

ESCAPE

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# Oi, Rio!

In This South American Hotspot, Decadent Luxury  
Meets Natural Beauty To Create Total Indulgence.

By: Gina Samarotto



**R**io. She's energetic, eclectic, elegant and exciting. She's a muse for romance, the inspiration for song and the pinnacle of tropical, South

American glamour. Home to famous beaches, world-class sports and iconic landmarks, and with a sizzling nightlife to boot; Rio is a sultry, surreal wonderland set within a world of indulgence.

It's a remarkable city of contrasts where one can see spectacular architecture, magnificent art, breathtaking vistas... you might even stumble upon a mischievous Marmoset – all over the course of a single afternoon and all contained within a single, distinctive city that sways to a hypnotic rhythm all her own.

At the epicenter of Rio is the instantly recognizable statue known as Christ the Redeemer – or Cristo Redentor as its called in the area's native Portuguese. Perched high atop Corcovado Mountain, *Cristo Redentor* is to Rio what *la Tour Eiffel* is to Paris – a powerfully symbolic and defining icon whose outstretched arms have been welcoming visitors to this legendary city since 1931. While designed to be seen from nearly anywhere in Rio, one must ascend more than 2300 feet to the peak of Corcovado to experience the statue from a more personal perspective. While seeing this monolithic masterpiece rising up from the mist and the mountains is breathtaking from any vantage point, for an even more intimate and wholly extraordinary experience, making the ascension as a guest of the Belmond Copacabana Palace is a moving thrill not to be missed.

The Copacabana Palace, itself an icon in Rio, is a gleaming grande dame. The sprawling, brilliantly white hotel has been the Brazilian darling and preferred home away from home for celebrities, royalty and societies elite since its debut in the 1920's. Offering world class dining throughout its restaurants including the elegantly appointed, Italian-inspired Cipriani and the sleekly modern, luxuriously zen Mee, indulgent rooms and suites and one of Rio's most exclusive and enticing pool scenes; the Belmond Copacabana Palace is a richly traditional, indulgently sophisticated oasis in the heart of the city. As of late, the Copa has exponentially elevated its allure by offering guests the Corcovado Experience. This inimitable opportunity is available exclusively through the Copacabana Palace and begins just before dawn when hotel guests are met in the lobby to be chauffeured to the base of Corcovado. Once arrived, guests are admitted before the mountain is open to the public, affording them the coveted privilege of making a private pilgrimage to the summit. There, alone in the shadow of the Redeemer and with the sun rising over the city below, daybreak is celebrated amidst jaw dropping views and over a gourmet picnic breakfast served by Belmond staff. Regardless of whether it's your first time seeing the statue, or your 100th visit to Corcovado, seeing Christ the Redeemer through the Belmond Copacabana Palace Experience is an utterly mesmerizing, luxury travel moment. It's an elite experience destined to create unforgettable memories. "Even for those of us who grew up in Rio," says Bruna Mariath, a communications executive with Belmond, "The first time you spend time alone on Corcovado... it changes you. It's difficult to explain, but it's something you never forget."







Sunbathe, swim and socialize in one of Rio's largest and most attractive swimming pools.





*CLOCKWISE FROM TOP:*

*enjoy art and sophisticated pan-Asian cuisine  
mee restaurant, Fine Wine Selection at  
Giuseppe Grill in Rio de Janeiro, and Cable  
cars taking visitors to the peak of mt. sugarloaf  
(photos by Gina samarotto)*

A morning spent atop Corcovado indeed sets the bar exceptionally high for the rest of your day in Rio, but this magical city readily rises to the challenge. Rio is alive with a host of things to see and do, not the least of which is a visit to one of the area's famously spectacular beaches where sun worshippers flock to see and be seen. "Each beach has its own flavor," says Rodrigo Vieira, a Rio native and director of the highly regarded tour company, Bravietour. "The beach is where cariocas (Rio locals) go to see friends and meet new people. Swimming, surfing, volleyball... there's always something to do and something to see at the beaches." Also popular with Bravietour guests are excursions through the winding streets of the crafty, cultural and bohemian neighborhood of Santa Teresa as well as visits to Sugarloaf Mountain where guests ride the famous cable cars up 1300 feet to observation decks where Sugarloaf's unparalleled, panoramic views of the city unfold before them.

Shopping in Rio is a dream. Those looking for a bit of retail therapy should plan to spend some time exploring Ipanema where cobbled streets are dotted with boutiques offering everything from the latest collection from Louis Vuitton to runway couture to H. Stern's handcrafted jewelry featuring Brazilian-mined precious and semi-precious stones. For the culinary driven, the upscale neighborhood of Leblon is where chefs show off their prowess through inspired dishes featuring local delicacies. A Leblon stand out known for their succulent beef, impossibly fresh seafood and a wine list worthy of the most discerning oenophile is Giuseppe's Grill on the Av. Bartolomeu Mitre. Housed in a chic space styled with original art and exposed, salvaged brick, the eatery is a casually elegant favorite with travelers and locals alike.

For a day, explore the natural side of Rio and head to Floresta da Tijuca. One of South America's most impressive national parks and the largest replanted tropical forest on Earth; Tijuca was conceptualized by the visionary Emperor Dom Pedro II to encompass more than twelve square miles of lush flora and fauna in the center of one of South America's most vibrant cities. Here, amid streaming waterfalls and beneath the dense jungle canopy, visitors can hike winding forest trails or take an open jeep tour to view the incredible scenery while communing with the resident monkeys, coatis, brilliantly plumed birds and other wildlife that make their home in this tropical haven. For a more cultivated approach to the great outdoors, Jardim Botânico is a spectacular public garden featuring more than 6,500 species of horticulture planted throughout 54 hectares. Founded in 1808 by King John VI of Portugal, the Rio de Janeiro Botanical Gardens are a veritable Eden set within a posh, residential neighborhood replete with the necessary shops, myriad galleries and a wide selection of restaurants to entertain its well-heeled residents.

For the sports aficionado, a visit to Estádio Jornalista Mário Filho, better known simply as Maracanã, is a must. Take in a match at this soccer Mecca, or make a reservation for a behind the scenes tour where fans can experience the thrill of walking through the players tunnel and onto the field that hosted the 2014 FIFA World Cup. "Rio de Janeiro has always been popular for travelers wanting to enjoy art, culture, and beautiful beaches," says Paulo Senise, Executive Director of the Rio Convention & Visitors Bureau. "But today, with the world looking at Rio as home of the 2014 FIFA World Cup and the 2016 Summer Olympics, it's become a more desirable destination than ever."

