

For Rio, a Test of Temperament

Brazilians Hope Famed Hospitality Trumps Homicides During City's Turn on World Stage
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RIO DE JANEIRO, July 6 -- Magazine surveys have called the residents here the friendliest in the world, the local music can melt stress on contact, and geological terms seem less apt than religious ones for the spectacular landscape.

So why is [Rio de Janeiro](#) making so many Brazilians nervous?

The Pan American Games begin here next week, and the city is set to represent [Latin America](#) by hosting one of the nine worldwide Live Earth concerts Saturday. For both events, security is the wild card -- nearly everyone here is hoping the city's reputation for beachside tranquillity can trump its flip side, one of the highest murder rates in the world.

More than 15,000 police officers -- military, civilian, local, federal -- are patrolling the streets to make sure the events go smoothly. Some of them have been put to work in recent weeks cracking down on Rio's notorious drug gangs, launching some of the most extensive -- and deadly -- slum raids the city has known. Last week, at least 19 people were killed during a single raid in Complexo do Alemao, one of the city's largest slums.

Police officials deny a link between the upcoming events and the large-scale raids, which have been occurring almost daily. But they acknowledge that cracking down on crime in the coming weeks is a top priority and that the fight against the city's drug traffickers has reached a new level of intensity.

"Of course there's a connection between the Pan American Games and the raids, and not just in Complexo do Alemao," said Angelo Marcio da Silva, a social activist who works with community groups in several slums, called favelas here. "All over the city, people are feeling the increased actions of the police, and they're also feeling the answers coming from the criminals."

Such tension has resulted in a tentative brand of prudence in some quarters. A judge this week temporarily called off the Live Earth show, saying preparations for the Pan Am Games had helped to exhaust the city's available security forces. The judge soon reversed the order, after concert organizers and local officials cried foul and police guaranteed enough officers to oversee the free concert on [Copacabana Beach](#).

"This is a really important time for the image of Rio and for all of [Brazil](#)," said Rio's Crispin Rosa Machado, 57, a retired naval officer who visited the beachside stage Friday to listen to sound checks. "The world is watching, and we need everyone in Rio to help out and make sure nothing bad happens."

Everyone from Pele to the president has called for Cariocas -- as Rio residents call themselves -- to show their best face to the world during the Pan Am Games, which run from July 13 to July 29 and feature athletes from 42 countries. When construction delays

and cost overruns threatened to disrupt the start of the games, President [Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva](#) announced that he was appointing himself personal supervisor of the preparations.

A good showing could help the city land its bids for the 2014 World Cup and 2016 Olympics.

"I'm very worried, because a lot of things are not working here yet," said Meg Girardi, 27, who works at the newly constructed Pan American Village here, coordinating athletes' schedules and transportation. "There are problems with transportation and infrastructure, and I don't think there's enough security in the other areas of Rio outside of the games."

The city is hardly a naive debutante when it comes to spectacle and spotlight. Rio hosts millions for Carnival celebrations each year, and its beachside concerts are legendary -- for their size and their atmosphere of festive civility. Last year, the [Rolling Stones](#) drew about 1.5 million people to a free performance on the same strip of sand now being prepared for Live Earth. Everything went smoothly.

"Brazilians, and Cariocas in particular, are very proud of their international standing and visibility, and we expect the security for these events to be flawless," said Domicio Proenca Jr., a professor and public security analyst in Rio. "Especially for the Pan American Games, we trust that the same expectations apply to those responsible for the security -- even the smallest blip in security would reflect very badly on Rio."

That might seem unfair, but Rio has always been held to a high standard among Brazilians. Brasilia might be the nation's capital, [Sao Paulo](#) its largest city and Manaus the gateway to the Amazon -- but the country's reputation has always rested on Rio.

"A forest catches fire in Amazonia and it's thought that someone in Rio had something to do with it -- no one's obliged to know that Rio is further away from Manaus than [Lisbon](#) from [Moscow](#)," wrote Ruy Castro, a Brazilian author, in his portrait of the city, "Rio de Janeiro: Carnival Under Fire."

Such observations help explain why it's not just Cariocas who have cringed when reading about the violence in the favelas, or about the planning challenges surrounding the Pan Am Games, or about the problems with air traffic control that have stranded thousands of passengers in the country's airports in recent weeks.

Most everyone is watching, and keeping their fingers crossed that everything stays under control until the events are over, and doesn't get worse when the spotlight goes off.

"I think these things happen with every big event," said Evandro Pontes, 52, who will drive a bus for the games. "But they usually turn out well."