

Created by: Debra C. Argen

Rio de Janeiro, Brazil (English Version)



From Rio with Love!

Edward F. Nesta and I just returned from a most incredible trip to Rio de Janeiro! Luxury Experience readers that read my “**Best of Sao Paulo**” article know that I had once lived in Rio de Janeiro and was a “Garota da Urca,” so for me, it was like a welcome home!

Our trip began with a luxurious start – flying **Varig Airlines**, www.varigbrasil.com, (1-800-948-2744), in their Executive Class from New York to Rio de Janeiro. After a quick check-in, we were able to relax in their comfortable Executive Class Lounge at JFK, where we fondly remembered many past trips to Brazil on Varig Airlines. Varig has 2 lounges at JFK, a First Class Lounge and an Executive Class Lounge. We toured both of the spacious Lounges, which share a reception area. There is free computer and Internet use for its guests for those last minute business deals, a shower with a variety of amenities, and when you are ready to relax, the Lounge offers a selection of liquors, wines, water, juices, soda, has a Lavazza Espresso machine, as well as whetting the appetite for Brazilian cuisine with fresh, warm, pão de queijo (the famous Brazilian small cheese rolls), sandwiches and mixed nuts. Once on the plane, we enjoyed a comfortable ride in our spacious Executive Class seats, where the professional flight attendants made sure that we had a pleasant trip.



Driving from the Rio de Janeiro airport to the **Caesar Park Ipanema** hotel, located at Avenida Viera Souto, 460, Ipanema, (www.caesarpark-rio.com), I thrilled at seeing some of my favorite sights again including **Corcovado Mountain**. Pampering started from the minute we arrived at this beautiful 222-room hotel located on Ipanema Beach. The reception was warm and welcoming, as we were whisked to our 2-room suite. Our marble sitting area had marvelous views of Ipanema Beach, a mini-bar, a desk and chair, bistro table adorned with a fruit platter, and 2 chairs, which were perfect for sitting in while gazing out to sea. There was also a corner television hidden behind a door, which swiveled to allow viewing from our king-size bed in the bedroom or from the sitting area. The marble bath had a walk-in shower, as well as a deep soaking tub, toilet and bidet, adjustable lighted make-up mirror, a scale, hair-dyer and a large variety of Granado amenities to spoil its guests. Of course, there were also plush terry robes. There was a safe in our large closet, as well as a very thoughtful beach bag with 2 beach towels for guests use. Finally, the “Garota do Urca” had an Ipanema address, and is now a “Garota da Ipanema” (Girl from Ipanema).

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After coffee and a lovely buffet breakfast at the hotel's **Galani Restaurant**, located on the 23rd floor of the hotel, with its outside terrace with sparkling pool, lounge chairs and tables overlooking the beaches of Arpoador, Ipanema and Leblon, we longed to head to the beach, but first took a tour of the hotel to make sure that we did not miss out on any of the hotel services. The hotel's glass-walled Fitness Center, boasts state-of-the-art CYBEX fitness equipment and unparalleled views of the sea, Massage Rooms, Dry and Steam Saunas, as well as a rest area with lounge chairs. There is a Business Center complete with computers and a small conference room, as well as a Lobby Lounge where guests can enjoy a snack or a cocktail. In the evenings there is live piano music in the lobby. The hotel has its own beach space in front of the hotel on Ipanema Beach, where Caesar Park Ipanema attendants are eager to set up a lounge chair and umbrella for the hotel guests. We went to the beach where we soaked up the sun, played in the waves, and enjoyed a stroll along the fine, white sandy beach.

In the evening, we went to the **Lagoa** area with friends, Gregório and Emi, where we found an outdoor restaurant, shared a few cocktails and enjoyed excellent live music.



The next day, eager to revisit some of my favorite places, we spent several hours at the **Jardim Botânico**, Rua Jardim Botânico, (www.jbrj.gov.br) founded in 1808, which has over 5000 plants, covers over 340 acres and has majestic Imperial Palms that were planted in 1842. We enjoyed wandering the gardens in the delicious shade of the tall trees on a very hot day. For me, the day was almost magical when I happened upon a bamboo forest, and found several varieties of monkeys playing in the trees. These special creatures delighted their audience by jumping from branch to branch, and drinking water from the bamboo trees by cupping their hands inside broken branches to scoop out the water. There was even a mother monkey carrying her small baby on her back, which was a most enchanting sight.

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After our garden walk, we returned to **Caesar Park Ipanema** for their famous afternoon Saturday Feijoada, held at **Petronius**, from 12:00 pm – 4:00 pm. A woman dressed in traditional clothing greeted and offered guests a selection of aperitifs: caipirinha (the national Brazilian cocktail of cachaça and limes), batido do coco (cachaça and coconut milk), or batida da maracujá (cachaça and passion fruit juice). The Saturday Feijoada is a buffet, where it is hard to know where you would like to start. There was a table laden with all types of fresh salads, another with several steaming pots of the traditional feijoada, (a stew of black beans each with extensive variety of meats), as well as all the accompaniments: farofa, fried yucca, kale, rice, sauces, fried sweet potatoes, and the list went on. There was another table that held a variety of breads, and then there was the dessert table – which was a dessert lovers dream!



Two bands alternated playing Bossa Nova and Samba music, and my feet tapped happily under the table, as I enjoyed my lunch, until I was overtaken by the music, and had to Samba with Gregório as we went in search of desserts. With all the desserts to select from, including Torte de Maracujá, Quindim, Torte de Chocolate, Torte de Demasco, Pudim de Leite, Torte de Ameixa, Torte Mousse de Goiaba, Claros Nevados, Torte de Banana, Pudim de Chocolate, Chocolate Sauce, Coconut Flan, and fresh fruits, what could be better than a little exercise in the form of dancing? The restaurant staff was both courteous and attentive, and eager to please. With a whisper to our waiter, Miguel, that it was another hotel guest's birthday, he promptly told the band, who played "Parabens" for Paulo Roberto, much to his and his wife, Marilda's delight.

In the evening, we went to **Barra da Tijuca**, with some friends, Moara and Yurgan, to an outdoor shopping mall that is often compared to Miami Beach shopping. There was great shopping, and lots of restaurants with live music. We selected a large restaurant with an endless International buffet and 2 bands playing on each side of the restaurant.



On Sunday, we returned to my usual haunt, the **Feira Hippy**, located at Praça General Osório, a few blocks from the Caesar Park Ipanema hotel. It was a wonderful place to spend the morning looking at (and buying) artwork, crafts, jewelry and leather goods. I enjoy wearing semi-precious stone jewelry and was really pleased with my jewelry purchases from **Alice Jardim**. She is a very creative designer, and is worth

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seeking out her stand. The fair is open every Sunday from 9:00 am – 6:00 pm.

We spent the afternoon at the beach with Emi, who surprised me with another pair of Havaianas (those Brazilian flip-flops that have become so famous) for my growing collection, catching up on our lives, and playing in the surf, which at times, seemed to enjoy knocking us down. Laughing we would stand up, and go back into the inviting surf. In the evening, we drove by **Pão da Açúcar** (Sugar Loaf Mountain) and my old apartment in Urca, where time stood still as I fondly remembered my days as a “Carioca” (someone who lives in Rio) before visiting another old favorite of mine, **Canecão**, Avenida Venceslau Brás, 115, Botafogo, (55 21 2543-1241), where the rock band, **Ney Matogrosso e Pedro Luis e a Parede** played an exciting evening of high-energy music, with an enthusiastic crowd, who at times, danced in the aisles and sang along with the music.



On Monday, Ed and I visited one of the most important jewelers in Brazil, **H. Stern Jewelers**, Rua Garcia D’Ávila 113, Ipanema, (www.hstern.com.br, www.hstern.net) and had the honor of interviewing and having a cafezinho with Mr. Hans Stern, at his Ipanema headquarters. He has carefully watched his company, which he founded in 1945, grow and develop into an international award-winning company, with over 160 stores in 12 countries. Mr. Stern is an innovator in his field, where some of his accomplishments include launching the first Brazilian battery-powered wristwatch, and setting up the first goldsmiths’ school for 14 to 17 year olds. He has a dedicated and loyal team where over 25% of his staff have been with the firm for over a decade. His creativity, and commitment to quality have attracted heads-of-state, politicians, musicians, film stars, and sports celebrities. He is a genuine person, and was I delighted to learn that we both share a love of Tourmaline. We took a Gemological Tour, to learn more about the gemstones and how they are processed, and was fascinated watching the jewelers set the stones, create designs, and even cut and polish the stones to turn them into works of art. We also learned that Brazilian Diamonds are only found in riverbeds, which make them the most important for quality, as they have fewer imperfections than those that are mined. Other important Brazilian gemstones include: Tourmaline, Emeralds, Amethyst, Opal, Aquamarine, Citrine, Garnet, Sapphire and Topaz. The H. Stern Museum has a fascinating collection of rough crystals and precious stones that are a collectors dream, as well as having the largest collection of over 1,000 Tourmalines. Their Showroom has astonishing jewelry creations, where I especially loved the Tourmaline with its rich variety of green stones and the dark taupe of the Smoky Quartz earrings I saw.

We had a few minutes left in our schedule before lunch, which provided just enough time to fit in a little shoe shopping at **Bunker**, located at Rua Maria Quitéria, 59A, since no trip to Brazil would be complete without a leather purchase.

For lunch, we went to the Centro district of Rio, to the **Confeitaria Colombo**, Rua Gonçalves Dias, 32, (www.confeitariacolombo.com.br), founded in 1894. This beautiful Belle Epoque restaurant, with its amazing stained-glass skylight, entertains its guests with live piano music, and has a wonderful buffet lunch that draws a large crowd each day.



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We spent the rest of the afternoon touring the historic Centro, with its cobble-stoned streets, stopping for a tour at the **Teatro Municipal**, Praça Marechal Floriano, s/n, (www.theatromunicipal.rj.gov.br) which was designed and built by A. Guilbert and Francisco de Oliveira Passos in 1909. This marvelous theatre conjures up another era with its opulence of a grand white marble staircase, green and beige onyx balustrades, red carpet, stained-glass windows from Stuttgart, Germany, sculptures, mosaics, and murals. As I glanced about I could almost see Rudolf Nureyev and Isadora Duncan dancing on the stage. We also visited the **Catedral de São Sebastião do Rio de Janeiro**, a pyramid-style cathedral with magnificent stained-glass windows that soar to the sky, providing a myriad of color on a sunny day.

In the evening, we went to **Modern Sound**, Barata Ribeiro, 502D, Copacabana, (www.modernsound.com.br), a music store that not only offers a large selection of CDs, DVDs, as well as many listening stations, it also has a restaurant called the **Allegro Bistro**, where you can enjoy a snack and a cocktail, while listening to live music. It was the perfect place to enjoy "Happy Hour," and to buy a few more CDs for Ed's ever-increasing collection, including a new CD by **Ney Matogrosso e Pedro Luis e a Parede**.



For our last evening in Rio, we went to dinner at **Margutta Ristorante**, Avenida Henrique Dumont, 62, Ipanema, (www.margutta.com.br), on the high recommendation of a "Carioca in the know." This charming, elegant Italian restaurant owned by Conceição and Chef Paolo Neroni, attracts a stylish crowd, where celebrity spotting goes hand-in-hand with a wonderful menu of pastas and seafood, and was the perfect ending to a perfect trip. Thank you to Maitre Monteiro, who anticipated our every need, from the start of our incredible meal with Polenta con Funghi, (creamy polenta in a rich, portabella mushroom sauce), followed by Farfalle ai Gamberi e Zafferano (Farfalle with Shrimp and Saffron), Risotto ai Gamberi (Shrimp Risotto), Gamberi Grilhado con Broccoli (Large, Fresh Grilled Shrimp with Broccoli) and the Calamari in Brodetto (Fresh Calamari in Sauce). A remarkable bottle of Chateaufeuf-du-Pape, Michel Picard 2000, perfectly complemented the dinner. The meals were exceptional, with such large portions, that for dessert, we settled for an espresso, which was served with delicious biscotti, which we had to sample.

We returned to our suite at Caesar Park Ipanema, and took a long last look at the moonlit beach, before we went to sleep to dreaming of our next trip to Rio. In the morning, we would fly **Varig Airlines** to Buenos Aires.

For more information on planning a trip to Rio, please visit, the **Rio Convention & Visitors Bureau** at www.rioconventionbureau.com.br, or **Myriad Travel Marketing** at www.myriadmarketing.com.

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