

Master Plan for Niteroi, Brazil

The birthplace of architect Oscar Niemeyer, the city seeks to broaden and strengthen its economic base through key public investments.

THE CITY OF NITEROI, BRAZIL, is in the early stages of a 20-year plan to reinvest in its historic central city. The Niteroi Centro 2026 Master Plan incorporates the municipality's traditional downtown, waterfront, port, industrial, and residential areas. It seeks to broaden and strengthen its economic base through key public investments that will leverage significant private development over time. Much of the effort will be focused on reconnecting the city to its greatest natural asset, its waterfront, and creating a better sense of place there.

Background

Niteroi is a historic community located 11 miles (17 km) across Guanabara Bay to the east of Rio de Janeiro. It lies just 20 minutes from the city of Rio—accessible from via bridge and ferry—and 30 minutes from the international airport.

Niteroi traces its history to 1573, when it was founded by chief Arariboia, making it the only Brazilian city founded by a non-Christian,

The Niteroi Centro 2026 Master Plan largely focuses on the municipality's waterfront, depicted below. Clockwise from right: proposed plan of entire waterfront; 3-D model of building massing adjacent to the marina; photograph of waterfront; and aerial view of existing conditions.



A marina and promenade will connect the waterfront to the rest of the city. Retail space, condominiums, a hotel, and a convention center are expected to follow.

nonassimilated Amerindian. Its current population is nearly 500,000 people. It has a high quality of life and a diverse economy that includes the petroleum industry, government offices, and retail. Various measures, such as educational attainment and health, are well above the national average.

Notably, Oscar Niemeyer, one of the most renowned names in modern architecture, is a native son. At age 100, Niemeyer still lives in the area and some of his works—including one of his most famous recent buildings, the Niteroi Contemporary Art Museum (1996)—can be found here. Many of them, including the Popular Theater and Baptist Temple, are loosely arranged near each other in an area called Caminho Niemeyer (Niemeyer Way), located on the waterfront in the central city.

The success of the Brazilian economy and increased tourism in Niteroi have resulted in the need for a growth management plan. Mayor Godofredo Pinto, continuing the

efforts of the previous administration, spearheaded an effort to create a 20-year plan for the city's core.

The Plan

In 2006, the city of Niteroi hired Morris Architects to complete the master plan. Based in Orlando, the firm employs 200 staff members and has offices in Houston, Los Angeles, and—since 2005—Rio de Janeiro. With previous experience in Brazil, it was well positioned to complete the assignment.

The architects worked closely with the city to create the master plan, which covers 717 acres (290 ha). A thorough market and economic analysis was completed, as well as a complete inventory of the city's existing physical assets. They found that the core city—particularly the land along its waterfront—is underutilized in many ways, and needs more housing. They also learned that, although Rio is known worldwide for its numerous resorts and beaches geared to leisure travelers, the area

lacks sufficient business and convention facilities. Finally, they determined that Niteroi needs a branding campaign to establish itself within the Rio area and events to support the campaign in general and leisure and business tourism in particular.

The plan's overall goals include:

- ▷ generating economic development to expand the city's tax base;
- ▷ reconnecting the waterfront to the fabric of the city;
- ▷ spurring public and private investment within Centro Niteroi;
- ▷ enhancing existing or providing new civic amenities; and
- ▷ developing enforceable guidelines for new projects to protect the unique character of Niteroi.

Catalytic Development

A key component of the master plan is the notion of "catalytic development." In other words, explains Todd McCurdy, principal and landscape architect at Morris Architects, the plan includes zones in which energy will be focused on specific public elements to leverage private investment.

The first major catalytic development is improvement of the waterfront, much of which is owned by the city. This includes connecting the waterfront to the rest of the city by creating a marina and waterfront promenade. New land will be added there to enhance the public space along the water and to accommodate future private development, including retail, condominiums, and a hotel/convention center. According to McCurdy, "The most important key to the entire project is the marina and the pedestrian promenade. That is the element that gives the project its Brazilian soul, and creates more land and opportunity to become a place."

Another catalytic development includes creating a main street with a high-quality streetscape that connects the waterfront to downtown, where a concentration of government offices and commercial development exists. The terminus of the main street will be a high point of land overlooking

the city, on which the plan calls for a work of civic art that will define the view from the waterfront.

A third catalytic development is the creation of a zoning overlay to allow for retail and entertainment uses in the North Port area, which currently functions as a commercial and industrial district. Although it will continue to accommodate existing industries, North Port has additional

waterfront access and includes warehouses that could be converted into restaurants, retail, offices, or lofts.

Looking Ahead

Historically, development in Brazil was more difficult due to high interest rates and a requirement for vast amounts of equity for projects. As a result, development often required a foreign investor with deep pockets.

In recent years, however, development has become easier to finance, which bodes well for Niteroi's redevelopment prospects.

Although the marina and promenade are not yet constructed, the city is already seeking bids from firms to design and build a new hotel and convention facility along the waterfront. The private developer will likely be chosen by the end of 2008.

The master plan also calls for several condo towers along the waterfront overlooking the promenade and marina. The city intends to partner with private developers of such projects as they come on-board, requiring them to upgrade the public space around their projects. The creation of this additional open space will allow the developers to take advantage of increased building densities, which will in

turn maximize real estate value and tax revenue for the city.

The plan also creates a central management authority for properties on or near the waterfront. In addition, it calls for the construction of a roadway tunnel to improve access to and from the core and outlying portions of Niteroi.

Although the physical manifestation of the plan lies ahead, the Niteroi Master Plan has already received recognition, winning an award from the Florida Chapter of the American Society of Landscape Architects. Morris Architects says that jurors called the project "comprehensive and impressive." **UL**

SAM NEWBERG is an urbanist, a writer, a consultant, and the founder of Joe Urban, Inc., based in Minneapolis, Minnesota.



MORRIS ARCHITECTS

The Niteroi Contemporary Art Museum was designed by native son Oscar Niemeyer, one of the most renowned names in modern architecture.