

## Global Shopping: Brazilian Gems

Written by Story and Photography by Elyse Glickman

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**While Rio de Janeiro is the home base for couture jewelry powerhouse H. Stern, it is also a serious haven for power shopping. At every price point, this city has everything you'd want and need, and from head to toe.**



Though the end of 2008 brought sobering news about the economy (involving the tightening of my money belt) and scary times for residents inhabiting the freelance world, I did get one very long-awaited and appreciated holiday greeting—an invitation to spend a glorious week in Rio de Janeiro. As the city is rich in natural splendor, dazzling Carnival culture, history and cocktail scene (with Cachçaca emerging as the fashionable spirit to build a cocktail on), I would at long last have the opportunity to write about these topics for my diverse cadre of newspapers and magazines in the States.

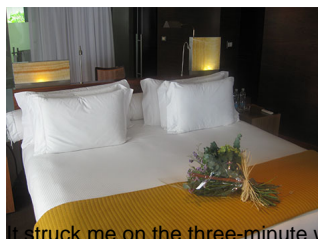


In the months leading up to this opportunity, friends and colleagues who previously got their samba on in Rio just couldn't say enough about carioca style, from fine jewelry at H. Stern's headquarters to the Hippy Market's sensational silver and leather finds to a Copacabana hideaway offering world-famous Havaiana flip flops in every color of the rainbow. Beyond that, everybody I discussed the trip with told me about what I must buy when down there—delicious dressy leather shoes in fashion forward shapes, a bikini and flirty skirts and dresses in splashy prints. New Zealand-based designer Turet Knüfermann also seemed excited about what treasures awaited me, especially as she clearly had the inside track on carioca (local) chic via her Brazilian boyfriend.

"Which mall is closer to your hotel," Turet asked as I informed her my figure may be too curvy for the samba aesthetic sported so beautifully by the twenty-something cariocas. "Iguatemi or Fashion Mall? If it is Iguatemi, go to the top floor and check out Gloria Coelho and Reinaldo Lourenco, cut for real women. They work for me, and will fit you, too. I know what you mean about those Brazilian bods, and how amazingly quickly you can adapt to local fashion. It gets hard to not be tempted to start wearing Lycra. If you are by Fashion Mall, don't miss Clube Chocolate. You'll be blown away. It was my biggest inspiration to open my own store. In the backstreets parallel to Ipanema Beach, you'll find the funkiest stores with new designers and the more alternative chic."

At last, the long-awaited day arrived, and on a cold winter New York afternoon a young, colorful group of six well-traveled journalists assembled at JFK. As we awaited our TAM Brazilian Flight to Rio at in the Virgin Atlantic lounge, we exchanged introductions. However, after the formalities, the names of shops and designers other people had told us about inevitably began to surface.

After a relaxed journey in TAM's extremely comfy Business Class, we arrived in Rio just days shy of Carnival season, on a rainy morning. However, a little water wasn't going to stop our fun. Though we all had our own agendas for our assignments, different tastes in fashion and different budgets, one thing clearly brought the diverse lot of us together...carioca chic. Inclement weather dashed our tentative plans to hit the beach, pool or the stylish streets of Leblon (now regarded as Rio's poshest neighborhood, topping Ipanema and Copacabana on some seasoned traveler's list). Additionally, our nicely appointed home for the week was the Hotel Intercontinental, 30 minutes from Rio's party center—if traffic cooperated. However, we quickly learned the neighborhood, São Conrado, was a very fashionable residential area and our hotel conveniently next door to the aptly-named Fashion Mall.



It struck me on the three-minute walk from my hotel to the mall that this was one of the fashion treasure troves Turet recommended. Given group trips don't always allow time for shopping, the girls and I were quite content to use our free afternoon to explore Rio's bounty of bikinis, baubles, bags and shoes. Although the mall architecturally looked like Anymall USA on the surface, inside there was an explosively colorful new world of fashion labels covering all the bases to delve into. And boy, did we!

As Turet promised, one shop was more fabulous than the next. My fellow L.A. journos who were the thinnest and most fashionable among us had no trouble finding stunning pieces from Farm, Tidsy, Loolia, Miss Zaidy and (especially) Maria Filo. Frankly, the tops and dresses were to die for...but not on me. But I was dazzled, nevertheless. The temptation was there to explore swimsuits at Track & Field, Lenny and Blue Man, but I deferred that in favor of something I knew would look good no matter how my weight fluctuated with gravity---shoes! I was dazzled by

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ManuFact's high-end footwear. Not one to buy the first thing I saw, however, I found Arrezo had a very snappy selection of sandals and Leather House had great 40s style sandals in a tasteful green-gold hue that were soooo Louis Vuiton. And mine fifteen minutes later.



After visiting Clube Chocolate—a cool amalgam of couture salon and bar with price tags to match—I checked back in with the girls, who were still finding treasure at Maria Filo. Seeing them model those flouncy and fab frocks made me more determined than ever to get a piece of Carioca cool. One floor up, I at last found it in the form of a splashy blue tunic at Folc.

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Our first night in town, we discovered that even when we weren't shopping, Rio's style was downright inspirational. It also helped to have professional guide Giônia Belmonte giving us the lowdown of where the beautiful people shopped, sunned, dined, drank, and worked out. After dinner at the stylishly healthy Ipanema location of Gula Gula (affordably chic right down to mix-and-match main courses and sides, and oh, that fresh-squeezed Raspberry-Orange juice!), with Giônia spending a lot of her mealtime recommending other restaurants and drawing maps of Leblon's prime shopping in our notebooks, we set out to the Salgueiro Samba School rehearsal to watch the community prepare for their turn at the upcoming Carnival. Even in the heart of a favela, the style and spirit was infectious and one could not help but be awed by the massive, very alive all-ages crowd.



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Though the Hotel Intercontinental had a good gym, the Panavision view from my window prompted me to do my daily workouts along the beach for the remainder of my stay. The surrounding landscape had the kind of voluptuous beauty that couldn't quite be captured in photos. At some point during the stay, Giônia had mentioned that in recent years 5,000 Americans had applied for residency visas. With natural beauty like that being a simple part of the daily routine, who could blame them?



serene Sunday morning, alas, could not last forever, and around noon, Giônia whisked us from the laid-back environs of São Conrado to Porcão Rio, a barbeque and buffet emporium with a stunning layout of food that could make one forget you had a bikini to fit into, even if meat was not your thing. Next, up to the top of Sugar Loaf, where visitors are not only treated to stunning 360° views of Rio, but also a champagne

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bar (!) and a micro-branch of Amsterdam Sauer (H. Stern's competitor) hawking jewels and gems. And as both Turet and Giônia informed me earlier on, a serious fashionista could not say she had been to Rio without a trip to the Hippie Fair. Though we nearly missed the fair because it was so hard to leave the vistas atop Sugar Loaf behind, the fair exceeded expectations...and my mission of bringing cool stuff back for friends was accomplished. The day was capped eating Amazon snacks at Palaphita Kitsch Gastonomia Amazonica, one of the most stylish outdoor beachside kiosks (down to Adonis waiters) I had ever experienced.

The rest of the week was a blur of style, substance and—gasp—more shopping. By the end of the third day, everybody was in agreement that Rio lived up to its promise as one of the greatest shopping cities on Earth. From a personal standpoint, there was something so fabulous about taking a jeep tour to the iconic Sanctuary of Christ the Redeemer and surrounding countryside by way of the famous Copacabana Palace Hotel and experiencing the highs and lows of gem and jewelry shopping. At one extreme, there was H. Stern's gem museum and emporium in Leblon and LEGEP ([www.legep.com.br](http://www.legep.com.br), located in the well-to-do suburb of Barra de Tijuca) on the other. Once gemmed out, Giônia spirited us into Rio Design mall, where I snagged a pair of shoes from Santa Lolla and the rest of the crew got fitted for sneakers at New Order. Though it was too rainy to wear the floor length dress I picked up at Claudia Simoes, I felt very carioca trying out the steps learned during our Salgueiro Samba School visit at Rio Scenarium (a former antique store turned restaurant and live music venue). Although we didn't get to experience Carnival full on, we visited the Sambadrome and City of Samba to see more rehearsals, watch floats come together and try on the costumes for a couple of reals.



Even with the rush of being in a city awash with color and music, Rio does have a wonderfully chill, bohemian side in its Santa Teresa quarter. At the heart of this artist district is Hotel Santa Teresa, a delightful historic retreat loaded with fresh modern amenities and dashes of French and Middle Eastern flair as well as a fantastic organic restaurant and spa. As you coil down the winding streets, you will find a half dozen charming artist ateliers, mellow local eateries, eye-popping street art and unique bed-and-breakfast properties (reservations at [www.camaecafe.com](http://www.camaecafe.com)). Once we wound our way to the bottom, Giônia took us to one of Rio's best-kept secrets—the stunning Santa Teresa stairway, made from tiles sent to the artist from around the world. She also advised us to spend two days of our next trip to Rio chilling in Santa Teresa and the rest of the week in the center of the action in a place like the Copacabana Palace or the new Faisano (home to one of South America's restaurants-of-the-moment and the oh-so-fab London Bar).



All parties ultimately come to an end. After a pilgrimage to Palácio das Havaianas (another gem from Giônia's black book of shopping, at Rua Figueiredo de Magalhães 414, Copacabana - tel (21) 25481644), we toasted the end of a perfect and perfectly chic week sipping all flavors of caipirinhas at the Academia de Cachaça and a whirl on a Ferris Wheel overlooking the city.

...the morning after, with an hour before our cab arrived to the airport, I slipped back to Fashion Mall to try on a bikini just to say I had done what people do when in Rio. I ended up with a slimming one-piece from Blue Man. There is that perfect gem just waiting to be had if you look hard enough.

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