

# The FLIP Festival

Head Over Heels in Parati, Brazil

**M**OUNTAINS thick with tropical vegetation rise behind the coastal town of Parati, Brazil; the bay spreads before it, dotted with fishing boats. Along the old wooden docks, fishermen, shirtless and shoeless, prepare their nets with quick, strong hands. In streets paved with oversized cobblestones, women serve *doces*, sweets like *maracujá* (passion fruit) tarts made with condensed milk. Parati—which, until the 1970s, was accessible only by boat—lies equidistant from Brazil's major cities, Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo, and is home to the last of Brazilian royalty. It is known throughout Brazil as somewhere special, a retreat and an oasis.

But that is not why writers, editors, journalists, television broadcasters, performance artists, and other interested Brazilians flock here for a long weekend in July (which is midwinter in Brazil, rainy and cold). It is in Parati that Liz Calder, a cofounding editor of British book publisher Bloomsbury, and Luiz Schwarcz, the head of Brazil's influential press Companhia das Letras, founded an international literary festival in 2003. In a remarkably short time, Festa Literária Internacional de Parati (FLIP) has blossomed into the most important literary event in Brazil.

The idea for FLIP began as a kitchen-table conversation among Calder and some well-connected Brazilian friends in Calder's solar-powered house in Parati, where she lives part-time. The

**JOELLE HANN** is a poet living in Brooklyn. She works as an editor for Bedford/St. Martin's. She is translating *O Amor Natural*, the erotic poems of Brazilian poet Carlos Drummond de Andrade.



The colonial town of Parati offers hundreds of beaches and islands accessible by boat.

idea kicked around for several years until Peter Florence, the mastermind behind Hay-on-Wye, an annual festival in Wales, visited Calder in Parati and coined the catchy acronym FLIP. "Peter galvanized us, gave us a bit of lead in our pencil," says Calder. "If the thing's got a name, it's got to happen." Florence, a close friend of Calder's, has advised on the planning and execution of FLIP since the beginning.

Initially, the event was held on the second floor of a large house in town, where you can see (and hear) horse-drawn carts hauling green bananas through the streets. Only a few hundred people were expected for the weekend festival that included readings and panel discussions—but more than a thousand came. Many watched from overflow tents outside. "It was quite improvised," says Samuel Titan Jr., a translator and editor, and codirector of FLIP 2005. "There were things like authors helping each other with their books, holding them open. It was quite a homely thing."

Homely—but not for long. Journalists from Brazil's major newspapers,

television stations, and Internet sites jumped on the idea of a literary festival in Brazil. "It was the press who created the excitement," says Calder of FLIP's skyrocketing popularity. "There was a lot of coverage—a lot." Large music festivals have been *de rigueur* in Brazil since the 1960s. Film festivals, too, are quite popular. The São Paulo International Film Festival, established in 1977, and more recently the Rio de Janeiro International Film Festival, established in 1999, draw hundreds of thousands of visitors each year. For literature, however, the pickings had been slim. With the press's enthusiastic coverage, FLIP's attendance swelled from a thousand-plus in 2003 to twelve thousand in 2005. What started out as a low-key weekend festival has become a five-day program of events that include music concerts, film screenings, and literary tributes.

**C**ALDER'S connection to Brazil dates back to the 1960s, when her husband, an engineer with Rolls-Royce, was posted to São Paulo. "I came in my early

WALTER CRAVEIRO