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ALL YOU NEED TO PLAN YOUR PERFECT TRIP



Chupacabras

Rio - Beyond the Beaches

Rio de Janeiro, 2 Days

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Guide Description



AUTHOR NOTE: The beaches of Rio are certainly spectacular, but it's well worth taking the time to get off the beaten track and explore the rest that this exciting city has to offer. From the colonial charm of Centro and Santa Teresa to the wilds of the city jungle, there's a whole lot more to Rio than sun, sea and sand!

Itinerary Overview

things to do
restaurants
hotels
nightlife

Day 1 - Rio de Janeiro

DAY NOTE: Copacabana Palace may be the most famous of Rio's hotels, but Hotel Gloria is in fact the city's oldest. With great ocean views, beautiful grounds and bags of historic charm (just make sure you book a room in the original building), this good-value hotel makes a great base close to the centre of Rio. From the hotel, walk or take a bus (never walk at night, take a cab) to Lapa, and check out the incredible Escadaria, or Lapa Steps. Lapa may be rather down-at-heel these days, but take note of the crumbling colonial buildings (and keep an eye on your wallet!). You can either walk up the super-steep steps to Santa Teresa, or head to the bonde (tram) station to make the ascent in more comfort. The rattling tram ride is a treat in itself, and Santa Teresa has much to justify making the trek up here. Explore the arts, crafts and vintage clothing stores, drink in the traditional bars and take in the beauty of the colonial mansions on the hillside. Don't miss a visit to Parque das Ruínas, with amazing free views across the city and Guanabara Bay, and the neighbouring Museum Chacara de Ceu. For great value food, head for Bar do Arnaudo, where an 'individual' plate of delicious, hearty Northeastern food feeds two or even three people. When night falls, drink in the neighbourhood bars, many of which stay open until the small hours, or head down the hill to Lapa.

	Hotel Gloria Hotel steeped in history
	Bonde de Santa Teresa Rio's last remaining street car
	Santa Teresa Rio's artiest neighborhood
	Bar do Arnaudo Hearty portions, friendly welcome
	Escadaria Selarón Hip hop-endorsed ceramics
	Museu da Chácara do Céu Beautiful artwork, beautiful setting

miss a chance to visit the nearby fairytale-esque palace at Ilha Fiscal, and enjoy a cool drink and a wander round the pleasant whitewashed spaces of Paco Imperial. In the afternoon, head off to the Jardim Botânico neighbourhood and snap some pretty pictures at the little-visited Parque Lage, or be more adventurous and take a guided trip into the depths of Parque Tijuca – the world's largest urban rainforest. When night falls, head for the pleasant suburb of Botafogo and dine at the delightfully off-beat Miam Miam before dancing the night away at the similarly kooky Bar Bukowski.

	Ilha Fiscal Fairytale palace by the docks
	Paço Imperial Coffee, culture and history
	Bar Bukowski Kooky Nightlife Option
	Praça XV de Novembro Shopping at the Dock of the Bay
	Parque Nacional de Tijuca For hikers and nature lovers
	Miam Miam Style and substance
	Parque Lage Gorgeous Gardens and Grounds
	Hotel Gloria Hotel steeped in history

Day 2 - Rio de Janeiro

DAY NOTE: Head into Centro early on Saturday morning to try and bag some bargains at the weekly flea market held at Praça 15 de Novembro. Vinyl, clothing, books, photographs and jewelry are all waiting to be snapped up – be prepared to haggle! Don't

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QUICK NOTE

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contact:

tel: +55 21 2555 7272
fax: +55 21 2555 7282
<http://www.hotelgloriario.com.br>

location:

RUA DO RUSSEL 632
Rio De Janeiro 22210-010

1 Hotel Gloria

OUR LOCAL EXPERT SAYS:

Make sure you ask for a room in the original part of the hotel. The new wing is somewhat sterile.

DESCRIPTION: The oldest hotel in Rio, Hotel Gloria may not quite measure up to Copacabana Palace in the glamour stakes, but it remains jam-packed with historic charm. With a glistening white façade and antique furnishings, the hotel is a great bet for anyone who wants to be close to Centro as well as the beaches (a handy Metro stop puts Copacabana beach within a few minutes' reach). The hotel also boasts gorgeous tropical gardens and two enormous outdoor swimming pools, and there are beautiful views out across Parque do Flamengo and Guanabara Bay. © NileGuide



contact:

tel: +55 21 222 1003 / +55 21 242 2354
<http://www.sectran.rj.gov.br/>

location:

Rua Professor Léo Gama,
65
Rio de Janeiro RJ 20031-080

hours:

7a-10p M-Su

Bonde de Santa Teresa

DESCRIPTION: The Santa Teresa bonde (streetcar) is the last reminder of what was once Rio's principle form of public transport. But far from being just a historical artifact, the rattling yellow tram is great fun to ride, as it clatters over the iconic Arcos da Lapa and up the winding cobbled streets of Santa Teresa. Locals jump on and off the bonde as it rattles by – there is no charge for those who choose to stand on the running board instead of taking a seat. There are two lines – one to Paulo Mattos, and one to Dois Irmaoes. Both pass tram stops at Largo do Curvelo, where there is regular live samba on Sundays, and Largo do Guimaraes, which is the central point for the neighborhood's many excellent bars, restaurants and shops. Jump off at either point and you will be well-placed for exploring this bucolic neighborhood. © NileGuide



location:

Ladeira de Santa Teresa
Rio de Janeiro 20241-140

2 Santa Teresa

OUR LOCAL EXPERT SAYS:

When taking the bonde line that heads towards Paulo Mattos, most tourists jump off at the busy Largo do Guimaraes. Stay on until the end of the line, however, and you'll reach Largo das Neves – a wonderfully tranquil square headed by a pretty whitewashed church and lined with several small bars serving very good food and tasty cocktails.

DESCRIPTION: Once home to Rio's wealthiest inhabitants, the charming hillside neighborhood of Santa Teresa began to fall into disrepair during the 1960s and 70s, when the emergence of favelas nearby drove the rich towards the city's beaches. Artists and musicians moved into the abandoned mansions, and today Santa Teresa is known as Rio's most bohemian neighborhood. Vintage clothes stores, artists workshops and wonderfully laid-back bars and restaurants make the neighborhood well worth a visit, and the iconic yellow tram that clatters its way along the twisting streets is a joy to ride. Despite its close proximity to the city centre, Santa Teresa has preserved a charming small-town atmosphere, and there is a real community atmosphere to the place. Santa Teresa is well-policed and its reputation as a dangerous area to visit is largely undeserved, however, do take the usual precautions, and take taxis between here and Santa Teresa at night. © NileGuide



contact:

tel: 55 21 2252 7246

location:

Rua Almirante Alexandrino
316, loja B
Rio de Janeiro RJ 20441-260

3 Bar do Arnaudo

OUR LOCAL EXPERT SAYS:

Go easy with the chilli sauce brought to your table at Bar do Arnaudo. It's something of an acquired taste, and fiery to say the very least!

DESCRIPTION: If you're looking for good food that will fill you up without blowing the budget, Bar do Arnaudo is the place to come. This traditional, homely restaurant (no, it's not actually a bar...) serves delicious food from the North East of Brazil in absolutely enormous portions. The set meals for one easily serve two or even three – take your pick from sundried meat or queijo coalho (a hard white cheese, similar to halloumi, served grilled), with brown beans, yucca, rice and pumpkin farofa (toasted seasoned yucca flour). Wash it down with a large, ice cold bottle of beer to share, or - even better – a delicious coconut or passionfruit batida. These creamy drinks are made with fruit, condensed milk and cachaca, the sugar cane rum that is Brazil's national drink. Beware, however, that although they may taste innocent they really pack a punch! © NileGuide



Photo courtesy of Lucy Bryson

location:

Escadaria do Convento de Santa Teresa
Rio de Janeiro RJ 20241-130

4 Escadaria Selarón

DESCRIPTION: The steps between Lapa and Santa Teresa have been turned into an ongoing work of art by eccentric Chilean artist Selarón. The artist has used painted and decorated tiles from across the world to create something truly unique - musicians such as Snoop Dogg and Pharell have shot promotional videos here.



Photo courtesy of Lucy Bryson

contact:

tel: 021/2507-1932
www.museuscastromaya.com.br

location:

Rua Murinho Nobre 93
Rio de Janeiro 20241-050

hours:

Wed-Mon noon-5pm

5 Museu da Chácara do Céu

OUR LOCAL EXPERT SAYS:

Connected to the museum by a metal walkway is Parque das Ruínas, a restored mansion house whose top floor provides amazing views over the city. Entrance to the park is free.

DESCRIPTION: On a leafy side street in bohemian Santa Teresa, Museu Chácara do Céu is a former mansion house that is now home to an impressive collection of art works – including pieces by Picasso, Monet and Degas. There are also plenty of pieces from Brazilian artists, and the museum itself is located in beautiful shady gardens that provide a welcome retreat from the beating sun. Entrance to the park is R\$5. © NileGuide



Photo courtesy of Lucy Bryson

Day 2 - Rio de Janeiro

QUICK NOTE

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contact:

tel: +55 21 25447992 (Tourist information)

location:

Baía de Guanabara
Rio de Janeiro 20010-010

1 Ilha Fiscal

OUR LOCAL EXPERT SAYS:

Keep an eye out for Ilha Fiscal if you're making the ferry trip over to Niteroi or Ilha da Paqueta – you'll pass it just a couple of minutes after leaving the ferry terminal. Cameras at the ready!

DESCRIPTION: Looking rather incongruous on a concrete island in Rio's slightly shabby docklands, Ilha Fiscal is a bright green palace that looks like it has been lifted straight out of a fairy tale. The elaborate neo-gothic construction was built for the less than glamorous purposes of customs verification, but secured its place in history when, in 1889, it was the venue for the Portuguese empire's last ever ball – Brazil was declared a republic just three days later. Beautiful stained glass windows depict Dom Pedro and Princess Isabel, and there are fantastic views over Guanabara Bay from here. © NileGuide



wcities

contact:

tel: +55 21 2533 4491 / +55 21 2533 7762

fax: +55 21 2533 4359
<http://www.pacoimperial.com.br/>

location:

Praça XV de Novembro, 48
Rio de Janeiro RJ 20010-010

hours:

Call for details

2 Paço Imperial

OUR LOCAL EXPERT SAYS:

Rio's lack of public toilets is a major bugbear for many visitors – as there's no entrance fee to the Paço Imperial, it's worth knowing that the building boasts clean toilets that can be used free of charge.

DESCRIPTION: It may look unassuming, but this pretty whitewashed building was the site of many an important political happening during Portuguese rule. Built in 1773 as the seat of the Portuguese government, the former palace building was the spot in which Portuguese king w Dom João VI established his court in 1808; where his son Dom Pedro V publically refused to return to Portugal in 1822; and where Princess Isabel announced the abolition of slavery in 1888. Today, the cool whitewashed walls house a bistro serving delicious, fresh light lunches and good wines, as well as a



Paco Imperial

small cultural centre that doubles as a book and CD store. © NileGuide

contact:
tel: 55 21 2244 7303

3 Bar Bukowski

location:
270 Rua Álvaro Ramos
Rio de Janeiro RJ 22280-110

hours:
Th-Sa 10p-Close

DESCRIPTION: Any bar named after the controversial American writer Charles Bukowski is bound to be a little different from the norm, and this kooky Botafogo hangout is no run of the mill bar. In a converted colonial building, it is not unusual to be served a shisha pipe by a dwarf, and the DJs spin some interesting tracks too. Expect the unexpected.
© NileGuide

contact:
<http://www.riodejaneiro-turismo.com.br/riotur/en/atracao/>

4 Praça XV de Novembro

location:
Praça 15 de Novembro
Rio de Janeiro 20010-010

DESCRIPTION: Just a stone's throw from the ferry terminal that links Rio with the city of Niteroi and the island of Paqueta, Praça 15 de Novembro is a lively square that hosts a bustling flea market each Saturday. With vendors selling everything from antique furniture to vintage vinyl, clothes, and accessories, it's easy to while away an entire Saturday morning browsing the stalls. Midweek, the square is quieter, but the Espaço Cultural da Marinha – a museum dedicated to Rio's seafaring history – is well worth a visit, and there are numerous good lunch spots nearby. - Lucy Bryson © wcities.com



Photo courtesy of Lucy Bryson

contact:
tel: +55 21 492 2253 / +55 21 492 5002

5 Parque Nacional de Tijuca

location:
Floresta da Tijuca
Rio de Janeiro RJ

hours:
Daily 8a-6p

DESCRIPTION: Parque Nacional de Tijuca is the largest area of urban rainforest in the world, and is testament to the huge success of a reforestation scheme from the Brazilian government. When the Portuguese arrived, the area which is now the city of Rio was covered by dense green tropical forest. As the city grew the trees were felled and the timber used in construction or for charcoal. However, if you look up from the streets of Zona Sul today, the mountains running southwest from the Corcovado are still covered with exuberant forest, the periphery of the Parque Nacional da Tijuca which covers an area of approximately 120 square kilometres, and is maintained by Brazil's State Institute of Forestry (IBDF). In the seventeenth century the forests of Tijuca were cut down for their valuable hardwood and the trees replaced by sugar cane and, later, coffee plantations and small-scale agriculture. In the early nineteenth century the city authorities became alarmed by a shortage of pure water and by landslides from the Tijuca slopes. Eventually it was decided that a concerted effort was needed to restore Rio's watershed and, in 1857, a reforestation project was initiated: by 1870 over 100,000 trees had been planted and the forest was reborn. Most of the seeds and cuttings that were planted were native to the region, and today the park serves as a remarkable example of the potential for the regeneration of the Atlantic forest. © NileGuide



contact:

tel: 55 21 2244-0125
<http://www.miammiam.com.br>

location:

Rua General Goes Monteiro
34
Rio de Janeiro RJ 22290-080

hours:

Tu-Sa 7p.m.-12.30 a.m

6 Miam Miam

DESCRIPTION: Housed in a tiny white colonial building in Botafogo, Miam Miam is easy to miss. Once inside, however, the kitsch décor can't fail to catch your attention. But while the authentic 1940s, 50s and 60s furnishings impress, it's the food that really impresses. The restaurant, which opened in 2007, has won a string of awards for its contemporary take on 'comfort food,' and the drinks are award-winning. Try the Caipivodka with pepper vodka, lime, pineapple and mint to see why. Botafogo might not be a tourist hotspot, but it boasts good backpacker hostels and some of Rio's most interesting drinking and dining options - Miam Miam being a great example of this. © NileGuide



Photo courtesy of Lucy Bryson

contact:

tel: (21) 2538 - 1879
<http://www.rio.rj.gov.br/fpj/pqlage.htm>

location:

Rua Jardim Botânico, 414 -
Jardim Botânico
Rio de Janeiro RJ

7 Parque Lage

DESCRIPTION: A dramatically different park that has featured in videos for Snoop Dogg and Pharell Williams as well as the Black-Eyed Peas, Parque Lage sits right next door to Rio's famous Botanical Gardens, but remains something of a secret to tourists. The park is set in the grounds of a beautiful 1920s mansion, now a coffee house and art school, and the grounds are dotted with little caves that are filled with tropical fish tanks. The cafe is a beautiful spot to enjoy a leisurely breakfast or brunch, or make like local families and bring along a cool box filled with picnic goodies and wine. For the more adventurous, trails run into the Tijuca National Park from here. © NileGuide



Photo courtesy of Parque Lage

contact:

tel: +55 21 2555 7272
fax: +55 21 2555 7282
<http://www.hotelgloriario.com.br>

location:

RUA DO RUSSEL 632
Rio De Janeiro 22210-010

8 Hotel Gloria

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Rio de Janeiro Snapshot

Local Info

This sizzling city of over six million people is the second largest in Brazil. Tourists flock to the wealthy Zona Sul (South Zone), where the world-famous beaches of Ipanema and Copacabana host throngs of beautiful people all year round. A city of contrasts, Rio's working class North Zone is a far cry from the glamor of the beach areas, while the hillside favelas (shanty towns) are notorious the world over. But despite its social problems, Rio is a city that loves to party-- Rio Carnaval and New Year's in Rio are two of the world's biggest and most colorful celebrations-- and Rio moves to a constant musical beat. Once described as "The most sinful city every to be blessed by Christ," Rio goes about its business under the ever-watchful gaze of Christ the Redeemer (Corcovado), who towers above the city, embracing saints and sinners alike in his outstretched arms. The staggering natural beauty of the city is best appreciated from above, and a trip to the top of Corcovado mountain is a great way to take in a panoramic view of this most stunning of cities. The dizzying cable car ride up to the top of Sugar Loaf mountain is another tourist must-do, and provides another opportunity to take in the spectacular cityscape below. Beautiful people, beautiful landscapes, magical music and memorable moments: they are all part and parcel of a trip to Rio de Janeiro, the Cidade Maravilhosa (Marvelous City).

Centro

The city center is the financial and business heart of Rio, and is also home to most of the city's historic monuments and buildings. Centro is awash with excellent cultural centers, many of which are free of charge, and the crumbling colonial buildings are an attraction in themselves. Centro is also home to Lapa-- a major party district that throngs with revelers at the lively weekend street parties. In Lapa's historic center, around Rua do Lavradio and Avenida Mem de Sa, visitors will find handsome colonial buildings that now serve as bars, restaurants, and samba clubs. Centro's interesting museums and cultural centers make it a good rainy day option, and visitors should be sure to check out the Monumento Nacional aos Mortos da II Guerra Mundial, the Teatro Municipal, the

Museu Nacional de Belas Artes (National Fine Arts Museum), the Museu de Arte Moderna (Museum of Modern Art) and the Sambódromo, where the Carnaval parades take place every year.

Santa Teresa & Glória

High on a jungle-clad hillside, beautiful Santa Teresa is notable for its bohemian atmosphere as well as its beautiful mansions, its excellent restaurants and lively cultural scene. Awash with artists, musicians, writers, and assorted eccentrics, Santa (as it is affectionately known by locals) is best reached by the charming bonde, the little yellow tram that rattles its way along the cobble streets. Be sure to check out Parque das Ruínas, a reformed mansion home with terrific city views, and the adjoining Museu Chácara do Céu. Downhill from Santa Teresa lies Gloria, a relaxed residential area that is home to one of the city's most attractive churches: the 18th-century Baroque Igreja de Nossa Senhora da Glória do Outeiro.

Flamengo & Catete

These residential areas benefit from being served by the city's efficient metro system, and hotel and hostel prices here compare favorably with the beach zones of Copacabana, Ipanema and Leblon. Flamengo's beach is pleasant, if not the city's finest, and the Burle Marx-designed Parque do Flamengo is an oasis of calm in this bustling city. Catete boasts some handsome historic buildings, good value restaurants, and tourist attractions such as the Folklore Museum and Museum of the Republic.

Laranjeiras & Cosme Velho

These leafy, largely residential areas are pleasant escapes from the hustle and bustle of the city center, and Laranjeiras in particular is becoming increasingly famous for its lively bar and restaurant scene. Pleasant pavement cafes are springing up beneath the orange trees, and some of the city's more interesting nightclubs can be found here. These two districts are located between Flamengo, Corcovado, and the Rebouças Tunnel. The Guanabara Palace, seat of the state government, is in Laranjeiras, while closer to the entrance of the tunnel, in Cosme Velho, are the colonial-style houses of the Largo do Boticário and the railway station for the train that goes up Corcovado mountain.

Botafogo

A relatively wealthy and largely residential suburb, Botafogo is a good bet for budget travelers heading to Rio thanks to its good hostel scene. Many of the hostels here, such as Tupiniquim, are housed in attractive colonial buildings, and prices compare very favorably with the tourist Meccas of Copacabana and Ipanema. While the neighborhood's own beach is not the cleanest or most popular in Rio, Botafogo's metro station puts it within a few minutes' reach of Rio's more celebrated sands. Handily located between the city center and the Zona Sul, Botafogo sits directly beneath the iconic Christ the Redeemer statue, and is home to a lively, relaxed bar scene and some highly regarded restaurants, such as Miam Miam. A handful of decent museums and some good shopping centers combine to make Botafogo a good base for a holiday in Rio.

Urca

Urca's main tourist draw is the legendary Sugar Loaf mountain, but it would be a shame to visit here without taking the time to explore a little further. The quiet streets are lined with some of the finest colonial buildings to be found anywhere in the city, and the little bay with its bobbing boats is a nice place to take in the view. Laid-back neighborhood bars largely cater to locals rather than a tourist crowd, and Praia Vermelha, the little beach right by Sugar Loaf, is a favorite spot for families.

Adventure tourists in Rio can try their hand at abseiling or climbing here, and the trail that runs around the base of Sugar Loaf makes a very pleasant short walk-- keep an eye out for monkeys in the trees overhead.

Copacabana & Leme

Possibly the most famous stretch of sand in the world, Copacabana Beach boasts over four kilometers of sands, crashing waves and the magnificent backdrop of Sugar Loaf mountain. Copacabana Beach is the spot for the biggest of Rio's New Year celebrations, and the neighborhood is awash with hotels and restaurants. However, the once-chic neighborhood has lost out to neighboring Ipanema in recent years, and the congested back streets, strip clubs and red light activity can make the neighborhood feel more than a little seedy at night. Although the beach is now

Rio de Janeiro Snapshot continued

floodlit after dark, it's still not a safe spot for late-night walks, although the many beach bars are generally trouble-free (you will be approached by a million and one hawkers, however, selling everything from sarongs and sunglasses to plastic miniatures of the Christ statue). Modern glass and chrome kiosks have recently replaced many of the traditional beach kiosks, and it's now possible to enjoy fine dining and champagne right on the sands. Like many spots in Rio, tourists should avoid flashing any valuables here, but with a little caution Copacabana can be a fascinating place to stay. For those with the budget for it, the legendary Copacabana Palace Hotel remains one of the most glamorous places to stay in Rio, and continues to attract visiting celebrities-- Tom Cruise, Madonna, Will Smith and the Rolling Stones being just a few of the famous names to have stayed here of late.

Ipanema

Together with neighboring Leblon, Ipanema is the destination of choice for chic beach-goers. The beach itself is packed year-round with beautiful Brazilian girls and boys, and this is the place to head for if you're looking for your own girl (or boy) from Ipanema. The neighborhood is home to countless upscale restaurants, shops and bars, and the elegant Fasano Rio hotel added some much needed glamor to the Ipanema hotel scene when it opened in 2007. You'll pay through the nose for a hotel room along Ipanema's beachfront, but there are some more reasonably priced options, including lots of hostels, to be found in the neighborhood's tree-lined back streets. Ipanema and Leblon are where the city's beautiful people come to party, so dress to impress if you're heading to bars and nightclubs here. Ipanema is also a key spot for gay visitors to Rio-- Rua Farma do Amoeda is packed with gay-friendly bars and restaurants, and the adjacent section of the beach is also earmarked for gay and lesbian beach-goers-- just look out for the large rainbow flag. Further along the sands, Posto Nove (lifeguard post 9) is the hangout for young, beautiful sun-seekers, while other sections of the beach are popular with families and sporty types. A small canal separates Ipanema and Leblon, a good spot for families, while Arpoador Beach connects Ipanema with Copacabana. With its crashing waves and jutting rocks,

Arpoador is a popular destination for surfers in Rio.

Lagoa

Surrounded by towering jungle-clad mountains, Rio's vast city lake is another of its picture-perfect spots. A seven-kilometer running, walking, and cycling track runs the perimeter of the lake, and free workout stations add to the appeal for athletic types. Families flock here on weekends, taking to the water aboard swan boats, while the many bars and restaurants dotted along the water's edge are wonderful places to relax with dinner and drinks as the sun sets over Rio. Throughout November and December, an enormous Christmas tree in the middle of the lake adds a sparkling centerpiece to Rio's Christmas lights.

Leblon

Home to some of Rio's most expensive apartments, upmarket Leblon is home to smart shopping centers and chic boutiques, elegant restaurants, bars and clubs, and a beautiful beach. There are informal bars and restaurants to be found at the Cobal do Leblon, while the calmer waters at this end of the beach make Leblon a popular spot with families. There are fewer hotel options here than in Ipanema and Copacabana, but Marina All-Suites is an excellent high-end option for those who have the budget for it.

Gávea and Jardim Botânico

These two leafy, upper class residential areas don't have much in the way of hotels and guest houses, but there are scores of good bars and restaurants to choose from, many of them largely undiscovered by tourists. Both neighborhoods are pleasant places for a day's exploring, and Gavea's planetarium is a major draw for families visiting Rio de Janeiro. In Jardim Botânico, meanwhile, the vast botanical gardens that lend the area its name are a leafy haven from the hectic pace of Rio's city life. Nearby Parque Lage is a perfect spot for a quiet picnic and a wander around the gardens.

São Conrado

Perfectly summing up the vast wealth disparity in Rio de Janeiro, Sao Conrado is an exclusive beach neighborhood packed with vastly expensive condominiums, yet it sits directly next door to Rocinha, Brazil's largest favela (slum). Surfers and hang-gliders populate the beach, while a designer shopping arcade sells

upscale brands to the wealthy. Meanwhile, favela residents are now seeing some improvements in their quality of life, with increased public services, more paved roads and improved sanitation. As a snapshot of the rich and poor in Rio, things couldn't get more explicit.

Barra da Tijuca & Recreio dos Bandeirantes

Jokingly referred to as the United States of Barra by some Rio locals, Barra da Tijuca feels like a city in itself. The wide avenues and towering apartment buildings of this wealthy neighborhood were modeled on Miami, and the sprawling shopping malls that dot the landscape feel more like the US than Rio de Janeiro. This is not the place to come for cultural activities, but if you're after a shopping splurge, Barra is the place. Barra Shopping is the largest shopping mall in Rio, packed with everything from mid-range chain stores to chic boutiques, and there are cinemas and bowling alleys to be found elsewhere in the area. Tellingly, Barra da Tijuca is where you will find the Rio de Janeiro branch of Hard Rock Cafe. Barra is also home to theme parks and a motor racing circuit, as well as a spectacular 15km beach that attracts tanned and toned locals. Nearby, Recreio is a more humble beach neighborhood, whose sands are popular with local surfers.

Floresta da Tijuca

A vast expanse of tropical rain forest in the middle of one of the world's major metropolises, the Floresta da Tijuca (Tijuca Forest) offers a great number of opportunities for hikes, climbs, and other outdoor activities. Natural pools and waterfalls, magnificent flora and fauna, and some spectacular views await the adventurous, but the sheer scale of the place makes it essential to come here with a guide or knowledgeable local. Attempts to explore the place by yourself are bound to end in tears, so ask at your hotel or hostel about trips to suit your tastes.

Zona Norte

Few holidaymakers in Rio will make the trip out to the city's North Zone, which is largely made up of residential apartment buildings and cinder block favelas. The Zona Norte is a long way, both literally and metaphorically, from the beautiful beach zones of the Zona Sul (South Zone), but there are some points of interest for tourists. The City's zoo, located in Sao Cristovao, is a

Rio de Janeiro Snapshot continued

great day out for families, while the Feira Nordestina (Northeastern Fair), also at Sao Cristovao, is a vast space dedicated to Northeastern culture and cuisine. Open during the daytime on weekdays, the fair opens its doors on Friday morning and doesn't close them again until Sunday evening, making it a great place to come and sample inexpensive and absolutely delicious food from Brazil's North, while taking in live forró music and dancing.

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Fun Facts

1. Interesting fact: when explorers arrived in Guanabara Bay on New Year's Day 1502, they mistook the bay for the mouth of a mighty river. Hence they called the place Rio de Janeiro- literally, 'River of January'.

2. Random fact: Funk music here bears no resemblance whatsoever to James Brown style funkiness. Carioca Funk is a style of music featuring lyrics shouted over tinny keyboards. Born in the city's vast favelas, Rio's baile funks (funk parties) are legendarily debauched. There are some socially conscious funksters out there making music with a positive message, but sex, drugs and gang violence remain the principal theme for most funk anthems.

3. Weird fact: The city's rich elite like to dress their pampered pets in shoes, hats, and even full outfits. Poodles are the most popular dogs in Rio high society, and some

have a different outfit for every day of the week.

4. Copacabana is one of the most densely populated places on the planet, with some 25,000 people per square meter. The majority of these inhabitants are squeezed into the myriad high rise apartments that dominate the neighborhood.

5. The state of Rio de Janeiro boasts more than 50 kilometers of beaches, with some of the best spots outside the city being located along the Costa Verde (Green Coast).

6. Brazilian football fact: The Maracanã Stadium holds the record for the largest attendance of any football (ok, soccer if you insist...) match in history. A record-smashing 200,000 fans turned out for the decisive match of the 1950 World Cup, only to see Brazil defeated by South American rivals Uruguay.

7. Carnival fact: Rio Carnival as we know it today is a far cry from the event's beginnings in 1641, when the Portuguese settlers celebrated Ash Wednesday with masked balls and sophisticated parties. Samba began to make its mark on the carnival festivities at the beginning of the 20th Century, with the first official Samba School created in 1928.

8. Fun Rio Carnival fact: The high entrance fee to the main carnival parades doesn't mean that cash-strapped travelers have to miss out on the carnival fun. Across the city, hundreds of street parties, or blocos,

take place over carnival season, featuring samba bands, dancing, and plenty of dancing.

9. Random Rio de Janeiro fact: see all those tall and attractive 'working girls' roaming the street? Many of them are not girls at all, but members of the city's large transvestite population.

10. Cultural Rio fact: The impressive Theatro Municipal, built in 1905 and located at the heart of Centro, was directly modelled on the Paris Opera House in a bid to replicate the sophistication of the French capital.

11. Interesting fact: Contrary to popular belief, the favelas of Rio de Janeiro are not solely populated by bandits and drug dealers. Some 20 per cent of Rio's residents live in the favelas, and the majority hold down regular jobs- security workers, cleaners, bar staff, restaurant workers...many of these hardworking individuals are living in these so-called dens of sin and vice.

12. Motels in Rio do not offer basic but affordable family accommodation. Rather, they are rendezvous points for amorous couples. While the most basic are rather unappealing, the most lavish feature everything from jacuzzis and spas to dance floors complete with dry ice machines. Hotel Love Time and Sinless are just a couple of the less than subtle names given to these hotels of lurve.

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