

Stones Hope to Make History Rocking Free in Brazil for 2 Million

Contributed by O.Ch.
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Screams and cheers greeted the Rolling Stones as they pulled up to their beach-front hotel Friday, February 17, in Rio de Janeiro, southeastern Brazil. in a huge police motorcade.

Die-hard fans were already staking out spots before an enormous stage on Copacabana Beach, where up to 2 million people are expected to attend the band's free concert Saturday night, February 18.

"We've been camped out here since 5:00 a.m. Thursday and we're only leaving to take baths in the ocean," said Rodrigo Barduco, a 23-year-old student from São Paulo, 250 miles south of Rio.

A week before Carnival festivities hit full-swing, the concert was already drawing tourists and Brazilians to Rio de Janeiro which knows a thing or two about hosting massive parties.

Millions of people flock to Copacabana Beach each year for the city's New Years' Eve celebration, which features fireworks, tributes to Afro-Brazilian spirit deities and bands on several stages.

In 1994, 3.5 million people hit the beach to see Rod Stewart in what The Guinness World Records Web site describes as history's largest live concert.

But Rio Mayor Cesar Maia is among the city officials already touting Saturday's Stones appearance as the biggest live concert ever, arguing that many of those counted at the Stewart show were on the beach to celebrate New Year's.

Stones fans were expected to fill fully half of the 2.5-mile beach. Eight video screens and 16 sound towers will give fans far from the action a glimpse of the sexagenarian rockers.

Security is a concern. Earlier this month, three people were crushed to death and 38 injured in São Paulo when thousands of fans surged through security barriers at an autograph session for the Mexican band RBD.

The city is deploying 10,000 police officers about three times the usual contingent for New Year's as well as 600 firefighters, civil defense workers and lifeguards, said Ana Maria Maia, Rio's subsecretary of special events.

The city's port authority also was preparing for the huge influx of boats expected to crowd the shoreline.

As workers put the finishing touches on the enormous stage, fans were hoping for a glimpse of the band, known for hits such as "Satisfaction."

"I'm here to see them," Cristina Spacarella, a 46-year-old tourist from Argentina, said Friday. But she said she would not go to the show itself: "It's going to be too crowded."

Local media speculated that the Rolling Stones might visit the city's Sambadrome stadium, where the Carnival group Imperatriz Leopoldinense was rehearsing, since Luciana Jimenez, who has a 6-year-old son with lead singer Mick Jagger, is a featured Carnival dancer for the group.

This is the Stones' third visit to the country, but the first time the band has played for free in Brazil, where few can afford tickets to see top international acts.

Fans were also camping out outside São Paulo's Morumbi stadium on Friday, hoping to be one of the first to enter the venue where U2 is playing Monday night.

Organizers were overwhelmed by huge crowds when the Irish band's tickets went on sale Jan. 16. Police were called in to restore order when some infuriated fans threatened to break into the stores where tickets were being sold.

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