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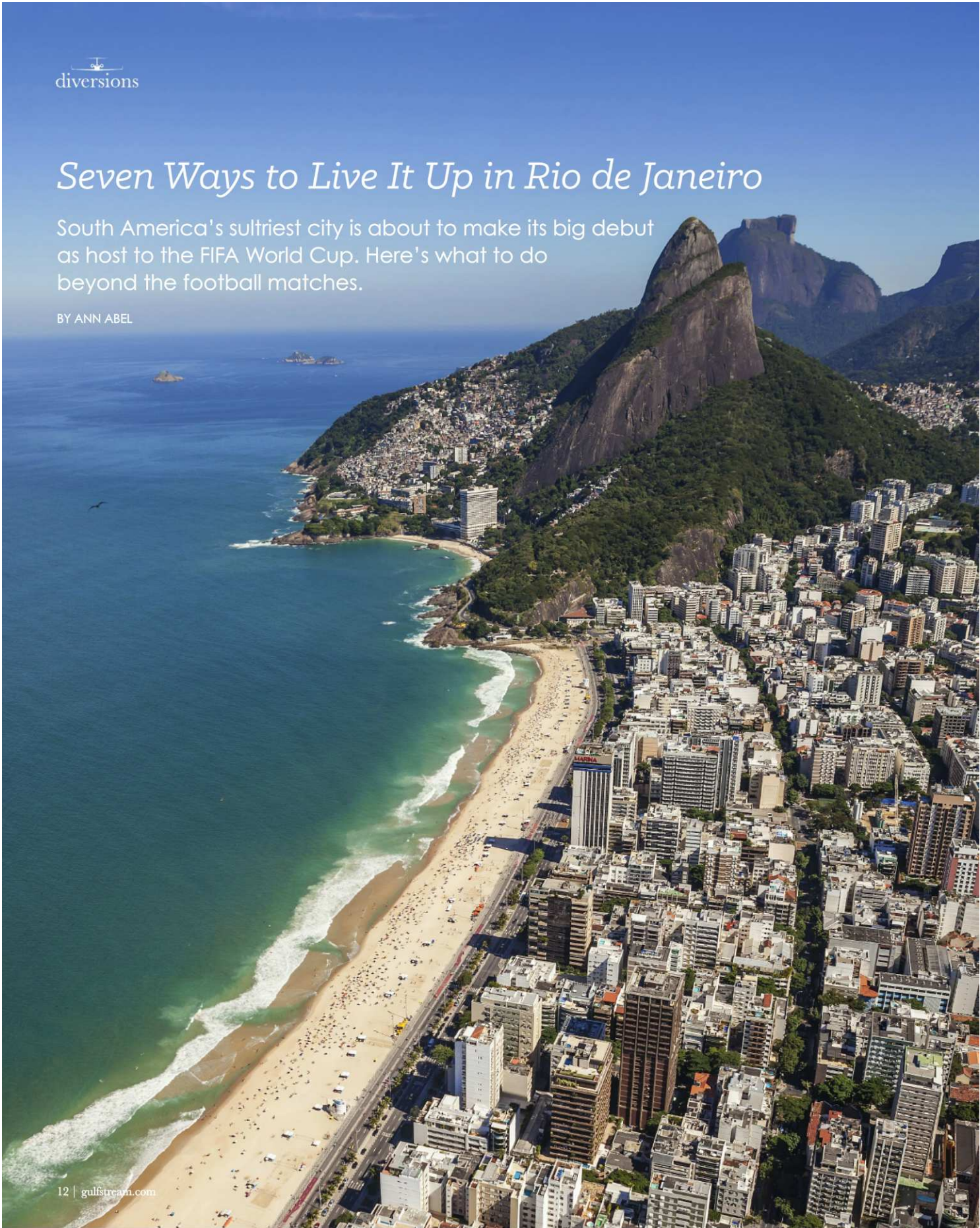
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NASA AND GULFSTREAM

Seven Ways to Live It Up in Rio de Janeiro

South America's sultriest city is about to make its big debut as host to the FIFA World Cup. Here's what to do beyond the football matches.

BY ANN ABEL



FACING PAGE: GARDIEL BERTRAND; HEIMS.FR.RM/GETTY IMAGES; ©STOCKPHOTO.COM/NIKADA. TOP TO BOTTOM: GARDIEL BERTRAND; HEIMS.FR.RM/GETTY IMAGES; ©STOCKPHOTO.COM/NIKADA.

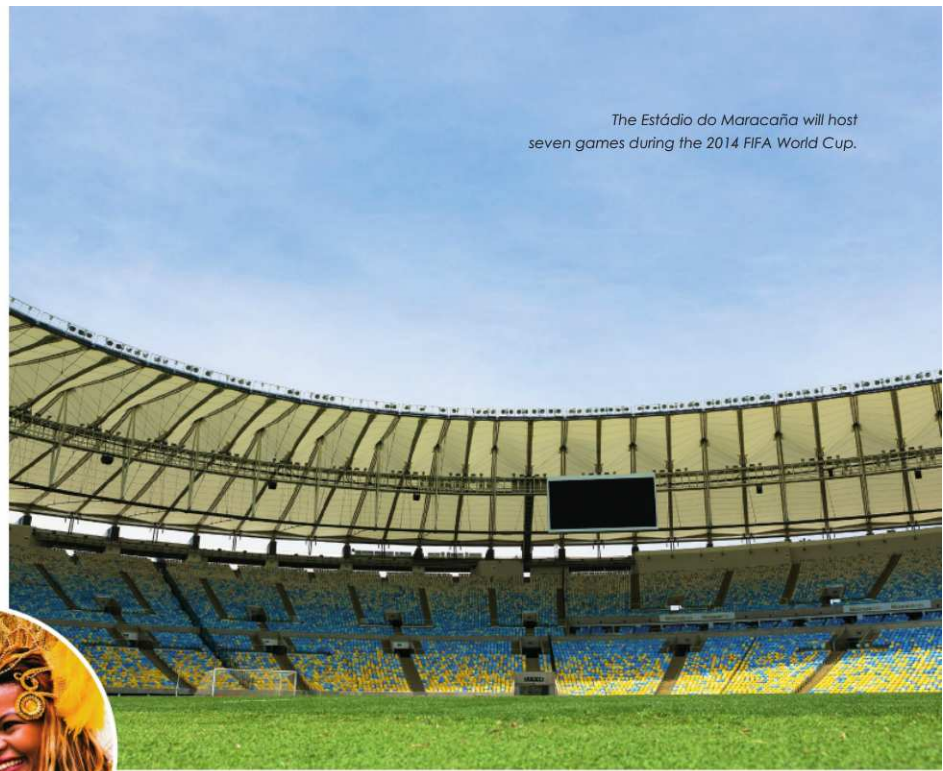
One of the most beautiful cities in the world, Rio de Janeiro has long epitomized all that's appealing about Brazil—beautiful beaches populated with even more beautiful bodies, samba dancing and bossa nova music in late-night clubs, Carnival celebrations, and a passion for the sport that Americans know as soccer and the rest of the world calls football.

It's football that will put Rio on the world stage June 12 to July 13, when the Federation Internationale de Football Association (FIFA) World Cup matches will take place across the country. Call it a warm-up to the city's even bigger debut in 2016 as the first South American host of the Summer Olympics. For now, football is the main attraction, with many matches, including the final, to be played in Rio's newly rebuilt, nearly 80,000-seat Estádio do Maracana.

"This will be the World Cup with the best atmosphere in a long, long time," says Martin Frankenberg, a Brazil-based co-founder of the luxury travel agency Matueté, which crafts bespoke itineraries for international visitors to all parts of the country. "There hasn't been a World Cup in a party place in a while."

There's much more to the Marvelous City than sports-fandom and party energy. Founded in 1565 by the Portuguese, Rio stretches along bays that are now more scenic than strategic; the city in 2012 was designated a World Heritage Site by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO).

Rio is also unusually diverse. Frankenberg points out that one of the city's great strengths is that the closeness between high and low is very intense, both in art and culture and in simple geography—Rio's



The Estádio do Maracana will host seven games during the 2014 FIFA World Cup.

poshest beachfront neighborhoods edge up to its hillside favelas (shantytowns).

01 BEACHES

The sand, sun and surfers are Rio's calling cards, but they aren't created equal: The high-end beaches are Ipanema and Leblon. The area around lifeguard Tower 8 is considered the "most democratic" because it's close to a favela and draws working-class Cariocas as well as neighborhood elites. Tower 8 also has the best surfing. Tower 9 is known as the beach for alternative lifestyles; Tower 10 is the most affluent part of the beach, and farther down is the most kid-friendly.



A Sugar Loaf cable car offers panoramic views.

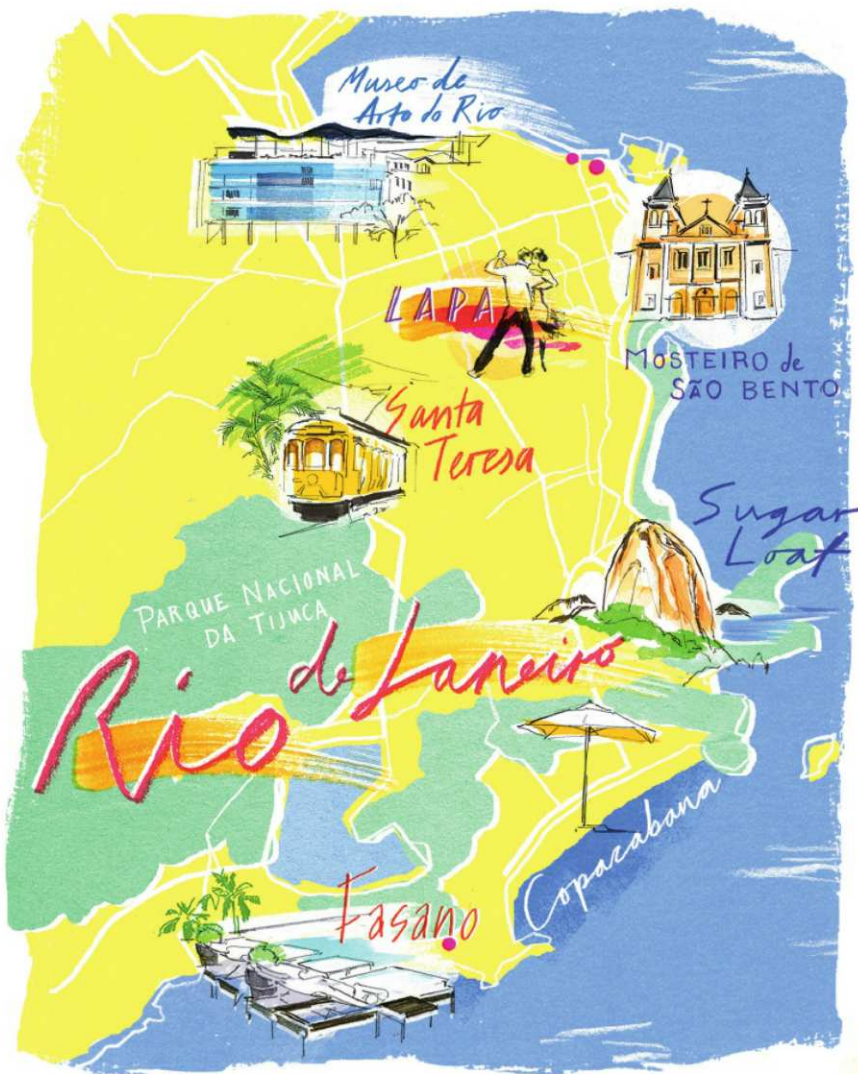
Copacabana Beach is more working class but still good for people watching. Further afield, uncrowded Prainha Beach, absolutely virgin in terms of nature, is the best for surfing and the most scenic.

02 TAKE A HIKE

One way to gain a unique vantage on the city is to hike its mountains or climb the famous Sugarloaf, which rises 1,299 feet/396 meters, offering spectacular panoramic views of the coastline. One local company, Climb in Rio, offers ascents up more than 50 routes, ranging from beginner to advanced. If you want the views without much effort, cable cars leaving in 20-minute intervals ferry visitors to the summit. Expect larger crowds and longer waits toward evening as the chance to view a mountaintop sunset lures more tourists.

03 SOUNDS OF SAMBA

Music pulses in Rio's veins, particularly in the salsa clubs of the Lapa neighborhood. The upscale club Rio Scenarium draws excellent dancers and musicians to its three-story antique-filled warehouse space and caters to an upscale international clientele. For a more locals-only experience (if you don't mind drinking Brahma beer from a can or caipirinha from a plastic cup), head to the



Monday-night street party in Pedra do Sal, a dockyard neighborhood said to be the birthplace of salsa.

04 ARCHITECTURAL WONDERS

Brazil has the largest Roman Catholic population in the world, and has no shortage of colonial churches. The most interesting one to see is the Baroque-era Mosteiro de São Bento (Monastery of San Benedict), with walls and ceilings elaborately carved and covered in gold. Monks intone Gregorian chants at 10 a.m. on Sundays. Real Gabinete Português de

Leitura (The Royal Portuguese Reading Room) is the other not-to-be-missed historical building. Outside, it's another beautiful Baroque structure; inside, the incredibly ornate library contains the largest collection of works in Portuguese outside of Portugal.

05 COLONIAL DETOUR

Most of Rio's desirable neighborhoods stretch along the coast, but the hilly, cobblestoned streets and historic trams of the Santa Teresa neighborhood offer a welcome diversion. An upper-class borough in the 19th century, it's now home to artists

and other Bohemians who have opened charming boutiques and art galleries. Plan on lunch at Aprazível, where modern fine dining meets traditional Brazilian cuisine in a pretty setting overlooking the city.

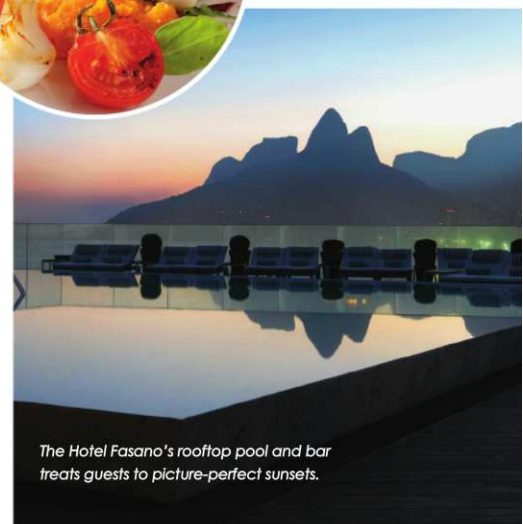
06 NEW MUSEUM

The most interesting new museum in Rio, the Museu de Arte do Rio (MAR), opened last year in a striking trio of historic, glass-walled buildings anchored by a wave-like undulating canopy. The museum's collection spans five centuries, from the first landscapes done by the Portuguese settlers to contemporary art.

07 WHERE TO STAY

The Philippe Starck-designed Hotel Fasano is hands-down the best place to stay. The appeal is immediate—a prime location on Ipanema Beach, 91 spacious rooms with ocean views, the excellent Al Mare restaurant—but also alluring is a laid-back but glamorous vibe where Havanias flip-flops and stilettos are equally at home. At night, head to the glorious rooftop pool and bar for evening sunset views while you enjoy some of the city's best caipirinhas.

Another good option is renting a fully serviced luxury apartment, penthouse or house through Matueté or Blue Parallel Villas. 📍



The Hotel Fasano's rooftop pool and bar treats guests to picture-perfect sunsets.