Centro & Cinelândia

Neighborhood Top Five

1. Peering back through hundreds of years of Brazilian history at the interactive Museu Histórico Nacional (p119), one of Rio’s best museums.
2. Taking in the fascinating exhibitions at the Centro Cultural Banco do Brasil (p120).
3. Getting an eyeful of ornate, gilded splendor of the magnificent 17th-century Mosteiro de São Bento (p121).
4. Watching a show inside the beautifully restored Teatro Municipal (p120).
5. Sipping coffee and munching on pastries inside the decadent Confeitaria Colombo (p127).

For more detail of this area see Map p246
Lonely Planet’s Top Tip

Centro provides good value for money. There are lots of good museums in the area that have free admission, and stiff competition helps keep lunch prices down – particularly at the many decent pay-by-weight restaurants. For an inexpensive cruise on the bay, hop on the ferry to Niterói.

Best Places to Eat

- Cais do Oriente (p129)
- AlbaMar (p129)
- Brasserie Rosário (p128)
- Rancho Inn (p128)
- Govinda (p128)

For reviews, see p127

Best Places to Drink

- Bar Luiz (p128)
- Adega Timão (p130)
- Boteco Casual (p130)
- Amarelinho (p130)

For reviews, see p129

Best Historic Sites

- Igreja São Francisco da Penitência & Convento de Santo Antônio (p120)
- Ilha Fiscal (p127)
- Mosteiro de São Bento (p121)
- Igreja de Nossa Senhora do Carmo da Antiga Sé (p120)
- Paço Imperial (p121)

For reviews, see p120

Explore Centro & Cinelândia

Rio’s business and financial hub is a wild architectural medley of old and new, with striking baroque churches and narrow colonial streets juxtaposed with looming office towers and wide, traffic-filled boulevards. During the week, it’s all fuss and hurry as Rio’s lawyers, secretaries and clerks jostle among the crowded streets. But despite the pace, it’s well worth joining the fray as Centro has some of the city’s best museums and its most intriguing historical sights, with avant-garde art galleries, 18th-century cathedrals and sprawling royal collections in former imperial buildings.

Many pedestrian-only areas crisscross Centro, and for the urban wanderer, there’s no better destination in Rio. The most famous sub-district is known as Saara, a giant street bazaar crammed with discount stores and sprinkled with Lebanese restaurants.

Speaking of eating, Centro’s restaurants suit every taste and budget, from greasy diners to elegant French bistros, with excellent per-kilo spots, art-nouveau cafes and old-fashioned pubs. After lunch, cariocas (residents of Rio) browse the bookstores, music shops, galleries and curio shops. By workday’s end, the bars and streetside cafes buzz with life as cariocas unwind over ice-cold chope (draft beer).

At the southern edge of the business district, Cinelândia’s shops, bars, restaurants and movie theaters are popular day and night. The bars and restaurants get crowded at lunch and after work, when street musicians sometimes wander the area. There’s a greater mix of cariocas here than in any other section of the city.

Local Life

- Arts Several key concert halls are in the area, including Theatro Municipal (p120), Teatro Carlos Gomes (p131) and Teatro Rival Petrobras (p131).
- Hangouts The open-air bars along Travessa do Comercio and nearby streets draw festive after-work crowds.
- Shopping Strips The narrow, pedestrian-packed streets of Saara are intriguing for browsing.

Getting There & Away

- Bus From the Zona Sul look for the following destinations printed in the window: ‘Rio Branco,’ ‘Praça XV’ and ‘Praça Tiradentes’.
- Metro Cinelândia, Carioca, Uruguaiana, Presidente Vargas.