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Coffee Barons & Slave Plantations

The 19th Century Rise and Fall of Rio de Janeiro's Coffee Valley

This is a unique day-trip opportunity to experience Brazilian history by visiting the 19th century plantations close to Rio de Janeiro in the Coffee Valley – Valé do Café.

In the 19th century the coffee boom had an immense impact on the Brazilian economy. In fact, in the 1850's, Brazil dominated the world market by supplying 75% of the total production of coffee. Back then Brazil was still a new empire. In the beginning of the 1820s the gold mines in the state of Minas Gerais emptied, the gold-rush slowed down and people started moving back towards the coast of Brazil.



A great deal of them settled in the green, fertile hills of inner Rio state, around the cities of Vassouras, Barra do Piraí and Valença. An area roughly 150 kilometers from the capital. Here the luckiest ones were given large land grants and baron titles by the emperor. At huge estates – known as fazendas – they created slave-driven plantations that gained them fortunes. Fortunes soon to be lost again due to politics, rising slave prices and increasing competition on coffee.

The coffee boom started in the 1820's and ended in the 1880's – it peaked in the 1850's where 75% of the world's coffee was produced in the Coffee Valley, Paraíba Valley – with Vassouras – the coffee princess – as the main city. In total, there were more than 100 plantations and tens of thousands of slaves.



Our trip begins in Rio de Janeiro and for the following 8 hours you will visit two plantation or historic “fazendas”. One of the estates is still producing coffee, so this is an opportunity to get an insight into modern coffee production. Following the visits, we will go to Vassouras and a walk in the historic center of the city and some great shopping opportunities.