



## An island-hopping expedition in Palawan

As someone who can feel woozy at the mere sight of a boat, sailing off into the sunset isn't usually my idea of a good time. But when I stumbled across social-enterprise business Tao Philippines, which runs multi-day island-hopping expeditions in collaboration with local communities, the opportunity to sustainably explore the Philippines' idyllic island province of Palawan was too enticing to pass up.

Before I knew it, I was boarding a *bangka* (motorised double outrigger) in the tourist hub of Coron, bound for a castaway adventure. We'd spend the next five days gliding across the blissfully peaceful aquamarine waters of northern Palawan, pausing to snorkel atop remote coral reefs and wriggle our toes in the sugar-white sands of uninhabited islands. In the afternoons, we'd anchor near one of Tao's 15 base camps dotted across the archipelago and 'check in' to our accommodation – a string of simple-looking but surprisingly comfortable bamboo huts, engineer-designed for tropical beach camping.

Most itineraries visit Tao Beach Farm, the heart of Tao's positive-impact purpose. Here, the camp doubles as a learning centre for communities, replete with an organic farm, massage centre and farm-to-table restaurant where our wonderful crew of 'Lost Boys' – recruited from local fishing villages – were trained to cook the wholesome Filipino-style meals we savoured throughout the expedition.

Camps have freshwater showers and flushing toilets, which is where the traditional luxuries typically end. But I couldn't have wanted for anything more as I watched the sun dance across the South China Sea just metres from my mattress on those lazy expedition mornings. *taophilippines.com* – Sarah Reid

PHOTOGRAPHY SCOTT SPORLEDER/@SPOART (TAO PHILIPPINES)



## THE PARTY OF A LIFETIME IN RIO

There are a few exceptional sights on the planet that make any traveller's heart soar when setting eyes on them for the very first time – the likes of Machu Picchu, the Pyramids of Giza, the Taj Mahal. I'm standing on the deck of the *Azamara Pursuit* as the ship slowly glides into the port of Rio de Janeiro when I spot one of these Seven Wonders of the World – the iconic 38-metre Christ the Redeemer statue dramatically perched atop Mt Corcovado with its arms outstretched over the sprawling Brazilian metropolis. Arriving by sea on the Carnival in Rio voyage from Buenos Aires reveals the city's splendour before we even step on its sun-drenched shores.

Known as *Cidade Maravilhosa*, Portuguese for 'Marvellous City', Rio de Janeiro is blessed with an abundance of natural beauty, where lush tropical rainforest-cloaked mountains meet the sea and pastel-hued *favelas* cling to the hillside. Our ship is docked in Rio for several days in February during the biggest event in the Brazilian calendar – Rio Carnival. I'm set to soak up some local *carioca* culture as I join more than two million people each day flocking the streets for Carnival celebrations that begin on the Friday before Ash Wednesday, with the festivities reaching a climax on 'Fat Tuesday'. Carnival uniquely combines

the Catholic tradition of pre-Lenten celebration brought by the Portuguese colonisers in the 18th century with samba, a musical style that is deeply rooted in Afro-Brazilian culture. Today, Rio de Janeiro hosts the most famous carnival in the world and one of the greatest parties on the planet.

I've chosen Azamara's walking tour, Secrets of Old Rio, to get myself acquainted with the city. One of the world's largest murals, the rainbow-hued 190-metre-long masterpiece by Eduardo Kobra is the first thing to welcome us as we disembark at the palm tree-lined Praça Mauá port. We are near one of the biggest arrival points into Brazil during the slave trade, Valongo Wharf, where almost one million enslaved Africans landed on Rio de Janeiro's coast. Many eventually settled in this part of town, known as Little Africa. We pass the historic Pedra do Sol, the site of a former slave market, which is considered by many as the 'birthplace' of Samba. The dance, characterised by fast footwork and rhythmical hips, has become synonymous with Brazilian identity.

It's Sunday, and the streets are alive with the spirit of Carnival. By the time we reach Praça XV, we've seen an array of eccentric fancy-dress >>

