

A low-angle shot of the Christ the Redeemer statue in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. The statue is white and stands against a clear blue sky. Its arms are outstretched, and it wears a long robe. The base of the statue is visible at the bottom.

FIRST-TIME VISITORS GUIDE TO RIO DE JANEIRO

WELCOME FROM THE AUTHOR

Hello and welcome to my guide to Rio de Janeiro!

In this guide I set out to share some of the experiences I had and the sights that are must-sees in Rio. Apart from that I walk you through everything organizational wise that you need to think of: transportation, accommodation, budget, tips for excursions to other regions, etc. And last but not least I give my two cents to the not so unimportant questions of security and health that you should know before going.

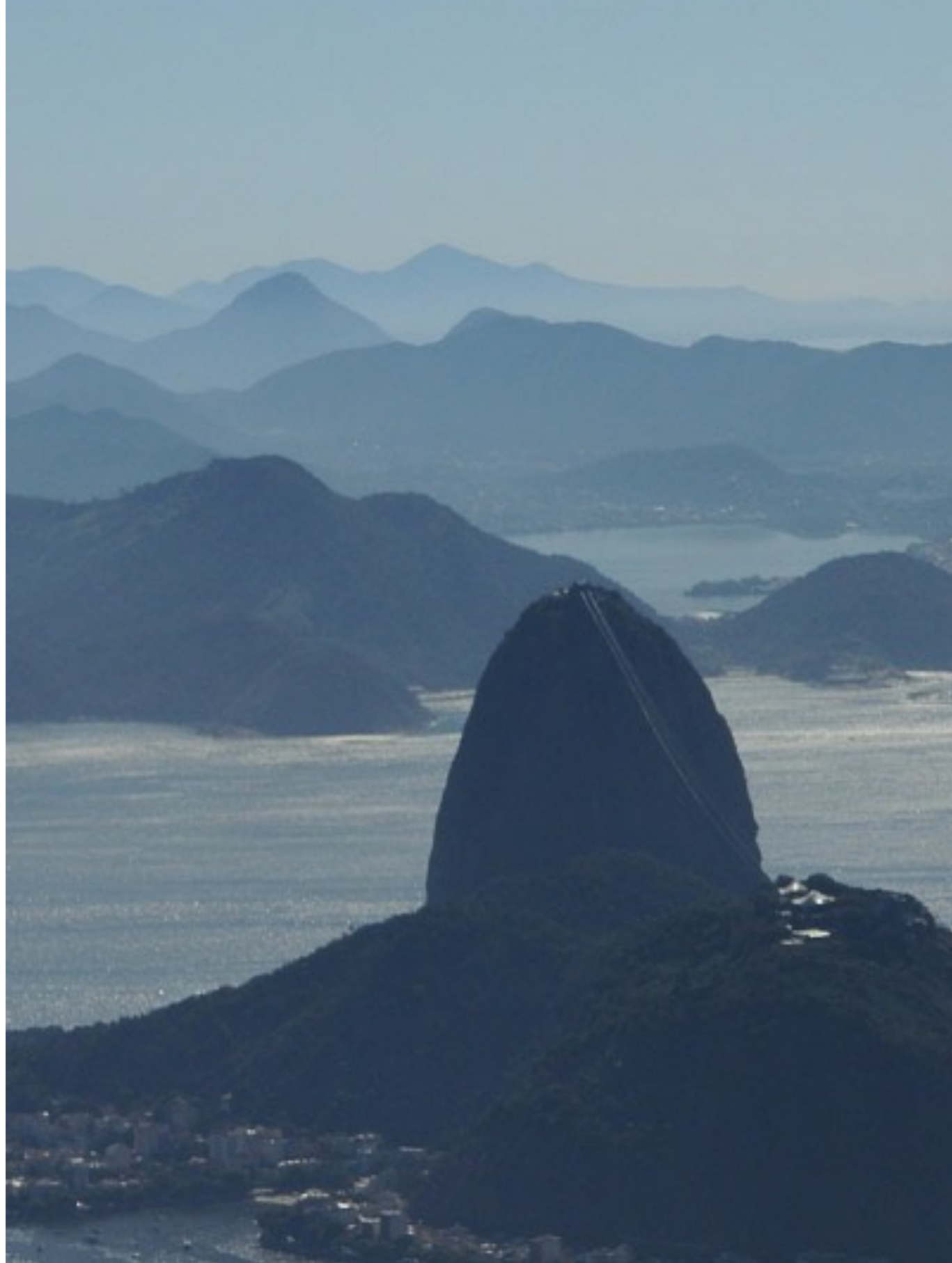
For me Rio is next to New York, San Francisco and Sydney one of the cities that are always worth visiting. A city like Rio will draw you in and give you a ton of options for exploration and fun activities. I would love to hear about your first impressions of Rio.

If you find something, which has changed, I am happy to get feedback in order to keep the information here as current as possible (please write to sue@travelzentric.com). Prices are sometimes based on negotiation and can change or are based on set prices in 2016.

Now enjoy the read and have fun in Rio!



Sue from Travel Zentric - the Individual Travel & Lifestyle Blog
(<http://travelzentric.com>)



1

POPULAR SIGHTS

RIO IS A FASCINATING CITY WITH A LOT OF POSSIBILITIES FOR ACTIVITIES AND DIFFERENT AREAS TO VISIT. THE MOST POPULAR SIGHTS ARE DESCRIBED IN THIS CHAPTER.

A first-time visit to Rio is not complete without having seen the famous **Christ statue**. Be sure to get there early in the morning and preferably on weekdays as it fills up very fast (be there at 9am or before).

How to get to the Christ Statue

There are several ways to reach *Christo Redentor* (the Christ statue) on the mountain Corcovado.

1. **Walk:** If you want to take the time to hike up the hill, start early and bring lots of water.
2. Another option is to take the **train** from Rua Cosme Velho (Rua Cosme Velho, 513, Rio de Janeiro) right up to the statue. The train ride is convenient and costs 68 Reais (approx. 16€).
3. The **shuttle bus:** take a minivan from the metro station Largo do Machado, from the Ancient Hotel Paineiras or a bus from Praça do Lido in Copacabana. The cost starts at 21 Reais and goes up to 49 Reais depending on the season and starting point.

Christo Redentor Statue





Another just as famous sight is the **Sugar Loaf Mountain** (Pão de Açúcar). You can take the cable car from the bottom to Morro da Urca and then on to the Sugar Loaf.

How to get to Sugar Loaf Mountain

In order to get to Sugar Loaf Mountain you can take the buses 511 or 512. They will stop at the bottom of the cable car station and you can continue up the mountain by cable car (costs 76 Reais for an adult).

Rio also offers lots of possibilities to relax. You can for example go to the sandy beaches of the **Copacabana** or **Ipanema**. Spend a day or two there, get in contact with the locals and enjoy a swim or a volleyball game.

Be sure to also bring some time to enjoy the city, its nightlife and Samba music. The Carioca, how the inhabitants of Rio are called, surely know how to party.

Ipanema Beach



A famous destination for a (Samba) party night out is the district **Lapa** which is located in downtown Rio (metro: *Cinelandia*). Famous stops there include the Rio Scenarium (Rua do Lavradio 20, Rio de Janeiro) and the Barzinho (Rua do Lavradio 170, Rio de Janeiro) where you can dance into the morning. More and more gentrification is happening in Lapa and the area in general now is more secure, but you should still leave your valuables at home and watch out.

If you get the chance, visit Rio during Carnaval. The parades during this time and even during the weeks before Carnaval, are great to get a feeling of the famous Brazilian spirit.

The **Sambódromo** is home of the Carnaval parades. Tickets for the Carnaval show are expensive and the visitor's block is pretty far away from the best seats. But you might be able to get other seats or you can go in the pre-carnaval time where a free rehearsal takes place in the Sambadrome. Family, friends, locals and visitors pretty much fill the seating area and have a big party together with the different Samba schools that practice. This was one of my best experiences in Rio!

Carnaval Rehearsal Parade in the Sambódromo



The city is as diverse as it is green. Rio does not only have lots of trees within the streets, but also a large jungle area within the city. Be sure to check out the inner-city tropical rainforest **Tijuca Forest** or the **Botanic Garden** (R. Jardim Botânico, 1008 - Jardim Botânico, Rio de Janeiro - RJ, 22460-030).

A very touristic sight are the **Selaron steps** (Escadaria Selarón) (R. Joaquim Silva, Rio de Janeiro). They are situated in the Lapa and Santa Teresa districts of Rio. The neighbourhood is rather shabby, but if you visit during the day you should be fine. Just keep as always an extra eye on your valuables.

I haven't visited a favela in Rio yet, but heard of two places/tours that have been recommended.

The first is a hike to **Morro Dois Irmaos** (Two Brothers Hill) which you could also do on your own. You can get to the start by moto taxi or by bus and then walk up the hill, which should take you about 1-1,5 hours.

The second option is a tour of the **favela Vidigal** which you should preferably do together with a guide.

Both tours offer superbe views and more insights into yet another side of Rio.

Selaron Steps



Not too far from the metro station Carioca you find Rio's Roman Catholic **Cathedral** (*Catedral de São Sebastião do Rio de Janeiro*). The exterior is rather uncommon and based on Mayan pyramids. The interior is certainly worth to have a look into. Coloured glass windows stretch from floor to ceiling of the cathedral.

Not to be missed is the famous sunset from the **Arpoador** (rocks where Copacabana and Ipanema beaches meet). From there you have the best view, but have to share it with loads of others locals and visitors alike. No secret tip, but although crowded a must-see in Rio!

The local football clubs Flamengo and Fluminense play in the **Maracana** stadium and if you get the chance, watch one of their matches there.

Sunset from Arpoador



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TRANSPORTATION

THE INFRASTRUCTURE IN RIO IS GOOD. THE MAIN FORM OF TRANSPORTATION FOR VISITORS IS THE METRO, TAXIS AND THE BUS.



In general in Rio it is easy to get from A to B if you are in the city centre or close to the tourist attractions around Botafogo and Copacabana.

Transport from/to the airports

From Rio's **International Airport Antônio Carlos Jobim** (also called Galeão) you can best take a **taxi**. I paid from the International Airport to Copacabana 100 Reais and from Copacabana to the international airport 70 Reais.

You can also take an **executivo bus** (16 Reais), which costs much less, but takes about 1-1,5 hours to Copacabana. If you have enough time and are not too jetlagged, this can be a good way to get a first overview of the city.

It can also be a good choice to take a taxi from the airport to a nearby metro station and go on from there by metro (**taxi/metro combination**).

Metro

The metro system is convenient and inexpensive (3,80 Reais per ride).

Traffic in Downtown Rio



Bus

The bus almost has the same price as the metro (3,70 Reais per ride) and can vary. But it's much less intuitive to take the bus. The maps at the bus station mostly don't provide enough information.

For some orientation you can use Google maps which offers an overview of the bus lines. It usually helps to ask the Carioca about the right bus, but they also sometimes don't know. You need to know where and when to get off. It's best to take the bus only in the tourist areas.

Bike

Rio offers some biking paths around the city. You will certainly come across the orange bikes from bikerio. In order to use them you have to register either through an app or online. It's still in development for the use by foreigners/in English. So you might have to ask someone for help with the booking if you don't know Portuguese.

Public Transportation in Rio



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DOMESTIC FLIGHTS

BRAZIL IS HUGE. THEREFORE GETTING DOMESTIC FLIGHTS MAKES SENSE IF YOU WANT TO SEE A LOT IN A SHORTER TIME FRAME.



Booking domestic flights

If you want to visit other cities in Brazil apart from Rio, you should consider getting a flight pass, which allows you to take e.g. four flights within Brazil. This is great to visit several stops in different regions in one go. The cost of a flight pass starts at approx. 400 US \$ for 4 flights with Azul. Prices will vary for other airlines. The flight pass will usually be a good choice for several long-distance flights.

In general, it is not easy to find cheap flights within Brazil for Europeans. Brazilians seem to get the better prices and sometimes you even can't book a flight as a foreigner (you need a Brazilian identity card number (CPF document)).

Booking directly with the airlines (TAM, GOL, Avianca, Azul) is a hassle. If there is a booking sight from your country, it might work, but for me the system was so buggy that it did not. Although usually it is great to book a flight individually, for Brazil I cannot recommend it. Apparently, you should be able to if you set the sys-

Flight over Rio



tem to your country/language. But I gave up and booked two flights via a German flight platform beforehand and an additional flight via a Brazilian travel agent locally. Marvelously the last also was the best (and with approx. 80 EUR even cheapest) flight.

That flight with Avianca (Star Alliance) was not only conducted by a high quality airline, but also inexpensive considering that it was booked only one week in advance. So unless you go in high season or during a big event, booking your flight locally can save you money.

Tip for **international flights**:

You can get **international flights** from Germany to Rio e.g. with Condor (Frankfurt – Rio - Frankfurt for approx. 590€)

Brazil Airport Map



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FOOD & DRINKS

BRAZIL HAS A LOT TO OFFER ON THE CULINARY SIDE. ESPECIALLY MEAT LOVERS WILL ENJOY MEALS WITH A HIGH VARIETY. BUT ALSO FRESH FRUITS AND EXOTIC COCKTAILS MAKE A STAY IN BRAZIL ENJOYABLE.



Food

Meat lovers will be in heaven in Brazil. A high percentage of the dishes on the menu are meat based. I have not specifically looked for vegetarian or vegan places, but I am sure you can get by somehow, although it might not be the culinary experience you can get in other cities or countries. But for those who eat meat, there will be lots of choices.

Definitely try a **Brazilian rodizio**, where you have an „all you can eat“ concept and you get tons of meat. What might also be interesting for you is a **pasta and pizza rodizio**. This is the same concept, just with pasta and pizza. You get served a different piece of pizza or sample of pasta every few minutes and can choose what you like to try or not.

In general, eating takes a central place in Brazil and wherever you go, you get huge portions. Even the choice for breakfast is usually big and in restaurants in the evening you could sometimes easily share a portion with two persons.

Manioc Strips (*Mandioca Frita*)



Of course a highlight in every tropical country is the vast amount of **tropical fruits**. Just some local examples are mangos, açaí, papayas and maracuja. In Rio you find lots of small sandwich and **juice bars** (sucos bars) where you can get small snacks and fresh fruit juices. This can make up a small breakfast or an inexpensive lunch or afternoon snack.

Drinks

The well known cocktail for Brazil is the Caipirinha, which can vary in taste, but usually is a great option if freshly made. Special to Brazil is the Guave juice or soft drink which has a similar effect as the energy drinks. Mate tea is a local tea which is strong in taste and a healthy alternative.

Well known, healthy and yummy is the coconut juice which you can usually get at every corner.

Coconut Drink



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ACCOMMODATION

IN BRAZIL AND ESPECIALLY IN THE METROPOLITAN AREA OF RIO DE JANEIRO YOU HAVE THE CHOICE BETWEEN ALL KINDS OF DIFFERENT ACCOMMODATION.



Accommodation is abundant in Rio.

Due to the economic situation and if you go in the off-season, you can get very good prices in Rio. Of course at a major event like the World Cup or the Olympics the prices go up.

Good and safer areas in Rio are Copacabana, Ipanema and Botafogo. Also the downtown area around Carioca is safe, although you should still watch out there, especially at night or in secluded streets. Other quarters might be good, too, but be sure to check it before for safety and good access to the metro.

I can recommend the following accommodation in Rio:

In Botafogo:

Injoy Hostel

Rua Estácio Coimbra, 80, Rio de Janeiro, 22260-010

I paid 250 R\$ per night for a twin room.

In Copacabana:

Mirador Rio Copacabana Hotel

Rua Toneleros, 338, Rio de Janeiro, 22030-002

I paid 297 R\$ per night for a twin room.

Wallpaper at Injoy Hostel



Hotel in downtown Recife facing the beach:

Nobile Beach Class Executive (not recommended based on my specific experience)

After a blackout and without having a generator, the hotel wanted to give us a room on an upper floor without electricity and without a working elevator. At least they let us cancel the room and we looked for a hotel closeby, which was a great thing in the end, because it was an outstanding hotel!

Transamérica Prestige – Beach Class International (highly recommended!)

Avenida Boa Viagem, 420, Recife, 51011-000

I paid 316 R\$ per night for a twin room. We were lucky to get a free upgrade and a room with all amenities, balcony on the 20th floor, a seating area in the room, two TVs and good and inexpensive food from roomservice. Highly recommended!

To get in contact with locals and save costs, **Airbnb** is always a good option. If you don't have an account yet, sign up [here](#). We will both get 30€ Airbnb credit extra if you [use this link](#).

View from Transamérica Prestige -
Beach Class International in Recife



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BUDGET

WHAT IS THE NEEDED BUDGET FOR YOUR TRIP TO RIO?



Your needed travel budget will depend on lots of factors such as your personal preferences of accommodation, the season and availability. Surely Rio will be more expensive at big events such as the Football World Cup or the Olympic Games.

With a mix of hostels, hotels and guest houses (Pousadas) and an accommodation of two in a room, including transport, food, sightseeing, etc. I had expenses of approx. 60-65€ per day including everything but the international flight. But you can surely travel for less if wanted.

Tile at Selaron Steps



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TRIPS OUTSIDE OF RIO

WHAT ARE GOOD AREAS TO VISIT FROM RIO?



If you are looking for a breakout to other areas from Rio, you can consider one or more the following:

- flight to **Salvador da Bahia** (beautiful city, with a high crime rate though)
- from Salvador da Bahia to the **National Park of Chapada Diamantina** (amazing nature!)
- from Salvador da Bahia to the islands of **Morro de Sao Paulo** (more touristic) or **Boipeba** (more secluded/less touristic)
- flight to **Recife** combined with a visit to:
 - **Olinda** (beautiful small town right next to Recife, UNESCO world heritage)
 - **Porto de Galinhas** (small beach town; a one hour car ride away from Recife)
- flight to **Iguazu falls** (amazing waterfalls and UNESCO world heritage)

Colorful Houses in Olinda

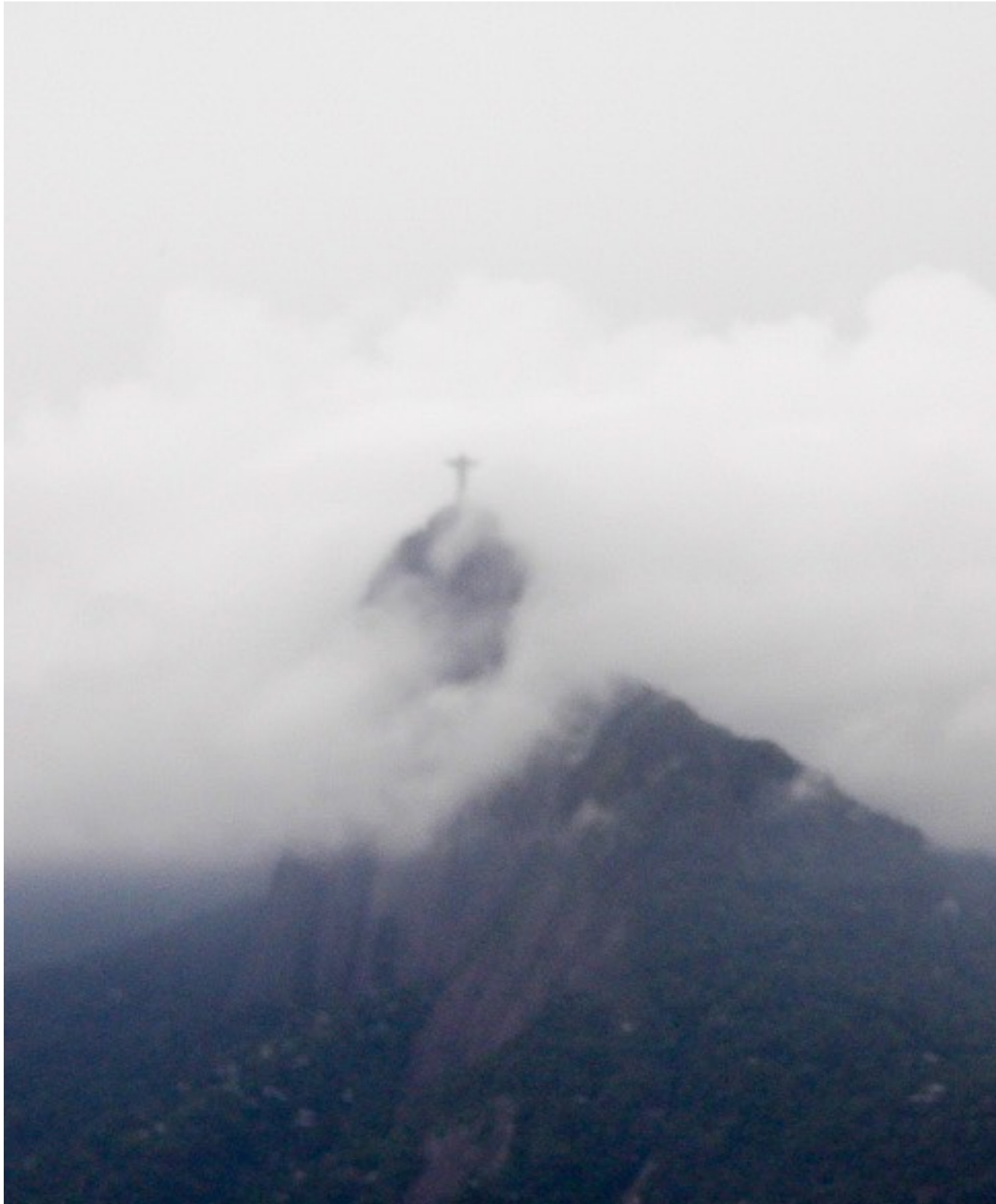
- flight to Fortaleza and by car on to Jericoacoara (approx. 4-6 hours car ride) (secluded hippy town)

These are just a few options. Brazil is huge and one can easily miscalculate when planning. So be sure to check the map and the distances and transportation possibilities exactly and calculate more hours than it would take for a direct car ride.

For 3 weeks Rio and Salvador with a trip to Morro de Sao Paulo and/or Chapada Diamantina is perfect. To squeeze in Recife/Olinda is maybe a bit much, but can be done. 4 weeks could also take you to Fortaleza and the sand and hippy town Jericoacoara (getting there is a bit tough, but I was told that it is worth it).



Brazil's Size in Relation to other Countries



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BEST TRAVELING TIME

WHEN IS THE BEST TIME TO VISIT RIO?



High season for Rio is **December to March** with temperatures in the 20s or 30s (Celsius). Also expect the most rain in this time of the year. April to May is less hot, but just as damp as the humidity sticks.

The region is known for its **year-round tropical heat**.

June to August account for the winter season with milder temperature, but still elevated hotel prices due to the July winter break of Brazilian schools.

September to November are low season and might be good to visit the tourist spots with moderate temperatures.

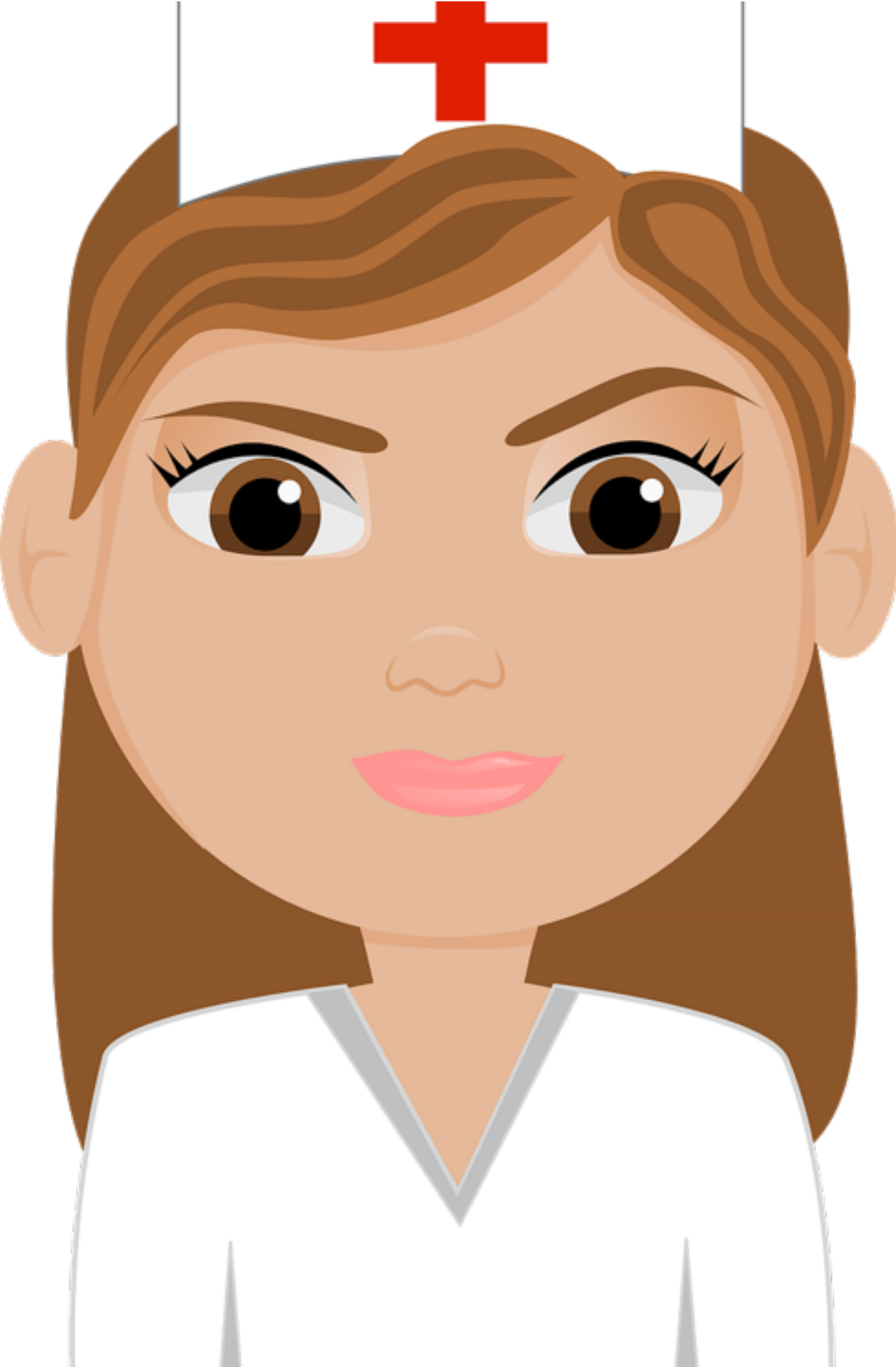
Beach in Boipeba



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HEALTH: DENGUE, ZIKA & CO.

WHAT IS IMPORTANT TO KNOW HEALTHWISE BEFORE TRAVELING TO RIO/BRAZIL?



Probably the single most asked question I got before, during or after my trip to Brazil was: what did you do against Dengue, Zika & Co.?

Of course I cannot give you medical advice. If you are unsure, you should **contact a doctor**. But I can give you my perspective, some basic tips and how I experienced the situation in Brazil.

I hadn't really heard much about Zika before and only really noticed the attention through the media. I certainly don't want to trivialize Zika, but Dengue and other virus infections can be just as bad or worse. [Click here](#) for more **information on the background of the different viruses**.

Especially concerning Zika the situation is still changing and new information become available regularly. So there might be situations where you could consider to **cancel an already planned trip** to Brazil. [The New York Times wrote](#) about the travel insurance you can get, which hotels might accept cancellations and what you can do to protect yourself.

If in doubt go to a Doctor



So what can you do to protect yourself?

Summing up some points I read and in short, you should at least know and do the following to protect yourself:

- Check if you travel to a risky area where Dengue or other viruses are transmitted
- Be sure to **use mosquito repellent** (e.g. Off! or any other product containing the substance „deet“)
- Wear **long light clothing** or permethrin-treated clothing and gear (e.g. for shoes, tents, etc.)
- Stay in **places with air conditioning and window and door screens** to keep mosquitoes outside
- Sleep under a **mosquito bed** net if air conditioned or screened rooms are not available or **if sleeping outdoors**
- Mosquito netting should be used to **cover babies younger than 2 months** old in strollers or cribs to protect them from mosquito bites

How to avoid Mosquito Bites?



- **Seek medical attention if you see symptoms** (a rash, flu-like symptoms, a fever, a headache or severe joint pain) and report it to a tropical institute
- If you are pregnant you should avoid going to Zika infected areas
- If you want to get pregnant after returning from an infected area, wait at least 8 weeks before trying to get pregnant
- If you are returning from a Zika infected area, you should use condoms for 6 months

There are still many questions unanswered concerning the Zika virus. There is no vaccine yet and all these measures don't give a 100% guarantee.

So, please: **Check the latest news** concerning medical development and tips to prevent health problems due to Dengue, Zika or other viruses.

Take extra Precautions if you are pregnant or want to get pregnant



Health Precautions before your trip to Rio/Brazil

In order to minimize health risks, you should:

- Check and get needed vaccinations **the latest 2 months in advance**,
- Just like in most tropical countries, you should be fine if you follow the rule of thumb „**cook it, peel it or leave it**“ for food,
- **Drink only bottled water.**

„Cook it, peel it or leave it!“



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SECURITY

HOW SECURE IS RIO AND WHAT DO YOU NEED TO
KNOW TO PROTECT YOURSELF?



How secure is it to travel in Brazil? And what can you do to protect yourself and your belongings?

In general I must say that all I had read or heard before going to Brazil seemed to be true afterwards. Yes, it **can** be dangerous. And no, **no need to panic**. There seems to be no pattern to who gets robbed. Tourists and Brazilians are targeted alike. I guess it's a matter of good luck or bad luck. And maybe a matter of knowing and following some security precautions.

Of course there are some things you can do to stretch your luck and to avoid getting in tricky situations. Try to **do the following**:

- **Avoid wearing expensive jewelry or fancy clothes** if possible
- Always **carry some reais to give away** (without having to touch your purse is best)
- Separate **credit cards**

Separate Credit Cards



- **Carry expensive equipment only if needed** (camera, camcorder, laptop, smartphone, etc. in a closed bag) and only use it in a safe environment
- **Use casual bags** and not expensive camera bags or laptop cases if possible
- **Avoid lonely streets** or unsafe areas (especially at night of course)

Are you asking yourself if you can risk to use your **smartphone** on the street? I was wondering the same and decided to risk it in some places. All was fine and I didn't feel as if someone would snatch it out of my hand. So in reality it felt much safer than I had imagined it before.

But of course this is no guarantee. I often **watch what the locals do**. I guess this basic rule usually works. But in the end in Brazil it seems to be a matter of luck (or time) if you get robbed or not. So don't be overly concerned, but beware and only carry as much with you (or in sight of others) as necessary.

Watch where you use Smartphones or other Equipment



Another tipp which might help you to get you out of the spotlight for robbers is to appear as a local or at least local-like. I.e. wear Havaianas (flip flops which you can buy at every street corner), Jeans and casual tops or t-shirts.

Don't go into unsafe areas if not necessary. For Rio it certainly is better to book your accommodation in safer neighbourhoods such as Copacabana, Ipanema or Botafogo.

Havaianas - the local Footwear



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GOOD TO KNOW

Miscellaneous Tips



If in doubt, ask a local

- Brazilians are friendly and helpful. In Rio they mostly speak at least a little English, but in other areas it's good to **learn some words in Portuguese** or at least Spanish. It counts to try to speak and be interested in the culture.
- Absolutely necessary to know: „**tudo bem**“ which means „everything is good / I am doing fine“
- There are some **restaurants** where you can **pay per kilo**, which is an inexpensive alternative if you only want to eat a smaller portion.
- If you arrive at Rio International airport: the ATMs are located on floor 3. A taxi

to Copacabana will cost you around 100 Reais.

- Bring a supply of tissues as you don't get them here everywhere.
- I would **rate the flights** with three different airlines I took in Brazil as follows:
 1. Top: **Avianca** (star alliance, leather seats, video entertainment)
 2. Standard: **Azul Airlines**
 3. Below standard/low-cost carrier: **GOL**.

But all three were OK to travel with if it is just about getting from A to B.



- If you want to **travel individually** in Brazil, you need lots of time or a car. And even if you own/rent a car you still need a lot of time as roads end sometimes and you have to turn around or are in bad condition.

Also with public transport it takes a lot of time for transferring, e.g. if you go by bus, you need to go first to the bigger cities and then take the local buses to your next destination.

Planning a trip yourself is not as easy as in other countries.

It helps to be in Brazil or knowing Portuguese. A great option is to go to a local travel agent if you don't get the information or good prices online.

- If you want to go online in Brazil, get an **International Visitor prepaid SIM Card from TIM** (4G). You can top up these cards at newsstands, but you cannot buy them there. So you have to find a shop that sells international visitor cards. I found one in the shopping mall right next to the metro station *Carioca* in Rio. It is located on the first floor in the central building (Edifício central, No. 156) of a shopping mall.

**Brazilian SIM Card - International
Visitor's Prepaid SIM Card from
TIM**

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