

# Rio de Janeiro

## I INTRODUCTION

Rio de Janeiro, city in south-eastern Brazil, on the Atlantic Ocean. It is Brazil's second-largest city, the capital of Rio de Janeiro State, and the country's leading cultural and tourist centre. Its name (Portuguese for "River of January") refers to its location near the entrance to Guanabara Bay, which appeared to be a large river estuary to early 16th-century explorers. One of them, Gonçalo Coelho, probably named the body of water for the month he arrived. The city, often called Rio, is a major port. It is separated from the rest of the country by mountains, including the Serra da Mantiqueira.



Stephanie Maze/National Geographic Society

### **Rio de Janeiro Carnival**

Brazil's annual Rio de Janeiro carnival attracts visitors from all over the world. The famous Mardi Gras celebration includes dance, notably the samba competitions, song, and music. Spectacular costumes provide a riot of colour throughout the five days of parties that lead up to the more sombre occasion of Lent.

Rio was the capital and dominant city of Brazil from 1763 to 1960. In the 1960s it lost its national administrative role to Brasília and its leading position as an economic centre to São Paulo, but it is still many Brazilians' preferred city to visit. The inhabitants of the densely populated city are known as Cariocas (after a form of music and dance, a variation on the samba). Rio's lush forests, spectacular mountains, and sparkling beaches make it one of the most beautiful cities in the world. Population 5,551,538 (1996).

## II ECONOMY



Paulo Fridman/Sygma

#### **Docks, Rio de Janeiro**

Container ships line this commercial pier in the harbour of Rio de Janeiro. Long an important trading centre, the city serves as a vital link in the economic and transportation systems of Brazil.

Rio is an important seaport located along the maritime traffic routes that link the coastal cities of north-eastern Brazil and the more economically developed areas of south-eastern Brazil. Rio's role as national capital for almost 200 years meant that much foreign trade had to pass through the main customs office here, and the city acted as a distribution centre for goods moving in and out of the country. Highways, railways, and airlines link Rio to the rest of Brazil.

In addition to being a transport hub, Rio is an important manufacturing and service centre. The city contributes about one-tenth of the country's manufactured goods in the form of such goods as processed food, chemicals, pharmaceuticals, metal products, ships, textiles, clothing, and furniture. The service sector dominates the economy, however, and includes banking and other financial functions. Tourism and entertainment are also important aspects of the city's economic life. Great numbers of people take part in Rio's colourful annual carnival, which occurs on the eve of Lent.

### III PLACES OF INTEREST



**Rio de Janeiro City Map**

Rio is in a magnificent natural setting between the mountains and the sea. From its beginnings as a fort and Portuguese colonial trading outpost, Rio has spread gradually to fill the space between the beaches and the mountains. The commercial core of the city is compact, centring on Avenida Rio Branco and Avenida Presidente Vargas. It includes a number of tall office buildings, and its streets are often clogged with motor vehicles and pedestrians. Major industrial areas are located in the less scenic north, which also includes large residential districts. Sections of poorly constructed housing called *favelas* are located on hillsides. The more fashionable residential zones are in the south, near such Atlantic beaches as Copacabana, Ipanema, and Leblon. Newly constructed tunnels and a bridge stretching 14 km (8.7 mi) across Guanabara Bay to Niterói have eased commuter traffic somewhat.

The more famous landmarks of Rio are Sugarloaf Mountain, situated on a peninsula in Guanabara Bay, and the large statue called Christ the Redeemer, which is on Corcovado Mountain. Many old churches and other colonial structures contrast sharply with the modern architecture built since the 1950s. Nearby recreational areas include the islands of Guanabara Bay and the mountain glens of the Tijuca Forest.



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**Copacabana Beach, Rio de Janeiro**

South of Rio de Janeiro on the Atlantic Ocean, Copacabana Beach attracts many visitors. It also contains some of the city's most fashionable districts.

The leading universities of Rio include the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro (1920), the University of the State of Rio de Janeiro (1950), and the Pontifical Catholic University of Rio de Janeiro (1941). The city also contains the National Archives and the National Library. It has several public museums, such as the National Museum of Fine Arts, and numerous private art galleries. Specialized museums include the Museum of Modern Art, the National Historical Museum, and the Museum of the Indian.

## IV HISTORY

The first Portuguese explorers landed on the site as early as 1503, and in 1555 French colonists established a settlement here. Tupi Native Americans lived in the region at the time. The Portuguese expelled the French in 1567 and maintained a small community until the 18th century, when a road to the gold mines of the inland Minas Gerais area made Rio a hub of transport and wealth. The city also benefited when the Brazilian capital was moved here from Salvador in 1763. From 1808 to 1821 Rio was the seat of the exiled royal family of Portugal, and in 1822 it became the capital of the independent Brazilian Empire. In 1889 it was made the capital of the republic of Brazil, and remained so until 1960.

With the development of industries and commerce in the period after World War II, Rio attracted many people from the interior of Brazil who were seeking economic opportunities, and the city expanded greatly.

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