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ALL YOU NEED TO PLAN YOUR PERFECT TRIP



Chupacabras

Rio Culinary Adventure

Rio de Janeiro, 3 Days

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Guide Description



AUTHOR NOTE: While Paulistas (residents of Sao Paulo) have traditionally sneered at Rio's 'inferior' dining scene, even the most discerning of gourmands now has to admit that the city now has plenty of restaurants to rival those of Sao Paulo itself. The dining options are fantastically varied, with opportunities to taste the flavors of every corner of Brazil, as well as sophisticated international options. Our three-day itinerary gives tips on where to go to sample the best of Rio's eating and drinking options, from tasty street snacks to sophisticated restaurant dining.

Itinerary Overview

things to do
restaurants
hotels
nightlife

Day 1 - Rio de Janeiro

DAY NOTE: Finding good value hotels in Rio can be hard work, especially if you want to make your base close to one of the fabulous Rio beaches. If you're looking for a great location and can compromise a little on luxury, Arpoador Inn is one of very few beachside hotels that won't break the bank. In a great location at Arpoador, the stretch of beach between Copacabana and Ipanema, Arpoador sits right by the sands on a pedestrianised road. Rooms with a beach view are pricier, but all rooms at this Rio hotel are good value. Handily for foodies, the hotel also has a very good seafood restaurant, Azul Marinho, with tables and chairs right on the beachfront. Once you've settled into the hotel, take a stroll up the beach to the well-heeled neighbourhood of Ipanema, and relax with a chilled coconut water at one of the numerous beach kiosks. Feeling peckish? Head a few blocks back to Rua Barao de Torre, where you'll find New Natural, a snack bar and pay-by-weight restaurant offering excellent food made from fresh, natural ingredients. My advice is to grab one of their 'pasteis' (stuffed pastries) which have to be among the best in the city. Try the option with palmito (palm heart) and catupiry, a Brazilian soft, creamy cheese. From here, grab a bus to Centro and head for the bonde (tram station), where you can pick up the rattling tram that will take you up the hillside to Santa Teresa. This pretty, bohemian neighbourhood is full of great places to eat and drink, so grab a Bohemia beer (one of the best of the bottled beers) at one of the many bars before heading to Espirito Santa for some excellent dishes that make use of exotic ingredients, principally from the Amazon. It's Friday night, so after dinner take a cab or bus down to the party neighbourhood of Lapa, grab a tasty fruit cocktail from one of the many street vendors, and then head to samba spot Carioca da Gema to dance the the night away (or just watch the locals shaking their funky stuff).



Arpoador Inn

Perfect spot for sunseekers



New Natural

Great for vegetarians



Bonde de Santa Teresa

Rio's last remaining street car



Santa Teresa

Rio's artiest neighborhood



Lapa Street Party

Lively street party



Espirito Santa

Excellent pan-Brazilian cuisine



Carioca da Gema

Great samba club second only to Rio Scenarium

Day 2 - Rio de Janeiro

DAY NOTE: After breakfast with a beach view at the hotel, head down to Copacabana and hop on the Metro at Cantagalo station, jumping off at Cinelandia. Take a stroll round the busy square and browse the nearby shops (note that many close in the early afternoon on Saturdays). Once you've worked up an appetite, head for Confeitaria Colombo – Rio's oldest coffee shop – for afternoon tea or just a coffee and a cake. Take the Metro back to Cantagalo, catch some afternoon sun on the beach at Copacabana, before heading back to the hotel to change for dinner. You'll need to have reservations to eat at Le Pre-Catalan, but hotel staff should be happy to call up for you. Here you'll find possibly the best French cuisine in the city. Prices aren't cheap, and you'll need to leave the shorts and flip flops at home, but the quality, service, and view over Copacabana beach make a meal here well worth the money and the effort. After dinner, take a cab or Metro to Copacabana and sample the great cocktail menu at Drinkeria Maldita, before heading to funky Bar Bukowski if you fancy a spot of dancing and mingling.



Confeitaria Colombo

Antique and Elegant Coffee Shop



Le Pré-Catelan

Rio's finest French food?



Drinkeria Maldita

Best cocktails in Rio!



Bar Bukowski

Kooky Nightlife Option



Arpoador Inn

Perfect spot for sunseekers

Day 3 - Rio de Janeiro

DAY NOTE: Nurse that Sunday morning hangover with breakfast at the hotel followed by a coconut water by the beach (coconut water really does work miracles for hangovers in Rio!) before

Itinerary Overview

things to do
restaurants
hotels
nightlife

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Ipanema Hippie Fair

Arts and crafts and much more



Carême

Taste and tranquility



Porcão

All the meat you can eat



Arpoador Inn

Perfect spot for sunseekers

Day 1 - Rio de Janeiro

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contact:

tel: +55 21 2523 0060
fax: +55 21 2511 5094
<http://www.arpoadorinn.com.br/>

location:

Rua Francisco Otaviano 177
Rio de Janeiro 22080-040

1 Arpoador Inn

OUR LOCAL EXPERT SAYS:

Rooms with sea views are more expensive, but well worth the indulgence if your budget can stretch to it.

DESCRIPTION: With a great location right on the beach at popular surf spot Arpoador, this small hotel offers fantastic value for money. Arpoador lies between the beaches of Copacabana and Ipanema, so beach bunnies will be spoilt for choice. The road in front of the hotel is completely closed to traffic, and guests eating at the hotel restaurant can enjoy their meals and drinks right on the sands. © NileGuide



Hotels.com

contact:

tel: 55 21 2287 0301

location:

Rua Barao de Torre 171,
Ipanema
Rio de Janeiro RJ

hours:

Sa-Su 8 a.m - 11 p.m.

2 New Natural

OUR LOCAL EXPERT SAYS:

New Natural is a great spot for a snack or light lunch, but if you're on a budget it's not the place to come when you're absolutely ravenous. The food is priced by weight and, at nearly R\$4 per 100 grams, you might find yourself spending more than you planned if you head here on an empty stomach.

DESCRIPTION: New Natural is a fantastic health food buffet. It's largely veggie-friendly, with a lot of soy dishes, although chicken and fish do make an appearance. The nourishing and delicious soups, pastries and hot dishes are popular with Ipanema's health-conscious beachgoers, as well

as with travelers staying at 'Hostel Alley', the strip of backpacker accommodation next door to the restaurant. © NileGuide

contact:

tel: +55 21 222 1003 / +55 21 242 2354

<http://www.sectran.rj.gov.br/>

location:

Rua Professor Lélío 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

3 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:
<http://www.lanalapa.com.br>

location:
Rua da Lapa
Rio de Janeiro

hours:
Th-Sa 10p-6a

4 Lapa Street Party

DESCRIPTION: If you're looking for the best weekend nightlife action there's only one place to head - Lapa. And for those on a budget, the good news is that you don't even need to pay to enter a club in order to party until dawn. From Thursday to Saturday (Fridays are busiest), the area around the Lapa arches fills up with parties, live music, and countless vendors selling food and drink - be sure to try some of the mouthwatering cocktails made with vodka and mango or strawberry. The crowd is mainly young and dress is very relaxed. Live music can crop up anywhere but is most often found on the square next to the famous arches - take care here and in other crowded places as the area is rife with pickpockets. © wcities.com



Lapa Street Party

contact:
tel: 55 21 2508 7095
<http://www.espiritosanta.com.br/>

location:
Rua Almirante Alexandrino,
264
Rio de Janeiro 20241-260

hours:
M-W 11:30a-6p, Th-Sa
11:30a-midnight, Su 11:30-7p

5 Espirito Santa

DESCRIPTION: The antique street car that rattles through Rio's Santa Teresa district passes right in front of this bar/restaurant serving terrific pan-Brazilian dishes. Much use is made of ingredients native to the country - most notably Amazonia. If piranha soup sounds a little too adventurous, try the mixed entree which combines tasty nibbles such as fresh palm heart and acai (Amazonian berry) chutney. Alongside excellent fish, seafood and meat dishes are some good vegetarian options - try the mixed root vegetables topped with abobora (similar to pumpkin) and melted cheese. Chef Natacha Fink has picked up a string of awards for her work here, and it's not hard to see why. The wine list is also decent, and the caipirinhas made with passionfruit are delicious. © NileGuide



Photo courtesy of Lucy Bryson

contact:
tel: 55 21 2221 0043
www.barcariocadagama.com.br

location:
Avenida Mem de Sa 79,
Centro
Rio de Janeiro

6 Carioca da Gema

DESCRIPTION: A lively place featuring live samba music and dancing, open late at weekends, call for listings and opening times.

Day 2 - Rio de Janeiro

QUICK NOTE

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contact:
tel: 55 21 22322300
<http://www.confeitariacolombo.com.br>

location:
Rua Gonçalves Dias, 32
Rio de Janeiro 20071-000

hours:
8.30a-7p Mon-Fri

1 Confeitaria Colombo

OUR LOCAL EXPERT SAYS:

It's not cheap, but if you feel like a treat this is a great place to enjoy a leisurely afternoon tea - for around R\$45 two people can enjoy a lavish spread of cakes, pastries and hot drinks.

DESCRIPTION: Relax with a frothy coffee or tangy fruit cocktail and soak up the opulence at this antique coffee house and restaurant. The sprawling building is full of historic charm, and was the favored meeting point of carioca high society during Brazil's Belle Epoque. There's formal dining in the upstairs restaurant, light meals and snacks below and, front of house, a stand-up snack bar selling tasty sweet and savory pastries and espressos to office workers on the go.
© NileGuide



wcities

contact:
tel: 55 21 25251232
fax: 55 21 25251200
http://www.sofitel.com/sofitel/fichehotel/gb/sof/1988/fiche_restaurant.shtml

location:
Av. Atlântica, 4240
Rio de Janeiro 22079-900

hours:
Daily 7p-midnight

2 Le Pré-Catalan

OUR LOCAL EXPERT SAYS:

When calling to make your reservation at Le Pre Catalan, ask for a table with views over the beach. The immense windows take in spectacular vistas over Copacabana.

DESCRIPTION: It occupies a lofty location on the top floor of the Sofitel Rio hotel, but Le Pre Catalan is far more than just a hotel restaurant. French chef Roland Villard has won countless awards for his finely-crafted dishes, and Le Pre Catalan is widely considered to be among the best restaurants in Rio. Villard keeps things interesting by changing the menu fortnightly, and those who really want to indulge might want to try the taster menu, which costs around R\$200, or choose one of the fixed-price set menus which range in price from R\$170 for three courses to R\$220 for a staggering 10 courses. © NileGuide

contact:

tel: 55 21 2527 2456
<http://drinkeriamalditacopa.blogspot.com/>

location:

10 Rua Voluntários da Pátria
Botafogo 22270-010

hours:

Tu-Th 6p-4a; F-Sa 6p-5a; Su
8p-3a

3 Drinkeria Maldita

DESCRIPTION: There's more to Rio's cocktail scene than the ubiquitous caipirinha, and nowhere is this better demonstrated than at Drinkeria Maldita, where a staggering 98 different type of mixed drinks are available. Among the stars of the drinks menu are the aptly-named Diablo, which combines tequila with lemon and pepper, and the Caipisake – a caipirinha made with sake instead of cachaca. Try the cocktail degustation menu – four different cocktails mixed to perfection by the expert bartenders. The food menu, meanwhile, offers very good sandwiches, salads and burgers, including soya options for vegetarians. © wcities.com

contact:

tel: 55 21 2244 7303

location:

270 Rua Álvaro Ramos
Rio de Janeiro RJ 22280-110

hours:

Th-Sa 10p-Close

4 Bar Bukowski

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:

tel: +55 21 2523 0060
fax: +55 21 2511 5094
<http://www.arpoadorinn.com.br/>

location:

Rua Francisco Otaviano 177
Rio de Janeiro 22080-040

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Hotels.com

Day 3 - Rio de Janeiro

QUICK NOTE

DAY NOTE: Nurse that Sunday morning hangover with breakfast at the hotel followed by a coconut water by the beach (coconut water really does work miracles for hangovers in Rio!) before checking out the handicrafts, clothes and assorted knick-knacks on offer at the famous Ipanema Feira Hype (Hippie Fair). If you've been smart enough to make reservations, take a cab or bus to the intimate Careme Bistro for a delicious lunch, before a spot of sunbathing in the afternoon. No trip to Brazil is complete without sampling the famous churrasco (grilled meat), and Porcao is the perfect place to do so. This upmarket chain restaurant serves excellent salads, pastas, seafood and sushi alongside as much meat as you can handle – waiters bring round different sizzling cuts to your table until you say 'no more!'. You'll be given a card with red for 'no' and green for 'go' sides – feel free to turn over onto the red side for a breather and then flip back onto green when you can handle more! After all that eating, you'll probably not be up to much more than a deep sleep, so head back to the hotel to rest up after your culinary odyssey!

contact:

<http://www.feirahippie.hpg.ig.com.br/>

location:

Praca General Osorio,
Ipanema,
Rio de Janeiro RJ

Ipanema Hippie Fair

DESCRIPTION: Shopaholics simply can't afford to miss this – the famous market held every Sunday in Ipanema. This is a large square just a couple of streets back from the beach, opposite the Zona Sul supermarket. Otherwise known as Feira de Arte de Ipanema, the fair is not just for hippies – the sprawling market sells everything from gorgeous handmade jewelry and pretty dresses, to paintings, figurines, and numerous arty knick knacks. You can also pick up the more obvious tourist stuff here – replica football shirts, baseball caps etc, and watch out for 'Pelé' – the guy in a Brazil football kit who manages to keep the ball up, on his head, feet, chest etc, for hours at a time, all the while blowing a referee's whistle! You'll need to set aside a good couple of hours to see everything, there are so many stalls to browse around and so many tempting wares on offer. © NileGuide



Hippie Fair of Ipanema

contact:

tel: 55 21 25372374

location:

Rua Visconde de Caravelas,
113
Rio de Janeiro 22271-030

hours:

Tu-Sa 8p-last customer

1 Carême

DESCRIPTION: Flavia Queresma, the exuberant head chef at Careme Bistro, is something of a television celebrity in Brazil. But while her on-screen persona has won her legions of fans, it's the quality of food that makes her restaurant such a hit. Housed in a small colonial building on a quiet Botafogo street, Careme enjoys a relaxed, dimly-lit bistro ambience and the mood is refreshingly unpretentious. The restaurant is located in a small, old house on one of the quietest streets in Botafogo. For a real gourmet experience, opt for the taster menu - starters, mains and desserts served in miniature portions. © NileGuide

contact:

tel: 55 21 3389 8989
<http://www.porcao.com.br/>

location:

Rua Barão da Torre, 218
Rio de Janeiro 22411-000

2 Porcão

DESCRIPTION: Don't be put off by the name, which means "big pig" in Portuguese, this legendary churrascaria caters to a well-heeled crowd. The decor is sophisticated, the ambience is relaxed, and the food is of the very highest quality. Waiters brandishing spits bring cuts of meat to your table until you can eat no more, while a buffet invites you to try excellent salads, sushi, pasta dishes, cheeses, breads, olives and countless other treats. © NileGuide



Porcao

contact:

tel: +55 21 2523 0060
fax: +55 21 2511 5094
<http://www.arpoadorinn.com.br/>

location:

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Rio de Janeiro 22080-040

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Hotels.com

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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