

# INTRODUCING RIO DE JANEIRO



*Pão de Açúcar (Sugarloaf; p79) is one of Rio's dazzling icons*

JOHN PENNOCK

Rio de Janeiro stretches between beach and mountain, with colonial neighborhoods, modernist style and that addictive sound that ties it all together: samba. Welcome to the *Cidade Maravilhosa* (marvelous city).

Once the adopted home of the Portuguese crown, Rio has long entranced visitors. Magnificent festivals such as Carnaval and Reveillon (New Year's Eve) are renowned, but the city has plenty of other occasions for revelry – weekend samba parties in Lapa, celebrations at a Flamengo football match, and impromptu music jams at sidewalk cafés in Leblon, Centro or any other corner of town.

Music is the lifeblood of Rio, with a soundtrack that begins with samba and encompasses old-school bossa nova, hip-hop, funk and Brazil's many regional styles. Catch the beat at open-air bars, old-fashioned dance halls or hypermodern nightclubs and lounges.

The setting is another reason why visitors fall hard for Rio. Rain forest still covers large swaths of the metropolitan area, while the city's dramatic mountains and white-sand beaches weave together one of the world's most striking urban landscapes. On sunny days, Cariocas (residents of Rio) head outdoors to cycle the shoreline, surf the waves, sail on Baía de Guanabara, hike the forests of Tijuca or rock-climb the face of Pão de Açúcar.

The Rio experience is about many things, from watching the sunset over Arpoador to dancing to live samba at an antique-filled bar in Centro. It's people-watching in Ipanema, seafood feasts overlooking Lagoa, and coming face-to-face with that spirit of spontaneity and joy seemingly found around every corner of this dynamic tropical city.

## RIO DE JANEIRO LIFE

Life happens out-of-doors in Rio. Drawn outside by sunshine (and cramped apartments), Cariocas find love, conflict and all the other varieties of human experience on the streets and beaches of town. Its big festivals are almost entirely outdoor events, while an afternoon at the beach, followed by a night of open-air eating, drinking and merry-making, are the preferred ways to spend a day.

Not surprisingly, gossip travels fast in this community. At cafés and juice bars, Cariocas swap the latest rumors. Political scandals often hog the headlines. Like many other countries, the media leans toward sensationalism, and splashy stories get much play. Celebrities tend to come crashing into the headlines. Hot topics here are who's cheating on whom, which Hollywood playboy was frolicking with you-know-who on Ipanema Beach and which Brazilian actress is doing nude magazine spreads this week. Occasionally, international stars – who tend to appear in small flocks during Carnaval – also become part of the talk of the town.

Crime, poverty and the gulf between rich and poor are other subjects that, if not mentioned, usually lurk in the subtext of news stories. Rio is a city divided into haves and have-nots. At one end are the million-odd Cariocas living at or below the poverty line, many in favelas (shanty towns), while at the other extreme are the rich living in luxury high-rises, with a maid and driver. The dividing line is often little more than a highway. While the chasm is wide, positive changes are underway. According to a report by the UN, more than 10 million Brazilians have risen above the poverty line since 2000. During the last decade, Rio (along with the federal government) has invested millions in infrastructure projects in the favelas, in attempts to raise living standards. The ongoing favela 'pacification' program has also made a handful of well-known favelas safer than they've been in years – decision-making and the future of the community belongs to local residents not to the drug lords who once called all the shots.

Whether they're rich or poor, there are some important ways in which the city comes together. The hundreds of roving Carnaval block parties often draw a diverse mix of folks who share nothing but the love of a wild celebration. The beaches of Rio, free and open to all, also host a democratic mix. Surfers, kids from the favelas, models, pensioners, hippies, yuppies, straights, gays, the slender and portly all share Ipanema Beach as the sun shines on the *Cidade Maravilhosa*.

RICARDO GOMES



*Dancing in the streets at Carnaval (p50)*

# THE AUTHOR

## Regis St Louis



Regis' longtime admiration for the *Cidade Maravilhosa* (marvelous city) has led to his deep involvement with the country, both as a traveler and as a writer. The city's vibrant music scene, its colorful *botecos* (neighborhood bars) and samba clubs, and the alluring energy of the Cariocas (residents of Rio) are just a few of the reasons why he's returned so often over the past 10 years. Regis speaks both Portuguese and Spanish, and his articles on Brazil and Latin America have appeared in the *Chicago Tribune*, the *LA Times* and the *San Francisco Chronicle*, among other publications. He is also the coordinating author of Lonely Planet's *Brazil* guide and *South America on a Shoestring*. He splits his time between New York City and the tropics.

### REGIS' TOP RIO DAY

Since this is my ideal day, the sun is shining when I rise and it's still early as I step outside. I decide to go for a long stroll along Copacabana beach, pausing for *agua de coco* (coconut water) at one of the sparkling new kiosks

(p137) along the sands. Afterwards, I grab an *açaí* – the world's most delicious (non-alcoholic) beverage – at the nearest juice bar, take a look at *O Globo* newspaper and contemplate the day ahead. As there's an exhibition I'm eager to see at the Centro Cultural Banco do Brasil (p89), I decide to take the metro up to Centro. Afterwards, I'll grab a coffee and a snack at Brasserie Rosário (p144), and have a browse at the books and music before strolling over to the bay-fronting Restaurante Albamar (p143) for some fresh seafood. Over lunch, I'll take a look at my walking tour of Centro (p95) and see if I can find some new places to add. Happily fed, I take a stroll west through the pedestrian streets, stopping at shops and taking in the street scene before ultimately making my way to the music vendors who make up the small open-air Feira de Música (p112) on Rua Pedro Lessa. I'll buy a few albums then catch the *bonde* (tram) up to Santa Teresa. There I'll stop in on a few friends, grab an afternoon drink at Cafecito (p147) or at the Bar dos Descasados (p157) and make plans for the evening. If I'm lucky, a friend will call and invite me to the opening of a new samba club in Lapa; otherwise, I'll consider my options and go either to Semente (p164) if today is a Monday, Democráticos (p163) if it's Thursday or Beco do Rato (p161) if it's Friday. Afterwards, I'll taxi down to Ipanema for a final drink at Devassa (p151).

## LONELY PLANET AUTHORS

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# GETTING STARTED

Before dashing off to Brazil, find out whether you need a visa. Many nationalities require them, including citizens from the US, Canada and Australia. See [p228](#) for more details.

If you plan to visit during the high season, it's wise to book accommodations at least two or three months in advance. For Carnaval or Reveillon (New Year's Eve), it's never too early to start planning, with some hotels filling up six months in advance.

Aside from accommodations, Rio is an easygoing place, and you can reserve most other things (tours, outdoor activities, tables at top restaurants) after your arrival.

Money is, of course, the other major consideration – and no small one, given the ongoing surge of the Brazilian *real* in recent years. In general, prices for most things are about the same as in cities in North America and Western Europe, with ample options for both budget travelers and visitors on generous expense accounts.

## WHEN TO GO

There is never really a bad time to visit Rio, but whether you want to party like a rock star or escape the masses may help in deciding when to go. Rio's high season coincides with the Brazilian summer, running from December to March. This is when the country fills with both foreign visitors and vacationing Brazilian families. Hotel-room prices are about 30% higher at this time and you'll face more crowds, though this is also the most festive time in Rio. The low season runs from May to September; if you're looking to beat the crowds and don't mind cooler weather, this is a fine time to visit.

If you plan any side trips, be mindful that Búzios, Paraty, Ilha Grande and other nearby destinations get packed on summer weekends. You'll have more luck going mid-week.

Rio lies just inside the tropics, with rainfall and humidity playing no small part in the city's seasons. Though it rains all year, in winter, blue skies and mild weather are the norm.

Summer days are warm to hot (see [p220](#)), and sometimes the humidity can be downright stifling – though nights often bring a welcome respite from the heat (and gentle

ocean breezes near the coast). Summer is also the rainiest time of year and powerful showers that erupt and pass within a few hours are not uncommon (it's always worth keeping a rain jacket in your bag).

## FESTIVALS

Rio's Carnaval (February/March) is deservedly popular, but that's not the end of the celebrating. Reveillon (New Year's Eve) is another citywide celebration, when Cariocas (residents of Rio) and visitors pack Copacabana beach. Other *festas* (parties) occur throughout the year. For the dates of Rio's many public holidays, see [p222](#).

## January & February

### DIA DE SÃO SEBASTIÃO

Jan 20

The patron saint of Rio is commemorated with a procession that carries the image of São Sebastião from Igreja (church) de São Sebastião dos Capuchinos in Tijuca to the [Catedral Metropolitana](#) ([p100](#)), where the image is blessed in a Mass celebrated by the Archbishop of Rio de Janeiro.

## ADVANCE PLANNING

In addition to organizing your visa (if you need one) and booking accommodations, there are a few things you might look into before flying to Rio.

The best guides (see [p225](#)) are often booked up well in advance, so get in touch early if there's something particular you want to do (such as scuba diving or rock-climbing up the face of Pão de Açúcar, [p177](#)). If you plan on tandem gliding, get in touch with a pilot ([p179](#)) and find out which day might be best for flying.

Check whether there will be any football (soccer) games on while you're in town (get the lowdown with [www.sambafoot.com](#)), and browse through listings on [Riotur](#) ([www.rioguaioficial.com.br/en](#)) to read about upcoming concerts and special events. Catch up on the latest news stories and political gossip with the *Rio Times* ([www.riotimesonline.com](#)).

## CARNAVAL

In February or March the city puts on its famous no-holds-barred party. For more information, see [p50](#).

## VERÃO DO MORRO

[www.veraodomorro.com.br](http://www.veraodomorro.com.br), in Portuguese  
In February or March, the Verão do Morro (summer on the mountain) party kicks off, with a month of weekend concerts in a fabulous setting above Rio. Top Brazilian bands and DJs headline the all-night fest. The event usually kicks off a week after Carnival. Tickets, available at the Pão de Açúcar cable-car station ([p79](#)), among other locations, cost around R\$90.

## March & April

### DIA DA FUNDAÇÃO DA CIDADE Mar 1

The city commemorates its founding in 1565 by Estácio de Sá with a Mass in the church of its patron saint, Igreja de São Sebastião dos Capuchinos.

### SEXTA-FEIRA DA PAIXÃO

In March or April (depending when Easter falls), Good Friday is celebrated throughout the city. The most important ceremony re-enacts the Stations of the Cross under the [Arcos da Lapa](#) ([p100](#)), with more than 100 actors.

### FESTIVAL INTERNACIONAL DE DOCUMENTÁRIOS

[www.etudoverdade.com.br](http://www.etudoverdade.com.br)  
Latin America's most important documentary film festival takes place over 10 days in March or April when more than 100 films from Brazil and abroad are screened at theaters in Rio and São Paulo.

### DIA DO ÍNDIO Apr 19

April 19 is recognized in Brazil as Indians' day, with a week of special events held at the [Museu do Índio](#) ([p78](#)). Exhibitions, dance and film presentations are staged daily.

### DIA DE SÃO JORGE Apr 23

Igreja de São Jorge, Rua da Alfândega 382, Centro  
On April 23 the city pays its respects to St George, an important figure in the Afro-Brazilian community. St George is the alter-ego of the god Ogum in the Candomblé religion (originating in Africa). There's a

Mass and procession, and food vendors abound.

## May & June

### RIO DAS OSTRAS JAZZ E BLUES FESTIVAL

[www.riodasostrasjazzblues.com](http://www.riodasostrasjazzblues.com)  
Located 170km east of Rio, on the way to Búzios, Rio das Ostras boasts lovely beaches and mangrove forests. In early June, it's the setting for one of Brazil's best jazz and blues fests, with five days of concerts on outdoor stages by international performers (John Hammond Quartet, Spyro Gyra, Coco Montoya and DJ Logic have played here in the past).

### FESTAS JUNINAS

Spanning the month of June, the feast days of various saints mark some of the most important folkloric festivals in Brazil. In Rio, celebrations are held in various public squares, with lots of food stands, music, fireworks and the occasional bonfire or two. The big feast days are June 13 (Dia de Santo Antônio), June 24 (São João) and June 29 (São Pedro). See [Riotur](#) ([p228](#)) for details.

### RIO MARATHON

[www.maratonadorio.com.br](http://www.maratonadorio.com.br)  
Set along the coast, with the ocean always at your side, this marathon course must be one of the most beautiful in the world. Rio hosts its annual 42km run in mid- to late June, when the weather is mild and the skies are clear and blue. There are also 6km and 21km runs.

## July & August

### PORTAS ABERTAS

[www.artedeportasabertas.com.br](http://www.artedeportasabertas.com.br), in Portuguese  
Artists in Santa Teresa open their studios for a week in July during this lively annual festival. Expect music, a diverse crowd and inventive installations that make good use of the atmospheric bohemian 'hood.

### FESTA DA SÃO PEDRO DO MAR Jul 3

The fishing fraternity pays homage to its patron saint in a maritime procession as decorated boats leave from the fishing community of Caju and sail to the statue of São Pedro in Urca.

## FESTA LITERÁRIA INTERNACIONAL DE PARATI

[www.flip.org.br](http://www.flip.org.br)

This important literary festival brings authors from around the world to Paraty for five days in July or August. Celebrated writers like JM Coetzee, Michael Ondaatje, Julian Barnes, Don DeLillo and Hanif Kureishi were among the featured guests in years past.

## FESTA DE NS DA GLÓRIA DO OUTEIRO

Aug 15

A solemn Mass is held at the historic church overlooking Glória and the bay to mark the Feast of the Assumption. From the church (ablaze with decorated lights), a procession travels out into the streets of Glória. This *feira* includes music and colorful stalls set up set up in front of the Igreja de NS da Glória do Outeiro (p88). Festivities start at 8am and continue all day.

## RIO JAZZ FESTIVAL

[www.jazzfestivalbrasil.com.br](http://www.jazzfestivalbrasil.com.br)

Although dates for this jazz festival vary (currently held in August), it's an opportunity for Rio's beautiful people to come together for three nights of great music. Local, national and international acts present a wide variety of music, playing jazz and its many relatives – samba-jazz, bossa nova, samba and Música Popular Brasileira (MPB).

## September & October

### SAMBA SCHOOL REHEARSALS

In September (though some start as early as July or August), samba schools begin hosting open gatherings once a week (usually on Friday or Saturday night). In spite of the name, these are less a dress rehearsal than just an excuse to dance (to samba, of course), celebrate and pass on the good vibe before the big show come Carnival time. Anyone can come, and it's a mixed crowd of Cariocas and tourists, though it gets more and more crowded (and the admission prices rise) the closer it is to Carnival. For more information on attending the open rehearsals, see p163.

## DIA DE INDEPENDÊNCIA DO BRASIL

Sep 7

Independence Day is celebrated with a large military parade down Av Presidente

Vargas. It starts at 8am at Candelária (p89) and goes down just past Praça XI.

## FESTIVAL DO RIO

[www.festivaldoriorio.com.br](http://www.festivaldoriorio.com.br)

Rio's international film festival is one of the biggest in Latin America. More than 200 films from all over the world are shown at some 35 theaters in Rio. Often the festival holds open-air screenings at locations around town. It runs from the last week of September through the first week of October.

## FESTA DA PENHA

One of the largest (and most popular) religious festivals in the city takes place every Sunday in October and on the first Sunday in November. The *feira* draws thousands of pilgrims who somberly ascend the 365 steps to the dramatically set church. In the plaza below, food and drink stalls and live music create a festive environment. The lively celebrations commence in the northern suburb of Penha at Igreja NS da Penha de França, Largo da Penha 19.

## GAY PRIDE RIO

[www.gaypridebrasil.org](http://www.gaypridebrasil.org)

Although not as large as São Paulo's massive parade, the Rio gay pride event gets bigger each year, with over a million people turning out in recent years. It usually takes place in October or November.

## November & December

### FESTIVAL PANORAMA DE DANÇA

[www.panoramafestival.com](http://www.panoramafestival.com)

Spanning two weeks in November, the Festival Panorama showcases the work of dozens of contemporary dance groups from across the globe, bringing together a mix of experimental troupes as well as traditional performers.

### NOITES CARIOCAS

[www.noitescariocas.com.br](http://www.noitescariocas.com.br), in Portuguese

The biggest summer concert series in Rio runs for two weeks in January or February, with all-night rock and MPB concerts held on weekend nights at Pier Mauá, just north of Centro. Previous years have seen performances by Brazil's biggest stars – Jorge Ben Jor, Lulu Santos, Elza Soares and others.

## LIGHTING OF THE LAGOA CHRISTMAS TREE

From early December to the first week of January, the world's largest floating Christmas tree (85m) glows brightly on [Lagoa de Rodrigo de Freitas](#) (p71). To celebrate its lighting, the city throws a concert in Parque Brigadeiro Faria Lima, usually on the first Saturday in December.

### FESTA DE IEMANJÁ Dec 31

Dwarfed by secular New Year's Eve celebrations, this Candomblé (a religion originating from Africa) festival celebrates the feast day of Iemanjá, the goddess of the sea. Celebrants dress in white and place their petitions on small boats, sending them out to sea. If their petitions return, their prayers will not be answered. Along with the petitions, celebrants send candles, perfumes and talcum powder to appease the blue-cloaked *orixá* (spirits or deities). Until recently, devotees gathered in Copacabana, Ipanema and Leblon but, owing to the popularity of Reveillon, and its chaotic spillover, they are seeking more tranquil spots – Barra da Tijuca and Recreio dos Bandeirantes – to make their offerings.

### REVEILLON Dec 31

Rio's biggest holiday after its spectacular and rowdy Carnaval takes place on the famed Copacabana Beach, where some two million people pack the sands to welcome the new year. A spectacular fireworks display lights up the night sky as top bands perform on stages built on the sands. The hardest of revelers keep things going all night long, then watch the sunrise the next morning.

## COSTS & MONEY

Rio is less expensive than some cities in Western Europe and North America, but Brazil's booming economy and strong *real* mean that it isn't the bargain it once was. Still, it is possible to enjoy the city without breaking the bank.

Ascetics could get by on about R\$60 a day, staying in cheaper hostels, preparing their own meals and avoiding pricey nights out. Midrange travelers should budget around R\$300 a day if traveling solo or R\$200 each for a couple – which will cover decent lodging near (but not directly facing) the beach and a good assort-

## HOW MUCH?

- 1L of gas R\$2.25
- 1L of bottled water R\$1.50
- Glass of *chope* (draft beer) R\$4
- Souvenir T-shirt R\$20 to R\$60
- Água de coco (coconut water) on the beach R\$3
- Metro ticket R\$2.80
- Pair of Havaianas R\$18 to R\$46
- Admission to samba club R\$10 to R\$25
- Dinner for two at *Sobrenatural* R\$120
- Cable-car ride to the top of Pão de Açúcar R\$44

ment of restaurant and bar expenses, plus a few day tours and adventure outings. High-end travelers will spend upwards of R\$500 each per day, which will cover hotel rooms with ocean views, Rio's best restaurants, and drinks at top music halls and dance clubs.

Accommodations will probably be your biggest expense. The cheapest rooms in town can go for as little as R\$29 per night for a bed in a hostel outside the Zona Sul (hostels in Ipanema, however, typically charge R\$45 or \$50 a night). A clean, fairly decent double room in Copacabana goes for about R\$250 and up. In Ipanema, good rooms start around R\$330. If you have money to burn, Rio's top hotel rooms will set you back a cool R\$750 or more.

Restaurants cater to an equally broad range of budgets. At the low end are inexpensive per-kilo restaurants and cheap set lunches, which can fill a person up for R\$20. If you're not scraping by, you can enjoy a good selection of local places with mains averaging R\$25 to R\$35, or enjoy a dinner for two for R\$80 to R\$120. Dinner at Rio's most expensive places will cost R\$200 or so, including a few drinks. Keep in mind that many restaurants list their menu prices for two. If you're not sharing, be sure to clarify before ordering (and you can usually order a *meia porção*, or half portion).

Getting around town is fairly inexpensive, with cheap bus and metro tickets (R\$2.80 one way), while taxi rides will run to a bit more (R\$25 to zip up to Lapa from Ipanema). Renting a car is expensive (starting at R\$100), with high petrol prices to match, and it's not worth recommending unless you plan to do a lot of exploring outside of the main towns.

Brazil is not the cheapest destination for solo travelers. The cost of a single room in a hotel is not much less than for a double.

## TRAVELING RESPONSIBLY

Since our inception in 1973, Lonely Planet has encouraged our readers to tread lightly, travel responsibly and enjoy the serendipitous magic independent travel affords. We still firmly believe in the benefits that international travel can bring – but, as always, we encourage you to consider the impact your visit will have on both the global environment and the local economies, cultures and ecosystems.

With the increasing use of ‘eco’ splashed about, it can be hard to separate the green from the greedy. With a little research and a bit of adventure your trip can have a positive impact.

### Accommodations & Food

Stay clear of chain hotels and all-inclusive resorts. These places are often owned by foreign investors who take all profit out of the country. You’re much better off staying in family-run *pousadas* (guesthouses), where your money will remain in the hands of the local people.

With food, Brazil requires some tough choices. Although Brazilian beef is top notch, the explosion of cattle farming continues to fuel the Amazon’s destruction, with old-growth forests cleared to make way for pastures. A growing number of restaurants serve organic and vegetarian fare. Avoid major fast-food chains, as these have played a significant role in fueling the country’s deforestation.

### Responsible Travel Organizations

Brazil has no certification system to identify the ‘green-ness’ of accommodations and tour operators. However, various organizations are working to establish sustainable-travel criteria, and the situation may change. Environmentally responsible organizations in Brazil include the following:

- **Rainforest Alliance** ([www.rainforestalliance.org](http://www.rainforestalliance.org))
- **ResponsibleTravel.com** ([www.responsibletravel.com](http://www.responsibletravel.com))
- **Sustainable Travel International** ([www.sustainabletravelinternational.org](http://www.sustainabletravelinternational.org))

You can also take an organized tour based on sustainable itineraries, including those that visit favelas or involve hiking (p225), or you can volunteer your time (p229).

During the December-to-February holiday season, lodging costs are higher than at other times of the year (and sometimes more in places such as Búzios and other popular resorts). You’ll pay a premium if you come during Carnival or Reveillon, with the price of accommodations doubling or even tripling – with the added requirement of four-night minimum stays.

## INTERNET RESOURCES

**Brazil** ([www.brazil.com](http://www.brazil.com)) In-depth articles touching on Brazilian politics, economy, literature, arts and culture.

**Carioca Forever** ([www.cariocaforever.com](http://www.cariocaforever.com)) Articles written by English-speaking expats living in Brazil, with info on cultural events, life in Rio and language-learning tips.

**Gringoes** ([www.gringoes.com](http://www.gringoes.com)) Articles written by Anglo-phones living in Brazil.

**Hip Guide to Brazil** ([www.brazilmax.com](http://www.brazilmax.com)) Excellent guide to Brazilian culture and society; good, selective articles and links.

**Insider’s Guide to Rio** ([www.ipanema.com](http://www.ipanema.com)) One of the best internet introductions to Rio, this guide has up-to-

date tips on hotels, restaurants, nightlife and shopping, with special sections on Carnival and Rio for gays.

**Lana Lapa** ([www.lanalapa.com.br](http://www.lanalapa.com.br), in Portuguese) Up-to-date listings of live concerts and other events in Lapa, plus a rundown of restaurants and bars in the area.

**Lonely Planet** ([www.lonelyplanet.com](http://www.lonelyplanet.com)) For summaries on Brazil travel, the popular Thorn Tree forum, online accommodations booking and links to a variety of other web resources.

**Maria-Brazil** ([www.maria-brazil.org](http://www.maria-brazil.org)) An expat’s recommendations of favorite dining, drinking, shopping and sightseeing in Rio, plus extensive recipes and links to blogs by other expats.

**Rio This Week** ([www.riothisweek.com](http://www.riothisweek.com)) Flashy photos and listings of what’s on around town, plus restaurant recommendations and other tips. You can download a colorful PDF of the current guide.

**Riotur** ([www.rioguiaoficial.com.br](http://www.rioguiaoficial.com.br)) Rio’s tourist information agency has a current website of what’s on around town, as well as comprehensive listings of museums, restaurants and other info.

**Rio Times** ([www.riotimesonline.com](http://www.riotimesonline.com)) This new online weekly is an excellent English-language resource for news and current events in Rio and around Brazil.

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