



Rio Grande do Sul

Brazil's southernmost state is covered largely by pampas, the grassy plains that supported centuries of cattle-herding. Much of this land is now actually used to cultivate soybean crops; but the cowboy culture endures.

So it is that residents of Rio Grande do Sul call themselves *gaúchos*, after the independent-minded ranchers and cattle herders that settled the state. In the countryside, it is not unusual to see old-timers sporting wide-brimmed hats and other traditional dress. Grilled meat, or *churrasco*, is still the state's favorite food, and everywhere, everywhere, locals suck down *chimarrão*, the distinctive tea made from the maté plant. Such traditions remain, even in the cosmopolitan capital of Porto Alegre.

The unique *gaúcho* culture is not the only thing that lures visitors to Rio Grande do Sul. In the state's northeastern corner, the earth opens up in an amazing geological display, giving way to the spectacular Serra Gaúcha. These mountains offer unlimited opportunities for hiking and other adventures, from the forest-covered canyons of the national parks near Cambará do Sul to the cascaded river valleys around Canela.

In the Vale dos Vinhedos, Italian-descended vintners are producing wines that rival the best vintages from Chile and Argentina. Inspired by the mountain scenery and influenced by their German and Italian heritage, towns like Gramado cast themselves as Brazilian alpine villages, selling fancy chocolates and publicizing their annual snowfall. In so many ways, Rio Grande do Sul defies notions of typical Brazil, which only makes this southern state more alluring.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Bargain for trash and treasures at the Sunday morning flea market at **Parque Farroupilha** (p357) in Porto Alegre
- Sample the crisp whites and earthy reds from the **Vale dos Vinhedos** (p360)
- Admire the views from the *teleférico* (chair-lift) in **Parque Floresta Encantada** (p362) in Canela
- Hike the **Trilha do Mirante** and peer over the edge of the **Cânion da Fortaleza** (p364) in the Parque Nacional da Serra Geral
- Uncover the mystery of the Jesuit mission at **São Miguel das Missões** (p366)



■ POPULATION: 15 MILLION

■ AREA: 43,910 SQ KM

History

Living on land long disputed by the Spanish and Portuguese, the people of Rio Grande do Sul used the conflict to create an identity distinct from the rest of Brazil. The region even declared its independence during the ill-fated Guerra dos Farrapos, a decade-long civil war ending in 1845. A wave of immigrants, mostly German, Italian and Swiss, began arriving in the late-19th century, reinforcing the region's cultural differences.

Climate

The Brazilian state sitting furthest from the equator, Rio Grande do Sul has the most temperate climate in Brazil, with hot summers and cool winters. The mountains of the

Serra Gaúcha north of Porto Alegre even see occasional snow. That said, the climate is subtropical in the coastal lowlands, with hot, humid summers.

National Parks

Parque Nacional Aparados da Serra occupies 10,250 hectares on the border between Rio Grande do Sul and Santa Catarina. North and south of Aparados da Serra, the parkland was extended in 1992 with the creation of the Parque Nacional da Serra Geral. These parks preserve some of the country's last araucaria forests, as well as a series of stunning canyons that offer opportunities for hiking, horseback riding and rock climbing.

