

TRAVEL

16

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48 hours in Rio

Brazil's second city is gradually shaking off a reputation for crime and decadence as it surfs an economic boom and prepares to host the World Cup and the Olympic Games

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Rio de Janeiro, Brazil's capital of samba and Carnival, is a city forever defined in people's imagination by its miles of golden beach that on weekends draw millions of sun-worshippers.

But there is much more to Brazil's second city, which is gradually shaking off a reputation for crime and decadence as it surfs an economic boom and prepares to host the World Cup and the Olympic Games in the next six years.

Here are some tips on how to get the most out of a stay in Brazil's former capital, which was also once the capital of the Portuguese empire.

Friday

5pm Walk the promenade along Ipanema beach and admire the sunset as *Cariocas*, as residents of Rio de Janeiro are known, wind up another day of sunbathing, beach volleyball and beer-drinking on one of the world's most spectacular city beaches. Quench your thirst with a fresh coconut or a *caipirinha* from a stall on the walkway or from one of the vendors on the beach.

10pm Take a taxi or bus to nightlife district Lapa and get a table at Nova Capela, a Rio institution founded in 1923 whose white-jacketed waiters will serve you some of the best *bolinhos de bacalhao* (cod balls), *javalí* (wild boar) and *cabrito* (goat) in the city.

Midnight Soak up the buzz around Lapa's famous white arches as revelers gather to drink cheap beer at outside stalls and people-watch to the beat of samba.

1am Head to one of Lapa's atmospheric samba clubs to try your hand at the dance that defines Rio's spirit or just watch *Cariocas* of all ages come together to dance and sing along with the lyrics of old favorites. Some great clubs in Lapa include the eclectically furnished Rio Scenarium (www.rioscenarium.com.br), Democraticus, and Carioca da Gema (www.barcariocadagama.com.br/bar.htm).

A taxi ride away are Centro Cultural Carioca (www.centroculturalcarioca.com.br/home.php) and Trapiche Gamboa (www.trapichegamboa.com.br) both in beautifully restored old buildings.

Saturday

10am After breakfast, shake off your hangover by ordering a fresh fruit juice from one of the juice bars that can be found on virtually every street corner. Remember to ask for *sem açúcar* (without sugar) or *pouco açúcar* (a little sugar) unless you have a sweet tooth. The Amazonian berry *acai* (pronounced ah-sah-EE) is a favorite of body-conscious *Cariocas*.

11am If the weather is clear, make the pilgrimage up to the iconic Christ the Redeemer statue on top of Corcovado mountain either by taxi or the train that leaves from the base of the mountain, in the Cosme Velho neighborhood.

On the first Saturday of each month, a great way to spend a few hours is wandering along Rua do Lavradio in Lapa where live music and an outdoor market accompany the street's furniture and antique stores.

1pm Try Bar Lagoa (www.barlagoa.com.br) for lunch beside the picturesque lake that sits between the Ipanema area and Corcovado mountain and which will be the venue for rowing events at the 2016 Olympics.

2pm Hit the beach! Order chairs and sun umbrella from one of the vendors. It's not cool to sit on a towel.

8pm to 9pm Get a taxi or the tram up to the cobbled streets of Santa Teresa and have dinner at restaurant Aprazível (www.aprazivel.com.br/aprazivelE6.htm), which commands sweeping views over the city and Guanabara Bay and has excellent Brazilian food and *caipirinhas*. Make an early reservation to get the best views.

Wander down to Largo dos Guimaraes, a square, and join the crowds drinking *choppes* (draft beers) at one of Santa Teresa's many *botecos*, or bars.

Sunday

10am Check out Ipanema's Hippie Market for some local arts and crafts and sample some *acaraje*, a treat deep-fried in palm oil from the northeast that is sold by Afro-Brazilian women from Bahia decked out in all-white dresses.

11am Consider taking a tour of one of the hundreds of slums, or favelas, that dominate Rio's hillsides. While they have a reputation for drugs and violence, the slums are also vibrant centers of culture, the cradle of samba, and many are perfectly safe to visit with guides. Some people have a moral problem with such tours, calling them voyeurism. But many of the big slums in Rio, such as Rocinha, are increasingly joining Brazil's middle class as the economy surges ahead, boasting banks, supermarkets and pet stores.

2pm Try one of Rio's *churrascaria* barbecue restaurants, where waiters will serve you a huge variety of meat cuts until you drop. Porcao ("Big Pig") in Flamengo on the banks of Guanabara Bay is a stalwart and has an excellent buffet that may appease vegetarians.

4pm Take the cable car up from Urca to the top of Sugarloaf Mountain overlooking Guanabara Bay with views over the city and its beaches as the sun sets.

8pm Samba out your last hours in Rio at Casa Rosa (www.casarsosa.com.br), a former brothel in Laranjeiras that draws lively crowds for singing performances and dancing at the end of the weekend. You can buy a ticket that includes a helping of *feijoada*, the hearty Brazilian dish of black beans, pork, jerked beef and sausage.

Residents of the Dona Marta favela in Rio de Janeiro paint their buildings on Thursday (1 and 3). A barbershop in Dona Marta (2). Rio de Janeiro's famous Christ the Redeemer statue (4). Dona Marta, foreground, stands below the Christ the Redeemer statue atop Corcovado Mountain (5). A boardwalk along Copacabana beach (6). Ipanema beach (7). A man jumps into the waters of Leme beach (8). Copacabana beach (9).

PHOTOS: AGENCIES