



**DESERTED BLISS**  
*Head to the far western  
 edge of the city to find  
 a string of secluded  
 hike-in beaches.*





INSPIRATOMAGAZINE.COM

# *RIO WILD, RIO MILD*

Brazil's oceanside metropolis melds contrasting forces like no other city on Earth, assuming you know where to look.

**BY DINA MISHEV**  
**PHOTOGRAPHY ANDRE KLOTZ**

"This place is true Carioca style," Sergio says before elaborating. "Relaxed." Here the water is clearer and more vibrant than at the eastern and central beaches.



#### COPACABANA CENTRAL

(Above) Copacabana Beach stretches for more than 2 miles. (Right) The historic Belmond Copacabana Palace is a short walk from Copacabana Beach.

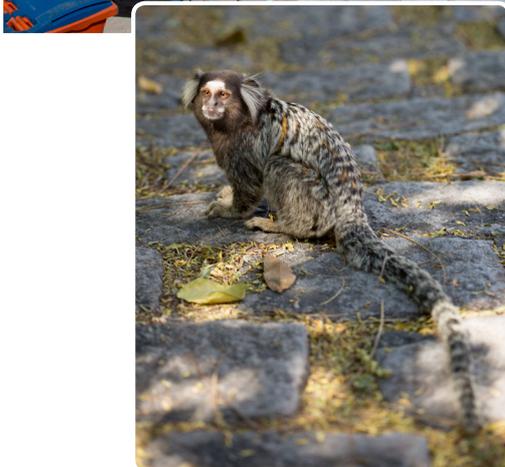
**W**e're hiking to Rio's *praias selvagens*, wild beaches, on a deserted, petrified dirt trail that cuts across a steep, vegetated hillside several hundred feet above the Atlantic Ocean, which stretches to the horizon.

The only things between me and Namibia, more than 3,000 miles distant on Africa's western coast, are a couple of fishing boats whose motors I can hear pattering below.

When I decided to come to Rio, I expected beautiful beaches, and Copacabana Beach, a three-minute walk from my hotel, Belmond Copacabana Palace, delivered. Or so I thought. My hiking guides disagree. "These wild beaches are special," says Sergio Tavares, a Carioca (native of Rio) and the founder of Rio Ecoesporte Adventures. Copacabana Palace has beach attendants who set guests up in chaise lounges and periodically stop by with chilled water and fruit. Copacabana's sand is so white it looks like it's been bleached, and it's as soft as pashmina. That's my definition of special.

Sergio's definition of special is something not directly accessible by road. "This means we must do some walking," he says. Thankfully we don't have to start our walk in Copacabana. Geographically, Rio is gigantic—covering 485 square miles. By comparison, New York City covers 306 square miles. A walk from Copacabana, or anywhere remotely near downtown, to the wild beach trailhead would take forever. Even driving there from Copacabana takes nearly two hours, mostly because we took the scenic, oceanfront route. From the car I see more beaches than I can count. They're almost all equal to Copacabana in beauty, but have different personalities.

Copacabana is flashy and full of beautiful people. There are games of beach soccer and tennis going on. Sit down for five minutes and you'll be approached by people selling towels, leather bracelets and key chains and/or offering massages. Sao Conrado beach is smallish; paragliders and hang gliders who launch off Pedra Bonita land nearby. Surfers flock to



**RIO WILD,  
RIO MILD**

5 MILES

ATLANTIC OCEAN

Prainha Beach, one of the city's best surfing spots. Abricó Beach is the city's sole nude beach. The last major beach you can drive to is Grumari. We drive 15 minutes past it, climbing steeply up a rocky, verdant peninsula and then dropping down its far side into the neighborhood of Barra de Guaratiba. We're still technically in Rio, but it doesn't feel like it.

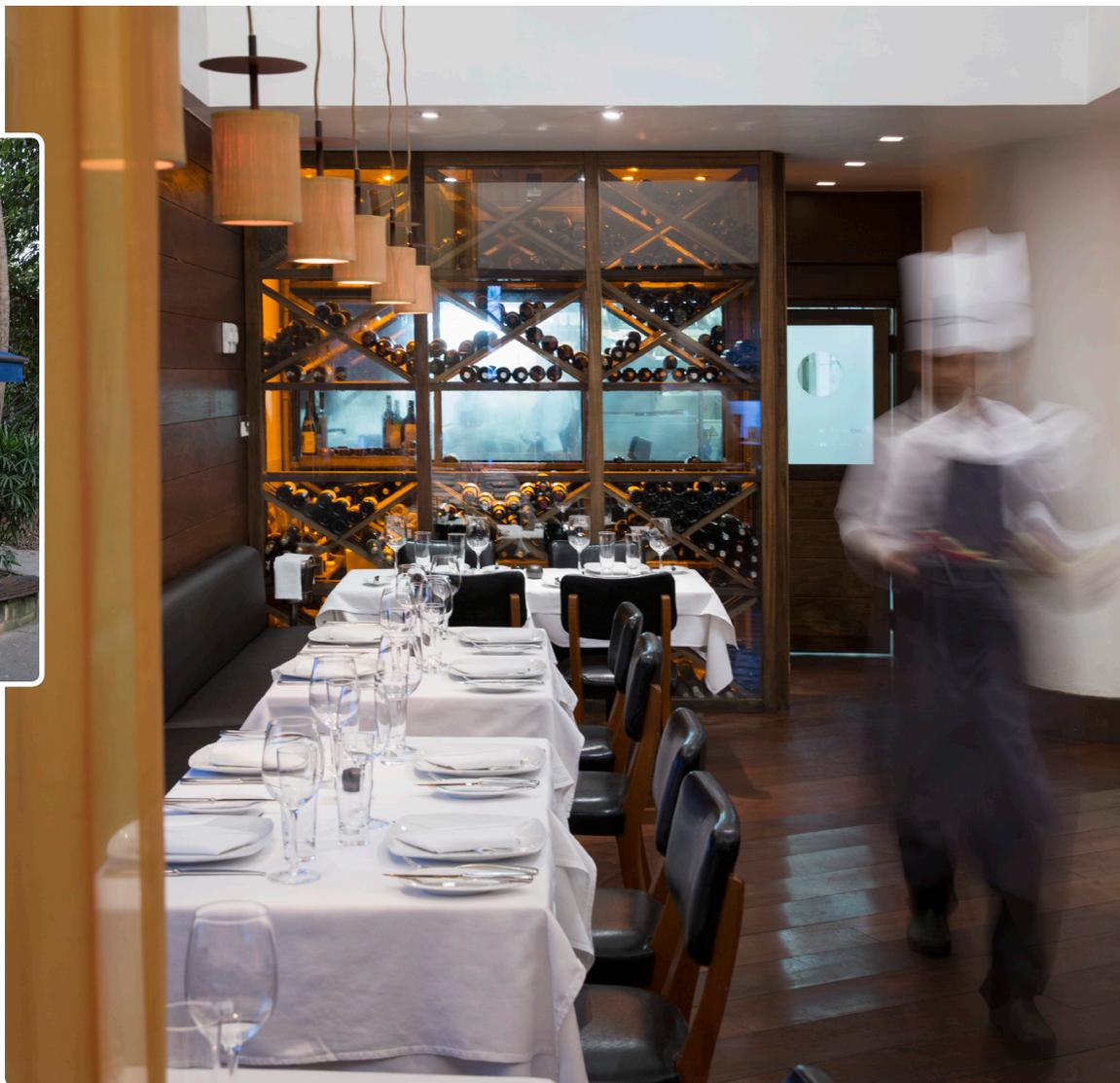
Old men in bathing suit briefs play cards at plastic tables. Cats laze in the sun. "This place is true Carioca style," Sergio says before elaborating, "Relaxed." Two- and three-story stucco houses are painted every shade of the rainbow. The rainbow spills down a crescent-shaped hillside until the hillside meets the ocean. Here the water is clearer and more vibrant than at the eastern and central beaches because it's further from the mouth of Guanabara Bay and its heavy shipping traffic. The trail to the wild beaches is hidden at the end of a residential road so steep and narrow I'd be nervous to drive it. I guess I'm not relaxed enough. Locals have parked cars along the sides all the way up.

I manage to walk for 30 minutes before doing something very un-Carioca and asking, "Are we there yet?" Almost. Before we get our wild beach on Sergio recommends a short climb. "Then you can see all of the wild beaches and take your pick," he says. Ten minutes later we're atop Pedra da Tartaruga, Turtle Stone, a rocky double mound rising from the Atlantic, attached to the mainland only by a narrow isthmus, its tail. On the mainland side of the tail are the wild beaches. From the top of the turtle's shell we look back to the wild beaches—four of them, separated from one another by small outcrops of snaggy cliffs.

Rio is going to meet all of your expectations for a historic, populous, cosmopolitan beach destination. There's traffic. The elegant Art Deco Copacabana Palace is relaxing and peaceful. The beaches are beautiful. Officials say it is the yearlong celebration of the city's 450th birthday and the upcoming 2016 Summer Olympics that power the city's current energy. "Rio has always been a great location

**NOT YOUR EVERYDAY  
METROPOLIS**

*(Clockwise from top left) Rio has more than 40 miles of beaches; Copacabana Beach near the Copacabana Palace; a small micos monkey in Tijuca National Park.*



**STAR TREATMENT**  
*(Clockwise from top)*  
*Olympe is one of Rio's*  
*four new Michelin-*  
*starred restaurants;*  
*Olympe's dining room;*  
*sesame salmon, one*  
*of the courses from*  
*Olympe's tasting menu.*

for tourists, but with all of the positive changes—in everything from transportation to the complete transformation of the port area—it's even more so," says Leonardo Gryner, General Vice Director of the Rio 2016 Organizing Committee. I say it's from the fun of going Carioca, of relaxing into the city and finding expectations are often exceeded.

When Sergio first mentioned an outing to wild beaches, I imagined small pockets of sand tucked into coves pirate ships might hide in. Each wild beach is the size of many football fields though. Three of the four beaches have only a handful of people on them. The fourth, which Sergio says is about 2 miles farther, doesn't have a soul. If I walked another 45 minutes, I could have an aircraft carrier-sized beach in Rio, a city of more than 6 million, all to myself.

After enjoying Copacabana along with several hundred others, only having three couples share Praia do Perigoso, the first beach, with me is pretty special. Praia do Perigoso translates to "Danger Beach." When I ask about this Sergio says, "It's Carioca danger. The danger here is that you won't want to leave."

Waves turn a dozen shades of green before cresting and breaking in a froth of white on the shore. Had I 1) thought to ask Sergio or the Copacabana Palace to pack a picnic lunch 2) didn't have an appointment for a facial at the hotel's spa in the late afternoon and 3) didn't have dinner reservations that night for the seven-course tasting menu at Olympe, one of the four restaurants in the city recently awarded a Michelin star, I wouldn't leave.

**M**y next chance to settle into a Carioca groove is on a day trip to the mountainous Serra dos Órgãos National Park, about an hour's drive from downtown Rio. The park sits above the former imperial city of Petropolis, which spills over the range's western, forested foothills. My intention is to pass through Petropolis and spend the majority of the day in the park, exploring its waterfalls and hiking trails.

Petropolis was the summer home of Brazil's emperors and royal family from 1845 until they were deposed in a coup in 1889. I can't resist a trip to the former royal summer palace, which has been restored to its original color—the same pink you see inside a conch shell—and made into the Imperial Museum. Inside, exhibits include the pen Imperial Princess Isabel used in 1888 to sign the law that emancipated all of the country's slaves and the gold crown of her father, Emperor Dom Pedro II, studded with 639 diamonds and 77 pearls.

Across the street from the neoclassical Imperial Museum is The Enchanted, a quaint, 100-year-old French alpine-style home. Walking around the historic center of town, where canals run down the medians of major streets and moss hangs from trees boughs like overgrown beards, I also find half-timbered homes that look like they've been transplanted from Bavaria, crenellated Italianate and Victorian villas and a French neogothic cathedral. All of these date from the 19th and early 20th centuries and were built for European expats, or as vacation homes for wealthy Cariocas or government officials. It's the most charmingly schizophrenic historic architecture I've ever seen.



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**CARIOCA LIFE**

(Clockwise from top, left) Cicero's restaurant on one of the islands in Tijuca Lagoon; fruit stands dot the city; fresh coconut water.





**INTO THE HILLS**  
*(Clockwise from top, left) A roadside fish market; Galpão Caipira's boutique; Galpão Caipira's café; Duvale cachaçaria; caiman in Tijuca Lagoon; Galpão Caipira's spa.*

It is just before we tour The Enchanted that my guide, a Petropolis native, breaks the news: I've already spent too much time exploring Petropolis to do any justice to the Serra dos Órgãos. I feed my disappointment at the café in front of the Imperial Museum with a slice of moist, nutmeg cinnamon cake with custard filling and topped with chocolate and a double espresso. Despite Brazil being the world's largest producer of coffee for at least the last 150 years, the country has only recently developed a coffee culture. With hints of citrus and cherry and a thick crema, the espresso is delicious.

Our new itinerary has us driving out to Vale das Videiras, in Araras, a rolling agricultural district at the edge of Petropolis and home to a burgeoning food and outdoor adventure scene. Turning off the expressway, the transition from Petropolis' historic downtown is as complete as that between downtown Rio and Barra de Guaratiba. Here, dogs and chickens run alongside the rudimentary road. Colorful roadside stands sell fresh eggs and cola. Traffic lessens with each hill we crest.

Thirty minutes after leaving the expressway we stop in a bucolic cobblestoned plaza in front of a row of gleaming, fire engine red Specialized mountain bikes. The bikes belong to Galpão Caipira, a boutique/café/bike shop/day spa. The spa part is thatch-roofed, tucked away in the back and intimate. The placemats on the café's tables feature a hand-drawn map

of the area's roads. I wouldn't want to use one for navigation, but it gives me an idea of the amount of riding in the area: a lot. While the road to Galpão Caipira from the main highway isn't bike-friendly, past here the roads are like well-groomed ski runs. Join several of them into rides between 10 and 30-odd miles. "And that just shows our road riding," says Beth, the manager. "More and more trails are being built." Most trails are doubletracks, suitable for riding or hiking. You can also tour them in Galpão Caipira's vintage, yellow Land Cruiser. During a lunch of mushroom-stuffed raviolis handmade a few miles down the road, I learn a boutique cachaçaria is nearby and offers samples.

Cachaça—pronounced *ka-shah-sa*—is Brazil's answer to rum, but made from fresh sugarcane juice rather than molasses. Most cachaça, on its own, is like drinking fire; it's best put to use in cocktails like the caipirinha. At Duvale, the cachaça can be sipped. In the shade of a pavilion overlooking two ponds, I can sample as many of their varieties as I want: cachaça aged in French oak barrels, cachaça infused with berries, cachaça aged in barrels that were previously used to age bourbon, cachaça aged for six months, cachaça aged for two years. The list goes on. After sampling two, I decide that I'm not at all disappointed to have missed the Serra dos Órgãos. Leaving, I give myself an "A-minus" for my Carioca-ness today.



DESTILAÇÃO



RIO WILD,  
RIO MILD

Before I can enjoy the panoramic views though, I must make it past the final section of trail, 117 steps carved into the granite. Once on top, little is hidden from Pico da Tijuca's rocky, exposed summit, which rises out of the rainforest like an anvil. The entirety of Rio spreads out below. I can pick out Guanabara Bay, Bico do Papagaio Peak, Pedra da Gavea, the Christ the Redeemer statue, Maracanã stadium and Barra da Tijuca. To the north, past the oil tankers and fishing boats heading into or out of the city's protected harbor in the bay are the Serra dos Órgãos.

I don't totally give up on my wilderness trip. There's a national park within the city itself, Tijuca National Park, found in the rainforest-covered mountains rising up behind Copacabana. At 15 square miles it is the smallest of Brazil's national parks, but it is also one of the largest urban forests in the world. On clear days, from one of many of Tijuca's summits, the Serra dos Órgãos, 30-some miles away as the crow flies, are clearly visible.

I hike up Pico da Tijuca, the park's tallest peak at 3,320 feet. While the purpose is to see the mountains that I missed in Petropolis, I don't ignore the journey. I'm in the middle of one of the world's densest cities, yet once inside the forest I hear no sounds of civilization. There's never a time I don't hear micos, monkeys about the size of a squirrel and a tail like a cat's, or the slightly larger capuchin monkeys, rustling in the trees overhead.

During the six hours it takes to hike up and down, I don't see a single monkey. Evidently, the rosewood, eucalyptus and mahogany trees don't just hide the honking horns, squealing brakes and wheezing shocks of the traffic below, but also monkeys. I don't know what's hiding the people. I see less than a dozen the whole time I'm out.

From here, it's obvious how they came by their name, which translates to "Organ Range." When seen in silhouette, their pointy spires resemble organ pipes.

Later in the day, and eager to show Sergio my burgeoning ability to relax and go with the flow, I accept his offer of a water safari around Tijuca Lagoon. The lagoon is notorious for its polluted water and trash, and for the first five minutes of our cruise, that's all I see in the water and the mangrove trees. But then I start noticing the birds—several species of herons, scarlet ibises, egrets, water chickens—everywhere. Some of the taller mangroves have nearly one dozen egrets perched in their branches, the birds' white feathers popping against the dark green leaves.

Looking back down at the roots, alongside the trash I now see mangrove crabs. And there are caimans, Brazil's alligators. A lot of them. I see caiman with their heads resting on logs and swimming alongside the boat. Some are as long as I am tall. I ask Sergio if I need to be worried. No. "These are Carioca caimans," he says, "They're relaxed, like the people here. They're no problem to you."

It appears even the animals here have adopted Rio's approach to life. ❖

## INSPIRATO RECOMMENDS



### Rio de Janeiro

Inspirato Members stay in the landmark Belmond Copacabana Palace, an Art Deco jewel situated across the street from famed Copacabana Beach.

TO LEARN MORE ABOUT OUR INSPIRATO'S RIO DE JANEIRO SUITE, TURN TO PAGE 174.



Zac Gunnison's  
picks  
Inspirato Vacation  
Specialist

#### EAT & DRINK BRAZIL:

Head to the trendy Leblon district and **Academia da Cachaça** for their famous variety of cachaça liquor. The Caipirinhas are a must at this longtime favorite.

Botafoto is the Beverly Hills of Rio and it's where you'll find **Miam Miam** and its fusion of French and Brazilian cuisine.

Chocoholics need to stop in at **Aquim Chocolatier**, a boutique shop in Ipanema, which uses local cocoa and nothing artificial to create some of the best sweets in the city.

#### BEACH-EY KEEN:

No time to head to Rio's secluded beaches west of the city? Seek out **Praia Vermelha** (red beach) in the Portuguese Pão de Açúcar. It's less crowded, the views are amazing, and it's within walking distance to the funicular that climbs to the top of Sugar Loaf.

If you want to see Brazil's beautiful people on display, Posto 9 (look for a numbered marker post in the sand) at **Ipanema Beach** is the place to go. Posto 7 is for surfers, while Posto 10 is for an older, upscale crowd.

February 5-9, 2016

#### CARNIVAL

The biggest carnival celebration in the world must be seen to be believed. From the Samba Parade through the Sambodrome to parties throughout the city, it's Latin America's party of the year.

August 5-21, 2016

#### SUMMER OLYMPICS

Rio hosts the world's largest sporting event with beach volleyball taking place on Copacabana Beach.