

Title:

Preparing for the Rio Carnival

Word Count:

712

Summary:

When Carnival arrives, companies close down, shops shut their doors early, and streets are closed off to make way for dancing, parties and parades. This is an event of mere days, but the result of months of preparation. Welcome to the world of Samba Schools and their Quadras de Samba.

Keywords:

Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, Carnival, samba, parades, Copacabana, Ipanema, Hotels, Apartments, Restaurants, nightlife, beaches, nightclubs, South America

Article Body:

So, this is the Brazil. This is what Rio de Janeiro is really all about. When the Carnival arrives, companies close down, shops shut their doors early, and streets are closed off to make way for dancing, parties and parades. This awe inspiring festivity not only provides entertainment for the thousands of people attending the Carnival, but also for the millions watching it on their televisions, giving them a chance to learn about the true culture of Brazil.

The next Carnival starts on Saturday 25th February 2006, and ends on Fat Tuesday leading up to Ash Wednesday, the beginning of Lent in the Roman Catholic calendar. This happens to be during the hottest time of the year in the Southern Hemisphere, when summer is at its peak. When that Saturday arrives then it's Carnival all over the place, in the streets and squares, bars, clubs and other venues, taking over the whole city of Rio and culminating in the Rio Carnival Parade also known as the Samba Parade.

The Rio Carnival is an event of mere days, but the result of months of preparation. The most giving and hardworking hands during the months before are often the ones most overlooked by outside eyes. These are the people who make the Carnival what it is, they add an ingredient that couldn't possibly be replicated by the largest tourist operator, most experienced guide or multi million dollar sponsor. They are the people from Rio de Janeiro's poorest neighbourhoods, the so called favelas or shanty towns.

So where did you think all the magic and thrill Carnival is famous for started?

From the production of the elaborate costumes to the performance and choreography of the costume bearers, residents of the favelas are deeply involved with every aspect of the Carnival. More often than not, this is done through their participation and membership to a local samba school.

The samba schools, with members reaching the thousands, will get together on a regular basis throughout the year for rehearsals and samba nights. All the samba schools have rehearsal spaces, called samba courts, or locally known as quadras de samba. They open, in most cases, at weekends for anyone, including tourists like you and me, as long as you pay the small fee at the door. To anyone who's not been to one of these places they can only be described as nightclubs with samba.

This is the best way to make contact with the real samba and people of Rio de Janeiro. The nights are totally informal, and members of all ages including many old people can go to the party of any school. Most are quite far out of from the main parts of Rio de Janeiro and some of the areas they are situated in can be rough. To this end I would recommend going with a group in a package including a local escort, and round-trip transportation. Once you're inside, it's very safe. I would recommend not going flashy or having anything valuable with you except of course your camera. This is only due to the high density and energetic atmosphere of these events and you are more likely to lose or damage such items rather than have them stolen.

So maybe you are planning to come to the Rio carnival, or maybe not and you just want to sample some of the rich carnival energy that lasts all year round in this city. Either way, visiting a Samba school is a great pre-Carnival excursion.

If you are coming for the main event then remember it also means a bit of preparation on your part too. You should not only get your flight, but do a bit of research on your Carnival tickets in advance. Try to plan your Carnival activities ahead to sample the immense variety on offer. Include in your must-do's the Samba Parade, street parties, and balls. You should also really organize your accommodation for the carnival well in advance. The best hotels, especially around Copacabana and Ipanema, are booked up early, so it's advisable to make your hotel reservations as soon as you have decided to attend this spectacular event.

The next article in this series is titled 'Rio Carnival - The Main Event'.