

Brazil celebrates its return to full-scale Carnival festivities



Brazil's Carnival celebrations are expected to be a boon to tourism after the coronavirus dampened the industry [Bruna Prado/AP Photo]

Rio de Janeiro, February 19 (RHC)-- The samba was playing, revelers were dancing and throughout the city of Rio de Janeiro in Brazil, parties and pageantry filled the streets. This weekend marked the official opening of Brazil's Carnival festivities, which run through February 22nd, and this year's events signal a return to the full-fledged celebrations not seen since before the coronavirus pandemic.

Brazil's government anticipates 46 million people will join in the annual celebration, a burst of exuberance held in the days before Lent, the 40-day period when many Catholics fast and practise acts of austerity.

For this year's Carnival, crowds are flooding into the streets of Rio de Janeiro and other big cities for music, sightseeing and parades. Rio alone has awarded more than 600 permits for street parties known as "blocos", with many more unofficial bashes expected to erupt in the days to come. Millions attend some of the city's biggest "blocos", with the local tourism agency estimating an economic boost of about \$1 billion in revenue for businesses like bars and hotels.

But this year's festivities come in stark contrast to the more muted Carnivals of previous years, as Brazil suffered under the COVID-19 pandemic. The country has recorded 697,894 deaths from the virus, according to the World Health Organization, with only the United States surpassing that total.

As the government grappled with its response to the health crisis, Brazil was forced to cancel Carnival in 2021 for the first time in a century. And in 2022, Rio and Sao Paulo chose to delay their festivities for two months, as the Omicron variant spurred renewed fears. The result was a more modest version of Carnival, attended mostly by locals.

But as the tourism industry recovers, the economy surrounding Carnival is likewise expected to rebound. Its parades and spectacles can take nearly a year to prepare and employ armies of carpenters, electricians, costume makers and choreographers.

Even Brazil's first lady Rosângela da Silva – wife of newly inaugurated President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva – is expected to join the revellers this year.

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