

# Beach Games

The eyes of the world will soon fall on Rio de Janeiro, with the Brazilian city set to host the Olympic Games from 5-21 August, as **Michael Stoneman** reports



Anyone who's visited Rio de Janeiro will know just how passionate the local people are about sport. On any given day, *cariocas* of all ages can be seen playing football and volleyball on the city's beaches, running along the scenic waterfront paths or cycling around the beautiful Rodrigo de Freitas Lagoon. And when they're not outside participating in sport, they can be found cheering on local football teams, such as Flamengo and Fluminense, showing their support for the Brazilian national team, or reminiscing about past glories by the likes of football icon

**Main:** Rio offers a stunning backdrop for the 2016 Olympics  
**Right:** Barbara Seixas will be vying for beach volleyball gold

Pele, seven-time Grand Slam tennis champion Maria Bueno or motorsport heroes Emerson Fittipaldi, Nelson Piquet and Ayrton Senna.

With such an appetite for sport, it's little wonder that the International Olympic Committee chose Rio de Janeiro to host the 2016 Olympic Games, which will get underway on 5 August with an Opening Ceremony that is sure to evoke the party spirit of the city's famous annual Carnival. For 16 days, Rio's spectacular beaches and iconic scenery – including the Christ the Redeemer statue that overlooks the city – will provide a picture-postcard setting for the Games, as millions of fans file in to the newly-built Olympic arenas and billions more tune into TV

coverage around the world.

Many will be hoping to witness Usain Bolt writing another piece of sporting history, as the Jamaican world record-holding sprinter goes for an unprecedented third successive trio of golds in the 100m, 200m and 4x100m relay, following previous triumphs in all three events at both the 2008 and 2012 Olympics.

Bolt's good friend Mo Farah will also be looking to make history of his own on the track, as he tries to become the first man in 50 years to successfully defend both the 5,000m and 10,000m Olympic titles. Britain's Farah won gold in both events in front of vociferous home support four years ago in London, but will have to overcome the rising talent of Yomif Kejelcha if he is to emulate Lasse Viren's feat.



But even the potential heroics of Bolt and Farah may be overshadowed by those of another Olympic legend, as US swimmer Michael Phelps returns to the Games four years after hanging up his goggles at London 2012. With 22 medals – including 18 gold – the 30-year-old already has more medals than any other Olympian and, having enjoyed an impressive run of form since returning to the ➤

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**Below: US swimmer Michael Phelps is returning to the pool**

"In these difficult days that Brazil is facing, the Olympic flame is a timeless reminder that we all are part of the same humanity," he said recently. "The Olympic Games are a great gift shared by all of humanity. Rio de Janeiro, with the support of all Brazilians, will provide a spectacular stage to showcase the best of the human spirit. In just a few weeks, the Brazilian people will enthusiastically welcome the world and amaze us with their joy of life and their passion for sport. This will be Brazil's moment and this will be Brazil's Games." ■

pool in 2014, he now looks set to extend his record even further.

As well as the return of Phelps, the Rio Games will also see the sports of golf and rugby back on the Olympic stage for the first time in 112 and 92 years respectively. The Olympic golf tournament will feature the likes of world no.1 Jason Day and two-time major champion Jordan Spieth battling it out for men's gold, while New Zealand young gun Lydia Ko and US hotshot Lexi Thompson will be among the favourites for the women's title. Rugby, meanwhile, will be played in the thrilling 'sevens' formats, which sees two teams of seven players contest two seven-minute halves of high-octane, fast-paced action. Reigning World Series champions Fiji are highly fancied in the men's tournament, but New Zealand's two-time Rugby World Cup-winner Sonny Bill Williams is among the star names who have switched to sevens

in search of Olympic gold, and he will be aiming to deny the Fijians their country's first ever medal in any sport at the Games.

While they won't be competing in rugby, Brazil's home fans will have plenty of other potential medal-winners to cheer on, with the women's volleyball team aiming for a third successive gold and the men looking to go one better than the silvers they won in 2008 and 2012. In beach volleyball, which will be held on the world-famous sands of Copacabana, Brazil also boasts the reigning men's and women's world champions. If Alison Cerutti and Bruno Schmidt, or Barbara Seixas and Agatha Bednarczuk, can replicate their success in Rio then the celebrations across the city are sure to last long into the night.

But whether Brazil's athletes win or lose on the sporting field, the city of Rio de Janeiro is unlikely to forget the 2016 Olympic Games

in a hurry. Preparations for the event have already left a positive mark on the city, with a number of long-term legacies set to benefit Rio for many years to come. Among these are the extension to the metro line and the construction of three new Bus Rapid Transport (BRT) routes, which have improved the public transport infrastructure of the city, and the regeneration of the port area, which has successfully restored one of the city's most historic locations. Many of the Olympic venues that have been built for the Games – including the golf course, the canoe-slalom stadium and the BMX track – will continue to be used by local residents long after the Olympic cauldron has been extinguished.

All this has been achieved against a challenging backdrop in Brazil, with the country suffering political and economic turbulence in recent years. Despite this, Rio is now counting down the days to the arrival of the Olympic flame, which is currently making its way around Brazil in a nationwide Torch Relay – something which International Olympic Committee President Thomas Bach believes can be a uniting force for Brazil and the world as a whole.



## ONES TO WATCH

Simone Biles  
(USA, gymnastics)  
Kristina Vogel  
(Germany, cycling)  
Eric Murray and Hamish Bond  
(New Zealand, rowing)  
Ami Kondo  
(Japan, judo)  
Katie Ledecky  
(USA, swimming)  
Ma Long  
(China, table tennis)  
Kim Woo-jin  
(Korea, archery)  
Eliud Kipchoge  
(Kenya, marathon)  
Abdulrashid Sadulaev  
(Russia, wrestling)  
Mutaz Barshim  
(Qatar, high jump)  
Fernando Gaviria  
(Colombia, cycling)  
Laura Asadauskaite  
(Lithuania, modern pentathlon)  
Teddy Riner  
(France, judo)  
Jess Fox  
(Australia, canoe slalom)

