



Rio de Janeiro State

POP 16 MILLION

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Best Places to Eat

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Best Places to Stay

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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 drive of Rio.

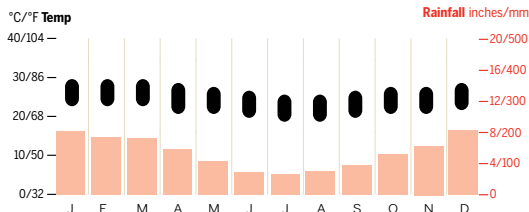
Inland you'll find Itatiaia, Brazil's oldest national park, and the spectacular Serra dos Órgãos, whose whimsically shaped peaks test the mettle of international climbers and form the backdrop for the former imperial city of Petrópolis.

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.

West lies the Costa Verde, a patchwork of bays, islands, waterfalls and forest-draped mountains. Highlights 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.

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

Dec–Feb Escape Rio's steamy heat in the mountain refuges of Petrópolis and Teresópolis.

History

The Tupí 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 gushing oil, a burgeoning tourist trade and traditional industries such as steel and to shipbuilding.

Getting There & Around

International and domestic flights fly into Rio de Janeiro's **Galeão** (☎ 021-3398-3034; Domestic Arrival Hall; ☀ 7am-11pm) and **Santos Dumont** airports, linking Rio state to cities throughout Brazil and the world. Rio's long-distance 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, and allows visitors to take time to appreciate the ever-changing panorama of bays, islands, peaks and waterfalls.

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.

Vila do Abraão, the island's biggest town, was itself 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 yellow 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. The most popular hike is the three-hour, 6.1km (each way) trek from Abraão to **Praia Lopes Mendes**. This seemingly endless beach with good surfing waves (shortboard/longboard rentals available on-site) is considered by some the most beautiful in Brazil. **Praia de Paranaíoca** also ranks up there, accessible via a 16km trail that passes through **Dois Rios**, a picturesque beach where two separate rivers flow into the open Atlantic. Dois Rios itself served as the site of the **Colônia Penal Cândido Mendes**, Ilha Grande's last functioning prison, which was used to hold political prisoners during the military regime that took power in 1964, and which was finally destroyed (literally blown up!) by order of the state government in 1994. The reconstructed prison ruins now house the small but interesting **Museu do Cárcere** (☎ 2334-0939; ecomuseu@uerj.br; ☀ 10am-4pm Tue-Sun)