Travel Guide
Rio de Janeiro
Samba beats and beaches by Sugarloaf Mountain

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Quick view

Rio de Janeiro: Samba beats and beaches by Sugarloaf Mountain

One of the world’s favourite party cities, Rio also has one of the most stunning natural settings on the planet. Its white-sand beaches curve around Guanabara Bay, with a tropical backdrop of jungle-clad mountains. Rio’s carioca residents don’t just live for the beach and their equally famous Carnaval. As the main host city for the 2014 FIFA World Cup, Rio showed its fervour for futebol – ‘the beautiful game’.

The 2016 Olympics took place in Rio, which was sprucing up for the flood of visitors. You can get away from the crowds, however, with leafy suburbs such as Santa Teresa offering bohemian cafés and art galleries. Or take a schooner cruise down the Costa Verde to one of the hundreds of paradise islands that lie just off shore.

Brazil

General knowledge

Country overview

From the jungle calls of the Amazon to the curves of Copacabana’s thong-clad crowds, Brazil is a heady celebration of the big, the bold and the beautiful. Brazil’s vast coastline is fringed with sandy beaches and island getaways, while buzzing Rio de Janeiro and stylish Sao Paulo offer nightlife and culture galore – as well as an annual dose of Carnival fever. Whether it’s the big surf of Santa Catarina in the far south, or the sand dunes of northern Natal, you could spend months hopping from one sun-baked beach to the next.

Hard as it may be to drag yourself away from the coast, this enormous country also offers many inland attractions. Not least the Amazon Basin, the lungs and freshwater supply for much of the subcontinent.

Geography

Brazil covers almost half of the South American continent and it is bordered to the north, west and south by all South American countries except Chile and Ecuador; to the east is the Atlantic ocean. The country is topographically relatively flat; at no point do the highlands exceed 3,000m (10,000ft). Over 60% of the country is a plateau; the remainder consists of plains. The River Plate Basin (the confluence of the Paraná and Uruguay rivers, both of which have their sources in Brazil) in the far south is more varied, higher and less heavily forested.

North of the Amazon are the Guiana Highlands, partly forested, partly stony desert.

The Brazilian Highlands of the interior, between the Amazon and the rivers of the south, form a vast tableland, the Mato Grosso, from which rise mountains in the southwest that form a steep protective barrier from the coast called the Great Escarpment, breached by deeply cut river beds. The population is concentrated in the southeastern states of Minas Gerais, Rio de Janeiro and Sao Paulo. The city of Sao Paulo has a population of over 12 million, while over 7 million people live in the city of Rio de Janeiro.

General knowledge

Key facts

Population: 205.3 million
Population Density (per sq km): 24

Capital: Brasília.

Language
The official language is Portuguese, with different regional accents characterising each state. Spanish and English are also spoken, particularly in tourist areas. Four linguistic roots survive in the indigenous areas: Gê, Tupi-guarani, Aruak and Karib.

Currency
Real/Reais (BRL; symbol R$) = 100 centavos. Notes are in denominations of R$100, 50, 20, 10, 5, 2 and 1. Coins are in denominations of R$1, and 50, 25, 10, 5, and 1 centavos.

Electricity
Brasília and Recife, 220 volts AC; Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo, 127V AC or 220V in larger hotels. Plugs are of the two-pin type. Most hotels provide 110V- and 220V-outlets, transformers and adaptors.

General business opening hours
Mon-Fri 0900-1800.

Public Holidays
Below are listed Public Holidays for the January 2019 – December 2020 period.

Note:
Regional observation only.

2019
Ano Novo (New Year’s Day): 1 January 2019
Paixão de Cristo (Good Friday): 19 April 2019
Domingo de Páscoa (Easter Sunday): 21 April 2019
Tiradentes: 21 April 2019
Dia do Trabalho (Labour Day): 1 May 2019
Corpus Cristi (Corpus Christi): 10 June 2019
Independência do Brasil (Independence Day): 7 September 2019
Nossa Senhora de Aparecida (Our Lady of Aparecida): 12 October 2019
Finados (All Souls’ Day): 2 November 2019
Proclamação da República Brasileira (Republic Day): 15 November 2019
Natal (Christmas Day): 25 December 2019
Véspera de Ano Novo (New Year’s Eve): 31 December 2019

2020
Ano Novo (New Year’s Day): 1 January 2020
Paixão de Cristo (Good Friday): 10 April 2020
Domingo de Páscoa (Easter Sunday): 12 April 2020
Tiradentes: 21 April 2020
Dia do Trabalho (Labour Day): 1 May 2020
Corpus Cristi (Corpus Christi): 11 June 2020
Independência do Brasil (Independence Day): 7 September 2020
Nossa Senhora de Aparecida (Our Lady of Aparecida): 12 October 2020
Finados (All Souls’ Day): 2 November 2020
Proclamação da República Brasileira (Republic Day): 15 November 2020
Natal (Christmas Day): 25 December 2019
Véspera de Ano Novo (New Year’s Eve): 31 December 2020

All information subject to change.

Travel etiquette
How to fit in
Social Conventions
In informal situations, it is common to kiss women on both cheeks when meeting and taking one's leave, whilst handshaking is customary between men. Frequent offers of coffee and tea are customary when visiting a host; if invited to someone's home bring a gift. Flowers either before or after your visit will be appreciated, as will small gifts from your country or origin.

Time-keeping is loose and fast in Brazil, so whilst punctuality may be expected from visitors, don't expect it in return – arriving 30 minutes later than scheduled is quite normal and acceptable.

In terms of what to wear, casual wear is normal, particularly during hot weather. Brazilians are known for their love of skimpy beachwear (thong bikinis for women and Speedos for men are the norm) but going shirtless anywhere besides the beach is generally frowned upon.

Health
Main emergency number: 192

Food & Drink
Water should not be drunk unless boiled or sterilised first. Even filtered water in more remote areas should be avoided and bottled water should be drunk instead. Pasteurised milk and cheese is available in towns and is generally considered safe to consume. Milk outside of urban areas is unpasteurised and should be boiled; travellers should also be wary of products that could have been made with unpasteurised milk, such as ice cream.

Other Risks
A polio vaccination certificate is required for children aged between three months and seven years old. Bilharzia (schistosomiasis) is present within Brazil, as are several other infectious diseases such as dengue fever (which is more prevalent after rain in densely populated areas). There have also been cases of meningococcal meningitis in and around the Bahia area. Rabies is present; if you are bitten, seek medical advice without delay. If visiting remote parts of the Amazon or more rural villages, be sure to take the usual precautions, stocking up on mosquito repellent, sunscreen lotion and wearing suitable clothing.

Contractual physician of Lufthansa
Dr. Strattner, Ralph
Avenida Nossa Senhora de Copacabana
1018/602 – Copacabana
Rio de Janeiro – 22060-000
Brazil
Tel. +21-2521-3723
Tel. +21-2521-2646

Please note that Lufthansa accepts no responsibility for the treatment nor will it bear the cost of any treatment.

Phone calls & Internet
Telephone/Mobile Telephone
Dialing Code: +55

Telephone
Public telephones accept cartões telefônicos (telephone cards), which can be
obtained from newspaper kiosks. International calls from Brazil are expensive and in most cases it will be cheaper to use VoIP services such as Skype for outbound international calls.

Mobile Telephone
Mobile coverage is generally very good. Coverage is provided with a number of mobile phone carriers including Oi, Vivo, Claro, Tim, CTBC, Sercomtel and Nextel. Roaming agreements exist with most international mobile phone companies, but travellers should check with their service providers. An unlocked GSM tri- or quad-band cell phone works in Brazil, with SIM cards widely available. Sim cards can be bought at newsstands, shopping malls and a variety of other outlets. Minutes can be added via cartões pre-pago (prepaid cards), available at newspaper kiosks.

Internet
Many hotels provide guests with internet access using Wi-Fi, although this may be added to the bill at the end of your stay. Internet cafés can be found in main towns and cities, and there are often internet booths at airports. In smaller towns, public access is sometimes available at post offices.

Top 10 sights
Top 10 sights in Rio de Janeiro

Cristo Redentor, Corcovado
The statue of Christ the Redeemer looking benignly over Rio from his perch atop Corcovado Mountain, is one of the most iconic city sights, visible from every corner. Take the cog railway up and check the weather first, as tropical mists sometimes shroud the peak.

Parque Nacional da Tijuca
20531-590 Rio de Janeiro
Brazil
Tel.: +55 (21) 2558 1329
Opening times:
Daily 0800-1900
www.tremdocorcovado.rio/

Pão de Acucar
Cable cars have been shuttling up the twin peaks of Sugarloaf Mountain for over a hundred years, and the journey remains one of Rio’s most popular activities. Go up at sunset and see the city below light up, including the Cristo Redentor statue illuminated on the horizon.

Avenida Pasteur 520, Urca
22290-240 Rio de Janeiro
Brazil
Tel.: +55 (21) 2546 8400
Opening times:
Daily 0800-1950
www.bondinho.com.br

Copacabana
Rio’s most famous beach stretches in a sumptuous arc around the bay, lined with soaring skyscrapers, housing many of the city’s top hotels and restaurants. The wide flat sands are filled with sun-lovers: playing volleyball, working out, or just working on the tan.

Ipanema

LH.com/travelguide
Rio de Janeiro
05/17
Adjacent to Copacabana, Ipanema has an equally pristine sandy beach, attracting many of the city’s trendiest set. Likewise, the beachside neighbourhood is a magnet for Rio’s wealthiest young hip crowd, with chic boutiques, nightclubs and bars to keep them entertained all night long.

Ipanema
Rio de Janeiro
Brazil

**Jardim Botânico**

These superb gardens house one of the finest tropical plant collections in the world, founded by Emperor Dom João VI in 1808. The shady avenues lined with towering palms, ponds filled with giant Amazonian water lilies and steamy glasshouses provide an idyllic oasis in the middle of the city.

Rua Jardim Botânico 1008, Jardim Botânico
22460-030 Rio de Janeiro
Brazil
Tel.: +55 (21) 3874 1808

Opening times:
Mon 1200-1700
Tue-Sun 0800-1700

www.jbrj.gov.br

**Parque Nacional da Tijuca**

The world’s biggest urban forest embraces the whole city. The lush, mountainous jungle is home to many exotic plants and animals, as well as several of its highest peaks, including Corcovado. A network of trails criss-crosses the park, leading past sparkling waterfalls and streams, with lookout points providing breathtaking views over Rio and beyond.

Estrada da Cascatinha 850, Alto da Boa Vista
20531-590 Rio de Janeiro
Brazil
Tel.: +55 (21) 2491 1700

Opening times:
Daily 0800-1800

www.corcovado.org.br

**Estadio do Maracanã**

Rio’s giant stadium is one of the largest and best known in the football world. It was built for the 1958 World Cup Finals and is renowned for the carnival-like exuberance of its fans. It also hosts concerts for mega-stars, from Madonna to Prince, and was once again the setting for the 2014 World Cup Final.

Avenida Presidente Castelo Branco,
s/n - Portão 2 - Maracanã, Rio de Janeiro
Brazil
Tel.: 0800 062 7222

Opening times: Matches usually at 1700; guided tours Mon-Sat, hourly from 0900, last tour starts four hours before kick-off on match days.

www.maracana.com

**Santa Teresa**

This attractive hillside neighbourhood overlooking downtown Rio was one of the city’s earliest residential districts, and its cobbledstoned streets are still lined with age-worn mansions. Today, Santa Teresa is home to many of Rio’s artists, and has several excellent museums and galleries, along with atmospheric local bars, restaurants and boutique hotels.

Santa Teresa
Rio de Janeiro
Brazil
**Mosteiro de São Bento**

This sumptuously gilded church and Benedictine monastery, on a city centre hilltop, is one of Rio’s most precious historic treasures, founded in 1590. The church’s interior is richly decorated with carvings and paintings in the Brazilian Baroque style, and is considered one of the finest examples in the whole country.

Rua Dom Gerardo 68  
20090-030 Rio de Janeiro  
Brazil  
Tel.: +55 (21) 2206 8100  
www.osb.org.br

**Praca XV de Novembro**

This downtown site was the ceremonial heart of Rio when it was the Brazilian capital. Many important buildings, including the Imperial Palace, overlook the square. An ugly modern flyover sadly blights Praca XV, as it is known, today, but it has witnessed many historic events, including, in 1889, the ousting of Emperor Dom Pedro II.

Praça Quinze de Novembro, Centro  
20010-000 Rio de Janeiro  
Brazil

**Shopping in Rio de Janeiro**

**Key Areas**

In its obsession with the body beautiful, Rio is hugely fashion conscious, particularly for beachwear, jewellery and cosmetics. Its Havaiana flip-flops alone are a major worldwide brand. Ipanema is the hub for chic boutiques, with slightly more affordable department stores along Avenida Nossa Senhora da Copacabana in neighbouring Copacabana.

**Markets**

Perhaps surprisingly, Rio is not very big on local markets, but there are a few worth visiting. Ipanema’s Hippy Market, every Sunday on Praca General Osorio, sells mostly handicrafts and souvenirs, as well as clothes and other bric-a-brac. Two decent antiques markets are the Feira do Rio Antigo, in and around Rua do Lavradio on the first Saturday of the month; and the Feira de Antiguidades, Sundays opposite the Jockey Club on Praca Santos Dumont, is smaller but sells more specialised ornaments, paintings and jewellery.

**Shopping Centres**

Shopping malls are dotted all over Rio. Giant modern centres line the broad Avenida das Américas in the western suburb of Barra, with outlets of all top Brazilian and international designer labels. The biggest mall, Barra Shopping, has some 600 stores, as well as restaurants, cinemas, a bowling alley and even a monorail. Free shuttle buses run between many malls and major hotels.

**Restaurants**

**Restaurants in Rio de Janeiro**

Reflecting the cultural melting pot that is Rio, the cuisine here spans the Amazon to the Andes, enriched with Brazil’s historical European, African and Asian roots. You can blow your budget on fine gourmet cuisine or just grab a *mixto quente* – toasted sandwich – washed down with an ice-cool beer at a street-corner boteco bar.
Le Pré Catélán
Stunning fusion cuisine created by celebrated French chef Roland Villard; try the Amazonian gastronomic banquet, serving up a mouth-watering medley of tropical fish, fruits and vegetables.
Avenida Atlântica, 4240
Copacabana
22070-002 Rio de Janeiro
Brazil
Price: Expensive

Roberta Sudbrack
One of Rio’s most feted chefs, Roberta Sudbrack takes deceptively simple fresh ingredients and conjures up wonders of culinary delight. An expensive but unforgettable experience.
Avenida Lineu de Paula Machado, 916
Jardim Botânico, Rio de Janeiro
RJ, 22470-040
Brazil
Price: Expensive

Paláfita Kitch
This romantic lakeside restaurant serves up Middle Eastern cuisine, with diners seated on low-slung sofas under the stars, and late-night dancing at weekends.
Av. Epitácio Pessoa, s/n Quiosque 20
Parque Cantagalo, Rio de Janeiro
RJ, 22471-003
Brazil
Price: Moderate

Casa da Feijoada
On a shady street corner in Ipanema, this is one of the best places to get a belly-busting feijoada, the closest thing to a Brazilian national dish: a rich stew complemented by exotic side dishes.
Rua Prudente de Moraes 10b, i
Ipanema
22420-040 Rio de Janeiro
Brazil
Price: Moderate

Cervantes
One of Rio’s most beloved street cafés, with loyal customers queuing around the block for one of its classic high-stacked sandwiches.
Rua Prado Junior 335
22011-040 Rio de Janeiro
Brazil
Price: Cheap

Nightlife
Nightlife in Rio de Janeiro
Cariocas love to party, late, loud and lively. From sensuous samba to sultry jazz to rough and raunchy Baile Funk, you can dance all night in hundreds of clubs and bars all over Rio. The live music hotspot though is Lapa, a historic downtown district packed with top-quality venues.
**Rio Scenarium**
 Excellent live samba performed in a restored old depository, its three floors decorated with eccentric collectibles and vintage memorabilia.

Rua do Lavradio, 20, Centro
20230-070 Rio de Janeiro
Brazil

**Estudantina Musical**
 One of Rio’s most venerable gafieira samba dancehalls. Locals of all ages come here for the pure joy of dancing, and they are only too pleased to teach novices their smooth moves.

Praça Tiradentes 79, Centro
20060-070 Rio de Janeiro
Brazil

**Oi Futuro Ipanema**
 An innovative cultural centre, promoting local talent, with a changing programme of live music and art events.

R. Visc. de Pirajá, 54, Ipanema
22410-003 Rio de Janeiro
Brazil

**Casarao Amena Resedá**
 A relative newcomer to Rio’s arts scene, this rambling old building hosts a vibrant mix of live music, dance, poetry and theatre.

Rua Pedro Américo, 277, Catete
22221-011 Rio de Janeiro
Brazil

**Circo Voador**
 A giant white marquee in the shadow of the famous Arcos da Lapa, this live music venue attracts some of Brazil’s top bands, and is hugely popular with a young crowd.

Rua dos Arcos, Lapa
20230-060 Rio de Janeiro
Brazil

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**Calendar of events**

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**Rio de Janeiro Carnival**
 Simply the world's greatest party, the annual carnival in Rio de Janeiro is one of the wildest extravaganzas on the planet. The main carnival parade in the huge, purpose-built Sambódromo comes alive with a riot of colour, outlandish floats, throngs of gyrating dancers and pounding drummers, all shaking to intoxicating samba rhythms.

Rio’s carnival starts on Saturday and ends on Ash Wednesday. Escolas de Samba (‘Samba Schools’) from each city neighbourhood compete to see which
can parade the best, loudest, and most creatively decorated floats, carrying samba bands and accompanied by dancers and other performers. Before, during and after the main parades (held on Sunday and Monday), there are many other events across the city, including music shows, carnival balls and separate parades for the lesser samba schools.

1 - 9 March 2019
www.rio-carnival.net/
Venue: Sambódromo, Avenida Marquês de Sapucaí, Santo Cristo

**Festas Juninas**

This is a New World twist on an old European Catholic tradition, brought to Brazil by the first Portuguese settlers. In Mediterranean countries, the Fiesta de San Juan (Saint John) falls on the summer solstice, and is celebrated with bonfires. Rio extends this June festival to include Santo Antonio (Saint Anthony) on 13 June, São João (St John), 11 days later and São Pedro (Saint Peter) on 29 June. On three separate evenings, in private homes, in clubs, and in public places all over Rio, stalls are set out to resemble village market places and are decorated with streamers and lanterns. Against the glow of bonfires there is much dancing, eating and drinking. In mock weddings, couples follow the old tradition of leaping the flames. Many other events also take place in the weeks before and after the saints’ days, in venues all across the city.

June 2019
Venue: Rio de Janeiro

**Rio de Janeiro Pride**

The Rio de Janeiro Pride (Parada de Orgulho Gay) is one of the biggest gay pride parades in the world. More than two million people take part in parties, on the Zona Sul beaches and across the city, in celebration of sexual diversity and equality. Visitors will be hard pressed not to find a samba band or sounds system somewhere around the capital.

November 2019
Venue: Copacabana

**Reveillon**

Outdoor concerts and parties all over the city culminate in a massive fireworks display on Copacabana Beach to mark Rio’s New Year’s Eve celebrations, its second biggest bash after Carnival. Up to one million people gather on the sands, so get there early to stake your place.

31 December 2019
Venue: Copacabana Beach and seafront

**Hotels**

**Hotels in Rio de Janeiro**

Rio has hundreds of hotels to suit all tastes, though it’s not a cheap city these days. Most major chain hotels are concentrated in Copacabana and Ipanema, though suburbs such as Santa Teresa have some chic boutique hotels, while booming Barra, out west, has larger resort-style accommodations.

**Sofitel Rio de Janeiro**

With a magnificent location at the far end of Copacabana Beach, this large luxurious hotel has a reputation for impeccable service and for its well-appointed
rooms.

Avenida Atlântica, 4240
Copacabana
22070-002 Rio de Janeiro
Brazil

Category: Expensive

Santa Teresa Hotel RJ MGallery By Sofitel

Oozing tasteful style, this exclusive boutique hotel is hidden away high up on a Santa Teresa hillside; its 40 rooms and suites are decorated with cool fabrics and tropical hardwood flooring.

Rua Almirante Alexandrino, Santa Teresa
20241-260 Rio de Janeiro
Brazil

Category: Expensive

Savoy Othon Travel

This large modern hotel is well situated in the heart of Copacabana one block from the beach; no frills but highly rated as good value.

Avenida Nossa Senhora de Copacabana 995, Copacabana
22060-001 Rio de Janeiro
Brazil

Category: Moderate

Jucati Seasons Apartments

This block of 55 modern apartments is ideal for families and those coming to Rio for a week or more. The apartments sleep up to six people and are well equipped with kitchen, cable TV and wireless access.

Rua Tenente Marones de Gusmão 85, Copacabana
22041-060 Rio de Janeiro
Brazil

Category: Moderate

Rio Nature Hostel Adventure

This friendly and small budget hostel is handily located in Botafogo, a coastal neighbourhood next to Copacabana. Breakfast is included, as well as WiFi access, cable TV and kitchen.

Travessa Dona Marciana, 31, Botafogo
22280-120 Rio de Janeiro
Brazil

Category: Budget

Crew tip

My Rio de Janeiro

My personal highlight in this breathtaking city is watching the sun set from Pedra do Arpoador (a rock located between Ipanema and the Copacabana), where the Cariocas, as the people of Rio de Janeiro are known, applaud enthusiastically as the sun sinks beneath the horizon. For me, that’s a wonderfully relaxing way to end the day.
Best of ... 
... samba dance clubs

Just a few years ago, Rio’s most famous dance was dead to the world, a sleeping beauty in need of a reviving kiss. Now the samba is alive and kicking – and the samba community more vibrant than ever – as a tour of the city’s dance clubs reveals.

Lapa 40°

Younger crowd, changing concerts on the first floor, billiard tables on the second, and on the third floor, every Saturday, samba lessons from 8 to 12pm. As Carlinhos de Jesus, dancer, choreographer and owner of a dance school and the samba club Lapa 40° tells us: “There are no tables because we don’t want our guests to watch, we want them to move!” At Lapa 40°, today’s malandros, the samba “bad boys” in their black T-shirts, flit with breathtaking lightness of foot around their lady partners. “The good ones are the guys who make their partner sweat – regardless how advanced or otherwise she is,” says Plinio. He and five other professional dancers make sure their female guests leave the place with a big smile.

R. Riachuelo 97  
lapa40graus.com.br
Rio de Janeiro 20230-010  
Brazil  
Tel. +55 21 3970-1338
Estudantina Musical

Popular with a middle-aged crowd, many of whom are pros. Every Sunday, there’s a ‘Golden Years’ Ball’ (8pm to 4am with live music starting at 10pm). This dance hall, which draws tourists from all over Brazil and abroad and has often featured in telenovelas and big-screen movies, has changed very little over the decades, and the old rules still apply here. Namely, all couples dance in a circle, counterclockwise, no drinks are allowed on the dance floor, and shorts and plunging necklines are taboo.

Praça Tiradentes, 79
Rio de Janeiro 20060-070
Brazil
Tel. +55-21/22 32 11 49

Carioca da Gema

Mostly frequented by locals who know the regular bands and singers. Live samba seven nights a week (starting 9:30pm); the doors only close when the last guest has grown too tired to dance.

Av. Mem de Sá, 79
Rio de Janeiro 20230-150
Brazil
Tel. + 55 2221-0043

Rio Scenarium

One of the most popular samba clubs in downtown Rio, it attracts a mixed, in other words Brazilian and international, set. Tuesdays to Saturdays, the live samba music begins at 7:30pm, and three bands perform in the course of the night. The popular, Northeast Brazilian dance rhythm forró is played regularly here. The Scenarium used to be a treasure trove for film set designers, but today it resounds with live music and is packed with people every night.

Rua do Lavradio, 20, Centro
20230-070 Rio de Janeiro
Brazil

City tour

In Rio with Carola Saavedra

Rio de Janeiro has a firm hold on writer Carola Saavedra’s heart. After ten years in Europe, she was overcome by longing for the city of her youth. Why? The answers can be found on beaches, in bookstores and at a Rio flea market. Join us on a tour.
Rio de Janeiro – a city I have left and returned to, wanted and rejected, so many times. A city that you cannot love without contradicting yourself. It all began when I was three, when my family left Chile for Brazil: the scorching February heat and humidity, the endless summer and my first words in Portuguese. I sensed the beauty of this language, which would one day be my home.

Our first apartment was in Copacabana. It was the ’70s. I remember my mother wearing a gigantic straw hat, us walking to the beach, people shopping, crossing the street, reading newspapers. Just everyday life. Here and there, something struck me: a barking dog; a man on the sidewalk selling live crabs; carnival, a few days each year. The streets were magical and full of life. Years went by, but my initial fascination and sense of wonder stayed with me.

I left Rio, much later, as an adult. I thought that even a city would eventually wear out, get used up, would need to be replaced by another. I went to Germany to study, at first only to complete a Master’s degree, to take a little break. That break turned into ten years abroad: Germany, France, Spain. A life in different languages, days in transit.

Rio was just a momentary flash of longing, annual visits, a picture postcard from the past.

Then, just as suddenly as my desire to leave had materialized, the longing to return grew in me. Unexpected, like something that exists inside you, and all of a sudden takes shape. Going back is just as difficult as leaving. It takes time and courage for the person you have become to meet the person you have stopped being, and the collection of irretrievable possibilities.

You have to arrive slowly, reconnect with the city, its rhythm, its scenery, its darker and its human sides. You have to inhabit it, become part of its everyday life, of its streetscape.

Finally, I commence my return. Searching for a place to drop anchor, I remember Copacabana, the neighborhood I grew up in. The man selling crabs is no longer there, but daily life has remained the same, as have most of its protagonists.

I move into an apartment in Bairro Peixoto, a small oasis in Copacabana, or more specifically a small square surrounded by two main roads. It’s a residential area with low-rise buildings, no shops, few cars. I work with the window open and can...
hear birds singing. Occasionally people on the telephone ask me where I am. It's as though time in Bairro Peixoto has stood still. Gradually, I find my routine.

Sometimes I go to the Forte de Copacabana and sit in the Confettaria Colombo coffee house, observing the beachfront from an unusual angle, the sands that form a clear line as if drawn by hand, the buildings, the hills surrounding the neighborhood.

In the water there are a few surfers, and small fishing boats a little farther out. I pay the check and wander across the grounds of the fortress.

From the tip of the peninsula, I have a panoramic view of the ocean. I walk up to the large beach promenade. Around me: tourists, senior citizens, mothers with young children, students, artisans, unemployed people; and people playing sports, working, standing at small booths drinking beer, caipirinhas or coconut water. Every tier of society is here. Copacabana Beach is a kaleidoscope in perpetual motion. It's as though the whole world is represented on this strip of land, between the buildings and the sea. I slip off my shoes and walk to the water's edge. The waves roll up against my feet. Gradually, I find my routine.

I take long walks around the city center. Through its large avenues and narrow, crooked streets, past the remnants of colonial architecture, modern skyscrapers, colonial-style townhouses, churches and cultural centers. I pass self-service restaurants selling food by the kilo, bars, trendy restaurants, large, impressive bookstores – and small, second-hand ones. Any era, any type of person can be found downtown. The city center on weekdays is different from the city center on weekends. I decide to go on a Saturday morning, to stop at the Praça Quinze flea market which sells anything and everything: ashtrays, engraved silver spoons, sculptures, old mirrors, analogue cameras, gramophones, toys, second-hand clothing.

Women sell acarajé, black-eyed pea and dried shrimp fritters. Families and solitary collectors wander around. I buy a cup and saucer that don’t match, and leave the flea market feeling triumphant.

Time has flown by. It's lunchtime already. I walk through the Arco do Teles archway toward Rua do Ouvidor. Here in the pedestrian zone, there are restaurant tables on the sidewalk. You’re surrounded by colonial buildings and live music: samba and chorinho. It's a city within the city.

Another day, feeling less sentimental, I set off for Ipanema. Another world awaits me here: fancy boutiques, restaurants with modern furnishings, women wearing high heels in imported cars, children accompanied by their nannies. I visit the beautiful Livraria da Travessa bookstore. Here, you can spend long afternoons browsing through new releases or buying books you’ve always wanted. You can sit in the café, alone with your book or your thoughts, or have an animated conversation with friends. Gradually, I find my routine. The city gets closer to me once more, lets me inhabit it.
I return downtown, this time to the newly opened Museu de Arte do Rio (MAR). Two architectural styles, an old palace and a modernist building, are joined together by a walkway. I am drawn to the exhibition of contemporary art. The MAR is located right across from the harbor. I go to the top floor and look down onto the wharves, the hill and the construction sites. The museum tells the story of the city’s history and houses several educational projects. I walk through the rooms and feel as though I’ve entered someone’s home. As I leave the museum, I hail a cab and head for the Urca district.

Passing Sugarloaf Mountain and the Pista Claudio Coutinho walking path, I start feeling sentimental. I ask the driver to stop at Praia Vermelha Beach near the entrance to the cable car that goes to the summit. The path starts here. I encounter a few joggers, couples, and mothers with baby carriages, but there are stretches on which I see no one, just the sea and the beach. I finish my walk at the Urca bar with its view of Guanabara Bay. I order coconut water, take a seat on the wall and enjoy the scenery in front of me. I’m astonished every time. How beautiful it is here. A Latin American metropolis with all the problems you would expect, but full of places to escape to. Full of moments like this, when your gaze loses itself in unexpected scenery.

Cities don’t belong to us just because we live in them, they accept us as we accept them. For many years I wanted to be in Rio, in these streets, surrounded by this scenery, but at the same time I didn’t. I was simultaneously fleeing and returning; like a person unable to live with their lover, but also unable to live apart from them. Until the day when my decision to return first developed into a gradual arrival, a renewed encounter with the city, and with everything that makes it fascinating and amazing. It actually exists: the kind of love that requires being apart before you finally say yes.
Cheers!

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