



Minas Gerais & Espírito Santo

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Why Go?

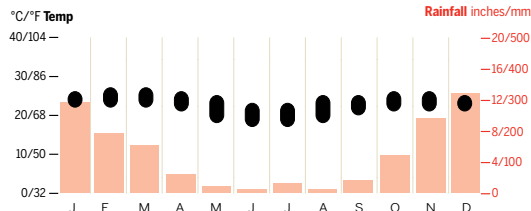
For those seeking a tangible sense of Brazilian history, no state compares with Minas Gerais. The cobblestone streets and splendid baroque monuments of Minas' colonial mining towns have seen it all, from the horrors of slavery to the fervor of Brazil's 18th-century independence movement.

Minas' natural wonders are equally alluring. The Serra do Espinhaço, a Unesco Biosphere Reserve running the length of the state, is just one of many refuges providing critical habitat for endangered species as well as exhilarating outdoor-recreation opportunities. Add to this the cosmopolitan charms of Belo Horizonte, the fabulous flavors of Minas' wood-fired cuisine, the intoxicating effects of Brazil's best *cachaça* (sugarcane alcohol) and the locals' legendary hospitality, and it's hard to resist Minas' seductive spell.

Neighboring Espírito Santo offers an attractive off-the-beaten-track counterpoint, with pretty beach and mountain scenery and some of Brazil's tastiest seafood.

When to Go

Belo Horizonte



Mar–Apr Witness Brazil's most colorful Easter-week processions in Ouro Preto and São João del Rei.

May See America's largest primate, the woolly spider monkey, as its favorite tree is flowering.

Jul Feel the heat at Itaúnas' *forró* festival, or chill out in Espírito Santo's 'wintry' mountains.

History

Espírito Santo, like much of the Brazilian coast, was colonized in the 16th century, but the focus quickly turned inland. In the late 1600s, when gold was discovered in Minas Gerais, Brazilians began flocking to Minas, while Portuguese flocked to Brazil. Slaves were brought from Bahia's sugar fields and the savannas of Angola, and until the last quarter of the 18th century, Minas' mines were producing half the world's gold.

Minas set the gold-rush standard – crazy, wild and violent – more than 100 years before the Californian and Australian gold rushes. Licentious living, disease and famine were rampant. Much of the gold wealth was siphoned off to Portugal; among the few lasting benefits to Brazil was the creation of the beautiful, church-clad mining cities that still dot Minas' hills. Nowadays, the Estrada Real (Royal Road) that connected these *cidades históricas* has become the state's most popular tourist route.

In neighboring Espírito Santo, coffee plantations were the prime source of income up until the 1960s. They've since been superseded by mining, shipping and – in the capital city, Vitória – Brazil's most famous chocolate factory.

Getting There & Around

Minas' capital city Belo Horizonte is the arrival point for most travelers. Pampulha and Confins airports handle domestic and international flights, while Belo's downtown bus station serves as a hub for ground transport. Direct buses from Rio and São Paulo also serve some of Minas' historic towns.

Vitória is Espírito Santo's largest city, with an international airport offering flights to major cities throughout Brazil. Buses run up and down the coastline, connecting Vitória with Bahia and Rio de Janeiro state, and also head inland to several cities in neighboring Minas Gerais.

MINAS GERAIS

POP 20 MILLION

Belo Horizonte

 OXX31 / POP 2.4 MILLION / ELEV 858M

Known to the locals as Beagá (pronounced 'bay-ah-gah', Portuguese for BH), Belo Horizonte was named for its beautiful view of nearby mountains. Urban sprawl makes it harder to appreciate the natural setting

nowadays, but Brazil's third-largest city still has considerable charm. Walk down the buzzing cosmopolitan streets of the Savassi neighborhood on a Saturday evening, eat at one of the fine restaurants in Lourdes, stroll through the densely packed stalls at Mercado Central, attend a weekend street fair or a concert at the Palácio das Artes, or visit the Inhotim art museum west of the city, and you'll see that Belo Horizonte has countless dimensions. Add to all this the friendly, welcoming nature of Beagá's people and you've got a winning combination. Stick around a few days – you might grow fond of the place.

History

In the late 19th century, as the Brazilian Republic was coming into its own, *mineiros* (residents of Minas Gerais state) began planning a new capital to replace hard-to-reach Ouro Preto, which had fallen out of favor as a symbol of colonialism. Belo Horizonte sprang up as an art nouveau city, influenced by the spirit of *Ordem e Progresso* (Order and Progress), the new slogan on the Brazilian flag.

In the 1940s Belo expanded northward. Then-mayor Juscelino Kubitschek commissioned young architectural-school graduate Oscar Niemeyer to design the brand-new Pampulha district. These two men are largely responsible for the city's wide avenues, large lakes, parks and jutting skyline.

More than 100 years after its founding, Belo Horizonte still has the young, contagious energy of a community reinventing itself. The city has undergone a major face-lift in recent years, with several new museums opening in Praça da Liberdade and a slew of government agencies moving 20km north to the Cidade Administrativa, a futuristic complex designed by the centenarian Niemeyer shortly before his death in 2012.

Beagá's role as a host city for the 2014 FIFA World Cup and the 2016 Olympics has prompted a whole new round of infrastructure improvements, including modern high-speed bus lines, an expansion of Confins international airport, and massive remodeling of the city's venerable football stadium, Mineirão.

Sights

Fans of modernist architect Oscar Niemeyer won't want to miss his creations dotted around a huge artificial lake in the Pampulha district, north of downtown. For