

# Rio de Janeiro State



Say the name Rio de Janeiro and people automatically think of the city. But there's another Rio out there, the stunningly beautiful state of Rio de Janeiro, home to some of Brazil's most alluring destinations, all within a three-hour drive of the Cidade Maravilhosa (Marvelous City).

To the southeast, the Costa do Sol is a land of dunes and lagoons, blinding white sands and limpid waters ranging from deep blue to jade green. Saquarema delights surfers with some of Brazil's best breakers. Arraial do Cabo has paradisiacal beaches and picturesque harbors tucked between steep promontories. And Búzios, chic but casual, sparkles day and night, with 330 days of annual sunshine and countless nightspots buzzing till dawn.

Just north of Rio, a jagged mountain wall forms the backdrop for the imperial city of Petrópolis and the climbers' paradise of Parque Nacional da Serra dos Órgãos. Nearby Teresópolis and Nova Friburgo straddle an equally picturesque landscape dotted with dairies, Swiss chalets and peaks whose names hint at their fantastic shapes: Friar's Wart, Finger of God, Woman of Stone.

West along the Costa Verde lies one of Brazil's true gems, the colonial town of Paraty, whose geographic backdrop of green forest, waterfalls and flowering trees is as dazzling as the town's colorful 18th-century architecture. Offshore, the vast traffic-free island of Ilha Grande offers over 100km of hiking trails leading to over 100 of Brazil's most secluded beaches.

To the northwest is Brazil's oldest national park, Parque Nacional de Itatiaia, where stark high country plateaus and rocky spires intermingle with lush, low country jungle. Bordering the park, the towns of Visconde de Mauá and Penedo welcome visitors with rustic cabins, rushing streams and fresh-grilled trout.

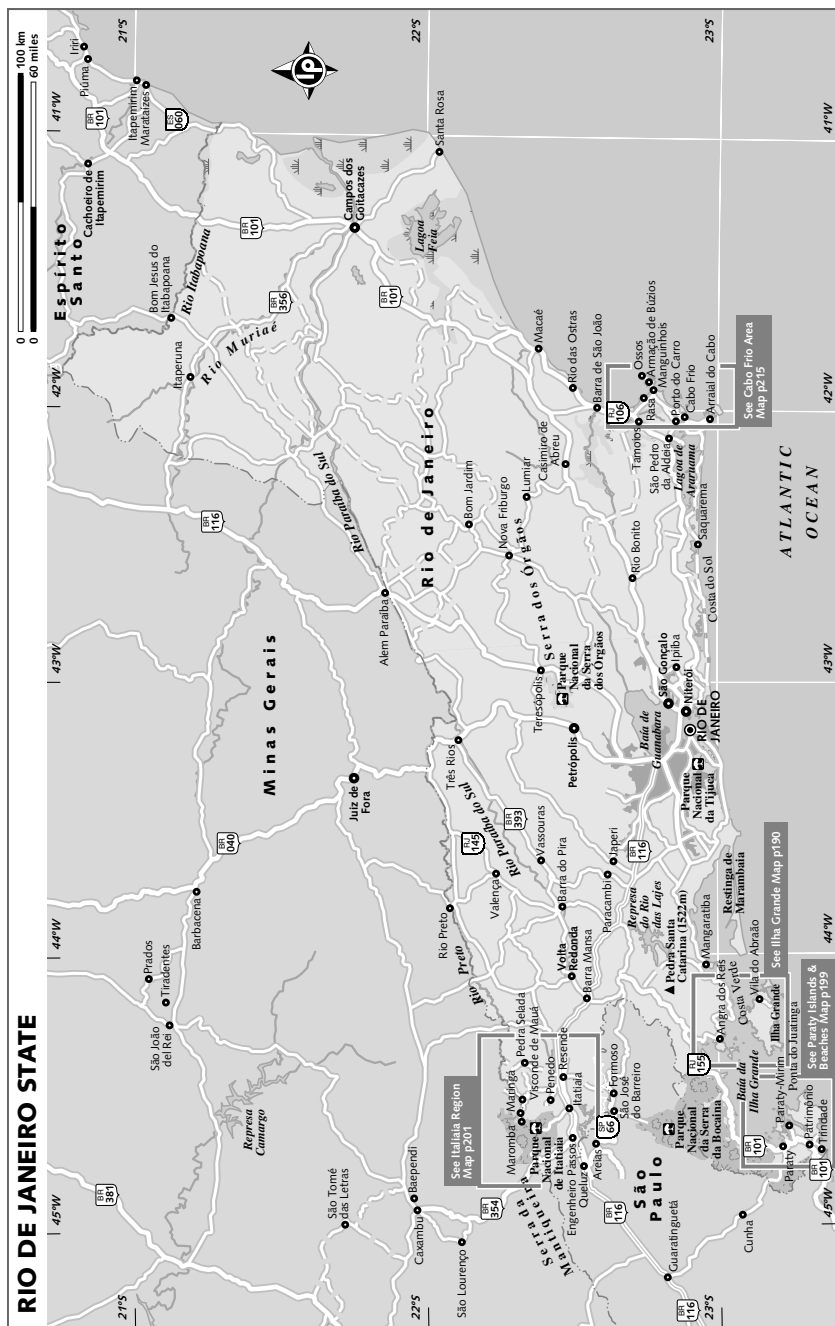
## HIGHLIGHTS

- On **Ilha Grande** (p190), surf the south shore's wild waves, or chill at the floating bar on a tranquil cove nearby
- Snorkel, swim and slide down waterfalls all day, then spend the evening learning to cook gourmet Brazilian food in picturesque, colonial **Paraty** (p193)
- Rappel up the rocky face of 2787m Pico das Agulhas Negras in **Parque Nacional de Itatiaia** (p203)
- Stroll at sunset, or party all night on breezy beachfront Orla Bardot in **Búzios** (p216)
- Sample local honey *cachaça* (high-proof sugarcane alcohol) and Alpine-style goat cheese while enjoying spectacular mountain scenery along the **Teresópolis-Friburgo Scenic Circuit** (p210)



■ POPULATION: 15 MILLION

■ AREA: 43,910 SQ KM



## History

The first European visitors to Brazil arrived by ship on January 1, 1502. For a short while it appeared that the newcomers were going to cohabit peacefully with the indigenous people, but once colonizing started in earnest in the early 16th century, everything changed. Great effort was put into enslaving indigenous people to work plantations and converting them to Christianity.

The state's development moved inland with the construction of Brazil's first major overland thoroughfare, linking coastal Paraty with the valley of the Rio Paraíba and continuing into Minas Gerais. Another important chapter in Rio's development was the establishment of coffee plantations here in the early 19th century. The crop was taken by mule train to new ports along the coast, and these roads were the main means of communication until the coming of the railways after 1855.

Modern Rio de Janeiro state is one of Brazil's economic powerhouses, where spurting oil and sun-baked tourists compete with traditional industries like steel and shipbuilding to see which can generate the most income.

## Climate

The best time to visit the coastal areas of Rio state is between May and August, when balmy trade winds cool the region and the average temperature hovers around the mid-80°F mark (around 30°C). But beware – during the same period it can get downright cold (single digits centigrade) in the mountains of Petrópolis and Itatiaia. Between December and March, the rainy season, the entire state is hotter and wetter.

## National Parks

For such a small state, Rio de Janeiro has an impressive array of national parks, including two of Brazil's oldest. Parque Nacional de Itatiaia, established in 1937, preserves large sections of lowland Mata Atlântica (Atlantic rain forest), plus significant high-altitude habitats. Parque Nacional da Serra dos Órgãos, established just north of Rio in 1939, gets its name from the remarkable organ-pipe shapes of its sheer rock walls. And little-visited Parque Nacional Serra da Bocaina encompasses a gorgeous swath of steep coastal jungle where the intrepid hiker can discover idyllic waterfalls and a section of the 17th-century gold route leading inland from Paraty.

## Getting There & Around

International and domestic flights fly into Rio de Janeiro's Galeão and Santos Dumont airports, linking Rio state to cities throughout Brazil and the world. Rio's local bus station is a hub for virtually every bus line in the country, with fast, frequent service to nearby towns via well-maintained modern highways.

## COSTA VERDE

West of Rio city is a captivating stretch of coastline where jungled hillsides dotted with flowering trees dive precipitously into a blue-green sea. The sinuous shoreline here is perfect for meandering, taking time to appreciate the ever-changing panorama of bays, islands, peaks and waterfalls.

## ILHA GRANDE & VILA DO ABRAÃO

☎ 0xx24 / pop 3500

The fabulous island retreat of Ilha Grande owes its pristine condition to its unusual history. First it was a pirates' lair, then a leper colony and, finally, a prison for some of Brazil's most violent and deranged criminals. All that remains of those days are some half-buried stone foundations, but the island's unsavory reputation kept developers at bay for a long time. Consequently, beautiful tropical beaches and virgin Atlantic rain forest (now protected by the federal government) abound on Ilha Grande, and there are still only a few settlements on the island.

Vila do Abraão, the only town of any size on Ilha Grande, was itself a sleepy fishing village until 30 years ago. Recently, there's been a steady stream of new pousadas and bars popping up, but this palm-studded beachfront town with its tidy white church is still incredibly picturesque, and remains small by mainland Brazil standards. Except for Abraão's lone garbage truck, fire engine and police vehicle, cars are not allowed in town, so the only transport here is by foot or boat. The village comprises a few dirt roads, and everybody congregates down near the dock and beach at night. On weekends and during high season it can get a bit claustrophobic in Vila do Abraão, but you can easily escape the crowds by hiking a few steps out of town in any direction.