



The beach empties out as the sun sets



Light and puffy Globo—Rio's quintessential beachside snack



Frolicking in the sand with the favela kids

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Sometimes we were joined by *favela* kids, who regardless of their ages, would delight in showing him how to tumble over the sand. Between watching him make new friends and staring unabashedly at toned, bare-chested *cariocas* play *futevôlei* (soccer volleyball), we were never short for entertainment.

Even on days we'd go on city tours, we'd always somehow end up at the beach. Even if it was for a brief post-dinner stroll. We'd been warned by all and sundry to stay away from the beaches at night, warnings that I'm sure had some basis. But on the brightly lit promenade, with families lounging around and thumping music adding to the festive atmosphere, we found little to be intimidated by.

When we tired of Copacabana, we'd explore the neighbouring beaches of Leme and Ipanema. Frank Sinatra sang true—the girls walking along the beaches were tall and young and lovely indeed. Weekends found us on Leblon, a trendy, upscale suburb with play equipment on the beach itself. The length of road by Leblon beach would be closed to traffic as families strolled down the middle of the wide boulevard, picnicking under palm trees. Both beaches at Ipanema and Leblon offer spectacular views of

the beguilingly shaped mountains that typify Rio's coastline.

One warm night, as we were walking along the promenade, we were greeted by a familiar face. It was the lady who sold açai ice cream around the corner from our house. Our love for açai led us to befriend her fairly early into our time in Rio. Her face would split into a 1000 watt smile at the sight of my son who would lovingly call her "Açaí Aunty." She chatted to him in rapid Portuguese and pressed into our hands a large helping of açai with extra condensed milk. We sat on the boardwalk listening to a samba band that had set up nearby and watched as passers-by paused to dance. For the briefest of moments, the samba, the chatter and the sound of the waves crashing behind me all ceased, and once again Barry Manilow sang in my head... "At the copa (co) Copacabana... Music and passion were always the fashion..."

Next stop: Sights and sounds of Rio de Janeiro!

Samai Haider is a writer, traveller, artist and... economist. If her rather odd amalgamation of interests isn't dotty enough, she is currently travelling around South America—with her pack and toddler strapped to her back. Read about the fables of her foibles here at Star Weekend. You can see more of her work at: <http://samaihaider.com>