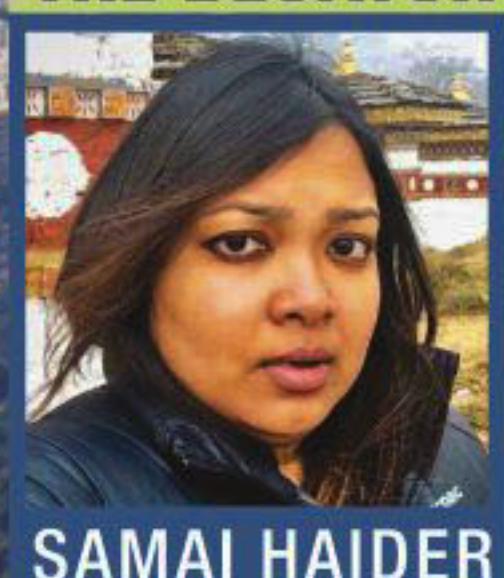


Bird's-eye Views of Rio de Janeiro

SOUTH OF THE EQUATOR



SAMAI HAIDER

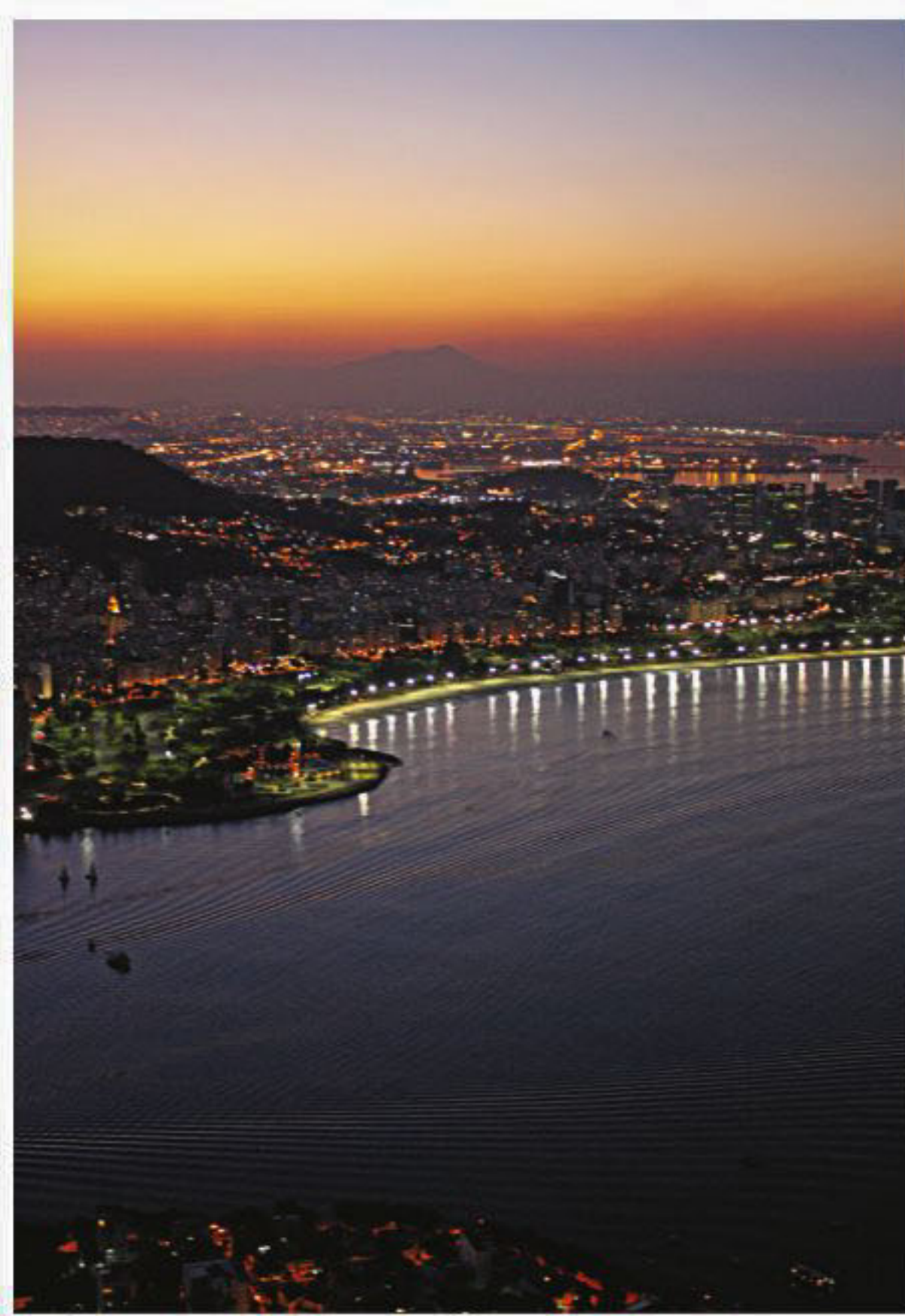
Bird's-eye view of Guanabara Bay from Corcovado mountain

Rio, the concrete jungle that sprung up amidst mountainous rainforests, is fondly referred to as *Cidade Maravilhosa* (Marvelous City). Standing atop one of the many mountains scattered around the city, it is apparent why. The views proffered were some of the most breathtaking. In my last article for the Rio series, I highlight some of the city's most unique and unforgettable views.

Christ the Redeemer & Corcovado Mountain

No self-respecting tourist will come away from Rio without having visited Christ the Redeemer, the statue that is emblematic of Rio. Perched atop the 2,300 feet Corcovado Mountain, it watches over Guanabara Bay, wearing an expression of utmost serenity, its arms outstretched as if in supplication. Nearly 100 feet tall, the statue of Christ referred to as *Cristo Redentor* by locals is clearly visible from most parts of the city. Up close, its size and scale are even more impressive and require one to channel their inner *yogi*, bending almost backwards to take in the sculpture in its entirety.

While Christ the Redeemer in itself is one of the most recognised landmarks in Rio, making it a favourite tourist destination, what makes this spot special are the views it affords. Corcovado mountain is



Christ the Redeemer - A Rio icon

situated within the Parque Nacional da Tijuca, a lush, tropical jungle situated in the middle of the sprawling metropolis of Rio de Janeiro. Visitors can reach the statue on special tourist buses or on foot, the latter reserved for the fit and the feisty who have little regard for the state of their calf muscles or the infrequent robberies that unfortunately, still occur on the hiking trails. With a toddler in tow and comfortable in our latest pursuit of lazing on the beach, we chose to take the easiest way up—by booking the park's tourist shuttle that'd take us directly from Copacabana beach and back.

Driving through the congested city streets, past flashy malls and crumbling classical buildings, the effect of entering the park is an abrupt assault on the senses. Dense forest rose on either side as our

bus began its strenuous climb up a steep road. It was almost as if someone had changed the backdrops for a stage play. As we wound our way up, I caught glimpses of the shimmering Atlantic below and the colourful hues of a nearby *favela*. As we careened up a hairpin bend, I caught a fleeting glance of a howler monkey flitting through the trees.

We were met with a crush of tourists at the top, all bent (literally and figuratively) on taking the customary photo with Cristo. Once I had had my fill of Rio's greatest icon, I elbowed my way to the edge of the monument to take in the views. What I saw before me had me enchanted. I stood, spellbound, despite being bashed by stray selfie sticks and untowardly tourists' elbows. Dense rainforests abruptly gave way to a concrete jungle, buildings of all sizes and materials densely packed together, sprawling off into the distance, its urban creep stalled by the sandy expanse of Rio's southern beaches. Beyond lay Guanabara Bay, painted the deepest of blues, its surface broken by a smattering of islands. My eyes fixated on the tell-tale silhouette of Sugarloaf Mountain and I remained transfixed, unable to tear my eyes away from nature's splendour. If it weren't for the insistent tugging of my toddler, impatient to go explore, I'm fairly certain you'd have found me still rooted to the same spot, much like *Cristo Redentor* behind me.

Sugar Loaf Mountain & Morro da Urca

The locals call it *Pão de Açúcar* likening it to the shape of the sugar blocks commonly seen in the heyday of Brazil's sugarcane trade. Its granite peak, standing at 1,200 feet, partners with the slightly smaller mountain of Morro da Urca to form one of the most distinctive profiles on Guanabara Bay. We queued up for our