

# BACKGROUND

## HISTORY

### THE PORTUGUESE ARRIVAL

In the 15th century Portugal, ever infatuated with the sea, began its large-scale explorations that would eventually take Portuguese explorers to the coast of Brazil in 1500. A little over a year later, Gonçalo Coelho sailed from Portugal and entered a huge bay in January 1502. It was his chief pilot, Amerigo Vespucci, however, who would give the name to this bay. Mistaking it for a river (or possibly making no mistake at all since the old Portuguese 'rio' is another word for bay), he dubbed it Rio de Janeiro (River of January).

Although the Portuguese were the first European *arrivistes*, the French would become the first non-natives to settle along the bay. Like the Portuguese, the French had been harvesting dyewood along the Brazilian coast, but unlike the Portuguese they hadn't attempted any permanent settlements in this region until Rio. Regardless, the Portuguese were far from being the first to set foot on the tropical shoreline, as the land had already been inhabited for at least 10,000 years.

### OF NOBLE SAVAGES & SAVAGE NOBLES

Some believe that the Guanabara *índios* (Indians; indigenous people), the Tupinambá (better known as the Tupi), inspired works such as Sir Thomas Moore's *Utopia* (1516) and would later inspire Rousseau's Enlightenment-era idea of the 'noble savage'. This all started from the letters credited to Amerigo Vespucci on his first voyage to Rio in 1502. The idea common at the time was that there existed on earth an Eden, and that it lay undiscovered. Vespucci claimed to have found that Eden, from his cursory observations of the Tupi. They were described as innocent savages, carefree and well groomed, with the unusual custom of taking daily baths in the sea. The fact that native women were freely offered to the strange foreigners probably added to the enthusiasm with which they spoke about the region upon their return to Portugal.

In fact, the honeymoon didn't last long. The conquerors soon came to see the forest-dwelling *índios* as raw manpower for the Portuguese empire, and enslaved them and set them to work on plantations. The *índios*, too, turned out to be different than the Europeans imagined. The Tupinambá were warlike and ate their enemies – through ritualistic cannibalism they believed they would receive the power and strength of the consumed opponent. They also didn't take to the work as the Portuguese had expected, and were dying off in large numbers from introduced diseases. By the 17th century the Tupinambá had been completely eradicated. To fulfill their growing labor demands, the Portuguese eventually turned to Africa.

### AFRICANS IN BRAZIL

The Portuguese began bringing blacks, stolen from Africa, into the new colony shortly after Brazil's founding. Most blacks were brought from Guinea, Angola and the Congo and would

## TIMELINE

8000 BC

Ancestors of Tupinambá settle along Baía de Guanabara; they are descendents of hunter-gatherers who crossed the Bering Strait from East Asia sometime between 10,000 BC and 12,000 BC.

AD 1502

Portuguese explorer Gonçalo Coelho leads an expedition from Portugal, sailing into Baía de Guanabara after an eight-month voyage. His chief pilot, Amerigo Vespucci (after whom 'America' is named), dubbed the lovely setting Rio de Janeiro.

1567

After successfully driving the French and their Indian allies off the land, the Portuguese set up the first settlement on Morro do Castelo. It's called São Sebastião do Rio de Janeiro (after Portuguese king São Sebastião).

# top picks

## HISTORICAL SITES

- **Paço Imperial (p92)** The former imperial palace was home to the royal family when they arrived from Portugal.
- **Praça Quinze de Novembro (p92)** Named after the date Brazil declared itself a republic (November 15, 1822), this plaza has witnessed a lot of historical action, including the crowning of two emperors and the abolition of slavery.
- **Travessa do Comércio (p94)** This narrow alley is a window into colonial Rio, with 18th-century buildings converted into bars and restaurants.
- **Museu Histórico Nacional (p89)** Set in the 18th-century royal arsenal, this museum houses Rio's best assortment of historical artifacts.
- **Jardim Botânico (p70)** Prince Regent Dom João VI insured the city would have no shortage of green spaces, and ordered this verdant garden planted in 1808.
- **Museu da República (p87)** Formerly known as the Palácio do Catete, this mansion was Brazil's presidential home from 1896 to 1954. Getúlio Vargas was the last president to live here, and committed suicide in one of the upstairs rooms.
- **Praça Floriano (p95)** Centro's picturesque main square has long been the meeting ground for popular demonstrations, including student uprisings against the military dictatorship in the 1960s and victory celebrations following World Cup finals.
- **Garota de Ipanema (p131)** Famed spot where Tom Jobim and Vinícius de Moraes penned the 'Girl from Ipanema', whose international success was a major moment in the history of bossa nova.

Rio's nearest *quilombo* in the 19th century was in Leblon – then quite distant from the city. Unlike other *quilombos*, it was headed by a white, progressive businessman who was in favor of slave abolition. Luggage manufacturer Jose de Seixas Magalhães kept farmland in Leblon, which was staffed entirely by runaway slaves, whom he hid and protected in his Leblon man-

constitute some four million souls brought to Brazil over its three-and-a-half centuries of human trafficking. The port of Rio had the largest number of slaves entering the colony – as many as two million in all. At open-air slave markets these new immigrants were sold as local help or shipped to the interior, initially to work on the thriving sugar plantations, and later – when gold was discovered in Minas Gerais in 1704 – to work back-breaking jobs in the mines.

Although slavery was rotten anywhere in the New World, most historians agree that the Africans in Rio had it better than their rural brethren. Those that came to Rio worked in domestic roles as maids and butlers and out on the streets as dock workers, furniture movers, delivery boys, boatmen, cobblers, fishermen and carpenters. The worst job was transporting the barrels of human excrement produced in town and emptying them into the sea.

As Rio's population grew, so too did the number of slaves imported to meet the labor needs of the expanding coffee plantations in the Paraíba Valley. By the early 19th century African slaves made up two-thirds of Rio's population.

Lots of illicit liaisons occurred between master and slave, and children born into mixed backgrounds were largely accepted into the social sphere and raised as free citizens. This contributed considerably to creating Brazil's melting pot. While escape attempts were fewer in Rio than in the more brutal climate of the northeast, there were attempts. Those seeking freedom often set their sights on *quilombos* (communities of runaway slaves). Some were quite developed – as was the case with Palmares, which had a population of 20,000 and survived through much of the 17th century before it was wiped out by Federal troops.

1580

The Portuguese bring 2000 slaves to the new colony. Over the next 300 years, more than four million blacks stolen from Africa will be relocated to Brazil.

1763

With gold flowing from the mines of Minas Gerais through Rio, the city grows wealthy and swells in population to 50,000; the Portuguese court transfers the capital of Brazil from Salvador to Rio.

1807

Napoleon invades Portugal and the Portuguese prince regent (later known as Dom João VI) and his entire court of 15,000 flee for Brazil. The royal coffers shower wealth upon Rio.