



Island of honey

Fast-talking Theresa was no saint and we were no ordinary tourists

Arriving on an island in winter is not ideal. Nobody takes an umbrella to paradise. You take a plane, then a taxi, then a train, then a boat; you land on a small beach, it starts to rain and it does not stop.

I wanted to go to Ilha Do Mel or Honey Island simply because I'm a sucker for names that sound exotic. If the island had been called Raimunda, which is apparently Brazilian slang for "woman with nice ass but ugly face", then I would rather have headed west.

My boyfriend and I were in a state called Parana. We had been on the island one hour and walked about 1km through tranquil jungle when a hysterical woman bounded towards us with a baby straddling her hip.

We took one look at Theresa and knew she was no saint. She was a barefoot Brazilian hippie wearing lilac bell-bottoms and a tie-dye vest with a pixie on a mushroom. Her skin was smooth like pebbles and her hair black like tar. She screamed when she spoke and her eyes grew huge and she ended every sentence with the word: "Imagine!"

Theresa was so well-built I thought she was the island's keeper. But she was really just a very lonely woman who insisted we stay for tea in her semi-built concrete shack. She dumped her baby in a hammock and put on a video of British rock stars performing at a concert in some huge stadium.

ACCIDENTAL TOURIST



Shani Raviv

She ordered us to sit down.

After a few songs, we told her we had to leave because our friend was waiting for us at the lodge. The only person at the lodge was a 40-year-old Belgian woman backpacking solo in an outfit that looked ironed. She was not a friend; and the only thing she was waiting for was a better life than the one she had left behind.

So, Theresa abandoned her infant, who was asleep in the hammock, and escorted us halfway back, through the jungle.

We passed an old man with a long beard sitting on a rock. She told us that he is the island's journalist. I asked her what he writes. She pointed to a wooden sign with a red arrow and painted letters that said "BEACH" in Portuguese.

Theresa had not stopped talking since we met and she was now telling us about her junkie husband — the most famous

juice maker on the island — who she has not seen or heard from in years. She said she knew he loved her totally when he bought her a second-hand surfboard with his last money before the baby was born. Then he left. Imagine.

Then we left and landed up at a beach restaurant. We ordered the region's staple food — fish fried in old oil — and plain white rice and salty cucumber.

The owner must have mistaken us for regular tourists because suddenly House music was pumping so loud that unless we were going to blow whistles and rub Tiger balm on each other, it was intolerable. As soon as we left, the music stopped and the rain started.

We ran to yet another beach and had to bribe a toothless, chain-smoking fisherman to use his motor-powered rowboat to ferry us to the other side.

The following morning we were up at sunrise to catch the first boat off Honey Island. It was raining. We were waiting in line when I saw two children running towards the boat pulling a metal cart stuffed with a heap of yellow plastic.

When they stopped, the plastic moved and an old man in an old suit got out from under it and shuffled onto the boat.

Minutes later, a huge two-door fridge was loaded on and positioned to stand upright next to the man. He looked at it, yawned and then dropped his chin onto his chest and fell asleep sitting up until we reached the shore. Imagine.