

# Understand Rio de Janeiro

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Great changes are sweeping across Rio, with its revitalized waterfront and expanded metro, though crime, pollution and other problems remain.

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Portuguese royals, authoritarian demagogues, repressive military dictatorships and socially minded visionaries have all played a role in Rio's complicated past.

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Rio's greatest hits feature bossa nova, *tropicália*, Música Popular Brasileira (MPB), hip-hop and, above all, samba.

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From baroque churches to postmodern concert halls, Rio has some surprising architectural treasures.

# Rio de Janeiro Today

It's a pivotal moment for Rio de Janeiro. With major public works happening all across the city, Mayor Eduardo Paes is betting big. His wager: that a wealth of private and public investment showered on the city will pay off, much as it did for Barcelona after its Olympic Games. *Cariocas* (residents of Rio), meanwhile, are hopeful about the city's urban renaissance, while also leery of the rising crime, pollution and the ongoing recession that could herald darker days ahead.

## Best on Film

**Cidade de Deus** (City of God; director Fernando Meirelles, 2002) Oscar-nominated film showing coexistence of brutality and hope in a Rio favela.

**Orfeu Negro** (Black Orpheus; director Marcel Camus, 1959) The Orpheus-Eurydice myth set during Rio's Carnaval with a groundbreaking bossa nova soundtrack.

**Central do Brasil** (Central Station; director Walter Salles, 1998) Epic journey through unglamorized Brazil, set in Rio and the Northeast.

**Madame Satã** (director Karim Ainouz, 2002) Compelling portrait of Rio's gritty Lapa district during the 1930s.

## Best in Print

**Dancing With the Devil in the City of God** (Juliana Barbassa, 2015) Portrait of the great changes happening now, plus a look at Rio's complex social challenges.

**Rio de Janeiro Reader** (Daryle Williams et al, 2015) Covers 450 years of history, culture and politics.

**Brazil on the Rise** (Larry Rohter, 2010) A journey through the culture, history and economic transformation of Brazil.

**Bossa Nova** (Ruy Castro, 2000) A fascinating look at the poets, composers and musicians behind the music.

## A Revitalized Waterfront

After winning the right to host the 2014 World Cup and the 2016 Summer Olympics, Rio got straight to work. Back in 2009, the city unveiled Porto Maravilha (Marvelous Port), an ambitious project that aimed to revitalize an astounding 5 million sq meters of the city's derelict waterfront near downtown, with new museums, green spaces, office buildings and residences.

After more than US\$1.7 billion of investment and seven years of construction, the project is nearing completion. For locals who haven't visited in a while, it will be a downtown transformed. The unsightly elevated highway that once marred the skyline has been torn down and replaced by tunnels, with new parks laid over the top. A new high-tech light rail will travel along 26km of rails through downtown, looping past the striking Praça Mauá, with its two grand museums – including a cutting-edge science museum designed by celebrated Spanish architect Santiago Calatrava.

Nearby stands the AquaRio, the largest aquarium in South America. Public and private investment has been pouring in. Even Donald Trump has gotten in on the action, opening five 38-story-high towers near the waterfront. Picturesque colonial-era buildings, forgotten for years beneath a layer of grime, are being restored, while new bike lanes (17km in all) and waterfront walking paths will connect it with other parts of downtown.

## The Downtown Renaissance

Although the port is the focal point, other parts of downtown are also being restored, including the Praça Tiradentes, a historic part of downtown whose nearby streets had long since been abandoned to urban blight. A new five-star hotel (Le Paris) will open here, in what was once an infamous brothel. Further east, Morro da