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MENU

BRAZIL, SOUTH AMERICA

Backpacker tips for Rio Carnival

by EOIN /

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Table of Contents



1. Backpacker tips for Rio Carnival
2. Rio De Janeiro Carnival-The Basics
 - 2.1. When:
 - 2.2. Where:
 - 2.3. Why
3. Safety in Rio
4. The Sambadrome
5. Rio De Janeiro Carnival parties
6. Rio Accommodation during Carnival
7. Transport during Rio Carnival
8. Top backpacker tips for Rio Carnival
9. Food and drink during Rio Carnival
10. Drugs at Rio Carnival
11. The best Sightseeing/Tours in Rio
 - 11.1. Dois Irmaos Hike
 - 11.2. Sugarloaf mountain

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Having survived one of the most violent carnivals in the past decade (Now that's dramatic), I thought it was right that I give some backpacker tips for Rio Carnival.

I must note that although it was supposed to be very violent, I for one never saw anything like the stuff reported. At least nothing that you wouldn't see on weekend in any major city.

It was one of the best festivals I had the pleasure of witnessing and something that should be on everyone's bucket list.

For my second adventure to South America attending Rio carnival and climbing Machu Picchu were my two goals. Having spent two weeks in Rio de Janeiro there are a few things I picked up that should help all visitors and backpackers especially.

Rio De Janeiro carnival was completely different from what I expected. I had images of Samba Parades, beautiful Brazilian women, dancing in the streets of Rio and while all this was going on, there was so much more.

I put together some tips for Rio Carnival that should help you navigate the parties, avoid trouble in Rio and have the best time at the beach and on the streets of Rio. You will find where to stay in Rio, what to wear for Carnival parties and how to see the sights of Rio.

Rio De Janeiro Carnival-The Basics

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As close as I got to Christ

When:

Carnival takes place the weekend before Ash Wednesday and usually falls on the last week of February/first week of March.

Once we arrived, I discovered that as the Carnival in Rio has grown so large, celebrations begin well before and last long after the official Carnival dates.

Where:

The entire city of Rio De Janeiro becomes a party and parade ground.

Throughout the rest of Brazil and some other parts of South America, Carnival is also held although from reports not to such a large an extravagant scale.

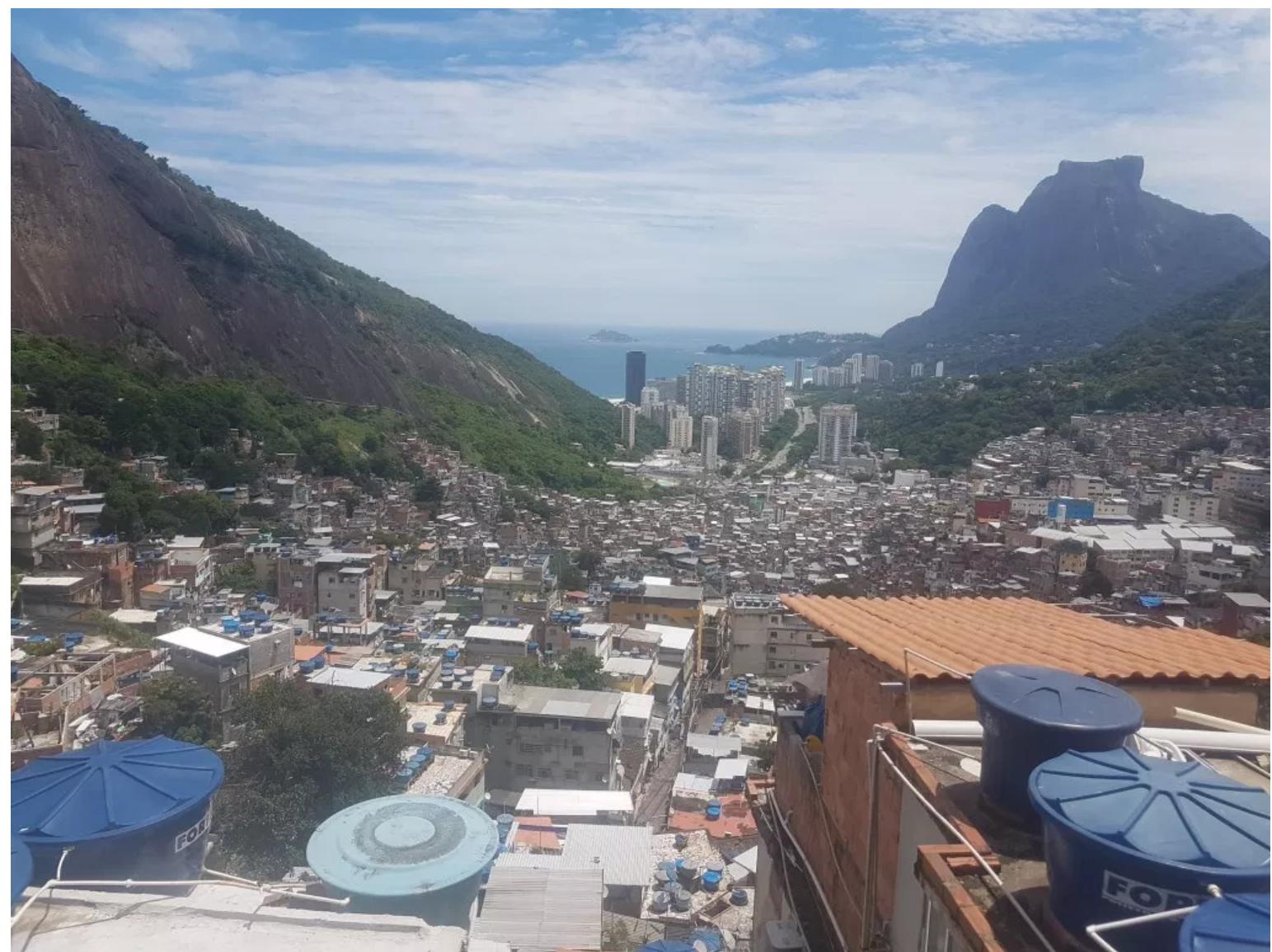
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When I asked many locals they did not seem to know the exact history and reasoning for the Carnival. Though some believe it was an appeasement to indigenous religions and beliefs by the Catholic church.

Now it is generally seen as a competition between samba schools, in regards to outfits, dancing and overall performance in the Sambadrome.

When I arrived I discovered that the Sambadrom is a very small part of Carnival. Most of the celebrations take place on the streets of Rio.

Safety in Rio



Rochina Favela

One major question I get asked constantly is how is the safety in Rio De Janeiro. Every now and then an incident will make the world news, but for the most part, information comes from gang documentaries.

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when you arrive.

If you smart and don't go to those neighbourhoods your safety is in a much better state.

Police in Rio de Janeiro are not the most proactive and are practically useless. So unless you have a major problem, don't bother.

Although the carnival I attended was supposed to be one of the most dangerous in recent memory I didn't see much. I did meet many people who had far worse incidents than me, most of this involved robberies, both snatch and grab incident and those involving some violence.

Of course, this isn't a nice thing to happen but there were a few similarities. Most people were very **drunk, travelling solo, showing off expensive items and money.**

Although not doing these things might not prevent crime it will definitely give you a better chance of not being involved. I steered away from anything I thought might be getting a little sketchy, usually, I was in a group and we didn't show off all of our items when out and about.

These backpacker tips for Rio Carnival should be used everywhere, take the regular precautions. It will definitely help your chances but as Carnival is a prime time for robberies etc don't be too shocked when things occur.

Be wary especially around the Sambadrome and on the beaches as these are notorious for pickpockets and thieves. This is true throughout the entire year but more so during the carnival.

You may also be witness to street justice. When a thief is caught locals are not afraid to beat the shit out of them and make an example of them in the community. This I did see.

The Sambadrome

The Sambadrome in Rio is where you want to go to see the pageantry and colours most associated with carnival. Here you will see the Samba schools in their incredible outfits, dancing singing and showcasing the talent that their neighbourhood has produced that year.

For those competing it is a very serious competition that has taken months of planning and training to get to this stage. The parades take place over the Friday and Saturday of Carnival and **start around 10.00pm. They finish at 4.00am** if you are lucky, during this time you will see hundreds of floats and thousands of performers.

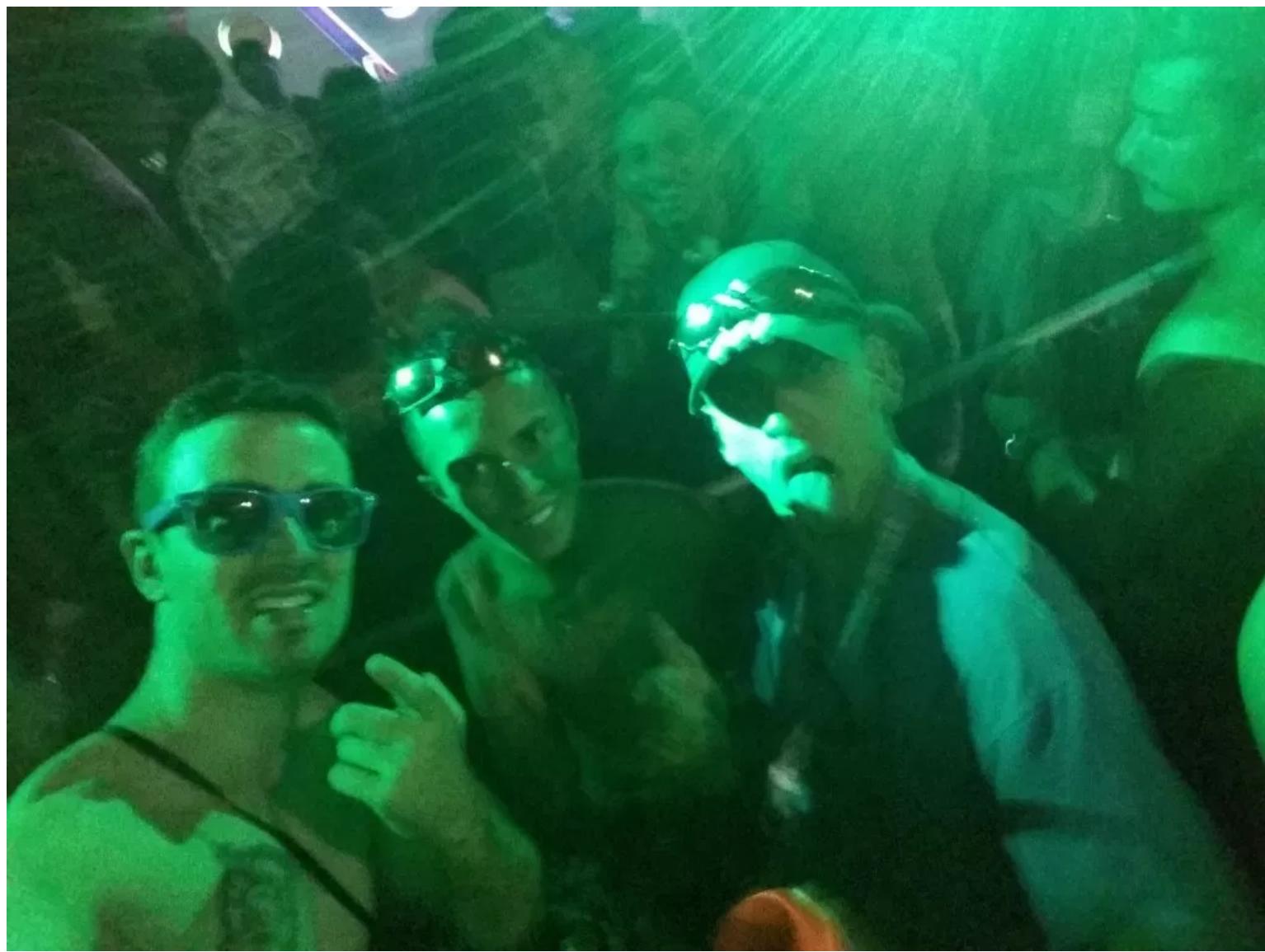
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My advice will be to avoid the tourist terrace and get among the Brazilian terraces for the real atmosphere associated with carnival. **Tickets can be bought on the day** you wish to attend.

I wouldn't worry about booking in advance. Sambadrome ticket prices can range from 40 reals to a few hundred, all depending on your bargaining ability and the seats you choose to take.

Be cautious in the Sambadrome and in the vicinity of the building as it is rife with **pickpockets** as many people I met found out the unfortunate way. There is no need to preorder tickets I found, most people I met bought tickets on the day that they decided to go.

Rio De Janeiro Carnival parties



If only I could remember taking this picture

Although the Sambadrome is the epicentre of the show and pageantry of carnival, the vast majority of the parties

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There were **costume parties**, **LGBT centred parties** **Raves** and **Samba** of course and every other type of music found throughout the streets.

You can check here for some of the biggest Bloco parties. The Rio carnival Blocos can range from a few hundred to a few million people. Among the organised parties, you will also find plenty of ad-hoc events. These may emerge due to somebody having an exceptionally loud Soundsystem or a nightclub that doesn't know when to stop.

You will not be short of entertainment when walking around the streets of Rio. If there are specific parties that you wish to attend plan your travel in advance. For the most part, attendance is free unless you are going to a special venue.

Rio Accommodation during Carnival



Usually, there was a bigger crowd at the hostel

To be close to the action and in a good neighbourhood **Lapa** or **Copacabana** are your two best options. Lapa is the main nightlife thoroughfare in Rio de Janeiro and is home to many events during Carnival. That being said the entire city becomes home to Blocos, parades and makeshift parties for you to discover.

Most accommodation tends to hike the prices considerably during Carnival. Some hostels **raise their prices 5x**

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Try to reserve way in advance. If you know that you are going, you can check out reviews of homeowners and hostels in advance. I heard some horror stories of overcrowded apartments and dilapidated accommodation.

Ipanema and Santa Teresa are also to other options, though **Santa Teresa** borders a Favela which may be a little risky at night.

Transport during Rio Carnival



A less congested street.

Travelling the city during Carnival can be an adventure in itself. One you may enjoy, but which will more than likely give you a headache. **Streets will be packed with people and popup parties** may divert metro lines. This can make walking from one place to another can be tiresome.

I would suggest planning the parties you wish to attend in advance. Try to aim for parties that are close together reducing the time spent travelling around the city. Certain themed parties such as the super Mario party are popular and you don't want to miss out on the fun.

The **metro and Uber** are the best options for covering longer distances. Expect huge crowds wherever you go, but the metro seems to run pretty regularly and is easy to navigate. Get a multi-day pass so you can beat the waiting

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Uber is cheaper and safer than regular taxis. Drivers will do their best to get you as close to your destination as possible. Expect to have to walk some distance due to crowds and police diversions.

Top backpacker tips for Rio Carnival



Go sightseeing before the craziness

- **Take out cash and hide it.** The banks tend to run out of cash over the weekend leading to Hhuuuuge ques and the possibility of having no money.
- **Book accommodation** in advance.
- Plan some of the events you want to see, but **leave room for improvisation** as it's the best way to find some of the coolest parties.
- **Have a small group when out and about** it helps you avoid trouble and there is always safety in numbers.
- **Avoid the police** if at all possible they are more trouble than help.
- **Avoid taxis** as they will rip you off and there's a good chance they will bring you to the wrong place.

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- **Talk to the locals**, I found this hard with a lack of Portuguese and having a group of friends to party with, it probably would have been a little more fun hanging with some locals for a bit.
- If you **see trouble walk away** immediately.
- **Don't be too worried about trouble** or issues if they occur you will be able to work your way out of it.
- **Say yes** to almost everything.
- If you can **learn to twerk**. The ability to shake your ass seems to be a key component of dancing in Rio.

Food and drink during Rio Carnival



Brazilian sweets

Throughout Carnival, you will find **vendors across the city** selling food, drinks and alcohol.

Most importantly water. Most of the time you will find these in the centre of the party and on the outskirts as they are mobile salespeople.

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I wouldn't buy early in the morning or late at night. Unless I saw the food being cooked fresh as you may not anyhow long its been standing there.

Around Lapa, there is a huge market which seems to run 24/7 so you will have no issues getting supplies when needed. *Tres por dies* (3 for 10) will be stuck in your head by the end of Carnival, this is a backpacker fact and not just a tip. It stands for 3 cans of beer for 10 reals.

Alcohol consumption is completely fine everywhere. Try not to buy too much of the **heavily alcoholised caipirinhas** as a few of these will quickly catch up on you especially in the sun.

If you want something a little more filling look out for **buffet restaurants** which are across the city. These are perfect for getting your energy levels back up after a few days partying. Again Lapa was quite full of these but I found a few around Copacabana also.

Like Argentina expect lots of meats and BBQ food but they also cater to vegetarians. I found Brazilian food to be some of the nicest in South America. It's just a pity I couldn't eat so much when I was partying.

Drugs at Rio Carnival



Not a map to find drugs!

I decided to mention this because well, people do drugs and at Carnival, it seemed pretty prevalent wherever you went. Drugs can be found at the events, a lot of times **people will approach you**. I have a few words of advice.

- **Do not leave the crowds** in order to do a drug deal. You are setting yourself up to be robbed or worse.
- Do not take out **huge amounts of cash** in front of a said drug dealer. Walk away pretend you are getting it to form friends or whatever, again avoid ing robbery.
- If you do decide to take drugs at least **take it in small amounts** so you can be a little sure of what you are getting. There are BS or dangerous substances out there.
- A lot of the time you can probably **source a contact from within the hostel**. Either a regular or sometimes a member of staff. This is your safest option.
- **Always drink water**, even if you're not taking drugs its helpful in the heat.
- If you are **feeling unwell or little spaces out tell your friends**. Even if you've just met them at least you have people to chill with. Or go to the hospital if it's serious.

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The best Sightseeing/Tours in Rio

While my backpacker tips for Rio Carnival focus on the party side of things, I also took the time to visit some of Rio most popular tourist attractions. I didn't go to see Christ the Redeemer as I was told it was pretty overrated. But here is my pick for what I did:

Dois Irmaos Hike

The Dois Irmaos hike was probably one of the most fun hikes I have ever done. I am not a huge fan of hiking as you can see from this post. But this one was the exception.

The trail leading to the hike brings you by Copacabana beach and through a favela. There is then a short four-hour hike to the top. This provides some beautiful dramatic views of the city and the beaches.

Sugarloaf mountain

The Sugarloaf is definitely one of the most famous tourist activities in Rio. Though I must say I wasn't hugely impressed, the views were nice and the cable car ride was fun but I didn't understand the whole hipe for this viewpoint.

Rochina Favela tour

One thing that Rio is famous for is its Favelas. From gang documentaries to movies such as the city of God, the favelas have a bad rap. So having the opportunity to visit the largest Favela in Rio was something I wasn't going to miss.

A very eye-opening experience. We learned the history of the city and the Favelas in particular and why they have become so notorious. Not once during the tour did I feel unsafe. What we found were normal people living in exceptional circumstances and doing their most to survive.



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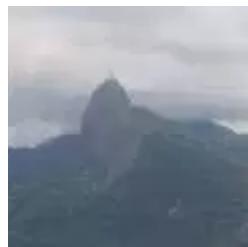
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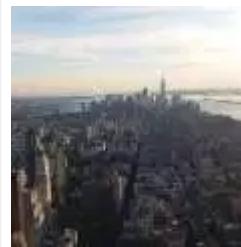
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