

BBE · THE BLACK BRAZIL EXCHANGE

Free Rio Starter

*What I tell every friend who's about to land in Rio for the first
time.*

Bryant Huff, Founder
Six years on the ground in Brazil

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Welcome

My name is Bryant. I went to Rio for Carnival 2020. A week later the world caught COVID, the borders closed, and I was stuck. What was supposed to be a quick trip turned into six months. Six months turned into six years.

This free guide is the basics: enough to land in Rio without getting taken, eat well, find the beach, and have a good time.

If you want the deeper version of this guide, every venue, the full nightlife week, the adult scene, the favela access, and the spiritual experiences only locals know about, that lives in my paid guide called **Por Dentro** ("From the Inside") for \$29. If you want a person on the ground when you arrive, that's BBE.

Read this start to finish before you fly. Save it on your phone. Hit me up if you want more.

Bryant Huff

Founder · The Black Brazil Exchange

WHAT'S IN THIS GUIDE

1. **The Basics:** money, phones, what not to bring
2. **Neighborhoods at a Glance:** where to stay, where to go
3. **The Beach:** Rasta Beach, the postos, beach rules
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1 · The Basics

Most of what goes wrong on a Rio trip is solved before you land. Read this twice.

Money

- Brazil runs on the **real (R\$)**. Bring two cards from banks with no foreign-transaction fee. Tell your bank you're

traveling.

- Cash is for tipping, beach vendors, and any moment you don't want a paper trail.
- Use **Banco do Brasil, Itaú, or Bradesco** ATMs inside a real branch during the day. Avoid standalone ATMs at night, especially in Lapa.
- **PIX** is Brazil's instant-payment system. If you're paying anyone on the ground (driver, vendor, BBE), PIX in reais is faster and cleaner than card.

Time your trip to payday, the 1st or the 15th

This is the single biggest tip in this guide. Most Brazilians get paid on the 1st and the 15th. After payday they want to party. The week of the 1st and the week of the 15th are when Casa Black is full, the funk parties are sweaty, and the city is at 100. Come during a non-payday week and half the venues you wanted to see will be running at half capacity, because the locals don't have money to go out.

Phones

Get a Brazilian SIM the day you land. **Vivo, Claro, and TIM** all have prepaid plans you can buy at the airport. WhatsApp is the entire country's default messaging app.

- Do not walk and scroll on the street. Stop, step into a doorway or café, then look at your phone.
- Do not put your phone on the table at a sidewalk bar. Pocket it.
- Do not bring your phone to the beach unless someone is staying with the towel. The 30-second swim is the 30-second window for the snatch.

What NOT to bring

- **No real jewelry.** Period. A gold chain glints from a block away and someone is watching.
- Your passport stays in the hotel safe. Carry a photocopy or phone photo.
- Bring two cards. Leave the rest in the safe.

Small things that save the trip

- If you drink tequila, bring it. Brazil basically only stocks Jose Cuervo.
- Don't rent a car. Uber and 99 are everywhere, parking is impossible. Download both apps before you land.
- Don't drink the tap water. Bottled is everywhere and cheap. Brushing teeth with tap is fine.
- Power: Brazil uses the Type N plug. Bring a universal adapter.
- Tipping is automatic at most restaurants (10% on the bill). You don't need to add more unless service was real.

MORE IN POR DENTRO

The full version of these tips

With surgical detail on every neighborhood, every situation, and the things you only learn after you've been here a year. **\$29 at theblackbrazilexchange.com.**

2 · Neighborhoods at a Glance

Rio is long and thin and wrapped around mountains. The neighborhoods feel like different cities. Stay in the wrong one and your trip is built around 40-minute Ubers.

Copacabana

Touristy, loud, the beach is the main attraction. Walkable to almost everywhere a tourist needs. **If it's your first Rio trip, Copa is the obvious answer.**

Ipanema

Cleaner, more expensive, more curated. Better restaurants. The gay scene is at **Posto 8 and 9**. **Farme de Amoedo** street is the gay social hub.

Leblon

Past Ipanema. Premium, residential, quiet. Older money.

Lapa

The party district. Samba, street drinking, the arches, dozens of small clubs. Don't stay here unless you want noise. Do come for nightlife. Always Uber out.

Santa Teresa

The artsy, hilly neighborhood above Lapa. Cobblestones, view of the city, slower. Visit for an afternoon, don't necessarily stay.

Madureira and the North Zone

This is Black Rio. Most tourists never go to the North Zone, which is exactly the reason BBE is built around it. You don't stay in Madureira. You go there with someone who knows the territory.

Where to stay specifically: which streets, which hotels, what to ask for, is in the Por Dentro guide. We also help BBE clients with hotel coordination directly.

3 · The Beach

Rio's beaches are urban beaches. The water is cold by Brazilian standards. The sand is the social space. Vendors walk through every two minutes selling everything from grilled cheese to bikinis.

Rasta Beach (Leme, Posto 1), my pick

Rasta Beach is what I call the stretch of Leme right in front of Posto 1. Less thieves than Copa proper. Cheaper drinks. Real party environment with music. The sun sets early there because of the skyline behind Leme, so get there early.

The posto system

Each beach is divided into *postos* (lifeguard stations), numbered north to south.

- **Copacabana:** postos 1 (Leme) through 6. Family scene around 4-5.
- **Ipanema:** postos 7 through 10. Gay scene at posto 8/9 (Farmer de Amoedo street).
- **Leblon:** posto 11-12. Family beach with toddlers and dogs.

How to do the beach

- Walk on with two pockets of cash, sunglasses, sunscreen, and a phone you don't need.
- Pay 10-15 reais per person for two chairs and an umbrella. Pay only the person who set them up.
- Try the *biscoito globo* (puffed corn ring) and the *mate* (sweet iced tea) at least once.
- Don't buy seafood from a walking vendor.

Six hidden Rio beach spots most tourists never find, Praia Vermelha, Joatinga, Prainha and Grumari, the secret cove off São Conrado, are in the Por Dentro guide.

4 • Tourist Stuff Worth Doing

The hits are hits because they're worth it. Don't skip them out of hipster instinct.

Christ the Redeemer

Yes. Go. The view is the view. Try to go on a clear morning.

Sugar Loaf Mountain

Cable car to the summit. Best at sunset over Guanabara Bay.

Pedra do Telégrafo

The famous cliff hike with the hanging photo. About 2 hours from Zona Sul. Go early to beat the line for the photo.

Escadaria Selarón

The mosaic staircase in Lapa, made by the late artist Jorge Selarón over 23 years from tiles sent by people from around the world. Best in morning light.

AquaRio

One of the largest aquariums in South America, in the port district near Pequena África. Big reef tank, sharks, stingrays. Pairs well with Museum of Tomorrow, they're a 3-minute walk apart.

Museum of Tomorrow

Striking modern museum on Praça Mauá, focused on climate and the future. **Free on Tuesdays.** About 30 reais other days. Worth the visit just for the building, designed by Santiago Calatrava.

Botanical Gardens and Parque Lage

Two of the calmest spots in the city. Botanical Gardens is 350 acres with an orchid house and giant water lilies. Parque Lage is at the foot of Corcovado with the famous mansion in the middle. Both perfect mid-day stops.

Arpoador outdoor beach gym

The Flintstones-style outdoor gym on the rocks at Arpoador. Free to use, full of locals, where Brazilian fitness culture lives.

5 • Eat

A short list of restaurants I send people to. The full list with notes is in the Por Dentro guide.

If you're going to spend (\$\$\$)

- **Churrascaria Palace** (Copacabana), best churrascaria in Rio. Period. Go hungry, leave horizontal.
- **Aprazível** (Santa Teresa), the view of Rio from your table. Brazilian food done elegantly. Reserve.
- **Escama** (Ipanema), fresh oysters and seafood, one of the best in the city.

Mid-tier solid (\$\$)

- **Boteco Belmonte** (Ipanema), great view, classic Rio boteco menu, casual.
- **Galitos Grill** (Ipanema), grilled chicken with sauce. Local, simple, good.
- **Stalos**: 24-hour pizza. The post-club move.
- **Gringo Café**: American breakfast for when you need it.

Cheap and local (\$)

- **Galitos Sat's**: whole roasted chicken, one of the great cheap dinners in Rio.
- **Joaquina**: real Brazilian plates at local prices.

The Brazilian standards to try

- **Feijoada**: black bean stew with various cuts of pork. Saturday is the traditional day.
- **Picanha**: the cap of the rump, grilled. Get it medium rare and salted only.
- **Açaí**: the real version, frozen pure açaí pulp blended with banana and granola.
- **Pão de queijo**: cheese bread, breakfast and afternoon snack. From a padaria, fresh.
- **Caipirinha**: the national cocktail. Cachaça, sugar, lime. Order with a quality cachaça, not 51.

The full list of 25 restaurants with my notes, which one has "mid food but a great view," which to make reservations two weeks ahead, which McDonald's is genuinely better than the US, is in the Por Dentro guide.

6 • Nightlife (The Overview)

Rio nightlife is on a schedule. Each night of the week has its own move. Most clubs don't fill up until 1am and run until 6am or later. You can do two clubs in one night.

The two venues we recommend to almost everyone

- **Casa Black Rio** (Madureira), the Black Rio experience. Samba, pagode, funk, afrobeats. The North Zone scene most tourists never see. Not on any travel app.
- **Boate Save** (Lapa), Friday and Saturday peak. Four to five rooms running like separate clubs. **Open bar venue, no VIP tables.** Mixed crowd, time of your life. Contact BBE 24 hours ahead for free general entry.

The other essentials

- **Pedra do Sal (Mondays)**: outdoor samba on the historic square in Saúde, the birthplace of samba in Rio. Free, no cover, real musicians, mostly Brazilians. **Late-night roda, show up around 11pm, music runs till ~3am.** If you only do one Monday in Rio, do this.
- **The Home (Sundays)**: Rio's main gay circuit party when it runs. Big production, runs until 1pm Monday. **BBE guests get free VIP entry.**
- **Lapa**: walk Mem de Sá on a Friday or Saturday and follow the music. Always leave by Uber after 1am.

Special parties to watch for

These don't run every weekend. They drop, they're enormous, they move locations. Ask BBE what's on during your dates.

- **Batekoo** (Black queer party, one of the best nights in Brazil)
- YOLO, Baile do Amor, Kilario, Samba da Rua, Nego de Moé

BBE handles a night out for you

Tell us 24 hours ahead what kind of night you want. We pick the venue based on who's in town, what's on, and what fits your group. We arrange entry (often free or VIP discount), book a section if you want bottles, and the driver is yours from pickup until you're back at the hotel safe.

Group of 4 is the sweet spot. Groups of 8+ unlock private sections at most clubs.

The full week-by-week breakdown: every venue, every night, the favela parties, the gay circuit, the after-after spots, is in the Por Dentro guide.

7 · Stuff Most Guides Don't Cover

These three things make up some of BBE's most-requested experiences. None of them are on any tourist website. All of them are real, legal, and accessible if you know the right people. Full details, venue lists, the rules, specific contacts, live in the Por Dentro paid guide.

Adult nightlife

Sex work between adults is legal in Brazil. There's a whole scene of high-end venues, historic red-light districts, and the Copacabana strip-club bars on the gringo strip. Most of the trouble that happens at these venues isn't violence, it's financial. Walk in informed and almost all of it disappears.

Afro-Brazilian spirituality

Candomblé and Umbanda are living spiritual traditions practiced openly across Brazil. They are not folklore. They are not performance. **For travelers from the diaspora, especially Black Americans, visiting a real terreiro is one of the most powerful things this country offers.** I have personal friends who practice. Through them, BBE arranges respectful access for visitors who genuinely want to learn.

Favela access

A favela is a community. A real one, with grocery stores, dance studios, churches, kids playing. Tourists go to favelas. The question is how, and who you go with. Don't go alone. Don't take a "favela tour" from your hotel concierge. The tourists who come back from a favela visit talking about it for years are the ones who went with someone who lives there.

Favela barbershop, favela parties, North Zone deep access: and Bryant's most restricted experiences (São João in June, Christmas Eve in December, 2 people only) are detailed in the Por Dentro guide and bookable through the BBE Experience Menu.

8 • How BBE Works

BBE is a person on the ground. We pick the venue, drive you to it, get you in, pick you up, and handle the language. Three package tiers.

The packages

- **Taste (\$300-500):** 5 points to spend on experiences. Guide for up to 3 days. Perfect for a quick trip.
- **Por Dentro (\$1,200-1,800):** 15 points. Guide for up to 7 days. Multiple experiences across beach, nightlife, culture, and fitness.
- **Full Access (\$2,500+):** 30 points. Guide for the full trip (14+ days). Access to everything including premium and high-access experiences.

Five prepackaged bundles

If you want it already built, we have five trips ready to book.

- **First Timer's Rio** (5 pts), the classic hits, no overthinking
- **Black Brazil Roots** (15 pts), cultural deep dive for travelers coming for connection
- **Bro Trip** (15 pts), built for groups of men who came to live
- **Gay Rio Insider** (15 pts), the gay scene with someone who has been in it for 7+ years
- **The Real Rio** (30 pts), everything. The ceiling of what BBE does.

9 · How to Book

Six steps from this guide to landing in Rio with a guide holding a sign with your name.

1. **Free 10-minute call with Bryant.** No purchase required. We figure out your dates, your group size, your vibe.
2. **Pick a bundle or build custom.** Most people pick a bundle and adjust 1-2 experiences. Some build entirely custom. Both work.
3. **Optional 30-minute consultation (\$59)** to walk through your full itinerary live with Bryant and lock in dates.
4. **30% deposit to lock dates.** Once we send the invoice and you pay it, your team is committed.
5. **Balance due 2 weeks before arrival.** Trip dossier sent after final payment.
6. **Driver inside the arrivals hall holding a sign with your name on it.** From that moment, you're ours.

That's the Free Version

If you read this whole guide, you already know more about Rio than most of the tourists who pass through every year. You know to time your trip to payday, where to put your phone, which beach to start at, and which two clubs to ask for.

If you want the rest, the full nightlife week, the 25 restaurants, the adult scene, the spiritual experiences, the favela access, the Salvador and São Paulo guides, the medical tourism section, six years of knowledge in one document, the paid **Por Dentro** guide is \$29.

If you want a person on the ground, that's BBE.

Either way, welcome to Brazil.

Bryant

Ready for the next step?

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\$29

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\$70

Guide + 30-min call with Bryant. The full package.

Free 10-Min Call

Free

BBE Packages

From \$300

No purchase required. Just dates, group size, and your
vibe.

Taste · Por Dentro · Full Access. A guide on the ground.

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