



Rio chooses Londoner as its carnival queen

When the “world’s biggest party” opens in Rio de Janeiro on Friday, one British woman will fulfil a lifelong ambition by gyrating her way into the carnival’s history (Stephen Gibbs writes). Samantha Flores has been chosen as the top dancer on the lead float — the Império da Tijuca samba school — which will have a non-Brazilian principal dancer for the first time in its 78-year history. “It’s a privilege and a responsibility,” said Ms Flores, 37, a former public relations executive from Kentish Town, north London, who now runs a property consultancy in

Brazil. Her journey to become the sequined lead dancer in front of a global audience of several million began when she went to Rio on a “girls’ trip” in 2006. “It was literally love at first sight,” she said. “Within six months I had quit my job and moved here.” She has no professional dance training and first paraded at the carnival in 2011, dressed as a canary. “I’d never felt such adrenaline than singing at the top of my lungs, dancing samba down the Sambodromo,” she said. The grandstand, designed by the modernist architect Oscar Niemeyer, is the 600 metre-long setting for the main carnival events. “I do sometimes think ‘what’s a nice Jewish girl who used to just love a dance, nothing



Samantha Flores, who has no professional training, will be the first non-Brazilian to lead the parade

more, doing here?” said Ms Flores, who becomes the first non-Brazilian to be the *musa abre alas*, or leading dancer.

The week-long Rio festival, leading up to Ash

Wednesday and the beginning of Lent, attracts five million people, including 1.5 million tourists. It is hoped that the celebrations will be a filip for the city, which has

struggled economically since the 2016 Olympics. A crime wave has led city officials to hire 3,400 security staff. Last year thousands of soldiers were deployed on the streets.