the beachside restaurant "Pli Onboard". We'd heard of Bruno. A cheerful and highly entrepreneurial young man he not only ran his excellent restaurant but also provided visiting yachts with anything from supermarket shopping, to fuel, ice, drinks - whatever you wanted. He gave us a menu to peruse and we later called him to order an excellent lunch of fried lula (squid) and beautifully light deep-fried cheese pasties, delivered once again by canoe.

28 March. Our 60nm passage from Itaipu to Ilha Grande was under motor the entire way – the most wind we saw was 7 knots, hardly enough to move us through the water let alone get us to our destination with enough sunlight to see it. But the sea was smooth, the sun was hot, and we were close enough to the shore the whole way to be pleasantly distracted. We arrived in Saco de Ceu on the north side of the island mid-afternoon and found ourselves in a paradise bay. The landscape here is hilly verging on the mountainous, and amongst the lush jungle a few picturesque houses nestled on the shore of the bay surrounded by palm trees. Turning a blind eye to the palm trees it was reminiscent of the prettiest islands in the Northern Aegean in Greece.

We decided that this place was so perfect that we would take a day's holiday and we have spent the whole day here just chilling. It's ages since we've done that and it's bliss.

29 March. The Bahia da Ilha Grande is an enormous, partially enclosed bay in between Rio De Janeiro and Sao Paulo, about 45 miles across and 20 miles deep. Surrounded by steeply forested hills the bay consists of numerous islands – there are said to be one island for every day of the year – and literally hundreds of anchorages. The water is clear and warm and the rocky islands are perfect for snorkelling. It is without doubt the best cruising ground in the whole of the east coast of South America and you could spend six months here and still leave with plenty of anchorages undiscovered. The only downside from a sailor's point of view is that there is rarely any wind. Well, not the only downside – there are the biting insects as well. Not dengue fever-carrying mosquitoes (the DS is always on the lookout for them), but Borachudos, midge-like creatures that you neither see nor hear but they

bite, drawing blood. The itch is five times worse than a mosquito bite and they last five times as long. And they appear to be unaffected by Deet, spirals or the DS's disapproval. But we may have found the solution. Someone suggested an almond and vanilla oil rub as being an effective, natural, green deterrent. We found a bottle in a chemist and have for the last few days been rubbing oil into each other all evening. The effect is dramatic. It probably doesn't keep the midges away, but I've enjoyed it enormously.



Saco de Ceu

We are to leave *Mina*² in Brazil for six months and we had previously made arrangements to leave the boat on a secure pontoon up a river in a well-protected condominium. But in the event we discovered that not only was this forbidden - one can only leave your boat in a public marina apparently - but the river where the condominium was had silted up and there was not enough depth for us anyway.

So, with less than a week to go we are now back to square one, and rather than exploring this paradise we will be trying to find a safe and bureaucratically compliant haven for *Mina*² for the southern winter.

1 April. To cut a tedious story short, we've found a secure winter berth for *Mina*² at Bracuhy Marina at the top of the Bahia de Ilha Grande. And rather nice it is too. The marina is well protected, secure and has nice restaurants and bars for us to relax in after a hard day's decommissioning work. Even better, we pulled a few strings and negotiated a price which is even lower than the condominium price.



The transport of choice for the young bucks

2 April. It is the Easter weekend, and rich Brazil has come out to play, flying in by helicopter, filling the fabulous shore-side houses and re-commissioning the enormous number of motor yachts which fill the marinas here.

Having negotiated *Mina*²'s home for the winter and got all the documentation in place, we were free to enjoy our last 36 hours before the end of our cruise. Good Friday morning and we knew that the more picturesque anchorages would start filling up by lunch time – so an early start.

First stop were the Ilhas Botinas which are a couple of postcard pretty tiny islands each with a few perfectly positioned palm trees and surrounded by clear warm water, corals and an abundance of tropical fish. As it was just 0730 when we arrived, we were the only boat. Perfect. Down with the dinghy for a Kodak moment, on with the snorkels to swim in the tropical aquarium, then back onto the boat and weigh anchor for a Beach.

The DS has a passion for beaches and she had been complaining that in the country with some of the best beaches in the world, she had enjoyed remarkably few of them. The hot one in the area is Praia do Dentista (Beach of the Dentist??) on the south side of Ilha Gipóia. It was 0900 when we dropped the anchor, and there were only three other boats there. We swam ashore, and the DS was happy walking down the deserted palm-fringed beach, for a while. A couple of motor boats approached the bay, anchored, and got their noisy Scoobidoo's down and started shooting round the anchorage. The DS was now unhappy. 'How are we going to swim back to the boat without being run down? Haven't they anchored too close to us? Can't they see the anchorage is almost full? '



***Mina*² anchored off Ilhas Botinas**

Remarkably we managed to swim back to the boat with all our limbs intact. Within minutes the horizon was filled with the bow waves of motor yachts all converging on the anchorage. One by one they winkled their way in, set their anchors, broke out the beers and cranked up their stereos. Having persuaded the DS that with no wind and no tide, no one was going to drag their anchor and cause irreparable damage, we settled down to a morning of people-watching. By lunchtime, there were conservatively more than a hundred boats in the anchorage – you could almost walk across the bay on the decks of plastic. What amazed us was that any boat over 10ft long had at least one professional crew on board. By the time you got up to 50ft, there were half a dozen of them rushing around doing goodness knows what. On *Mina*², with just two Skippers on board, no one does anything.

Before we got hemmed in for the night we decided to move on. But as we went from one anchorage to another, we found them all full to bursting. Moving round to the north side of Ilha Gipóia, remarkably we found a delightful anchorage with no one else there at all. How lucky is that? We were to find out.

4 April. The following afternoon we were to go to Bracuhy, tie up in the marina and start the hard work of decommissioning *Mina*². This was the last night of our cruise and we were all alone, at anchor in a romantic setting. The stage was set.

Two hundred yards down the coast was a restaurant with a pontoon for their water-borne guests. As darkness fell, the lights of the restaurant were switched on – bright, garish greens and reds, and a searchlight which described patterns across the sky. 'How ghastly' we said 'thank goodness we aren't eating there'.

After a romantic dinner onboard, cooked to perfection by the Skipper, and washed down with an excellent bottle of wine, we retired at 2245 for our last night at anchor.

The searchlight was an indicator which we had missed entirely. At 2300 the “music” hit us like a sledgehammer. The “Íla” was open for business. Not a restaurant, but a club (or disco for those of a certain age). The owners had invested enormous amounts of money on the best and loudest sound system in Brazil. It was fantastic. The noise could be heard in Angra, four miles away. From 200 yards away it had a physical impact.

Had the DS and I been sound engineers, we would have been waxing lyrical about the high fidelity of the monster, saying 'Maria, listen how the higher frequencies resonate perfectly with our rigging, causing them to twang in sympathy with the Brazilian rhythm'. 'Indeed', the DS would have said, 'and note how the strength of the lower frequencies cause the entire hull to act as a sound box, so that with the regular bass notes, it is like sitting inside a constantly beaten drum'. But we weren't sound engineers, we were a couple of tired old sailors needing a bit of peace and quiet. And we weren't going to get it.

Just as the DS and I were debating whether this was Garage Music or HipHop, the first of the rocket-fuelled revellers arrived in their rocket-fuelled stink boats. Stink boats only have two speeds – flat out and stop. As the constant procession passed us to anchor off the club and get ferried ashore, their enormous wash caused *Mina*², already under the physical onslaught of the music, to start rocking and rolling with our stern, right beneath our berth in the aft cabin, crashing up and down in the waves. As the last of the revellers arrived at 0300, so the first of the revellers started to leave, so the bucketing was continuous. Incapable of sleep I went on deck to survey the scene and my guess was that more than 100 stink boats (not one sailing yacht) were anchored off the club.

The purgatory didn't end until 0800 when, groggy from lack of sleep, we returned to Bracuhy and the end of our cruise.

10 April. And so ends a remarkable, varied and most enjoyable cruising year. Ten thousand nautical miles, four continents and ten different countries. It has been a wonderfully enriching cultural experience. There has been enormous diversity in terms of the people, their way of life, their food and their music.

There has been enormous diversity in the landscape as well. The volcanic mountainous Atlantic islands – some barren as dust, others lush Gardens of Eden. In stark contrast were the bone-dry sandy dunes of Saharan Africa, and the meandering low-lying mangrove-lined swamps of the Sine-Saloum delta in Senegal, the water thick with fish and the mangroves filled with birds of every species. And then there is the lush tropical mountainous jungle down the entire coast of Brazil. It has all been a wonderful adventure. *Mina*² is now tucked up for her southern winter and it is time for us to return home to what some people refer to as "the real world".