

SAO PAULO

GOING TRAVELLING?

Songlines has now profiled the world music scene in 40 cities. Check the archive on www.songlines.co.uk

Brazil's most populous city bursts with sounds from all over the country. Alex Robinson delves into the musical metropolis

São Paulo never seems to end. Even from the plane the city stretches to every horizon in a chaos of high-rise, barely broken by a patch of green. There are almost 20 million people squeezed in here – between the whizzing 16 lane freeways, mazes of fortified one-way streets and graffiti-scratched alleys. And they're from all over Brazil – from the steaming rainforest-covered Amazon through to the dry as dust *sertão* (the semi-arid interior of the north-east) and the pulsating African heart of tropical beach Brazil in São Luís and Salvador. The rhythms trip off the buses, trucks, cars and trains – there's *caçuriá* from Caxuxa, *maracatu* from Maragogi and *embolada* from Alagoas. And *samba*, *ciranda*, *afoxé*, *axé*, *choro*, *forró*, *frevó* and *bossa* all swirling and mingling in the cities honeycomb of terracotta breezeblock *favelas* and funky dance clubs. Like the city, the array of unfamiliar names and styles never seems to end. So much so that it can be hard to know where to begin.

The best quarter is Vila Madalena. This is São Paulo's East Village, Montmartre or Hoxton – a hilly grid of pastel-painted town houses clambering over steep hills and buzzing with bars and clubs. It's a great place to wander with a surprise at every turn. After eating Bahian-Japanese *robalo* sushi with cashew-fruit caramel glaze, or a bowl of Açaí energy pulp topped with Guaraná syrup, drop into

a little designer bar and sip an ice cold Bohemia *cerveja* to the ever-so-cool, dub-friendly sounds of Céu or Mariana Aydar. Then slip next door to hear Clube do Balanço or Funk Como Le Gusta play some infectiously funky samba-swing. Or dance forró with a passion fruit *caipirinha* in hand in an upmarket spit-and-sawdust mock-Bahia beach bar, with a bunch of hippy-chic students. Vila Madalena is so cool that it took Seu Jorge away from Rio. He lives just down the road in Pinheiros near Benedito Calixto market – a bustling sprawl of arty stalls and food trolleys broken by streetside samba and choro dance bars. On Friday nights there's great live music here and everyone from five-year-olds with candyfloss to the toned and tanned and little old men in cloth caps dance into the small hours.

Other live music events and venues are dotted around the city. Some are like nothing you'll ever have seen. On the Morro do Querosene – Kerosene Hill, a (safe) favela – locals re-enact the shamanic, African-Brazilian Bumba Meu Boi festival. This is a drum and sung dance pageant depicting the ritual slaughter of a prize bull, his resurrection by a witch doctor and the rainy season that the magic brings. Some are conventional – like the wonderful sit-down shows at the SESC arts centres that dot the city. And others are spontaneous, like the impromptu *repentista* – rhyming, sung poetry jousts – that occur regularly on the Praça do Sé in the city centre during the week.

BARS & CLUBS

Bambu

Funky little forró bar and restaurant in the heart of Vila Madalena serving caipirinhas and north-eastern campfire cooking. Great informal atmosphere, an arty crowd and live bands every weekend.

Rua Purpurina 272, Vila Madalena, +55 11 3031 2331, www.bambubrasilbar.com.br

Bar do Alemão

A cosy little brick-walled bar and restaurant, tucked away in a semi-residential neighbourhood famous for its live samba. There are shows most nights with an especially lively crowd at weekends. Clara Nunes used to play here and famous samba musicians often appear still – including Paulo César Pinheiro and Eduardo Gudin.

Avenida Antártica 554, Água Branca, +55 11 3879 0070, www.bardoalemao.zip.net

Bourbon Street

A medium-sized show hall with a dining area which is cleared for dancing later in the evening; there's an upper gallery with great views of the stage. It plays host to up-and-coming São Paulo performers like MPB singer Luciana Mello and samba-funkster Tutti Baê, alongside some international acts.

Rua dos Chanés 127, Moema, +55 11 5095 6100, www.bourbonstreet.com.br



LISTINGS

!Oba Oba & Guia da Semana

Listings and features on all that's going on in the city – in Portuguese – but it's easy to find out who's playing where by following the links.

www.obaoba.com.br and www.guiadasemana.com.br

Samba Choro

Exclusively music listings – especially for samba, choro and quality MPB.

www.samba-choro.com.br

Brazil Max

The best general overview of São Paulo and Brazil, in English, with some music features and downloads.

www.brazilmax.com



Old and young get together over samba in Praça Benedito Calixto

Casa de Francisca

An intimate, newly opened live music café-bar in an upmarket neighbourhood that plays host to the refined end of the musical spectrum, with acts like virtuoso guitarist and composer Chico Saraiva or pianist Paulo Braga.

José Maria Lisboa 190, Travessa da Brigadeiro Luís Antônio, +55 11 3493 5717, www.casadefrancisca.blogspot.com

Diquinta

A long, low dance bar with some of the best small samba-funk acts on the São Paulo circuit between Thursday and Saturday every week. Near the fashionable Vila Madalena neighbourhood.

Rua Baumann 1435, Vila Leopoldina, +55 11 5506 0100, www.diquinta.com.br

Grazie a Dio!

Very popular and fashionable Vila Madalena restaurant and bar/club with live music from Tuesdays to Sundays. Music tends to be up-tempo and is played by some of the

best local and visiting acts – including bands like Mombojó (the new post-*mangue beat* sensation from Recife), Clube do Balanço and established acts like Banda Black Rio.

Rua Girassol 67, Vila Madalena, +55 11 3031 6568, www.grazieadio.com.br

Ó do Borogodó

This intimate club is always packed with people between Wednesdays and Saturdays. On Wednesdays there's classic *samba canção* from retired cleaner Dona Inah who sings material from the likes of Cartola and Ataulfo Alves. And on other nights there's a varied programme of choro, forró and MPB.

Rua Horácio Lane 21, Pinheiros, +55 11 3814 4087

Tocador de Bolacaha

A great little bar with a little heliconia-filled garden, old vinyl on the walls and classic album sleeves for place mats. There's live music from Wednesday to weekends from a variety of bands and samba acts like Jane do Bandolim.

Rua Patizal 72, Vila Madalena, +55 11 3815 7639, www.tocadordebolacha.com.br

FESTIVAL AND EVENTS

Benedito Calixto Market

There's live choro and samba every Saturday afternoon and evening at this buzzing little arts and crafts market. The crowd is eclectic with everyone from old men and models to musicians.

Praça Benedito Calixto, Pinheiros

Bumba Meu Boi

The Bumba Meu Boi is re-enacted here three

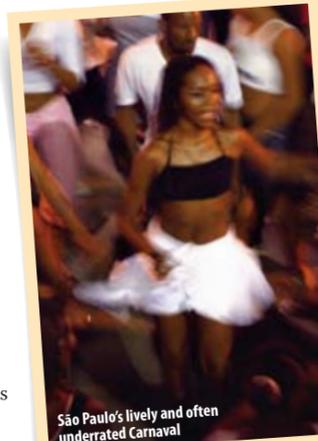
times a year – On October 23 the bull is killed, on Easter Saturday he is resurrected and on June 24, baptised.

Morro do Querosene, Butantã

Carnaval

São Paulo's Carnaval is as lively as Rio's and far less visited by foreign tourists. Like Rio's it takes place in a designated stadium with ancillary street parties in other neighbourhoods. One of the best is in the Vai Vai Samba School in Bela Vista.

Sambódromo, Avenida Olavo Fontoura 1209, +55 11 2224 0626



São Paulo's lively and often underrated Carnaval

RECORD SHOPS

FNAC

This record store has two big branches in town. www.fnac.com.br

Saraiva

Located throughout the city. www.saraiva.com.br

My São Paulo CÉU

"There's a very rich music scene made up of musicians like Curumin, Coletivo Instituto, Turbo Trio, Nação Zumbi, Zé de Riba, Siba e a Fuloresta, Mamelão Sound System and others. Many of them play along Rua Augusta in places like Studio SP, Vegas and Inferno, or CB and Berlin in Barra Funda [neighbourhood] – which offer eclectic live programmes and Brazilian and foreign DJs."



VENUES

SESC

These arts centres and concert halls dotted around the city and the country play host to some of the most interesting medium-sized acts in the country – with formal sit-down concerts in excellent theatres with great sound systems. There is always a great show on somewhere – usually at SESC Pompeia or Vila Mariana and from artists like Seu Jorge, Chico Buarque and Egberto Gismonti.

Various venues, www.sesc.com.br

ARENAS

The biggest acts like *sertanejo* stars or Ivete Sangalo play in large stadiums (see below):

Estádio do Pacaembu, Pça Charles Miller, +55 11 3664 4650, www.pacaembu.com.br

Credicard Hall, Avenida Nações Unidas, +55 11 6846 6010, www.credicardhall.com.br

Auditório Ibirapuera, Avenida Álvares Cabral, +55 11 3629 1075, www.auditorioibirapuera.com.br



The futuristic Auditório Ibirapuera



PHOTOS, UNLESS STATED, BY ALEX ROBINSON