



nileGUIDE

ALL YOU NEED TO PLAN YOUR PERFECT TRIP



Chupacabras

Rio for Singles

Rio de Janeiro, 3 Days

Table of contents:

Guide Description	2
Itinerary Overview	3
Daily Itineraries	4
My List	10
Rio de Janeiro Snapshot	11

Guide Description



AUTHOR NOTE: Possibly the sexiest city in the world, sultry Rio de Janeiro positively sizzles. With a social culture that revolves around posing on the beach by day and relaxing over caiprinha cocktails at night, visitors to Rio will find no shortage of stunning Brazilian girls and boys to admire. If you can speak a few words of Portuguese, all the better - the locals are inclined to find foreigners' attempts at their language quite charming.

Itinerary Overview

things to do
restaurants
hotels
nightlife

Day 1 - Rio de Janeiro

DAY NOTE: With a base between the beaches of Copacabana and Ipanema, you'll be spoilt for choice when it comes to admiring Brazilians in their skimpy swimwear. Right on the beach at popular surf spot Arpoador, your hotel is extremely reasonably priced given the prime location. Start the day with breakfast at the hotel before taking a stroll down to Copacabana, enjoying a beer and a bite to eat at one of the many beachside bars and restaurants. After a couple of hours here, change at the hotel (you'll need to pack some glad rags if you're planning a night out) and grab a bus to Barra da Tijuca. Here you'll find a 14-kilometre beach, lots of beautiful people, and endless shopping centres. Barra Shopping is the largest shopping centre in Rio and boasts everything from boutique bikini stores to branches of local chains such as Taco and Mercato.

Check out the tanned, toned bodies on the beach and grab a drink at one of Barra's many bars, before grabbing a taxi down to Nuth, one of Rio's most exclusive bars. If you want to mingle with the beautiful people, this is the place to do it. You'll pay through the nose for the privilege though - prices here easily rival those of the US and Europe.

	Arpoador Inn Perfect spot for sunseekers
	Copacabana Beach The World's Most Famous Stretch of Sand?
	Barra da Tijuca Sun, Sea, Surf and Shopping
	Nuth Flashy bar, flashy people

Day 2 - Rio de Janeiro

DAY NOTE: After a night of partying and mingling, enjoy a leisurely breakfast at the hotel before heading up the road to Ipanema. Check out the beach beauties at Posto Nove (lifeguard post 9), before carrying on down the beachfront to Leblon. Here you can grab a bite to eat at Celeiro - a popular hangout for models and soap stars due to the healthy, salad-based food you'll find here. After lunch, top up the tan some more at the beach before joining the locals for early evening drinks at friendly Bracarense. Sample the local firewater at Academia da Cachaca, before heading back to the hotel for a quick change. You'll be heading to Lapa for the famous weekly street party, so casual is the name of the game - Lapa's not the place to flaunt your wealth!

Join the hordes for cocktails on the street before heading for some saucy samba dancing at Carioca de Gema.

	Celeiro A treat for lovers of fresh food
	Academia da Cachaca A different kind of academy
	Bracarense Happy hour, happy customers
	Lapa Street Party Lively street party
	Carioca da Gema Great samba club second only to Rio Scenarium

Day 3 - Rio de Janeiro

	Orla Marítima Beside the seaside
	Pérgula Copacabana Palace's glamorous poolside bar
	Maracanã Stadium Soccer Mecca
	Barril 1800 One of Ipanema's best bars
	Help Club (The) Strangers in the night!
	Emporio Late night Ipanema option

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 2542 8080
fax: +55 21 2542 0964
http://www.copacabanapalace.com.br/web/orio/orio_a2a_home.jsp

location:

Avenida Atlantica and Xavier da Silveira
Rio de Janeiro 22010-000

2 Copacabana Beach

DESCRIPTION: Possibly the most famous stretch of sand in the world, Copacabana beach is synonymous with the hedonistic side of Rio – with sun, sea, beautiful bodies and New Year celebrations on the beach. Stretching for around five kilometers (the beach is called Leme at its northern end), Copacabana boasts soft white sand that is crammed with locals in tiny bikinis and shorts. Stalls selling ice-cold beers and caipirinhas line the beachfront, and joggers run along the pavements – famous for their distinctive wave-patterned black and white tiling. Copacabana beach is overlooked by the attractive, jungle covered hill of Morro do Leme, and Sugar Loaf mountain is resplendent in the background. Avenida Atlantica is the busy road running along the beachfront, and across from the sands the road is lined with towering high rise hotels and apartment blocks, as well as any number of places to eat and drink. Be warned, however, that while a visit here is a must, Copacabana is not the best place to sunbathe. The water is too dirty for swimming, the beach is rife with pickpockets, and



vendors selling tourist tat are annoyingly relentless in their drive to relieve you of your tourist dollar. © NileGuide

contact:

<http://www.barradatijuca.com.br/si/site>

location:

Avenida das Americas
Rio de Janeiro 22649-900

3 Barra da Tijuca

OUR LOCAL EXPERT SAYS:

Like it or loathe it, don't miss the giant fiber glass 'Statue of Liberty' that stands proudly in front of the New York City Center entertainment complex.

DESCRIPTION: Located to the West of Rio de Janeiro, Barra da Tijuca feels like another city altogether. The modern high rise apartment blocks and wide avenues have been modelled on Miami, and it is with good reason that many Rio locals refer to the neighborhood as the United States of Barra.

But while some may mock the faux-Western attitude, it's hard to find fault with the 17km beach, whose sands rarely get as crowded as the tourist Meccas of Ipanema and Copacabana. Meanwhile, shopaholics will be in seventh Heaven - Barra is awash with vast US-style Malls, including Barra Shopping, the largest mall in Rio de Janeiro.

Be prepared for a bone-rattling white knuckle ride of a bus trip out here (or, during rush hour, be prepared to spend hours staring idly out of the window).

© NileGuide



wcities

contact:

tel: 55 21 3153 8595
<http://www.nuth.com.br/novo/scr/principal.asp>

location:

Avenida Armendo Lombardi
999,
Rio de Janeiro 22640 020

4 Nuth

DESCRIPTION: Baronettii's only real competition in the glam stakes, Nuth is an attractive, flashy bar, attracting a flashy and attractive crowd. Music varies nightly, check local listings for details.

hours:

11pm-late nightly

Day 2 - Rio de Janeiro

QUICK NOTE

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contact:

tel: 55 21 2274 7843
http://www.celeiroculinaria.com.br

location:

Rua Dias Ferreira, 199
Rio de Janeiro 22431-050

hours:

11:30a-10:30p M-Tu,
11:30a-5p W-Sa

1 Celeiro

DESCRIPTION: With an emphasis on fresh, natural ingredients, Celeiro has established itself as a firm favorite among models, soap opera stars and other body-conscious cariocas. The sheer range of salads - more than 40 each day - is astonishing, and the hot dishes are often veggie-friendly. Celeiro also serves low-cal versions of favorite desserts, so you can satisfy your sweet tooth without too much guilt! The food is served buffet-style and charged by weight while soups are charged separately. Perfect for a light lunch, but don't head here when you're dying of hunger or you could end up paying more than you expect! © NileGuide



Celeiro

contact:

tel: 55 21 2529 2680
www.academiadacachaca.com.br

location:

26 Rua Conde de Bernadotte
Leblon
Rio de Janeiro 22430-200

hours:

Daily from 12p

2 Academia da Cachaca

DESCRIPTION: At the Academia da Cachaca you'll learn how to eat, drink and be merry ... like the Brazilians. With over 500 concoctions to choose from, you'll never tire of visiting this up-scale yet casual place. Most drinks are made from the traditional Brazilian spirit of Cachaca. The food, which comprises of North East Brazilian cuisine, is also quite an attraction. Enjoy a Manioc Croquette with Cream Cheese while you sip on a Passion-Fruit Caipirinha (made with real fruit). © wcities.com



Photo courtesy of Gosto de Brasil

contact:

tel: 55 21 2294 3549
http://www.bracarense.com.br/

location:

Rua Jose Linhares 85,
Rio de Janeiro RJ 22430-220

hours:

Mo-Su 8 a.m - 10 p.m

3 Bracarense

DESCRIPTION: Relaxed and refreshingly unpretentious, Bracarense has been a Leblon hotspot for over 60 years. This simple pavement bar is one of the best places in the city to catch locals enjoying post-work drinks and snacks (known as 'happy hour') and swimwear-clad lovelies also flock here after a day at the beach. On the menu is perfectly chilled beer and some of the best bar snacks in the city. The fried balls of yucca with shrimp and catupiry cheese are among the favorites here. Prices are very reasonable, so order a selection of snacks,

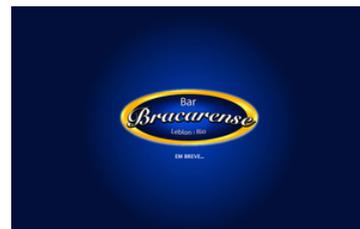


Photo courtesy of Bracarense

wash it down with an icy beer, and watch the locals at play. © 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 partiers, 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 paces as the area is rife with pickpockets. © wcities.com



Lapa Street Party

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

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

5 Carioca da Gema

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

Day 3 - Rio de Janeiro

QUICK NOTE

location:

Leme até Barra da Tijuca
Rio de Janeiro 22010-000

hours:

24 hrs

1 Orla Marítima

DESCRIPTION: The beaches of Rio's Zona Sul (south zone) stretch for miles, and walking the length of these famous stretches of sand is a great way to catch some sun while taking some exercise and enjoying fantastic views. Walking and cycling tracks make seaside strolls a safe activity any day of the week, but the best time for a walk by the beach is Sunday, when the roads are closed to traffic from Leblon right down to the far end of Copacabana. Joggers, cyclers, roller-bladers and power walkers all head here on Sundays to take in some hard core exercise, but a less strenuous option is just to walk along at your own pace, stopping now and then for a cooling agua de coco (chilled coconut water) at one of the many beachside kiosks. © NileGuide



wcities

contact:

tel: 55 21 2548 7070

fax: 55 21 2235 7330

<http://www.copacabanapalace.com.br/>

location:

Avenida Atlântica, 1702
Rio de Janeiro 22021 001

hours:

7a-10a, 12.30p-5p, 7.30p-12a
Mon-Sun

2 Pérgula

DESCRIPTION: Copacabana Palace remains a byword for glamor and indulgence in Rio, and you'll really feel like you're living the high life as you sip a cocktail and nibble on bar snacks at Pérgula, the hotel's relaxed poolside bar and restaurant. The restaurant is open to non-guests and there is no dress code, but do be aware that the clientele here is very well-heeled. If you really feel like splashing out, treat yourself to the set 'brunch', served between 12.30pm and 4.30pm, which includes treats such as salmon, caviar, shrimp and a glass of champagne. This is not a spot for holidaymakers on a budget, but the luxurious surrounds, impeccable service and delicious food and drink more than justify the high price tag. © NileGuide

contact:

tel: +55 21 2264 9962

<http://www.rio.rj.gov.br/riotur/en/atracao/>

location:

Rua Professor Eurico Rabelo
s/n
Rio de Janeiro RJ 20271-150

hours:

Daily 9am-5pm

3 Maracanã Stadium

OUR LOCAL EXPERT SAYS:

To really enjoy the atmosphere at the Maracana, buy the cheaper tickets. The 'cheap seats' are in fact the liveliest in the stadium, with drumming, singing, dancing and impressive displays of absolutely enormous flags.

DESCRIPTION: For fans of 'futebol' (football/soccer), a trip to the legendary Maracanã stadium is every bit as vital as visiting the Christ statue or taking the cable car up the Sugar Loaf. Football is often described as 'the beautiful game', and nowhere is this description more apt than in Brazil. The national side has won the football world cup five times, and is pretty much every non-Brazilian's favorite foreign team. While the big names may have left for high profile, high wages teams in Europe, locally played Brazilian football is still a joy to behold, largely due to



Photo courtesy of Lucy Bryson

the fantastic festival atmosphere. Samba drumming, singing, dancing, firecrackers and enormous flags liven up even the most humdrum of games, and if you are lucky enough to catch a local derby or important cup match then the atmosphere will be even more electric. © NileGuide

contact:

tel: 55 21 523 0085

fax: 55 21 521 5111

location:

Avenida Vieira Souto, 110
Rio de Janeiro 22420-000

4 Barril 1800

DESCRIPTION: The bar, which is right in front of the Ipanema beach, has been elected one of the best bars in Rio, with one of the best draft beers in town. To eat, the barbecued meat is a must, especially the Picanha. It's always very busy, with a friendly and popular atmosphere, especially in the summer. © wcities.com



Barril 1800

contact:

tel: 55 21 2522 1296

location:

Avenue Atlântica 3432
Rio de Janeiro RJ 22070-000

5 Help Club (The)

DESCRIPTION: If you were at Rio about 20 years back, then this would have been a definite stop for a fun night out. Today, it provides for a different kind of fun. A roaring discotheque once, Help Club today attracts a lot of foreign men looking for a lady for the night. A well-known and popular pick-up joint, the club operates right into the wee-hours of the morning. There is a cover charge, but once inside prices are cheap. With the Copacabana beach atmosphere and the funky salsa 'n' samba beats in the air, this makes a great place to check-out the wild side of Rio! © wcities.com

contact:

tel: 55 21 3813 2526

location:

Rua Maria Quitéria 37,
Ipanema
Rio de Janeiro

6 Emporio

DESCRIPTION: Open nightly until around 4am, Emporio gets particularly busy on Mondays, when people spill onto the streets. Attracts hordes of local people but is also a good spot to meet other travellers. DJs spin a mix of American and UK alternative and rock music, with a bit of vintage Brazilian MPB.

hours:

Nightly, from early evening
until 4a

My List

location:

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

1 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: 55 21 2512 5651
fax: 55 21 294 3173
<http://www.esch.com.br/ac2eng.htm>

2 Esch Cafe

DESCRIPTION: A bar, a restaurant and a cigar store, this is one of the hippest nightspots in Rio, with beautiful people and good food, and the ambience of a typical cigar store. The inspired cuisine coexists harmoniously with the best Habanas, offering treats like the lavish Havana fillet, a garlic-covered wonder. For those not too keen on cigar smoke, there is a non-smoking area. The original branch downtown was ranked by the American magazine Newsweek as one of the eight best in the Americas. © wcities.com

location:

Rua Dias Ferreira, 78-A
Rio de Janeiro 22431-050

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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