

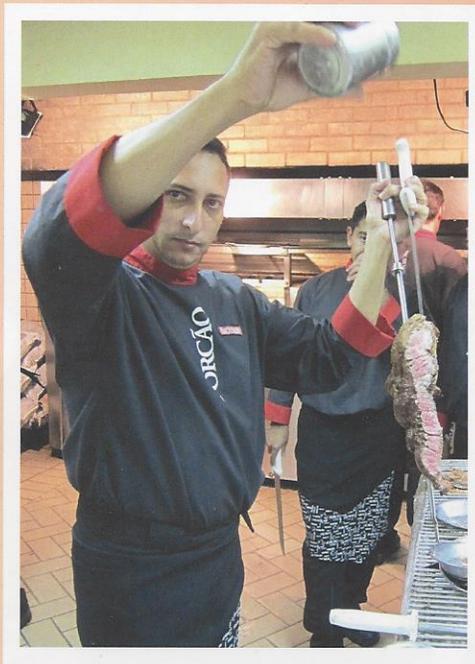
# RIO EATS

By Margaret Swaine

*The world spotlight will soon be on Brazil with its double-billing of the 2014 World Cup and the 2016 Olympic Games.*

**I**N Rio de Janeiro they have been busy civilizing the *favelas* (slums) whose brutal existence was immortalized in the 2002 film, *City of God*. Adventurous tourists are now visiting some of the more sanitized *favelas* and small restaurants have opened up. (The *favela* Dona Marta gained fame for the visits of Madonna and Michael Jackson.) My guide in Rio, Marco Bransford, said he celebrated last New Year's in a *favela* overlooking the festivities on the beaches of Copacabana. It's the beginnings of gentrification of the notorious slums. Rio—the country's second largest city with six million people—has much more to offer.

Chefs who have gained fame in Brazil are those who embrace the country's diverse cuisine. Brazil is like many countries in one—dishes vary considerably from state to state—and represent Portuguese, African, Italian, German, Dutch, Indian and other influences. The African influence is strongest in the northeast in Bahia, where the slave trade began. Much loved is a seafood casserole called *moqueca* from the African *mukeka*, meaning fish chowder. While there are hundreds of versions, most contain coconut flesh or milk and *dendê* (palm oil) and are served with starchy vegetables, salsas and *farofa* (toasted manioc flour). *Feijoada*, a bean and beef stew, often called the national dish of Brazil, is made differently in each state. Exotic fish from the Amazon are popular in



the far north. Against the Uruguay border in the south, the Campanha region is ranch country where BBQ beef is king.

Alex Atala (of the award-winning **D.O.M.**) and Ana Luiza Trajano (**Brasil a Gosto**) are famed locavore chefs in Sao Paulo. In Rio, chefs Tereza Corção (**O Navegador**) and Roberta Sudbrack (**Sudbrack Restaurante**) are highly praised. Sudbrack is renowned for using refined culinary techniques to transform Brazilian favourites into exquisite dishes in her restaurant in the Jardim Botânico area. She also spent seven years as lead chef at Brazil's presidential palace. For the ultimate indulgence go for the tasting menu, which changes daily according to what was sourced that day.

In the artsy and trendy Santa Teresa district, small restaurants such as **Bar do Mineiro** draw crowds that spill out into the street for simple *pastéis de feijão* (a savoury black bean pastry) accompanied with the local beer. For fine dining, two restaurants stand out in this pretty neighbourhood with panoramic views over the city centre and Guanabara Bay: **Têreze**, within the gorgeous Relais Chateau property Santa Teresa, and **Aprazível**. Both feature upscale, modernized Brazilian cuisine. Aprazível has its own *cachaça* sommelier, Paulo Magoulas, and a *cachaça* list with more than 100 versions, organized under the states that produce them. *Cachaça* is a distilled liquor from sugar cane juice: the best come from artisanal "pot still" production in regions such as Salinas in Minas Gerais state, Paraty in Rio de Janeiro state and Monte Alegre do Sul in São Paulo state and can be aged in wood barrels for many years.

One can't leave Rio without visiting a *rodízio*—a fixed price restaurant that features a rotation of waiters who come around with food until you cry uncle. There are sushi, pizza and pasta *rodízios*, though the most popular are the steakhouse versions that bring meats on huge skewers. A treasured one is **Porcão Rio**, which has an enormous buffet of "starters" including salads, seafood, sushi, sashimi, asparagus, grilled vegetables and hearts of palm. As soon as you sit down, onion rings, breaded shrimp, French fries, manioc and rice are plunked on the table. Then the meats come: chicken hearts, lamb chops, pork sausage, pork ribs and all cuts of beef. It's endless until you flip your personal sign to a red "não obrigado." It's hard to say no in Rio but believe me, you'll have to learn. —

