

48 hours



Rio de Janeiro

Pick out the highlights of Brazil's most iconic city for clients on a two-day foray with **Laura French's** guide



If there's one city that divides opinion, it's Rio. While it can be at times intense and in-your-face, it's also a place of extravagant beauty and palpable energy. There's a tangible sense of life and passion that runs through its samba-blasting bars and caipirinha-loving locals, and it didn't take me long to be charmed by its creative, cobbled lanes, tree-carpeted hills and vibrant, lively beaches. You could easily spend several weeks here, but for clients on a shorter time frame, we've pulled out our pick of the highlights. ➤



DESTINATIONS

RIO DE JANEIRO | LATIN AMERICA

best
OF THE
REST



Largo do Botafogo: This square of neoclassical houses tucked away in the Cosme Velho neighbourhood (from where the train up to Christ the Redeemer departs) offers an intriguing glimpse into the city's past, with colourfully painted, now-abandoned houses peeping out amid exotic rainforest.



Parque Lage: A mansion-turned-park at the foot of Corcovado, this patch of calming green remains something of a hidden gem. The architecture is impressive, and the views of Christ the Redeemer in the background make for ideal photo territory.



Biblioteca Nacional do Brasil: Pay a visit to the largest library in Latin America to witness nine million items, many brought over from Portugal in the early 19th century, housed in exquisite surroundings.

FROM FAR LEFT: Ipanema Beach; Selarón Steps; Mural das Etnias; Rio Scenarium; Copacabana Beach; Jardim Botânico; Sugarloaf Mountain; Metropolitan Cathedral of Saint Sebastian

PICTURES: Shutterstock, Unsplash

DAY TWO

10.00: Kick things off with a trip to the Olympic Boulevard, whose cluster of port-side attractions helped revitalise a once-dilapidated area in the city's historic centre. At its heart is Mural das Etnias, the world's biggest street art mural, stretching 15m high and some 200m along the waterfront. Created by Brazilian graffiti artist Eduardo Kobra, the sprawling patchwork of colour was designed to depict Indigenous groups from across the world and took two months, 500 gallons of paint and 3,500 cans of spray paint to produce, and the result is nothing short of masterly.

11.00: Next to it you'll find the Museum of Tomorrow, a solar-panelled, armadillo-like juggernaut that houses an array of interactive displays tracing how the Earth began, how it's changed since and what it may look like in the future. It's deep, thought-provoking stuff that spans the rise of megacities to climate change, rising population

numbers and beyond, with immersive experiences that leave a lasting impression.

13.00: Hop south to Ipanema to explore one of Rio's trendiest (and fanciest) neighbourhoods, set just along from the iconic Copacabana. You're not short on lunch spots here, but for one of the best try Casa da Feijoadada, which serves Brazil's renowned black bean and cured meat stew with all the trimmings. You can choose how traditional you want to go – from sausage and salt ribs to pig's ear and tail – then wash it down with a caipirinha, in true Carioca style.

14.00: Wander around Ipanema's streets to browse its boutiques, then head to the beach to spot surfers strutting their stuff against snow-white sand and cerulean sea. Stroll along the promenade to reach Copacabana, the spot that shot to fame in the 1950s and now draws football-playing locals, snack-selling vendors and, during carnival, feather-wearing revellers.

16.00: For a dose of nature, walk 20 minutes inland to explore the Jardim Botânico, a peaceful, 137-hectare stretch of greenery home to a huge water lily pond, an exotic Amazonas section and 600 species of orchid, plus colourful birds flitting above it all.

20.00: Venture back to the coast to explore the upscale Leblon neighbourhood, where bougie bars and restaurants line manicured streets, and make a beeline for Giuseppe Grill. Tender steak and exquisite seafood are the showstoppers here, with guava jam and cheese ice cream for a quirky sweetener, alongside arty surroundings and regular live jazz bands.

22.00: Leblon has some of the city's best nightlife, so if you've still got energy, head to Rua Dias Ferreira for the likes of Stuzzi Bar, where the star cocktail is Yami, an unusual combination of soursop, vodka and jam made from the local jabuticaba fruit. Just don't miss your flight home the next day – they're potent. **TW**



TRIED
&
TESTED

MIRAMAR HOTEL BY WINDSOR

It's hard to beat the location of this modern, five-star spot, which sits just across the road from Copacabana Beach and offers head-turning views across it. The vibe is trendy, with a rooftop infinity pool and bar overlooking the ocean, plus light, elegantly decorated rooms and apartments featuring local paintings. There's a beach service with private sunbeds and parasols for those wanting to kick back, and a good restaurant serving Italian dishes against a backdrop of shimmering blue for those wanting to indulge.

Book it: Rates start from £77 per room per night. miramarhotelbywindsor.com.br



DAY ONE

10.00: Start the day with a visit to Rio's premier icon: Christ the Redeemer, the 30m-tall statue set atop Corcovado mountain. Reached by car, train or hike, this towering stone behemoth took nine years to build and offers commanding views over the city and its surrounding hills, as they rise up from the ocean in hazy, forested humps.

12.00: Venture over to Lapa to glimpse the Metropolitan Cathedral of Saint Sebastian – a pyramid-shaped, modernist feat inspired by Mayan design that is reminiscent of a giant Dalek. It's attention-grabbing on the outside, but it is the inside that's really mesmerising, with a series of colourful stained-glass windows through which light glimmers like a giant kaleidoscope.

13.00: From there it's a five-minute walk to the famed Escadaria Selarón (Selarón Steps), a strikingly colourful outdoor staircase made from 2,000 mosaic tiles and mirrors

by Chilean artist Jorge Selarón as a "tribute to the Brazilian people". Now it's a gathering point for Cariocas as well as visitors, with musicians strumming guitars on the steps and tourists snapping pictures against the sparkling ceramic walls. Pharrell Williams and Snoop Dogg even chose it as the setting for the video of their song *Beautiful*.

14.00: Take a stroll around the surrounding Santa Teresa neighbourhood to glimpse its steep, cobbled streets, where artists' studios and boutiques meet historic mansions and markets. Often referred to as the Montmartre of Rio, this laid-back, bohemian area is a hotspot for artists, who gather to display their works every Sunday morning, and it makes an inviting stop for lunch. Try Espirito Santa for modern Brazilian dishes in a historic colonial building, or Café do Alto for more-traditional, well-priced plates inspired by Brazil's northeast.

16.00: Head up on the cable car to reach Rio's crowning glory,

Sugarloaf Mountain, the soaring rock that juts up from the sea and was named for its resemblance to the conical shape in which sugar was distributed at the height of the sugarcane era. The views from the top are spectacular, with a circular platform giving a 360-degree panorama of the city, while the two-stage cable car is a scenic glide above tree-carpeted hills and bright opal ocean.

21.00: When night falls, Rio comes alive, and Lapa is at the heart of the action, with streets turning into one big party and kiosks selling cheap (and potent) caipirinhas. The area isn't short on buzzing venues, but for something a little different try the Rio Scenarium, a former antique shop that's now a three-floor, eclectic bar strewn with quirky oddities (dolls, bikes – you name it). Live music performances, local cocktails and tapas dishes are the order of the day, with a mix of ages flocking to sip caipirinhas and dance samba within its grand, mansion-like walls.