



Sun, Sea and Samba

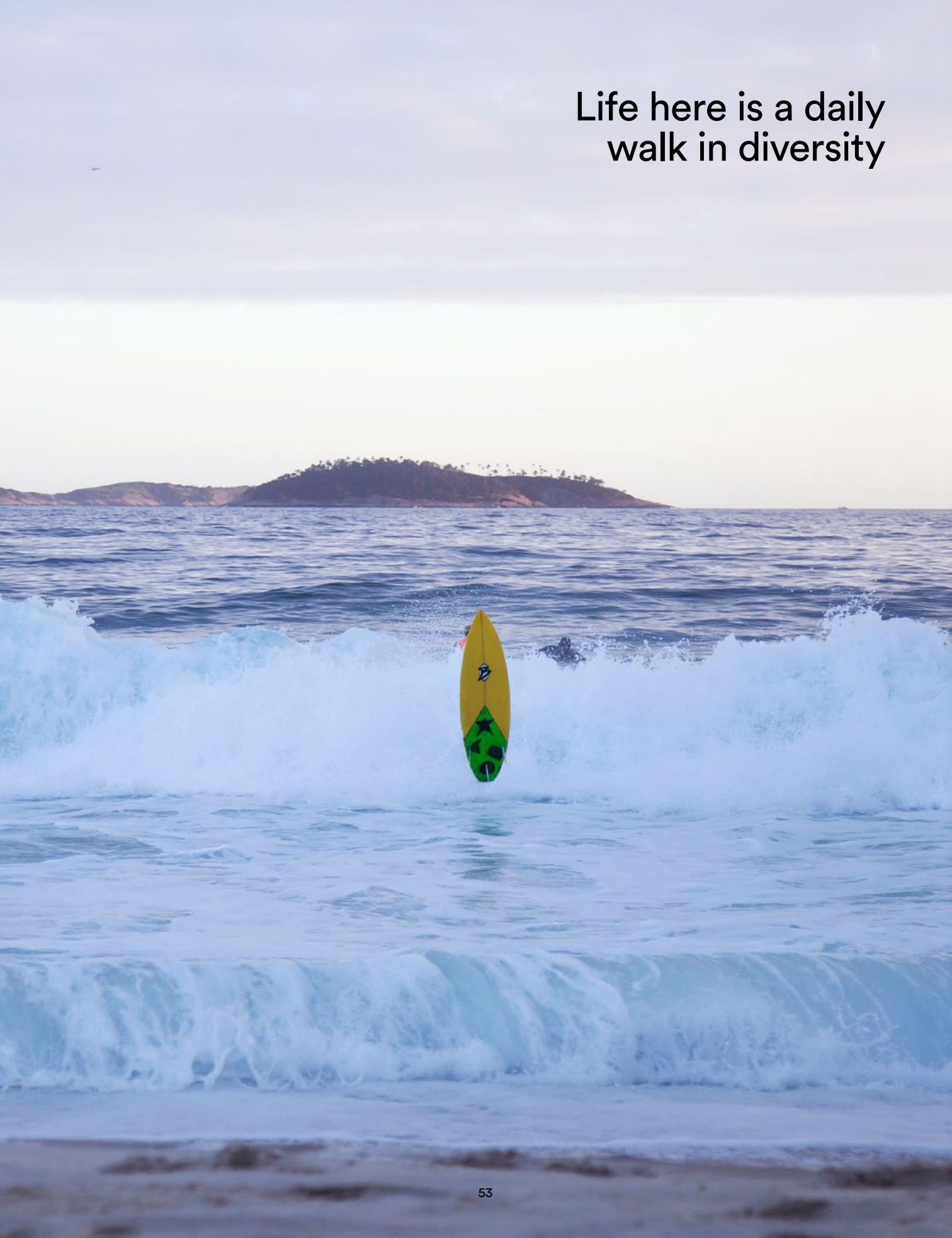
Brazil's second largest city certainly has the best of all worlds: mountains with breathtaking views, a beautiful coastline along the Atlantic Ocean, sensational rainforest flora, a pulsating nightlife and plenty of culture.

*Text Taylor Barnes
Photography Mirjam Bleeker*





Life here is a daily
walk in diversity



When it comes to culture, Rio both imports and exports



Facing page top
Taking it easy on a stretch of Rio's sandy coastline.

Facing page bottom left
The attraction Brazilians have for Rio is what brings so many different rhythms to the same place.

Facing page bottom right
Rio brings people from varied walks of life together in its beautiful open spaces.

The lyrics of the 1969 Jorge Ben Jor song *Tropicalia* waft through the air on a breezy Sunday in Rio de Janeiro. His lyrics serenade those on the pavements of Copacabana beach as the city does what it does best: brings people from varied walks of life together in its beautiful and ever-inviting public spaces. Cariocas, as the locals are called, live at the blurry intersection of the natural and man-made worlds, where the strong ocean riptide is never far from the classy condominiums, hillside squatter settlements known as *favelas*, and the encircling exuberant forests. Sunday is a special day along the Copacabana and Ipanema beaches. The pedestrian-only area of the wide Avenida Atlântica – from the dark blue ocean waters through the long bed of sandy beach to the black-and-white stone pavement and wide avenue – becomes a multi-lane beach-goer's playground. Parents push kids on tricycles, as young couples skateboard past, hand-in-hand; brawny teenage boys show off to one another as they do dips and pull-ups on iron bar workout stations; and vendors peddle pink and white candy floss while bikini-clad bathers sit down to long skewers of grilled shrimp and a cold beer.

Life here is a daily walk in diversity. Rio is a city blessed with a natural geography and man-made environment that grants it seemingly endless options of open spaces to enjoy the year-round sun. The city has 246 kilometres of coastline – including the likes of the trendy Ipanema beach and the remote sands and rocky cliffs of Grumari, accessible only by car and well worth the jaunt – nearly 4,000 hectares of the urban Tijuca forest, and countless public plazas.

And just like the geography, Rio's 6.3 million Cariocas also have a unique way of drawing outsiders into their folds and making them a part of the city.

Universal style
If Cariocas are inventive in the way they dress, it's down to the fact that this is a city of many cultures. Brazil's demographics have often been compared to those of the United States, with a colonial history that brought together African slaves, European migrants and a large indigenous population. Later generations would see waves of German, Italian, Syrian, Lebanese and Japanese migration, and descendants of those immigrants now meet a contemporary stream of labourers from other countries in Latin America, the Caribbean and Africa who come looking for work in Brazil's boom times. Rio, the city of dreams within this country of 200 million, draws in the hopeful looking for a better life in a Los Angeles or New York-style starry-eyed bustle.

When it comes to styling yourself like a local, the motto is: Relax, while still being (what Cariocas call) *chamativo* – attention-grabbing. It's also worth bearing in mind that what a carioca would describe as 'cold' in Rio's winter months is what a New Yorker may call 'spring-time'. Which is why beach culture reigns supreme here – shorts, backless shirts and flip-flops are standard fare for the Carioca. But there's a strong sense of style here too. Women wear strapless jumpers with long pants, and bright prints with birds and tropical flowers are considered in season year-round.

According to accessories designer Marcella Virzi, it's a unique Carioca distinction. Rio is a city that does not strive to be ostentatious in a way that exudes wealth, but opts to be loud, fun and *brincalhão* (playful) instead. "There is a >

Places to eat

Culinary Backstreets Tour

A most unique tour, this food walk takes you through Rio's bustling historical Port Zone, and the city's oldest *favela*, and teaches you – through a variety of tastings – about the city's migrant cultures and cuisine history. culinarybackstreets.com/culinary-walks/rio

Aprazível

A Rio treasure, Aprazível ('Pleasant') brings the best of carioca dining to a one-of-a-kind garden thick with tropical plants such as orchids, bromeliads and banana trees. aprazivel.com.br
Rua Aprazível 62, Santa Teresa

Fat Choi

Amongst Rio's subcultures is a fascinating community with deep ties to a place far away: the Chinese port city and casino hub of Macao. Once a colony in the Portuguese empire, the strategic commercial nature of the seaside city brought in African, Asian and European culinary influences, and it's this unique cuisine that the Assumpção family recreates at Fat Choi. The *bafassá*, pork marinated for 12 hours in wine, saffron and coconut milk, is a trademark dish. fatchoirestaurante.com
Rua do Catete 127, Catete

Places to drink

Quiosque do Português

Tippling locals will invariably tell you that this father-son owned bar on Rio's lagoon has the city's best *caipirinha*, Brazil's national drink of lime, sugar and *cachaça* (a sugar-based alcohol). Here the drink is remixed far beyond its original conception, with liquors such as sake and beer, and Brazilian fruits like *seriguela* (a sweet yellow-red fruit from Brazil's northeast) and tangerine with ginger. Avenida Borges de Medeiros 1424, Lagoa

Jobi

A classic in the upscale beachside Leblon neighbourhood, where you'll drink beer in the standing-room only bar alongside the carioca who are unwinding from their workday. jobibar.com.br
Avenida Ataúlfo de Paiva 1166, Leblon

Places to dance

Camerata Laranjeiras

Cariocas love their own native genres, and happily reinvent their favourite foreign sounds. This orchestra brings together youth from diverse social classes for lessons with professional musicians, and performs compositions from Brazilian *bossa nova* to American pop and Brazilian funk. Monthly performances take place during Saturday's General Glicério fair in the Laranjeiras neighbourhood. cameratalaranjeiras.com.br

Trapiche Gamboa

A pitch-perfect night out for live music in the renovated Port Zone, the city's oldest region and original city centre. The port fell into decay as the beachside South Zone of Copacabana and Ipanema became trendy, but is now making a comeback with a new nightlife scene and historical landmarks opening up to visitors. One of these nightlife venues is the elegant two-story Trapiche, which hosts live samba nights Thursday through Sunday, and the occasional weekday. trapichegamboa.com
Rua Sacadura Cabral 155, Praça Mauá

perennial idea of relaxation, even when we dress up," says Virzi, whose designs capture the chill-but-fun-loving spirit of the city. Men wear surfer- and skater-style clothing or slacks with fedora hats, while women go for *chamativo* pieces like maxi-dresses and printed tiny shorts. To grab attention, "We don't take the 'let me show off my wealth' path of the rich. We take other paths, and use tricks of our own," says Virzi.

Music to our ears

When it comes to culture, Rio both imports and exports. Brazilians bring their culture here to refine and reinvent it; and on the flip side, Rio is a cultural laboratory that spreads ideas around the rest of the nation.

The country's most popular telenovelas are filmed here, and viewers from the Amazon right through to the ranches of the country's south eat up the city's glamour. The attraction Brazilians have for the city, says samba musician Moacyr Luz, is what brings so many different rhythms to the same place.

"The ocean gave us *bossa nova*," – a cool genre sometimes called 'Brazilian jazz' – "the suburbs gave sound to *choro*, and *pagode* and funk came from the *favelas*," says Luz, referring to the upbeat strings music, a pop genre rooted in samba and electronic beat styles all associated with Rio's blue-collar periphery neighbourhoods and low-income squatter settlements. Having these genres mix in one city, he says, "are the collateral effects of a cosmopolitan space."

Downtown bohemian neighbourhood Lapa is a must-stop for Rio's music scene, where rundown historic homes have been converted into venues for live samba and fun folksy *forró* performances, and electronic music is never far off at the *boates* (dance clubs) that stay open until the wee hours of the morning. *Bailes* (dance parties) across the city in places like Rio's jockey club and *favela*-based samba schools are staples of weekends here. Cariocas love long and late nights out, so don't expect crowds to form in clubs until 11pm or midnight. That most characteristic and entrancing of Brazilian dances – the samba – is set to a fast >





- ❶ Maracanã stadium
- ❷ Quinta da Boa Vista park
- ❸ Trapiche Gamboa
- ❹ Lapa neighbourhood
- ❺ Aprazível restaurant
- ❻ Laranjeiras neighbourhood
- ❼ Copacabana beach
- ❽ Ipanema beach
- ❾ Quiosque do Português
- ❿ Fat Choi
- ⓫ Rio

tempo based on a count of three. Frenetic footwork is coupled with a proud and controlled posture on top, all motions beaming enthusiasm and confidence. Asked to define samba, Luz playfully avoids the question: “If I were a doctor, I would say it does not have an explanation. It is a phenomenon.”

Dining with gusto

But dancing the night away requires a certain amount of energy and sustenance, and that’s where the city’s culinary world steps in. The Rio palate can be reduced to one word: *gostoso*. It comes from the verb *gostar*, which simply means, ‘to like’, and can refer to food, the weather, and makes frequent appearances in pick-up lines.

The cuisine here includes just as many rich and hedonistic meals, like thick steaks roasting on skewers, as it does healthy ones, like the fresh juices that are ubiquitous at the city’s *lanchonetes* (snack bars). Take advantage of what may be considered by a traveller as an inversion of sweet-and-salty flavours – avocado is consumed as a sweet smoothie, while guava paste is eaten with savoury white cheese. The combination is so perfect and complementary,

that Cariocas call the dish, ‘*Romeu e Julieta*’. Pedro Hermeto, a partner in the Aprazível restaurant – a landmark for locals and tourists alike for its splendid garden setting and fine Brazilian dining options – says the Rio palate is often defined by simplicity. Dishes are frequently made using a minimal number of ingredients, with cariocas speaking fondly of their favourite cuts of beef, which they eat only with salt at *churrascos* (cook-outs). “My mother says that the basic ingredients in Rio are garlic, onion and salt. She says that it is something you can never get away from,” says Hermeto.

But the migrants who come to this city of dreams, particularly from Brazil’s traditionally economically depressed northeast, have left their own unique ingredients, such as the palm oil and coconut milk used in *moqueca* stews, which are usually made with seafood. And from the country’s north and Amazon region comes the açaí berry – the main ingredient of the velvety, frozen purple drink that hits the spot on a 40°C Rio day.

Under the watchful eye

Located in the city’s North Zone, Rio’s Maracanã stadium is bustling with life as rushed spectators drink their final beer and scalpers sell last-minute tickets to a Sunday game. The stadium was the centre of the sporting world’s attention during the 2014 World Cup Germany-Argentina final, and all eyes will once again be focused on it when the city gears back into sports mode and the stadium hosts the opening and closing ceremonies of the 2016 Summer Olympics.

But in the meantime, the local leisurely pace of life takes hold. Joggers trot round the track that circles Maracanã. A new pedestrian bridge takes you over a busy highway and into a new skate park and the entrance to the colonial-era park Quinta da Boa Vista. On a fine day, the park’s gentle hills are teeming with families, as parents are eager to take their kids to the adjacent zoo. Kites dot the sky, and the forms of tiny children bouncing in a large inflatable castle animate the horizon. It’s a scene where the city welcomes visitors not by putting on a new face, but by letting them glimpse an authentically carioca one. ■



Book
this
story



KLM operates five non-stop flights per week to Rio de Janeiro International Airport from Amsterdam Airport Schiphol.

Book your flight on klm.com