

Mossoró, Brazil

Mossoró is a city of the state “Rio Grande do Norte” in Brazil. It is equidistant from Natal and Fortaleza (approximately 270 km.), and has a population of 300,000 people (2020). It is in the heart of Brazil's salt production area, and has a large petroleum industry. For Brazilians, the city is famous for its association with the person "Lampião". He led a gang of “cangaceiros” in the “sertão” during the 1920's and 30's. It was also the city that first allowed women to vote in Latin America (in 1928). Mossoró is growing fast, even though it appears like a small market town. In the centre there is a market, a square and some ornate 1930's public buildings, with white and pink walls, which look like wedding cakes!

It's easy to find your way around in Mossoró, despite the lack of town maps and tourist information. The main street is Avenida Augusto Severo , which passes the municipal market, the bus station and the two squares which are the hub of the city; Praça Vigário Antônio Joaquim , where the cathedral is, and Praça da Independência. The town has an old jail and a museum, and on the other side of the Rio Apodi is a small “*artesanato*” market.

We recommend you walk around the municipal market. It sells dried meat, medicinal herbs and slabs of salt. Here you can see many people wearing straw hats. The brightly painted lorries and buses, many of which should be in a museum, are the villages' only link with Mossoró. Outside the market you can buy food and rum and iced “*caldo de cana*” (sugar-cane juice), and small vendors spread their wares out on the pavement. Also you can buy kerosene lamps and other simple items made with great talent from old tins.

However, the main places of interest in the city are connected with Mossoró's glorious moment in 1924 when the people defended the town from Lampião and his followers. On June 13th, 1924, Lampião attacked with a band of about fifty “*cangaçeiros*”, and there was fierce fighting, concentrating on the church, where the mayor and his family was hiding. In the late afternoon the bandits retreated with many wounded, one dead, and one famous outlaw, Jararaca, wounded and captured. Despite being a humiliating defeat for him, the battle of Mossoró became one of the most famous events in Lampião's life. It is an event that is celebrated every year on June 13th with masses and re-enactments. You should visit the “Igreja de Santo Antônio”, near the centre. It has a plaque commemorating the event, and you can still see the walls and tower marked with bullet holes.



You should also see the “Museu Histórico Municipal”, in Praça Antônio Gomes, housed in the oldest building in the city, a nineteenth-century building that was once a jail. It contains a remarkable collection of photographs and newspaper articles of the attack and its aftermath, together with the guns used, clothing of the bandits and maps of how the action developed. There are also photographs of Jararaca, who was kept in a cell in the same building as the museum today. Jararaca was in jail for one day, treated by the town doctor, interviewed by the local paper, visited by town luminaries, constantly photographed by the town photographer, and then was taken out (at dawn the next day) to the municipal cemetery, stabbed, thrown into a grave, and shot. Reading what he said that day, it's clear that he knew his fate, but he expressed no fear or regret, only his determination to die like a man. His grave is in the “cemitério municipal”, near the church. The grave isn't marked, but anyone can show you where it is. Jararaca eventually became a mythical figure and a saint for the poor of the region, despite attempts by the Church and the municipal authorities to prevent it. This is why there is not a signpost nor path to his grave. His grave is covered with flowers and candles and is regularly visited. On December 13th every year, thousands of people go to Mossoró, from the interior of Rio Grande do Norte, to celebrate the holy day of Santa Luzia, the city's patron saint.

Vocabulary, Grammar and Expressions

Brazil's salt production area	área de produção de sal do Brasil
he led a gang (<i>vb: to lead</i>)	ele liderou um bando (<i>vb: liderar</i>)
allowed women to vote (<i>vb: to allow</i>)	permitiu mulheres para votar (<i>vb: permitir</i>)
is growing fast (<i>vb: to grow</i>)	está crescendo rapidamente (<i>vb: crescer</i>)
looking like wedding cakes (<i>vb: to look like</i>)	parecendo com bolos de casamento (<i>vb: parecer</i>)
the <u>hub</u> of the city	o <u>centro</u> da cidade
jail	prisão / cadeia
dried meat	carne seca
slabs of salt	barras de sal
straw hats	chapéus de palha
brightly painted lorries	caminhões pintados em cores vivas
old tins	latas velhas
fierce fighting	luta feroz
wounded	ferido
outlaw	bandido / fora-da-lei
defeat	derrota
masses and re-enactments (<i>vb: to re-enact</i>)	missas e representações (<i>vb: reviver</i>)
marked with bullet holes	marcada com buracos de bala
housed in the oldest building	instalado/abrigado no prédio mais velho
a remarkable collection of photographs	uma excepcional coleção de fotografias
the attack and its aftermath	o ataque e suas conseqüências
stabbed, shot (<i>vb: to stab, to shoot</i>)	esfaqueado, baleado (<i>vb: esfaquear, balear</i>)
signpost	placa
candles	velas
holy day	dia sagrado