

Place-Names and Way-Finding

Many place-names in the Marvelous City, including the name “Rio de Janeiro,” are artifacts of Portuguese colonial rule. The names of colonial-era Portuguese authorities and the saints prominent in Iberian Catholicism loom large in the landscape. Even natural features and regions that acquired indigenous names (e.g., Guanabara Bay, the Carioca River, Andaraí, Tijuca) carry with them the legacies of colonial naming practices. These toponyms of the colonial era still orient today’s reader within a spectacular landscape of massifs, hills, lowlands, and waterways that has undergone a half millennium of urbanization. Nonetheless, Rio’s postcolonial history has added infinite complexity to local place-names. Modern nomenclature for neighborhoods, regions, squares, and streets evoke local notables, real estate speculation, historical dates, and the convenience of municipal administration. Popular naming practices have added more layers of richness to the vocabulary used to demarcate place and orient movement through urban space.

The Rio de Janeiro Reader uses local place-names, written in modernized Brazilian Portuguese. Exceptions include toponyms that have acquired common currency in English (e.g., Sugarloaf Mountain, Copacabana Beach, Guanabara Bay, Corcovado). We also follow local conventions of dividing the city into the historic center city (Centro) and three major zones (Zona Sul, Zona Norte, and Zona Oeste). Finally, *The Rio de Janeiro Reader* follows local conventions to reference the municipalities that surround Guanabara Bay.

Given the importance of place-names and cardinal directions used throughout *The Rio de Janeiro Reader*, some key way-finding tips follow.

THE CENTRO is the urbanized historic core of Rio de Janeiro. Although very little of its earliest edifications survive into the twenty-first century, the Centro originated in Portuguese land grants that date from 1567. Colonial-era projects of fortification, earthworks, and lowland drainage, followed by the progressive demolition or disfiguration of numerous hills (e.g., Senado, Castelo, Santo Antonio) in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, produced a semiregular street grid bounded by the port district (today’s Praça

Mauá, Saúde, Gamboa, and Santo Cristo), the parade grounds of Campo de Santanna (also known as the Praça da República), and landfill that now houses Santos Dumont Airport. The Centro is the financial and commercial nerve center of the city as well as home to many, including the residents of the working-class Bairro de Fátima and the Morro da Providência, where the city's first favela took root.

The Centro's main public squares include Praça XV de Novembro (formerly the Largo do Paço), Praça Tiradentes (formerly Praça da Constituição), Largo da Carioca, and Praça Floriano (more commonly known as Cinelândia). All have been sites of some of the city's great historic gatherings. The verdant Passeio Público offers one of the Centro's few respites from dense urbanization. Yet, like the rest of downtown Rio, the eighteenth-century pleasure park has been separated from Guanabara Bay by a series of ambitious public works and feats of engineering that have extended the built city well past the historic shoreline known to the Indians, Portuguese, and Africans who constructed the embryo of today's downtown.

The ZONA SUL, which begins at Praça Paris and follows the bay shore along the Aterro do Flamengo, was lightly populated until the middle of the nineteenth century. Until the early twentieth century, the zone's famous oceanfront promenades of Copacabana, Ipanema, and Leblon were isolated from the central city by the valleys and hills that radiate outward from the forested peaks of the Maciço da Tijuca. Development accelerated with the arrival of tram lines and the construction of streets and tunnels that cut through granite hills to open up the beaches to apartment high-rises. Now dominated by residential neighborhoods that hug the shoreline between Glória and São Conrado, the Zona Sul also encompasses upscale neighborhoods that abut the Floresta da Tijuca, including Laranjeiras, Cosme Velho, Humaitá, and Botafogo as well as Lagoa, Jardim Botânico, and Gávea. The Zona Sul is intimately associated with the Carioca middle and upper classes, yet the region has many pockets of working-class and popular-class housing including favelas, some with startling vistas onto the beaches of Leme, Copacabana, and Vidigal.

The ZONA NORTE—located to the north and west of the Centro—was once an intermediate zone between the urban core that grew near the port and the agropastoral hinterland that stretched into the upper reaches of Guanabara Bay. Tramways, constructed in the late nineteenth century, enabled urban expansion into middle-class suburbs, including Tijuca and Vila Isabel. Railways and later highways accelerated the spread of industrial enterprises that, in turn, attracted working-class migrants from southern Europe, the interior of Rio de Janeiro state, and the Brazilian northeast.

Industrial activities were especially prominent around São Cristóvão, site of a major gas works complex that operated from 1911 until 2005. The working poor filled humble homes and public housing constructed throughout the region from Penha to Madureira. Although Zona Norte neighborhoods cover a wide spectrum of human development indices, the high concentration of irregular settlements contributes to the zone's close association with favelas, a deceptively simple term used to describe a heterogeneity of popular construction and land usage in precarious areas (e.g., hillsides, swamps, underpasses, wastelands).

A rough natural topography, dominated by three forbidding massifs (*maciços*), the Atlantic Ocean, and brackish lagoons isolated the ZONA OESTE from the historic core and the Zona Norte until the second half of the twentieth century. In the colonial period, parts of the region were turned over to agricultural estates, including the Fazenda Santa Cruz. In the nineteenth century, the forested hillsides leading toward the Serra do Mendanha were laboratories for the coffee cultivation that transformed agrarian life in Rio and São Paulo provinces. Over the last century, the farms of the Zona Oeste have supplied local markets for oranges, bananas, chayote (*chuchu*), and ornamental plants. As rail spurs expanded in the latter nineteenth century, followed by the major highways Avenida Brasil and the Rodovia Presidente Dutra in the twentieth, industry spread from Bangu toward Campo Grande. Over the past fifty years, the region has been transformed by massive urbanization largely driven by the demands—and social distortions—of private automobiles, civil engineering, and consumerism. The Zona Oeste, like the rest of the city, is a district of great socioeconomic contrasts, exemplified in the glittering oceanside condominiums and shopping centers of Barra da Tijuca and the rough-and-tumble sprawl of Cidade de Deus, in the lowlands of Jacarepaguá.

The Atlantic Ocean crashes down upon a spectacular coastline that extends across the mile-wide entrance to GUANABARA BAY. Oceanic tides pulse throughout a great natural harbor covering more than four thousand square kilometers, but steep mountain ranges flanking the oceanic canal shield coves, islands, marshes, and mangrove forests along the bay's inner shores. Landfills and bridges now link many islands of the bay to the mainland, and urbanization has despoiled much of the original wetlands. Nonetheless, various islands featured in maps that date from the colonial period remain recognizable features of Rio city: Cobras, Enxadas, Fiscal, Fundão, Governador, Paqueta, and Villegagnon. These islands are blessed with unobstructed views of inland mountain ranges (*serras*) of varying heights and shapes, including the Serra dos Órgãos, where the peaks evoke the form of

organ pipes. Aside from the city of Rio de Janeiro, the other municipalities that surround Guanabara Bay are (clockwise) Duque de Caxias, Magé, Guapimirim, Itaboraí, São Gonçalo, and Niterói (linked to Rio city by bridge since 1974). In addition to forming the watershed for the bay, these municipalities of Rio de Janeiro State are the core of the Metropolitan Region of Rio de Janeiro, popularly known as Grande Rio (Greater Rio).