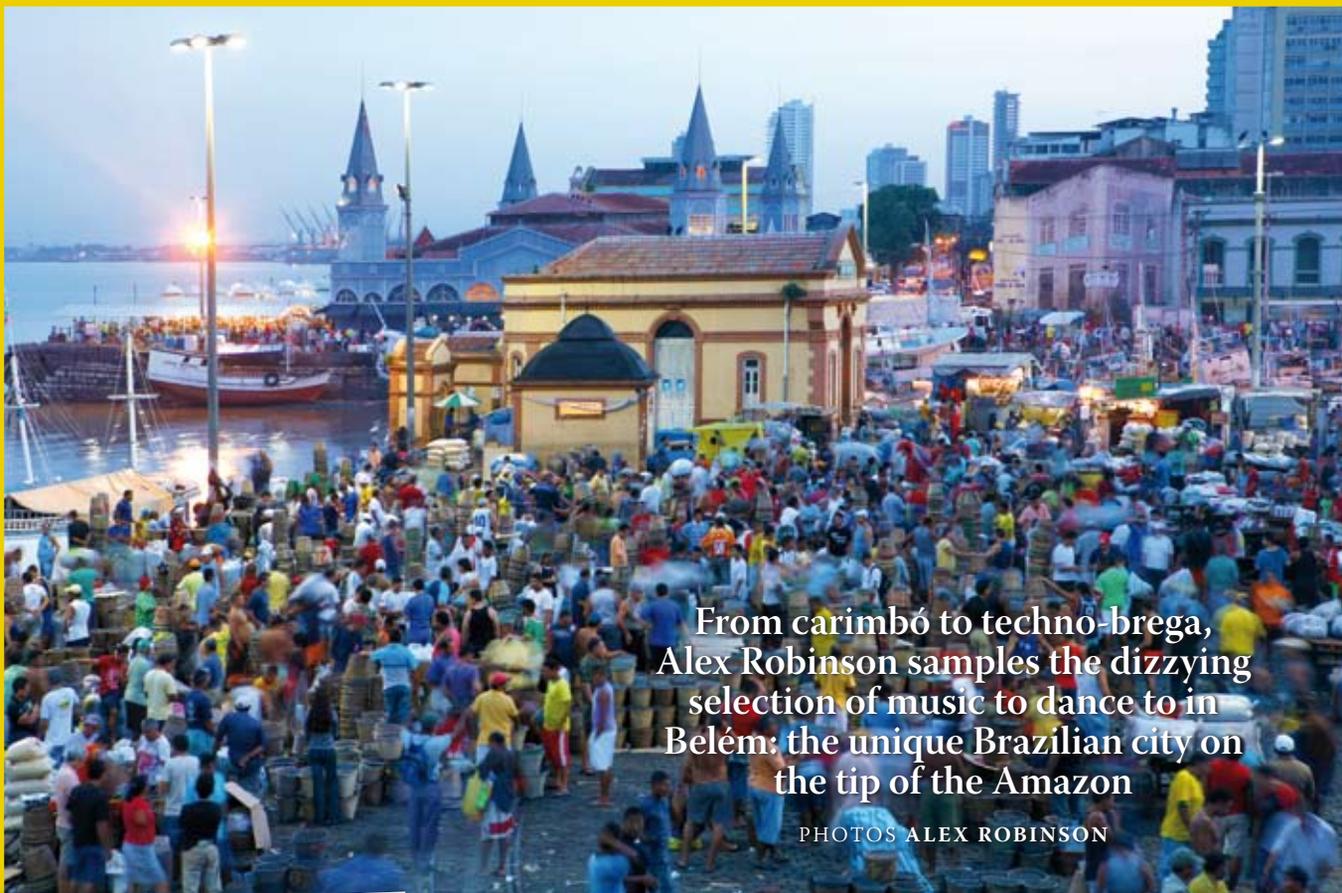


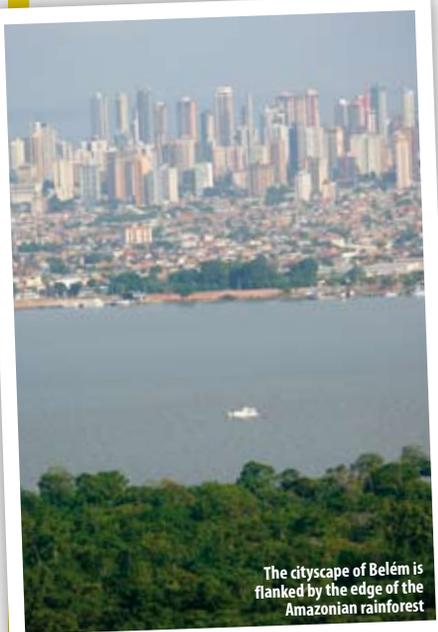
BELEM

SOUNDING OUT



From carimbó to techno-brega, Alex Robinson samples the dizzying selection of music to dance to in Belém: the unique Brazilian city on the tip of the Amazon

PHOTOS ALEX ROBINSON



The cityscape of Belém is flanked by the edge of the Amazonian rainforest

From the plane Belém first appears on the horizon as a distant cityscape of serrated concrete spires in a vast expanse of Amazon forest, reticulated with meandering brown rivers and inky swamps. It's far from anywhere. The nearest city of any size is almost 1,000km away, and the Caribbean is a closer neighbour than Rio or São Paulo. Yet as the plane arcs over the city – and you see the eggshell blue and ochre houses, the spalted forts and terracotta roofs that cluster in the old city centre – it soon becomes clear that Belém has been here for a very long time. Its past looks wealthy, too. Shady streets lined with hundreds of giant mango trees and palatial neo-classical and art nouveau mansions lead to cobbled squares watched over by

rococo church facades. And at the centre of it all, a lavish opera house that could belong to Paris. Were it not salmon pink.

Belém's isolation and a long, glorious past (beginning in 1616 and including a period as South America's wealthiest city) have left it with a unique heritage. Samba and *bossa nova*, *forró* and *frevo* were always foreign sounds here – from another Brazil as far away as the rest of the world. And whilst psychedelia and punk influenced the south, Belém listened into calypso and surf music, Jamaican reggae, Guadeloupian *zouk* and Colombian *cumbia*. Bands fused these styles with Belém's root genre – *carimbó*: a fast Amazonian-African rhythm, whose accompanying dance is a hip-swinging swirl of colourful dresses. In the 1960s this fusion produced *guitarrada* – calypso-tinged surf

BARS & CLUBS

Carrousel

On Fridays, DJs man what looks like the flight control gallery for a 70s starship. Experience the spectacle to believe it.
Av. Almirante Barroso at Antônio Baena.

Mormaço

A warehouse-sized, waterfront building showcasing some of Belém's best live acts.
Passagem Carneiro da Rocha s/n,
+55 91 3223 9892;
www.mormaco.net

Baía Cool Jazz Club

International and local acts from rock to carimbó-fusion, reggae and jazz. After shows, DJs play in the dark cellar bar.
Avenida Almirante Tamandaré 1, between Rua do Arsenal and Rua de Breves, +55 91 3289 6632.

Ibiza

Club-bar with live rock, funk and *música popular Brasileira* (MPB) and DJs. Popular but far from cutting-edge.
Rua Jerônimo Pimentel 201, Umarizal,
+55 91 3222 0562; www.ibizabellem.com.br

Boteco das Onze

This restored colonial fort attracts Belém's young upper-middle classes who sip cold beer on the veranda or dance inside to live MPB.
Praça Frei Caetano Brandão s/n, Complexo Feliz Lusitânia, +55 91 3224-8599.

A Pororó

These steaming warehouses pack in scantily clad blue-collar locals, dancing wildly to techno-brega acts. These usually comprise a platinum blonde with a tiny skirt and

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guitar music. In the 70s and 80s it produced *lambada* and *brega*; which spilled out into the rest of Brazil and the world beyond. And at the turn of the millennium, the city entered its richest era yet, with a florescence of musical styles that fused all of Belém's unique genres with other global influences; and, most especially, with rock. The scene has now become so fertile and diverse you might call it mango-beat.

Music in modern Belém ranges from cheesy to cutting-edge cool: from Brazil's most successful band, Banda Calypso, a brega act led by spangle-dressed, bouncy, bottle-blonde Joelma and her slickly-quiffed partner, to Madame Saatan, *Matrix*-cool, metal-playing men in black, fronted by Sammliz, who has a face like a fashion model and the richest Brazilian female voice since Elis Regina. Guitarrada-rockers La Pupuña play psychedelic dance. Coletivo Rádio Cipó are a carimbó rap-reggae outfit fronted by satin-suited octogenarian Mestre Laurentino. At weekends, techno-brega DJs captain space-pods as large as trucks and covered in flashing lights to play pounding, high-tempo beats to warehouse-sized crowds. The overall scene is as torrid and electric as the stormy Amazon air itself. There's really nowhere else like it. Anywhere.



BELÉM ARTISTS

Joaquim de Lima (Mestre Vieira) – along with his band *Mestres da Guitarrada*, Mestre Vieira is credited with inventing both *guitarrada* and *lambada*.
Pio Lobato – techno-brega and techno-guitarrada guitarist and DJ.
Coletivo Rádio Cipó – funky, socially-aware carimbó reggae-rap. The group's live show is infectiously danceable.
La Pupuña – the best of the new *guitarrada* bands.
Nazaré Pereira – roots old-school brega meets north-eastern *forró*.

Madame Saatan – jungle-powered metal from MTV Brazil's new band of the year 2008.

Filhos de Empregada – The rainforest children of *Os Mutantes* and *The Flaming Lips*.

Clepsidra – wistful and arty Latino-emo.

Stereoscope – catchy Amazon surf-pop with a psychedelic gloss.

Cravo Carbono – Avant-garde *guitarrada* art-rock fused with Belém rhythms.

Banda Calypso – commercial dance music that's as cheesy as a Gruyère fondue, but currently Brazil's most popular band.



Carimbó rap-reggae outfit Coletivo Rádio Cipó



Guitarrada rockers La Pupuña

RECORD STORES

Ná Figueredo

One of the best in the north of Brazil, selling a wealth of local sounds and some unusual, great music from throughout the region.

Av. Gentil Bittencourt 449, Nazaré and Estação das Docas, +55 91-3224 8948.
www.nafigueredo.com.br

WEBSITES & PUBLICATIONS

Footprint Brazil

Brazilian music and travel essentials.
www.footprintbooks.com

Brega Pop

From dreadful duos to techno dance.
www.bregapop.com

Pará Turismo

Information on Belém, the state of Pará and the Amazon beyond.
www.paratur.pa.gov.br

Trama Records

For directional music in Belém. Browse the catalogue and buy music at <http://tramavirtual.uol.com.br>

Amazonian thighs, her band and male dancers. Immense fun and barely known even to Brazilian tourists.

Av. Senador Lemos 3316, Sacramento, +55 91 3233 7631.

Café com Arte

A brightly painted colonial house with three floors of live rock, MPB fusion and DJs for an alternative, student-orientated crowd. Head there after 11pm.

Av. Rui Barbosa 1436 (between Braz de Aguiar and Nazaré), Nazaré, +55 91 3224 8630.

Bar do Gilson

A covered courtyard with live Rio de Janeiro samba and *choro* at weekends. The owner Gilson plays mandolin in the band.

Travessa Padre Eutíquio 3172, +55 91 3272 1306.

São Mateus

Another pretty colonial house-turned-street bar. Eclectic live bands with space for some 300 people sipping *caipirinhas* and munching *comidinha* bar snacks.

Travessa Padre Eutíquio 606, next to the Praça da Bandeira, Campina, +55 91 3252 5338.



Techno-brega DJs spin tunes from gigantic space-pod structures in Belém clubs such as Carrousel. These machine-like booths are known as 'Aparelhagem'