

INTRODUCING RIO DE JANEIRO

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Rio de Janeiro stretches between beach and mountain, with colonial neighborhoods, modernist style and that addictive sound that ties it all together: samba. Welcome to the *cidade maravilhosa* (marvelous city).

Once the adopted home of the Portuguese crown, Rio has long entranced visitors. Magnificent festivals like Carnival and Reveillon (New Year's Eve) are renowned, but the city has plenty of other occasions for revelry – weekend samba parties in Lapa, celebrations at a Flamengo soccer match, and impromptu music jams at sidewalk cafes in Leblon, Centro or any other corner of town.

Music is the lifeblood of Rio, with a soundtrack that begins with samba and encompasses old-school bossa nova, hip-hop, funk, and Brazil's many regional styles. Catch the beat at open-air bars, old-fashioned dance halls or hypermodern nightclubs and lounges.

The setting is another reason why visitors fall hard for Rio. Rain forest still covers large swaths of the metropolitan area, while the city's dramatic mountains and white-sand beaches weave together one of the world's most striking urban landscapes. On sunny days, Cariocas (residents of Rio) head outdoors to cycle the shoreline, surf the waves, sail on Baía de Guanabara, hike the forests of Tijuca or rock-climb the face of Pão de Açúcar.

The Rio experience is about many things, from watching the sunset over Arpoador to catching an impromptu samba jam in a tiny backyard club. It's people-watching in Ipanema, seafood feasts on Lagoa, and coming face-to-face with that spirit of spontaneity and joy seemingly found around every corner of this dynamic tropical city.

RIO DE JANEIRO LIFE

Life happens out-of-doors in Rio de Janeiro. Drawn outside by sunshine (and driven out by cramped apartments), Cariocas find love, conflict and all the other varieties of human experience on the streets and beaches of town. Big festivals like Carnival and Reveillon are almost entirely outdoor events, while an afternoon at the beach, followed by a night of open-air eating, drinking and merry-making, are the preferred ways to spend a day.

Not surprisingly, gossip travels fast in this community. At cafés and juice bars, Cariocas swap the latest rumors. There are usually plenty of scandals to whet the appetite. Political scandals often hog the headlines. Like many other countries, the media leans toward sensationalism, and splashy stories get much play. Violence in the favelas (shanty towns) is another recurrent theme.

Celebrities also tend to come crashing into the headlines. Hot topics here are who's cheating on whom, which Hollywood playboy was frolicking with you-know-who on Saõ beach and which Brazilian actress is doing nude magazine-spreads this week. This kind of attention to frivolity is one of the reasons why Paulistas (residents of São Paulo) sometimes stereotype Cariocas as superficial beach bums obsessed with their bodies. Cariocas for their part describe Paulistas as being workaholics with no zeal for life.

Residents of both cities have more in common than they're sometimes willing to admit. They usually rate crime, for instance, as the number one problem in both towns. Middle- and upper-class Cariocas, like Paulistas, live in highly secured buildings, and some even hire private bodyguards. Like São Paulo, Rio has a huge gap between the haves and have-nots. At one end are the million-odd Cariocas living in favelas, often struggling just to feed themselves, and at the other end are the stratospherically rich living in luxury high-rises, with a maid, a driver and various other servants to attend to their needs. The dividing line is often little more than a highway.

Despite the chasm between rich and poor, there are many ways in which the city comes together. The beaches in Rio, for instance, have always been free and open to all, and today on Ipanema beach it's possible to see soccer-playing kids from the favelas, cell phone-toting models, pensioners, hippies, yuppies and assorted tourists – all in the span of a few volleyball courts.

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THE AUTHOR

Regis St Louis



Regis' longtime admiration for the *cidade maravilhosa* (marvelous city) has led to his deep involvement with the country. The city's vibrant music scene, its colorful *botecos* (neighborhood bars) and samba clubs, and

the alluring energy of the Cariocas (residents of Rio) are just a few of the reasons why he's returned so often. Regis speaks both Portuguese and Spanish, and he has written many articles on Rio. He is also the coordinating author of Lonely Planet's *Brazil* guide, and covered both Rio and Brazil's southern states for Lonely Planet's *South America on a Shoestring*. He splits his time between New York City and the tropics.

REGIS' TOP RIO DAY

Since this is my ideal day, the sun is shining when I rise and it's still early as I step outside. I decide to go for a stroll along Ipanema beach, pausing for *agua de coco* (coconut water) along the way. Afterwards, I grab an *açaí*, the world's most delicious (non-alcoholic) beverage, at Bibi Sucos (p137), take a look at *O Globo* newspaper and contemplate the day ahead. Seeing there's an exhibition I'm eager to see at the Centro Cultural Banco do Brasil (p89) – which is free, no less – I decide to head to Centro. Along the way, I'll take a

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peak at nearby eating spots (p146) and see what tempts me. Unable to decide between two of my favorites, I opt for Arte Temperada (p146) followed by Brasserie Rosário (p147) for coffee and dessert. Over lunch, I'll take a look at my walking tour of Centro (p95) and see if I can find some new places to add. Happily fed, I take a stroll through the pedestrian streets, stopping at shops and taking in the street scene before ultimately making my way to the music vendors, including Feira de Música (p118), on Rua Pedro Lessa. I'll buy a few records then catch the *bonde* (tram) up to Santa Teresa. There I'll stop in on a few friends, grab an afternoon drink at Jasmin Mango (p149) and make plans for the evening. If I'm lucky, a friend will call and invite me to the opening of a new samba club in Lapa; otherwise, I'll consider my options and go either to Semente (p167) if today is a Monday, Democráticos (p166) if it's Thursday or Beco do Rato (p163) if it's Friday. Afterwards, I'll taxi back to Ipanema for a final cocktail at Londra (p154).

PHOTOGRAPHERS

John Maier Jr

John is a journalist, photographer and videographer who has been living in Rio de Janeiro since 1985. His work has been featured in leading publications and networks, including *National Geographic*, *Time*, *The New York Times*, HBO, the BBC and Discovery (and Lonely Planet, of course). His work has been honored with two Emmys and a Peabody.

Ricardo Gomes

Ricardo is a native of Rio and an accomplished photographer, videographer and editor. He has worked for top Brazilian and international publications such as *O Globo*, *The New York Times*, *Spiegel* and *Adrenalin Magazine*. He specializes in covering nature and extreme sports, but he also photographs and films institutional videos for companies and non-government organizations.

GETTING STARTED

Before dashing off to Brazil, find out whether you need a visa. Many nationalities require them, including citizens from the US, Canada and Australia. See [p228](#) for more details.

If you plan to visit during the high season, it's wise to book accommodations at least two or three months in advance. For Carnaval or Reveillon (New Year's Eve), it's never too early to start planning, with some hotels filling up six months in advance.

Aside from accommodations, Rio is an easy-going place, and you can reserve most other things (tours, outdoor activities, tables at top restaurants) after your arrival.

Money is, of course, the other major consideration – and no small one given the surge of the Brazilian *real* in recent years. In general, prices for most things are slightly lower than those in North America and Western Europe, with ample options for both budget travelers and visitors on generous expense accounts.

WHEN TO GO

There is never really a bad time to visit Rio, but whether you want to party like a rock star or escape the masses may help deciding when to go. Rio's high season coincides with the Brazilian summer, running from December to March. This is when the country fills with both foreign visitors and vacationing Brazilian families. Hotel rooms are about 30% higher at this time and you'll face more crowds, though this is also the most festive time in Rio. The low season runs from May to September, and if you're looking to beat the crowds and don't mind cooler weather, this is a fine time to visit.

If you plan any side trips in Rio, be mindful of weekends. Búzios, Paraty, Ilha Grande and other nearby destinations get packed on summer weekends, and you'll have more luck scoring rooms (and deal with fewer crowds) going mid-week.

Rio lies just inside the tropics, with rainfall and humidity playing no small part in the city's seasons. Summer temperatures hover around 82°F (28°C), but can often reach 95°F (35°C) or higher. In the winter, blue skies and mild weather is the norm, with temperatures around 70°F (mid-20s). Rain falls on the city

ADVANCE PLANNING

In addition to organizing your visa (if you need one) and booking accommodation, there are a few things you might look into before flying to Rio.

The best guides often book up well in advance, so get in touch early if there's something particular you want to do (such as scuba diving or rock-climbing up the face of Pão de Açúcar, [p181](#)). If you plan on tandem gliding, get in touch with a pilot ([p183](#)) and find out what day might be best for flying.

Find out if there are going to be any football games on while you're in town (cbfnews.uol.com.br in Portuguese lists game schedules), and browse through listings – on Riotur (www.riodejaneiro-turismo.com.br) and other sites – for events on while you're in town.

all year long, though the wettest months are October to February.

FESTIVALS

Rio's Carnaval is deservedly popular, but that's not the end of the celebrating. Reveillon is another citywide celebration, when Cariocas and visitors pack Copacabana beach. Other *festas* (parties) occur throughout the year. For the dates of Rio's many public holidays, see [p22](#).

January & February

DIA DE SÃO SEBASTIÃO

On January 20, the patron saint of Rio is commemorated with a procession that carries the image of São Sebastião from Igreja (church) de São Sebastião dos Capuchinos in Tijuca to the [Catedral Metropolitana](#) ([p100](#)), where the image is blessed in a Mass celebrated by the Archbishop of Rio de Janeiro.

CARNAVAL

[www.rio-carnival.com](#)

In February or March, the city puts on its famous no-holds-barred party. For information on how to celebrate with Cariocas, see [p50](#).

March & April

SEXTA-FEIRA DA PAIXÃO

In March or April (depending when Easter falls), Good Friday is celebrated throughout the city. The most important ceremony re-enacts the Stations of the Cross under the [Arcos da Lapa](#) ([p100](#)), with more than 100 actors.

DIA DA FUNDAÇÃO DA CIDADE

On March 1, the city commemorates its founding in 1565 by Estácio de Sá with a Mass in the church of its patron saint, Igreja de São Sebastião dos Capuchinos.

FESTIVAL INTERNACIONAL DE DOCUMENTÁRIOS

[www.itsalltrue.com](#)

Latin America's most important documentary film festival takes place in late March and early April when more than 100 films from both Brazil and abroad are screened at theaters in Rio and São Paulo.

DIA DO ÍNDIO

April 19 is recognized in Brazil as Indians' day, with a week of special events held at the [Museu do Índio](#) ([p79](#)). Exhibitions, dance and film presentations are staged daily.

DIA DE SÃO JORGE

Igreja de São Jorge, Rua da Alfândega 382, Centro
On April 23, the city pays its respects to St George, an important figure in the Afro-Brazilian community. St George is the alter-ego of the god Ogum in the Candomblé religion (originating in Africa). There's a Mass and procession, and food vendors around.

May & June

RIO DAS OSTRAS JAZZ E BLUES FESTIVAL

[www.riodasostrasjazzblues.com](#)

Located 170km east of Rio, on the way to Búzios, Rio das Ostras boasts lovely beaches and mangrove forests. In early June, it's the setting for one of Brazil's best jazz and blues fests, with a good mix of Brazilian and international performers.

FESTAS JUNINAS

Spanning the month of June, the feast days of various saints mark some of the most important folkloric festivals in Brazil. In

Rio, celebrations are held in various public squares, with lots of food stands, music, fireworks and the occasional bonfire or two. The big feast days are June 13 (Dia de Santo Antônio), June 24 (São João) and June 29 (São Pedro).

RIO MARATHON

[www.maratonadorio.com.br](#)

Set along the coast, with the ocean always at your side, this marathon course must be one of the most beautiful in the world. Rio hosts its annual 42km run in mid- to late-June, when the weather is mild and the skies are clear and blue. There are also 6km and 21km runs.

July & August

GAY PRIDE RIO

Although nowhere near as large as São Paulo's massive parade, the Rio gay pride event is growing in popularity, attracting 500,000 people on average. It usually takes place in late June or early July.

PORTAS ABERTAS

[www.artedeportasabertas.com.br](#) in Portuguese
Artists in Santa Teresinha open their studios for a week in July during this lively annual festival. Expect music, a diverse crowd and inventive installations that make good use of the atmospheric bohemian hood.

FESTA DA SÃO PEDRO DO MAR

On July 3, the fishing fraternity pays homage to its patron saint in a maritime procession. Their decorated boats leave from the fishing community of Caju and sail to the statue of São Pedro in Urca.

FESTA LITERÁRIA INTERNACIONAL DE PARATI

[www.flip.org.br](#)

This important literary festival brings authors from around the world to Paraty for five days each July. The opening concert features big names in Brazilian music.

FESTA DE NS DA GLÓRIA DO OUTEIRO

On August 15, a solemn Mass is held at the historic church overlooking Glória and the bay. From the church (ablaze with decorated lights), a procession travels out into

the streets of Glória to mark the Feast of the Assumption. This *feira* includes music and colorful stalls set up in the Praça NS da Glória. Festivities start at 8am and continue all day.

September & October

SAMBA-SCHOOL REHEARSALS

In September (though some begin as early as July or August), samba schools host open rehearsals once a week (usually on Friday or Saturday night). In spite of the name, these are less a dress rehearsal than just an excuse to dance (to samba, of course), celebrate and pass on the good vibe before the big show come Carnival time. Anyone can come, and it's a mixed crowd of Cariocas and tourists, though it gets more and more crowded the closer it is to Carnival. For more information on attending the open rehearsals, see p163.

DIA DE INDEPENDÊNCIA DO BRASIL

On September 7, Independence Day is celebrated with a large military parade down Av Presidente Vargas. It starts at 8am at Candelária and goes down just past Praça XI.

FESTIVAL DO RIO

www.festivaldoriorio.com.br

Rio's international film festival is one of the biggest in Latin America. More than 200 films from all over the world are shown at some 35 theaters in Rio. Often the festival holds open-air screenings at locations around town. It runs from the last week of September through the first week of October.

FESTA DA PENHA

One of the largest (and most popular) religious festivals in the city takes place every Sunday in October and on the first Sunday in November. The lively celebrations commence in the northern suburb of Penha at Igreja NS da Penha de França, Largo da Penha 19.

FESTIVAL PANORAMA DE DANÇA

www.panoramafestival.com

One of Brazil's biggest dance festivals takes place in late October through early November and, at various locations around the city, features the work of around 200 different contemporary dance groups. The

one-week festival features plenty of experimental troupes – from both Brazil and abroad – as well as traditional performers who don't get much attention.

RIO JAZZ FESTIVAL

Although dates for this October jazz festival vary, it's an opportunity for Rio's beautiful people to come together for three nights of great music. Local, national and international acts present a wide variety of music, playing jazz and its many relatives – samba-jazz, bossa nova, samba and *Música Popular Brasileira* (MPB).

TIM FESTIVAL

Tim, the über-successful cell-phone service provider, throws a huge music festival in October (currently the third weekend, though dates can vary). Expect Brazil's top names in pop, jazz and MPB in an eclectic line up of performers at one of Rio's big venues (most recently at the Marina da Glória). Tickets often sell out well before the three-day event, so keep an eye on *Veja* magazine, which announces details in advance.

November & December

NOITES CARIOCAS

oinoitecariocas.oi.com.br in Portuguese

Atop one of Brazil's most beguiling viewpoints, the city of Rio forms the backdrop to one of its best music fests during this annual summertime event. Beginning in November and running through February, all-night rock and MPB concerts are held on weekend nights, attracting a well-dressed Zona Sul crowd. Concerts are currently held at Pier Mauá, just north of Centro.

LIGHTING OF THE LAGOA CHRISTMAS TREE

From the end of November to the first week of January, the Christmas tree glows brightly on the *Lagoa de Rodrigo de Freitas* (p73). To celebrate its lighting, the city often throws big concerts in Parque Brigadeiro Faria Lima, usually on the first Saturday in December. Big Brazilian names have performed in the past.

VERÃO DA URCA

www.morrodaurca.com.br in Portuguese

From December through Carnival, Morro da Urca becomes the setting for a great

party above Rio. Concerts take place on periodic Saturday nights – and some Friday nights – and feature top Brazilian bands and magnificent views.

FESTA DE IEMANJÁ

Dwarfed by secular New Year's Eve celebrations, this Candomblé (a religion originating from Africa) festival on December 31 celebrates the feast day of Iemanjá, the goddess of the sea. Celebrants dress in white and place their petitions on small boats, sending them out to sea. If their petitions return, their prayers will not be answered. Along with the petitions, celebrants send candles, perfumes and talcum powder to appease the blue-cloaked *orixá* (spirits or deities). Until recently, devotees gathered in Copacabana, Ipanema and Leblon, but owing to the popularity of Reveillon, and its chaotic spillover, they are seeking more tranquil spots – Barra da Tijuca and Recreio dos Bandeirantes – to make their offerings.

REVEILLON

Rio's biggest holiday after its spectacular and rowdy Carnival takes place on the famed Copacabana beach, where some two million people pack the sands to welcome the new year. A spectacular fireworks display lights up the night sky as top bands perform in the area. The hardest of revelers keep things going all night long, then watch the sunrise the next morning.

COSTS & MONEY

Rio is less expensive than many cities in Western Europe and North America, but Brazil's booming economy and strong *real* mean that it isn't the bargain it once was. Still, it is possible to enjoy the city without breaking the bank.

Ascetics could get by on about R\$60 a day, staying in cheaper hostels, preparing their own meals and avoiding pricey nights out. Midrange travelers should budget around R\$300 a day, which will cover decent lodging near the beach and a good assortment of restaurant and bar expenses. High-end travelers will spend R\$500 or more a day, which will cover hotel rooms with beach views, Rio's best restaurants, and drinks at top music halls and dance clubs.

Accommodations will probably be your biggest expense. The cheapest rooms in town

HOW MUCH?

Liter of gas R\$2.20

Liter of bottled water R\$1.50

Glass of chope (draft beer) R\$4

Souvenir T-shirt R\$20-30

Caipirinha (cocktail) on the beach R\$5

Metro ticket R\$2.40

Pair of Havaianas R\$15-25

Admission to samba club R\$10-25

Dinner for two at Bar do Mineiro R\$60

Cable-car ride to the top of Pão de Açúcar R\$35

can go for as little as R\$20 per night for a bed in a hostel outside the Zona Sul (hostels in Ipanema, however, typically charge R\$45 a night). A clean, fairly decent double room in Copacabana goes for about R\$200 and up. In Ipanema, good rooms start around R\$300. If you have money to burn, Rio's top hotel rooms will set you back a cool R\$1000 or more.

Restaurants cater to an equally broad range of budgets. At the low-end are inexpensive per-kilo restaurants and cheap set lunches, which can fill a person up for R\$10. If you're not scraping by, you can enjoy a good selection of local places with mains averaging R\$20, or enjoy a dinner for two for R\$80. Dinner at Rio's most expensive places will cost R\$200 or so, including a few drinks. Keep in mind that many restaurants list their menu prices for two. If you're not sharing, be sure to clarify before ordering (and you can usually order a half portion).

Getting around town is fairly inexpensive, with cheap bus and metro tickets (under R\$2.50 one way), while taxi rides will run to a bit more (R\$20 to zip up to Lapa from Ipanema). Renting a car is expensive (starting at R\$100), with high petrol prices to match, and it's not worth recommending unless you plan to do a lot of exploring outside of the main towns.

Brazil is not the cheapest destination for solo travelers. The cost of a single room in a hotel is not much less than for a double.

Lastly, during the December-to-February holiday season, lodging costs generally increase by about 30% (and sometimes more in places like Búzios and other popular resorts). You'll pay a premium if you come during Carnival or Reveillon, with accommodation prices doubling or even tripling – with the added requirement of four-night minimum stays.

INTERNET RESOURCES

Agenda de Samba e Choro (www.samba-choro.com.br in Portuguese) This no-nonsense site lists top places to catch live samba and *choro* in town.

Brazzil (www.brazzil.com) In-depth articles touching on Brazilian politics, economy, literature, arts and culture.

Carioca Forever (www.cariocaforever.com) Articles written by English-speaking expats living in Brazil, with info on cultural events, life in Rio and language-learning tips.

Gringos (www.gringoes.com) Articles written by Anglo-phones living in Brazil.

Hip Guide to Brazil (www.brazilmax.com) Excellent guide to Brazilian culture and society; good, selective articles and links.

Insider's Guide to Rio (www.ipanema.com) One of the best internet introductions to Rio, this guide has up-to-date tips on hotels, restaurants, nightlife and shopping, with special sections on Carnival and Rio for gays.

Lana Lapa (www.lanalapa.com.br in Portuguese) Up-to-date listings of live concerts and other events in Lapa, plus a rundown of restaurants and bars in the area.

Lonely Planet (www.lonelyplanet.com) For summaries on Brazil travel, the popular Thorn Tree forum, online accommodation booking and links to a variety of other web resources.

Maria-Brazil (www.maria-brazil.org) An expat's recommendations of favorite dining, drinking, shopping and sightseeing in Rio, plus extensive recipes and links to blogs by other expats.

Rio This Week (www.riothisweek.com) Flashy photos and listings of what's-on around town, plus restaurant recommendations and other tips. You can download a colorful PDF of the current guide on the site.

Riotur (www.riodejaneiro-turismo.com.br) Rio's tourist information agency, Riotur keeps a current website of what's-on around town, as well as comprehensive listings of museums, restaurants and other info.

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