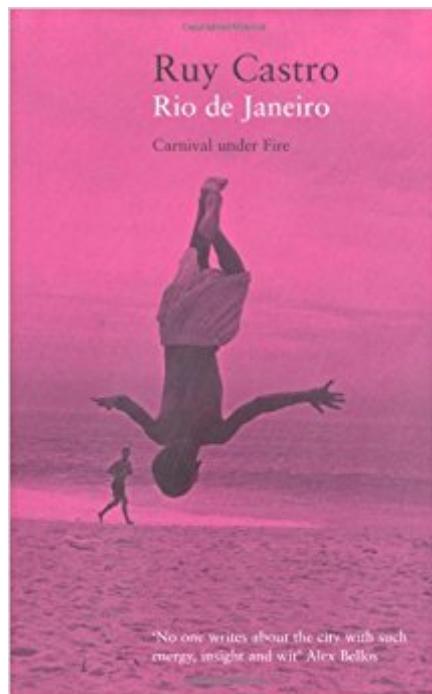


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Rio De Janeiro: Carnival Under Fire



Synopsis

Occupying what is arguably the most breathtakingly beautiful site in the world, the people of Rio - the Cariocas - tell their stories: of cannibals charming European intellectuals; of elegant slaves and their shabby masters; of how a casual chat between two people drinking coffee on Avenida Rio Branco could affect world coffee markets; of an awesome beach life; of faveals, drugs, police, carnival, football and music. With his own Carioca good humour and spellbinding storytelling gifts, Ruy Castro brings the reader thrillingly close to the flames.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

The fifth book in Bloomsbury's the Writer and the City series is no dry travelogue, dutifully reciting the requisite tourist attractions and eating and drinking establishments. Castro (Bossa Nova), a notable Brazilian essayist, meanders through Rio the way a long-time resident might take a visitor through favorite neighborhoods, telling charming anecdotes as they occur to him: a French viscount's lunatic plan to knock down the Sugar Loaf mountain that rises in the midst of Guanabara Bay; the quixotic efforts to move Carnival to the cooler month of June; the playboy Porfirio Rubirosa's loss of his wife in the middle of a dance floor. Historical fables are woven in with an account of contemporary Brazil and a strong dose of the legendary carioca humor. Castro takes us from Amerigo Vespucci's arrival in Brazil in 1502 to the 17th- and 18th-century battles for control of Rio, recounting colonial-era maneuvering with an ear for irony. His musical chronicles follow the Belle Èpoque and the first hit samba in the 1960s Carnival, "The Girl from Ipanema." He also recounts the drug wars and the growth of the hillside favela slums. He conveys Rio's *jeito*, or

indefinable spirit, in a way that no traditional travel book could ever do. Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved. --This text refers to an alternate Hardcover edition.

Often resembling "heaven and hell at the same time," Rio de Janeiro has served as a haven for pirates, fugitives, and rebels, and until 1888 it was one of the world's largest slave markets. But despite its checkered past and troubled present, Rio refuses to take itself seriously. When Portuguese explorer Amerigo Vespucci first arrived in 1502, he discovered natives who "spent all their time singing and dancing in the sun, everybody naked, cheerfully fornicating in the woods"--that is, when they weren't eating each other. Today, Rio celebrates Carnival as its cultural centerpiece, and its inhabitants fill Copacabana's sex- and samba-fueled nightclubs, even while the thriving local drug trade routinely erupts in car chase and police shoot-outs. The beach, meanwhile, serves as a pseudo-town square: the places to meet friends, get gossip, and talk business. A worthy entry in Bloomsbury's Writer and the City series, this small, compact book teems with detail and offers an exciting take on Rio's topsy-turvy social history. Andy Boynton
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Those who loved Castro's book about Bossa Nova, might find his book about Rio a bit thin. No photos, less details and not many anecdotes from the last decade. Still "Carnival under Fire" offered interesting knowledge about Rio's fascinating history. And Ruy Castro knows how to write.

I love books like these over a typical guidebook when preparing for a trip to a new place. This book did not disappoint and I am now even more excited for my trip to Rio!

brilliant little book. too bad the author has become a fascist in his old age.

Castro is a fair writer, presenting an honest view of the city. I've never been, so I cannot base this on my own experiences. The book presents a little bit of everything which seems to be central to Rio: the nightlife, Carnival, the cuisine and, most importantly for me, the history. The problem with small books such as this one, which in a standard layout would maybe top 130 pages, is that the writer is prohibited from straying from the main path of introducing the city to the reader. I would say this book is the equivalent of spending two days in a major city - seeing the major sights, creating opinions and generalizations without really getting to know any citizen or neighborhood too well.

However, the book did succeed in what I took as its major goal: to get the reader to go to Rio. Brazil is now definitely near the top of my travel list.

The city has an eclectic past that comes to life in Castro's virtual historic tour of the last 500 years

Ruy Castro's slim volume on Rio de Janeiro provides the casual reader a compelling portrait of that most intriguing of cities. Providing a rapid history of the city from the first Portuguese explorers to the celebrations of the dawn of the 21st century, he tells the tale of a city that has at times been the height of fashion, that has provided the world with at least its share of memorable movie scenes, more than its requisite portion of compelling rhythms, and a plentiful supply of legends, scandalous and otherwise. Seemingly influenced by the flaneur approach to writing on cities (though not adopting the majority of that form's conventions) and with the long memory that comes of living in and loving a city for his whole natural life, Castro gives plentiful insight into a genteel experience of the city. He tells how Rio rose over its first few centuries, and then fell into the same morose situation that afflicted so many metropolises through the Cold War years, a conflation of the effects of over-exposure that turned an exciting, exclusive experience like early Copacobana into the banality of over-exposure, and a structuralist approach to cities that sucked them of life. Alongside the allusions to many a scandalous encounter, there are nods to the less glamorous aspects of Rio's underbelly, but the favelas, the drugs trade and Brazil's notorious crimeworld are skipped over with only the scantest of mentions. Despite the vivid picture he draws, for all the talk of hypnotic rhythms, the book never quite grips the reader or imparts the carnival spirit on which its first half is almost entirely focussed. It may be that that detachment is telling of a divorce that has taken place between the Rio of legend and the Rio as experienced by a man who has lived through the city's awkward middle years and is still trying to work out a place in a new age, but it results in a less engaging book than one might hope this city would inspire. As a quick read, Rio is worth a look, but it's not quite the mesmerising experience readers may be looking for.

Rio is every carioca's mistress. As a true lover of the city, I was amazed by Ruy Castro's profound and inspired view of Rio. He makes this book as interesting for someone just looking for a travel guide as for the most serious and passionate student of the city's soul. Rio is more than just a beautiful accident of geography and history. This one place that, so stubbornly and yet, so rightfully calls itself "the wonderful city", like a being greater than its buildings, streets, beaches and mountains, is a major character of our lives. This is no trivial book about Rio. Ruy Castro writes, in a

good-humored and elegant style, a guide to the carioca soul: a fresh, original and colorful view of the city and the people that make it the best place to live in the world.

Ruy Castro's chronicle of Rio takes you through the city's centuries long history to where it is today: the marvelous city. Castro has great wit and humor and has knack for telling a story. Excellent quick read before visiting Rio before the Carnival.

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