



Rio de Janeiro State

POP 16 MILLION

Includes ➔

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Best Places to Eat

- ➔ Rocka Beach Lounge (p161)
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Best Beaches

- ➔ Trindade (p135)
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Why Go?

If you thought Rio was just a city, think again! Right next door, the equally enticing *state* of Rio de Janeiro is home to some of Brazil's greatest treasures, all within an easy one- to four-hour journey from the Cidade Maravilhosa.

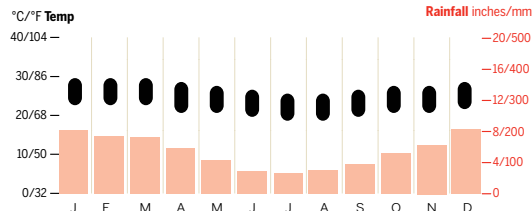
East along the coast are the dunes, lagoons, white sands and limpid blue-green waters of the Costa do Sol, an ever-popular playground for surfers, divers and suntan-seeking urban escapees.

Inland you'll find Itatiaia, Brazil's oldest national park, and the spectacular Serra dos Órgãos, whose whimsically shaped peaks test the mettle of international climbers and form the backdrop for the former imperial city of Petrópolis.

West lies the Costa Verde, a gorgeous patchwork of bays, islands, waterfalls and mountains. Highlights here include the 18th-century architecture of colonial Paraty and the vast island paradise of Ilha Grande, where dozens of hiking trails lead to more than 100 of Brazil's most secluded beaches.

When to Go

Búzios



May Drier weather, perfect waves and lower prices create dream conditions.

Jul International authors and coffee *fazendas* (farms) during festivals in Paraty and Vassouras.

Dec–Feb Escape the heat in the mountain refuges of Petrópolis and Parque Nacional do Itatiaia.

History

The Tupi and other indigenous groups inhabited modern-day Rio state for over two millennia before Europeans arrived in the 16th century. Early Portuguese activity was focused along the coast, but the discovery of gold in the late 17th century prompted 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 state'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, fueled by oil, a steady tourist trade, and traditional industries such as steel and shipbuilding.

Getting There & Around

International and domestic flights fly into Rio de Janeiro's **Galeão** and **Santos Dumont** airports (see p 117), linking Rio state to cities throughout Brazil and the world.

Rio's long-distance bus station (p118) 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 the Costa Verde (Green Coast), a captivating stretch of coastline where jungled mountainsides dotted with flowering trees dive precipitously into a blue-green sea. The sinuous shoreline here presents visitors with an ever-changing panorama of bays, islands, peaks and waterfalls. Tucked into this idyllic landscape, the 17th-century port of Paraty is famed both for its well-preserved historic center and for the legendary beauty of surrounding beaches such as Trindade and Sono. Just inland lies the Parque Nacional da Serra da Bocaina, which protects large tracts of endangered Mata Atlântica (Atlantic rainforest), along with sections of the 18th-century Caminho do Ouro (Gold Trail) once used to transport gold from Brazil's interior to the coast. Off-shore lies another hiker's and beach lover's dream: Ilha Grande, a vast island with no vehicle traffic and very few settlements to disrupt its pristine natural splendor. Amazingly,

all of this is right in Rio's backyard: hop a bus in the morning, and you can be spending the afternoon in tropical coastal paradise.

Ilha Grande & Vila do Abraão

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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 penitentiary where political prisoners were held alongside some of Brazil's most violent 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 rainforest (now protected as state parkland) abound on Ilha Grande, and there are still only a few settlements on the island.

Boats from the mainland arrive at Vila do Abraão, the island's biggest town. Abraão was just a sleepy fishing village until the mid-1990s, when Ilha Grande's infamous penitentiary was destroyed and tourism on the island started in earnest. Over the years, a veritable thicket of pousadas (guesthouses), restaurants and bars has popped up, but this palm-studded beachfront town, with its tidy orange church, is still incredibly picturesque, and remains small by mainland Brazilian 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 docks 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.

Sights & Activities

The outdoor adventure options on Ilha Grande are endless. Posted around town are maps showing 16 different signposted trails leading through the lush forest to several of the island's 102 beaches. When visiting some beaches, it's possible to hike one way and take a boat the other.

Before hitting the trail, let people at your pousada know where you're going and when you'll be back, stock up on water and bug repellent, and bring a flashlight, as darkness comes swiftly under the jungle canopy.