RIO DE JANEIRO

Rio was founded in 1565 by the Portuguese as a fortification against French privateers who trafficked wood and goods from Brazil. Piracy played a major role in the city's history, and there are still colonial fortresses to be visited. The Portuguese fought the French for nearly 10 years, both sides having rival native tribes as allies.

For the next two centuries it was an unimportant outpost of the Portuguese Empire, until gold, diamonds, and ore were found in Minas Gerais in 1720. Then, as the nearest port, Rio became the port for these minerals and replaced Salvador as the main city in the colony in 1763. When Napoleon invaded Portugal, the Royal Family moved to Brazil and made Rio capital of the Kingdom.

It is a common mistake to think of Rio as Brazil's capital, a distinction it lost on 21 April 1960 when newly built Brasilia became the capital. Rio de Janeiro is the second largest city in Brazil, on the South Atlantic coast.

Rio is famous for its breathtaking landscape, its laid back beach culture and its annual carnival.

The harbour of Rio de Janeiro is comprised of a unique entry from the ocean that makes it appear to be the mouth of a river. The harbor is unique also because it is surrounded by spectacular geographic features including Sugar Loaf Mountain at 395 meters (1,296 feet), Corcovado Peak at 704 meters (2,310 feet), and the hills of Tijuca at 1,021 meters (3,350 feet). These features work together to collectively make the harbor one of the Seven Natural Wonders of the World.

In 2009, the city won their bid to host the games of the XXXI Olympics in the summer of 2016. This was the fifth bid by the city, whose 1936, 1940, 2004 and 2012 bids lost, but 2016 proved to the world that Rio was Olympic class.