



AllWays Traveller

Rio de Janeiro, Brazil

www.allwaystraveller.com

Unforgettable – that's what Rio is!

Rio de Janeiro is Brazil's second largest city, sitting on the Atlantic Ocean in the South East.

It is surrounded by the Tijuca Forest and has a stunning natural landscape of mountains, forest and beaches.

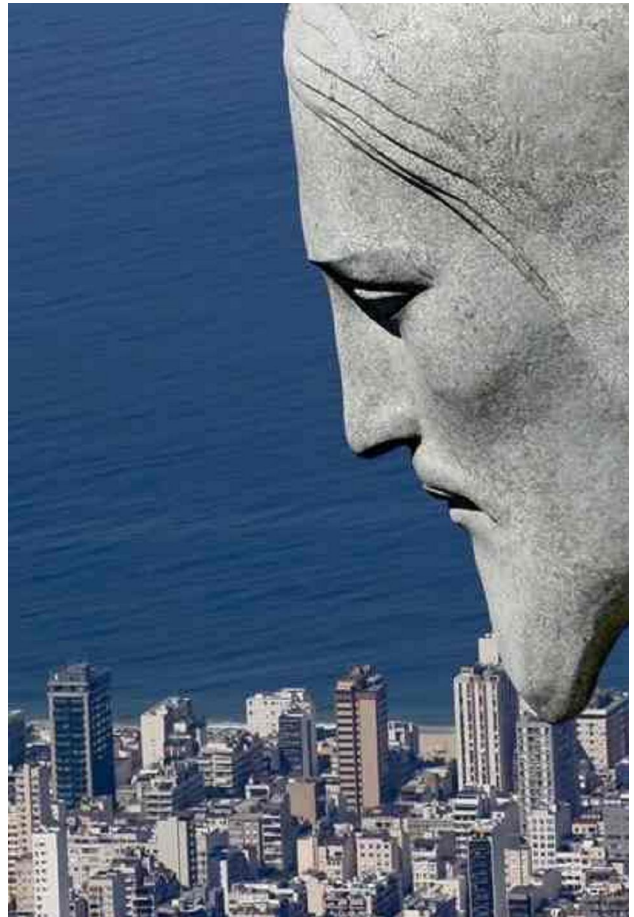
High rise buildings and colourful favelas are just as memorably inter-woven into the urban landscape of this large city.

Rio is one of the most important and influential cities in South America and makes for a fascinating visit.

Rio is busy all year round but during the Summer months (December to March) it fills up even more with barely space to lay your towel on the beaches.

Ashley Gibbins

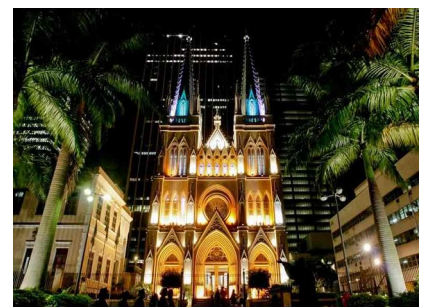
The International Travel Writers Alliance
www.itwalliance.com



When to go to Rio

Carnival in February is, of course, one of the biggest attractions for visitors and accommodation is booked months in advance so be sure to plan ahead.

To escape the crowds but still enjoy the sun visit during the slightly cooler and quieter months of Autumn (March to June) and Spring (September to December).



A city of faded fame?

by Amanda Barnes



I didn't expect to hear Frank Sinatra in Rio de Janeiro, but there he was.

"Unforgettable that's what you are... Unforgettable though near or far..." Frank's soothing voice seeped through the stocky taxi driver's CD player as we jerked our way through heavy traffic past a soggy and overcast Copacabana beach towards a dreary high-rise Centro.

"I hope you don't mind the music," Joao leant over and asked modestly in his thick Brazilian-laced Portuguese, "it relaxes me."

A city of contrasts



By all means if Frank relaxes someone on Rio's roads I hope they make it compulsory in all vehicles. Rio de Janeiro, as the over-used cliché goes, is a city of contrasts.

The poverty of the hillside favelas overlooks wealth in the city centre.

Suited and booted businessmen sit high above haggard workers in hand-me-down clothes who polish their leather shoes as bronzed and honed young Cariocas saunter by in skimpy swimwear and designer sunglasses.

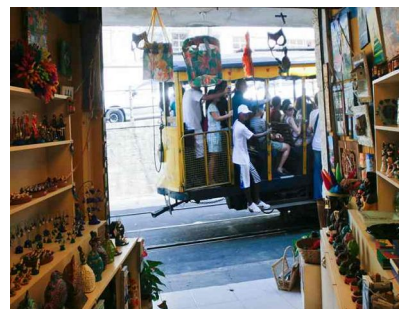
Rio

by Amanda Barnes

How to get there

Rio de Janeiro is served by international flights to Aeroporto Galeão (15km north of the city centre) and well connected by taxis and buses.

Rodoviária Novo Rio bus station (served by domestic and international companies) is 2km to the centre but is situated in a rather seedy area that may warrant a taxi ride.



Where to stay

The nicest areas to stay are up-market Ipanema and Leblon; touristy and busy Copacabana and Leme; and picturesque Urca.

Centro is a well-connected area to stay in however it is also very busy with no beach as respite. Catete is a cheap option but far from most attractions

How to get around

Rio de Janeiro's beautiful landscape of mountains, forests and beaches are stunning to look at but makes travelling around the city a bit of a challenge.

Buses

It is not easy (or safe) to walk between areas so buses are the cheapest way to travel in Rio and relatively easy to work out due to the city's grid system.

On late night buses sit near the front to avoid pick pocketing.

The more expensive minibuses offer a quicker, more comfortable option.

The metro

The metro is safe and fast although limited; it is currently being extended and a bus replacement service runs through the new routes.

Bumper to bumper

Cars sat bumper to bumper revving their engines impatiently waiting at the traffic light for a glimmer of green to signal that they could make a quick dart for any lingering or frail pedestrians still crossing the road.

Driving is competitive here and Brazilians work hard to maintain the country's position as the world's third highest road death rate.

With each player clearly working to their own theme tune, I was glad that mine chose Sinatra as it had a mildly calming effect on the chaos unfolding quickly past the car window.

"I like being a driver in Rio," explained Joao evidently reading my mind and anticipating the obvious question. "I once picked up Madonna," he proudly informed me, "although she was wearing a wig."

"Oh, wow," I feigned interest.

Beyond the postcard view



This is typical of Rio, a city of fading celebrity. Copacabana Beach is no longer what Barry Manilow sang about, the 'Girl from Ipanema' has sold out to become a chain restaurant, and even Madonna wears a wig here.

All Rio's old claims to fame are outdated and over-exercised.

However that is not to suggest that there is nothing left in the city worth spending some time over – it is just a case of looking beyond the postcard view of the city and approaching its old attractions from a new direction.

The words 'Rio de Janeiro' probably conjure up images of Sugarloaf Mountain and the omnipresent Christ statue.

They continue to be one of the main tourist attractions of Rio and are still worth the hype but why not hike them for a different perspective?

Urban hiking is becoming more popular in Rio with walkers taking advantage of its unique landscape.

The views at the top are spectacular but so is the wildlife on the way up where you can see small monkeys and even the odd toucan among the dense bamboo.

Corcovado (the mountain which elevates Christ the Redeemer) is a much longer and more challenging route but you can reach the first point of Sugarloaf (Urca Mountain) in under an hour and with little difficulty if you are fit.

For more information on other urban hikes around the city visit:

www.brazilmax.com/news1.cfm/tborigem/pl_southcentral/id/35.

Taxis

Taxis are one of the best ways to travel however catching one can be a nightmare in rush hour.

Driving would be a bonus if parking were not a problem.

Be advised that drivers only slow down at red traffic lights (to avoid armed hold-ups).

During the day perhaps opt for a bus and in the evening a taxi.

Top things to do in Rio de Janeiro

Christ the Redeemer



The most iconic image of Rio, perhaps of Brazil and possibly even of South America - it had to be up there didn't it?

Corcovado offers sweeping views over the city and region and will give you a bit of perspective on an otherwise geographically confusing city.

The statue, erected in 1931, has an imposing presence but it is the breathtaking views that make the trip worthwhile.

Rio is unique in its rich and diverse landscape with humped mountain peaks, elongated sandy beaches, a wide lagoon and islands dotted in the distance.

From on top of Corcovado you can take in the natural wealth of the landscape and also look at the varied architecture of the city from the high-rise homage to concrete.

Corcovado is best accessed by car.

You should also take the opportunity to stop at the other viewpoint signposted on the way up.

It can also be reached by train, taxi or a three hour hike.

Santa Teresa



Santa Teresa is another 'has been' area but is certainly coming back.

The once wealthy barrio has a rather dilapidated and run down feel to it, but the colourful houses are still some of the most attractive in Rio.

The bohemian neighbourhood gives an insight into what the city would have been like before the high-rise boom which dominate central Rio and have shaped much of the city's urban landscape.

Cobbled streets and colonial-style houses create the perfect setting on a Friday evening where you can usually catch some live music while sat at a bar or eating a Feijoada at one of the restaurants.

You can take a taxi or bus up to Santa Teresa or by the tram (bondinho), which has been running for over 150 years and is the only big city tram system remaining in South America.

Everyone crams into a bondinho as it slowly chugs up the steep and narrow lanes picking up locals who hang on to the sides along the way.

Another way is to walk up the steps from Lapa, an area which is worth a visit in its own right for its iconic architecture, most famously its arches.



However one of the most well known places in Lapa is the 'Esadaria de Selaron', the steps to Santa Teresa, which have been colourfully decorated in tiles from around the world by Chilean artist Jorge Selaron.

Selaron has been decorating these steps since 1990 and continues to do so today even at 63.

"It is a continual work of art," said Selaron who can often be found painting or tiling on the steps outside his house. "It is a tribute to Rio de Janeiro as a city. I will keep working on it until the day that I die – only then will it be complete."

www.selaron.net

Ipanema Beach



Rio is famous for its beaches, but forget Copacabana and head to Ipanema Beach instead.

Full of image-conscious Cariocas, 'Poste 9' is the place to be and is always heaving with people even if the beach further down in Leblon is practically deserted.

Although the sand is of good quality and the water is refreshing, most Cariocas don't come to the beach to swim or sunbathe but rather pose.



Similarly tourists will be more taken by soaking up the buzz and beach culture rather than the sunrays.

Rio must be the first city in the world to master the art of sandy silver service where beach vendors bring you everything from umbrellas and chairs, bikinis and sunscreen, to chilled coconuts, brewed mate tea, freshly cooked prawns and grilled cheese.

Sit back on the beach and enjoy a traditional Brazilian snack such as frozen acai with crunchy granola.

Lapa



Lapa is also an area that should be experienced during the evening for a real flavour of Rio's nightlife.

Artists, musicians and young people all head there at the weekends to drink on the streets, play music and dip in and out of Samba bars.

There is nothing quite like the thousands of people congregated under the faded arches, but the area should be treated with caution as crime increases at nightfall.

Another element to Rio's fame are the beaches.

They are now outranked in quality and beauty by some of the neighbouring regions but are still worth a visit although not for what you may expect.

Cariocas live on the beach when the weather is good and with a population of over 14m, it can get pretty crowded.

Although not ideal for relaxing or swimming the beaches in the city are worth visiting for an experience of the beach culture.

A constant hubbub

The constant hubbub of vendors, selling everything from chilled coconuts and bikinis to grilled cheese and jewellery create an interesting soundscape and inviting smells.

The relentless catwalk of Cariocas sauntering and pouting in their swimwear also provides plenty of entertainment as you witness the bright and colourful down to the barely-there and plain skimpy swimwear.

Rio is full of interesting things to do and see but to avoid that faded celebrity feel, you need to open your eyes to a different aspect of the city taken from a different approach.

For all these reasons and more, although maybe not what you would expect, Rio de Janeiro is as Sinatra would say, simply "unforgettable".

The bikini

Rio has also mastered the art of the bikini and it is worth sitting on the beach to watch the professionals.

It is admirable how Brazilians can strategically place a couple strings of material to keep within the law (nudity and topless sunbathing are surprisingly illegal) and yet cover so little.

Keep your eye out for when a big wave comes though!

Centro



Go into Centro during the week to see where most Cariocas work and wander through the concrete jungle stopping off at museums and for shopping on the way.

In between the sky scraper office blocks are nestled some beautiful old buildings and (just off of Praca XV de Novembro.

Or visit the markets at Saara off of Rua Uruguayna) there still exist some of the narrow, cobbled streets of the old town.

Pop into some of the older churches and the Monastery to experience a nostalgic look at older religious architecture before heading to an altogether different style church.

The conical Cathedral was built during the 1960s and 70s and more closely resembles a pyramid-shaped spaceship from the outside.

Once inside however, there is quite a different feel with stained glass windows creating atmospheric and colourful pillars of light.

No peace and quiet



Rio's beaches aren't exactly peaceful. The sands are alive with sounds and smells from all the vendors who relentlessly pace up and down throughout daylight.

The beach is a congregation point for the city and most days you will find a buzz of chatter from sunbathers, energetic grunts from the 'fut volei' games and the heavy purring of police helicopters regularly sweeping across the sky to monitor the favelas.

Even the idyllic beaches are a constant reminder of the enormous disparity between Rio's wealthy and devastatingly poor.

Although this may seem uncomfortable to the tourist, there is little hostility from either party and the beach is reasonably safe. To most vendors this is their livelihood and they work every angle to find a market.

"There is no need to bring anything to the beach," said Raquel, a seasoned Carioca who has been coming to the beach for over 30 years. "Everything you could want is brought to you – lunch, drinks, sunscreen, even a bikini! Just don't forget your wallet..."

Indeed, a homemade picnic is almost exclusively something reserved for foreigners.

And why would you bring your own soggy sandwiches when the food served on the beaches is so varied and, comparatively to the prices off the sand, the best bargain in Rio.

Vendors bring around chilled mate tea, aromatic Arabic pastries, cool and refreshing coconuts and sticky Brazilian sweets.

Some even carry a portable BBQ to freshly grill cheese for you.

Beach vendors have taken it to a completely different league here. You may still get fake designer glasses and overpriced icy water, but where else do you see men with mini fridges on their backs and a portable hotplate in their hand to cook you up some fresh prawns in garlic sauce for £1?

Most vendors have a sales song or chant – whether it is using a police siren to sell frozen juice or the vegeburger seller's rap about psychedelic tomatoes – but no-one can compare to the old man selling newspapers who tries to lure his customers in with, quite badly sung, opera.

Rio's beaches are unlike anywhere else in the world.

The Café Colombo in Centro



For a break from the bustle of the city, step into Café Colombo on Rua Goncalves Dias.

This is a colonial style dancing hall where you can sit and eat Brazilian pastries and sweets whilst sipping tea in a grandiose setting.

Alternatively if you fancy a bite on the run pull over at one of the lanchonetes (corner bars) outside, grab yourself a chopp (beer) and try a couple paes de queijo (cheesy bread balls).

Churrascaria



Brazilians like their meat. And it is no surprise that this all-you-can-eat style BBQ is a must when you visit Rio.

Waiters bring around delicious cuts of meat to your table from rare and bloody steak, tender lamb and cheese stuffed beef to tiny chicken hearts and meaty sausages.

Start off with a traditional Caipirinha and eye up all that is on offer, then fill your plate with salads and sides at the buffet and start to dig into the meat!



AllWays

AllWays is the consumer travel service from the International Travel Writers Alliance.



The International Travel Writers Alliance

The International Travel Writers Alliance represents travel writers, editors, broadcasters and photographers worldwide

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After six years working as a reporter and editor in newspapers in Southern England, Amanda took the plunge to go freelance and explore a continent she has always been fascinated by from afar.

She is currently darting in-between Argentina and Brazil torn between her love for both Malbec and Cachaca.

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