

## Guide: All the Rio Carnaval You Can Play in Brazil

Written by Thaddeus Blanchette  
Thursday, 27 January 2005 17:51

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Most people when they think of Carnaval in Rio de Janeiro think of the immense, luxurious parades of the first-line samba schools in the Marquês de Sapucaí- sambadrome.

What few outsiders realize, however, is that these groups are just the tip of the iceberg of *grupos*, *blocos*, *escolas* and Carnaval associations that will be out and about in the city during the Carnaval season.

Most of these groups are free and open to all. All of them are at least as much fun to participate in as anything you're liable to run into at Sapucaí-.

The following is a brief rundown of the beginning of this year's *bloco* season, followed by party tips and a smorgasbord of groups, which plan to hit the streets this year. We hope this will help you plan your folly in Rio's 2005 Carnaval.

### Street *Blocos*

Not the least important of the groups that will be on display in Rio are the third-line samba schools, which generally parade on Avenida Rio Branco during the first and second days of Carnaval.

Representing pretty much every gang of suburban *Cariocas* who can produce a T-shirt, rent a sound truck and bang on a *tamborim*, the parade will be moving to a new venue this year: Av. 28 de Setembro in Vila Isabel.

People who are interested in watching a samba parade similar to that on display in Sapucaí- "without the costumes, decent music, sense of rhythm, or drop-dead gorgeous models of the former but WITH a lot of energy, plenty of beer and no entrance fee" are well advised to check this parade out.

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However, the real hidden gems of the *Carioca* Carnival (if one can use such an adjective to describe parades that bring together upwards of ten thousand people) are the dozens of non-professional blocos de rua, which will be parading in the city during the upcoming weeks, spreading cheer, samba and utter chaos throughout the metropolitan area.

Though a tradition as old as Carnival itself (the Sapucaã- schools began, in fact as street groups), the blocos de rua entered into decline during the '70s and '80s, but have since enjoyed a vigorous revival.

So vigorous, in fact, that city authorities report having received over 400 requests for *bloco* parades this year (up from perhaps a couple dozen or so a decade ago).

In order to meet the demand without completely strangling movement in the Marvelous City, the Mayor's Office issued parade permits for this year's harvest of *blocos de rua* stipulating that the events begin on the 22nd and stretching them out over a three week period.

Last Saturday thus found me organizing my household to hit the streets a couple weeks earlier than is our Carnival norm.

Rounding up grandma and the kids took only a couple of hours, however, and by 6 PM, we found ourselves outside the Mercadinho São José in Laranjeiras, awaiting *Imprensa que Gama* to officially open our festivities.

Blocos de Rua are generally organized by professional or local residents' associations and parade either in their neighborhood or in a place where members of a given profession customarily meet to lift a few loiras geladas.

*Imprensa que Gama* is no exception to this general rule. Formed by members of the city's journalistic and press associations, the bloco has chosen the Mercadinho as its concentration point due to the venue's great popularity as a press watering hole.

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Costumes are optional for street blocos, though most groups produce their own T-shirts, which are offered for sale a few weeks prior to hitting the streets.

However, people often show up in Carnival gear of their own making, ranging from parodies of public figures (Bush, Lula, etc.) to more generic fair such as sailors, prostitutes or Indians.

The center of the *bloco* is usually a huge sound truck with a samba band on top and 8 foot tall speakers on the sides. A big group like "Imprensa" may actually hire two trucks.

The group's rhythm section (usually composed of 50 or so people who kinda sorta know how to bang a drum in time) precedes the truck and the public gathers around and dances to that year's chosen samba, generally written by one of the members of the group.

Of course, during the parade, streamers and confetti are thrown, artificial snow sprayed and prodigious quantities of liquid refreshment are imbibed as the mobile party troops a couple of blocks or so at snail's pace, hopelessly snarling any traffic attempting to use the streets for their nominal purpose.

The best thing about *blocos* is that attendance is completely open and free. Some group's samba sections are, in fact, as good or even better (if not as produced) as anything you'll hear in Sapucaí.

This year, "Imprensa que Gamo" celebrated its 10th anniversary as an organized *bloco* with a samba roasting the current gringo bête noir of the Brazilian press, New York Times writer Larry Rohter.

Lamponing Rohter's "scoops" of 2004 "Lula's supposed drinking habit (later revealed as the irresponsible repeating of a malicious rumor) and the increased obesity of Brazilian women (a story which was illustrated with photographs of Czech beach-goers in Ipanema) " the samba "O Larry Rohter, SerÁj Que Ele Á%?â" was well-received by all

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and sundry.

Here's a brief, contextualized translation of the words, which provide a feel for the general level of these kind of sambas. It may also help one to achieve a deeper understanding of the meaning of the Brazilian phrase "cair na boca do povo" (to fall from the mouth of the people).

### **O Larry Rohter, Serã Que Ele ã%?**

(by Marceu, Janjã, Larry Rohter and Harry Potter)

It came out in the *New York Times*  
That the Garota de Ipanema is now chubby  
And that brown girls have been seen with flaccid butts  
Cellulite and mud-flaps  
That our muse is now a whale  
A mermaid of old-time Carnivals  
"Brazil doesn't know Brasil."  
Is Lula our president or a barrel?

### CHORUS

He doesn't like cachaça  
Our girls make him turn gray  
Oh, Larry Rohter, is true what they say? (You fairy!)

See, these are our times,  
There's only *Playboy*, no headlines or vision  
I'm already unemployed  
But at least I no longer have an editor  
At Carnaval I'm a freelancer  
At the Mercadinho drowning my sorrows  
The Press, my love

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Imprensa que Gamo, my love.  
I arrived at ten but I'm already up to a hundred.  
And Larry came out!

Came out in the *New York Times*!  
(Repeat, ad nauseam)

I talked to one of the *bloco*'s organizers during the parade and he made it clear that the samba wasn't a call to censure Rohter.

Hell, we even supported the sonuvabitch when Lula tried to boot him out of the country, said the man, slugging down an ice cold *iscã*.

But hell, if Larry's going to tweak the nipples of power, then why doesn't he do it over something that makes a difference, for Christ's sake? Lula drinks? There are fat girls in Brazil? Who cares about that kind of stuff?

I'd like to see Larry cover something meaningful for a change, something that doesn't look like it could be on the front cover of *People Magazine*. You know, serious journalism, not this gossip column crap. So that's the why and wherefore of the samba.

In this sense, then, the *blocos* de rua maintain what's perhaps the oldest Carnival tradition: the use of popular space as a forum for lampooning public figures.

If you go to Sapucaã- this year, you're guaranteed to see a spectacle. However, don't expect to hear songs calling the President a drunk or casting aspirations on the masculinity of members of the foreign press.

Instead, expect to see Mangueira wax poetic over "Energy" and Portela muse on the benefits of "Fire", this year's themes for those schools.

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(More than one wag, however, has suggested that given the recent murder by microwaving (burning alive in piles of gasoline-soaked tires) of the director of Magueira's drum section, "Fire" would be a very appropriate and political theme for that school. But I digress. And make myself a target!)

In any case, we danced all Saturday afternoon and into the evening, getting drunk, screaming out that Larry Rohter was queer and taking about 4 hours to make it around one block in Laranjeiras.

What more could one want from Carnaval...? After the sound truck made it back to the Mercadinho, we hitched a cab home to Santa Teresa where we got to see the Bad News Bears of samba, the Carmelitas, conduct their semi-final competition for this year's samba.

Now most schools and *blocos* would be nervous about heading into Carnaval without a samba having been chosen and practiced, but after 15 years as a *bloco* de rua in the cramped streets of Santa, the Carmelitas realize two salient facts:

No matter what samba they choose, or when, there's a good chance that their rhythm section isn't going to be able to play it competently, given all the amateurs who'll show up to parade at the last minute carrying every percussion instrument imaginable, from tamborins to jack-hammers.

Even if they COULD play the chosen samba in peace, given the tortured acoustic geography of Santa's streets, more than half the crowd won't be able to hear anything beyond a screeching blare and a dull rumble, anyhow.

Thus, from the heights of their decade and a half of experience, the Carmelitas have learned to relax and enjoy the inevitable. This coming Saturday (the 29th) will finally see them choose this year's samba, based upon the public applausometer, in an open party here in Santa.

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People are advised to come on up this week if they want to hear what's going to be sung at Carnaval. Lord knows they won't be able to, come the event!

Unfortunately, we missed out favorite group, the Banda de Ipanema, one of the oldest of the Carioca street *blocos* and one which has now been almost entirely taken over by gays and transvestites, ensuring that the costumes on display are always top-notch.

The Banda also paraded on the 22nd, but will thankfully take to the streets again before Carnaval is out, giving us another chance to see them.

### Etiquette for Street *Bloco* Partiers

Bring only the money you think you'll need, a 50 real or so reserve in your shoe or underwear and NO jewelry, cameras, watches etc. A few years ago, in Ipanema, I had so many thieves' hands in my shorts that I eventually pulled out my pockets and let them hang at my side in order to show that I had nothing to steal.

Do not go to a street *bloco* if you are claustrophobic or hate crowds. Be prepared to be pushed and pummeled from all sides at once.

Think of it as a giant, gentle slam-dance pit, relax and enjoy the inevitable. Women should feel free to respond to overly insistent, undesired gropes with prejudice, however.

Be patient, be polite and avoid fights. If you step on someone, ask their pardon. Do not take umbrage at anything. 99.9 percent of Carnaval-goers are very nice people but there are always a few drunk assholes. Why ruin your Carnaval by fighting with them?

If you bring children and old people, stay on the sidelines for a while and watch. See if the overall vibe is OK before plunging into the middle of it all with Grandma and Junior. Be aware that MANY people bring their children to these things, so you won't be alone.

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Agree upon a meeting point and time if you are separated. A group I saw a couple years ago attached orange bicycle flags to their hats so they could pick each other out at a distance. Good idea, even though they looked weird.

Do not spray strangers with artificial snow unless they ask you to. On the other hand, do not get angry if someone sprays you with snow or even accidentally drenches you with beer.

Most *blocos* have T-shirts for sale. It is polite to buy these in order to help them finance the party. They make better souvenirs for the folks back home than your average Rio T-shirt.

Most *blocos* have preferred colors and carefully (cough, cough) chosen sambas. It is considered polite to wear their colors and learn the words of the sambas. People will probably be passing out pamphlets or fans with the words written on them.

Wear light, comfortable, clothes and sensible shoes. Rio has many cobble-stoned streets and your feet won't last the whole parade if you go in high heels or flip-flops. Use sun-screen and sunglasses at daytime affairs.

If you do decide to wear a costume, try to make it as light-weight and open as possible. Sure, it'd look cool to go as Tobor the Robot to Carnival, but Rio's summer heat will wilt you before you dance a block

Above all remember that Carnival is about fun and folly. Do not take anything too seriously and you're bound to have a great time.

Start worrying about the time, where you parked, where you'll go next, and oh-my-God-there-are-so-many-people-here and you're better off spending your cash on a couple of Sapucaia tickets.

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### Eliomar's Guide to Carioca Street *Blocos*

For the past few years now, Rio's Councilman Eliomar Coelho has produced a guide to street events which lists the most important ten percent of the *blocos* which will come out during Carnaval.

As a public service to the *gringaiada*, then, we are proud to offer his guide in English, duly annotated with commentary of our own.

For further information about these groups, I suggest you visit Eliomar's website at [www.eliomar.com.br](http://www.eliomar.com.br)

. Click on Mapa da Folia. I've taken the liberty of not listing those groups that came out on the 22nd, for obvious reasons.

#### Friday, January 28th

Eu, Você e sua Mãe (Me, You and Your Mother)

New group, founded in 2004, with the colors blue and orange. Concentrates at 6:00PM in front of the statue of Noel Rosa in Vila Isabel.

#### Saturday, January 29th

Simpatia é Quase Amor (Sympathy is Almost Love)

This Ipanema group's 21st anniversary. Colors: yellow and lilac. Concentration: Praça General Osório in Ipanema, 5:00PM.

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### Gigante da Lira (Giant with the Lyre)

A bloco entirely dedicated to children. A "must" for the kiddies as there will be clowns, jugglers and other circus figures. I'll be taking my niece. Meets at the Pracinha da Rua General Glicéio in Laranjeiras at 5:00 PM.

### Sunday, January 30th

#### Suvaco do Cristo (Christ's Armpit)

One of Rio's oldest and most popular, blocos, Suvaco avoids giving out the precise time of their concentration in order to avoid congestion. You just have to keep your ears peeled, won't you? Concentration point is the Bar Jãia, at the corner of Rua Jardim Botânico and Rua Faro.

#### Quem Num Guenta Bebe Água (Those who can't handle it drink water)

It's this group's second year of parading through Laranjeiras. They concentrate at 2:00PM at Juca's tavern, Rua Gago Coutinho, 37.

Wednesday, February 2nd

#### Discípulos de Oswaldo (Oswaldo's Disciples)

This bloco is formed by FIOCRUZ employees, but all are welcome. Concentration at Chico's Bar, on Rua Castro Tavares, 185 in Manguinhos at 5:00PM.

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### Thursday, February 3rd

Escravos de Mauã; (Mauã;â€™s slaves)

Bloco concentrates at 7:00 PM in the Largo de SãŁo Francisco da Prainha, behind Praãa Mauã;. Walks down Av. Rio Branco. One of my favorite blocos and a great way to begin Carnaval.

### Friday, February 4th

Badalo de Santa Teresa

One of two blocos in Santa Teresa. Concentrates at 8:00 PM in the Largo das Neves in that neighborhood.

Carmelitas

The other Santa Teresa bloco. Concentrates at 6:00 PM in front of Sergioâ€™s Bar on R. Hermegildo de Barros. With both blocos coming out on the same night, ST will be a carioca version of Olinda on this night. Should be fun. Might be horrible. Will in any case be chaos.

Rola Preguiãosa (Roll Over, Lazy Woman)

Concentrates at 6:00 PM in Lagoa at the corner of Maria Quitãria and Epiãcio Pessoa. White and orange are this groupâ€™s colors and their principle attraction is a 6.5 meter long condom. Zezã Motta is the groupâ€™s sponsor and singer.

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Vem ni mim que eu sou Facinha (Come with me cuz lâ€™m easy)

This block doesnâ€™t parade: it hunkers down for serious singing and drinking. Great drum section. 5:00 PM at Rua Prudente de Moraes #10, Ipanema at the "Largo das Facinhas".

Boca que Fala (The mouth that speaks [as opposed to the one that... well, you know.])

The SINTRASEF (Federal Public Workers) bloco. Concentrates at the MEC building at 6:00 PM.

Bloco do Bip Bip

Named after the tiny little samba bar where it concentrates, this bloco always has first rate sambas. Red and white are its colors. Bip Bip (a great bar in and of itself) can be found at R. Almirante GonÃ§alves #50 in Copacabana.

The group hits the streets at midnight and one minute on Carnival Saturday, making it the first bloco to take to the streets during the "official" Carnival.

Concentra Mas NÃ£o Sai (Concentrates but goes nowhere)

The name says it all. Another group, which prefers drinking, dancing and singing to parading. Concentrates at R. Ipiranga 54, at Severyna's Bar. Beth Carvalho is one of the organizers.

**Saturday, February 5th**

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### Zumbi de Pilares

Concentrates and parades every day of official Carnival, starting on the 5th and ending on the 8th. Meets at the Largo de Pilares, in Pilares, (way out there in the north zone) at 7PM.

### Cordão da Bola Preta (The Black Ball Krewe)

The oldest Carnival association still active in Rio, bar none. Originally founded by bohemians who had been black-balled in all the city's proper clubs. Now a carioca tradition going on 8 decades or more.

Plays old-time Carnival marches with brass band accompaniment. King Momo shows up, as does everyone else, to take over downtown and officially open Carnival.

Concentrates in Cinelândia at 9:00 AM. You read that right: 9 o'clock IN THE MORNING. Lugar quente ☺ na cama, ou então na Bola Preta, meu bem.

### Bloco das Barbas (Bearded Bloco)

21 years old this year, the Beards include in their parade a tanker truck to soak down their followers if things get too hot. Red and white are their colors and they meet at the corner of Rua Assis Bueno and Arnaldo Quintela in Botafogo starting at 2:00 PM.

### Dois pra Lá, dois pra cá (Two to the left, two to the right)

This group was founded by Carolina de Jesus and brings ballroom dance lovers together. Concentrates at the Casa de Dança Carolina de Jesus, R. Álvaro Ramos #11 in Botafogo. 2:00 PM.

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### Laranjada Samba Clube

Founded in 2002, colors orange and blue. Concentrates in Laranjeiras on R. General Glicero. No time listed.

### O RemÃ©dio Ã© o Samba (Samba is the Cure)

Concentrates on Av. AtlÃ¢ntica on the corner of Xavier da Silveira in front of the Othon Palace at 5:00 PM.

### Que Merda Ã© Essa? (What Sort of Shit is This?)

Concentrates in front of the Paz e Amor Bar on the corner of R. Garcia D'Avila and Nascimento Silva in Ipanema at 2:00 PM.

### Meu Kantinho (My Corner)

Another children's group. Concentrates in Penha at noon at Meu Kantinho School, Rua IndÃ©gena #62.

## Sunday, February 6th

### Simpatia Ã© Quase Amor (Sympathy is Almost Love)

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Concentration: Praia General Osório in Ipanema, 5:00PM.

Bloco dos Coqueiros (Coconut Tree Bloco)

Out on Paqueta Island. Colors: orange, white and green. Concentrates at noon on the Praia dos Coqueiros.

Cordão do Boitatã

Plays old Carnival marches with brass band accompaniment. Concentrates somewhere in the center at a time and place yet to be determined. Bloco asks that people come costumed in an attempt to create the illusion of an old-time Carnival.

Enxame do Pandeiro (On the Tamborine)

Rhythm section composed entirely of tambourines. Concentrates in front of the old Semente Bar in Lapa at 5:00 PM.

### Monday, February 7th

Bloco de Segunda (Monday's bloco [or second-class bloco])

Parades in Botafogo with highly sarcastic and politicized sambas and white, red and blue as its colors. Concentrates at Cobal do Humaitã (Voluntários da Pátria side). No time listed.

Rancho Flor de Sereno

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Another old-time style group. More lyrical and slow than others but very pretty and fun. Concentrates at 7:00 PM at Posto 6 on Copacabana and marches to Alcazar Restaurant, where they will engage in a confetti battle.

### Tuesday, February 8th

Bloco da Ansiedade (Bloco Anxiety)

Frevo bloco with silver and rose as its colors. Concentrates at the Mercadinho São José in Laranjeiras, 3:00 PM.

Meu Bem, Eu Volto Já; (I'll Be Right Back, Honey)

Parades in Leme. This year's theme is "I'm back from the dead, where is my love?" T-shirts signed by cartoonist Aliedo. Concentrates at the beginning of Av. Atlântica, Leme side, at 3:00 PM.

Tramela

Parades down Rua da Abolição. Concentrates at Rua João Pinheiro and Rua Teresa Cavalcanti at 4:00 PM.

Sã³ Pra Ver o Que Vai Dar (Just to See What'll Happen)

Botafogo. Colors are blue and yellow. This year's theme is "Making Fun of Grandma". Concentrates on the corner of Rua Arnaldo Quintela and Oliveira Fausto at

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3:00PM.

Vem ni mim que eu sou Facinha (Come with me cuz I'm easy)

5:00PM at Rua Prudente de Moraes #10, Ipanema at the "Largo das Facinhas".

Ã% do Pandeiro (On the Tambourine)

Rhythm section composed entirely of tambourines. Concentrates in Jardim de Alah in Ipanema at 5:00 PM

Meu Kantinho (My Corner)

Another children's group. Concentrates in Penha at noon at Meu Kantinho School, Rua IndÃ-gena #62.

Bloco dos Coqueiros (Coconut Tree Bloco)

Out on PaquetÃ; Island. Colors: orange, white and green. Concentrates at noon on the Praia dos Coqueiros.

Carmelitas

The Carmelitas escort any and all errant and erring (but we hope not pregnant) nuns back to the convent at 6:00PM in Santa Teresa.  
Concentration in Largo dos GuimarÃes.

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### **Bloco do Bip Bip**

Bip Bip returns to close out Carnaval at 11:59 PM at the bar of the same name, the last block to go out during the official Carnaval season (Saturday to the dawn of Ash Wednesday).

### **Thursday, February 10th**

#### **Voltar Pra Que? (Why Go Home?)**

Red and blue are the colors, with the concentration point in front of the Teatro Rival in the Center, in the infamous Cirrhosis Alley. 8:30 PM.  
Saturday, February 12th

#### **Bafafãj**

This three-year-old bloco doesn't parade. It concentrates in front of Posto 9 in Ipanema do drink and dance to the sound of the Black Ball Krewe band and DJ Franz.

### **Sunday, February 13th**

#### **CondomÃ-nio Barangal**

Concentrates on Av. Vieira Souto near Posto 9 at 3:00 PM. Green and orange are the group's colors.

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