



ABOVE. Poster for *Flying Down to Rio*, 1933.

OPPOSITE. Ginger Rogers and Fred Astaire in *Flying Down to Rio*, 1933.

OVERLEAF. The cast of *Flying Down to Rio* lounge around on the massive Copacabana Palace set, one of the largest constructed indoors for a talking picture, 1933.

PAGES 116-117. Still from the spectacular final musical number of *Flying Down to Rio*.

The first Brazilian Miss Universe was chosen at the hotel, and three years later, in 1933, Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers starred opposite each other for the very first time in *Flying Down to Rio*. A link between the Pacific and the Atlantic, between Hollywood and Copacabana, the film sums up all the extravagant glamour of the era and all the fascination of Rio. Through a sequence of cleverly choreographed scenes, it put the hotel on the world map forever. With tremendous skill, it gave audiences the impression of moving quite naturally through the hotel's superb Art Deco lounges, its magnificently decorated rooms, its gardens filled with tropical blooms, its restaurant and its terraces looking out over the bay, which seemed to be just a stone's throw away. From the opening credits to the finale, the movie was a fireworks display of escapism and charm.

That many of most memorable scenes were due to magical camerawork and the amazing technical crew at RKO Pictures was neither here nor there. Audiences marvelled as one amazing setting after another was revealed. In the astonishing finale, an aerial ballet featuring chorus girls dancing on the wings of a squadron of planes in the skies over Rio, the beach and the hotel, all revealed with a clever use of rear projection. In the space of a few minutes, cinema and tourism were successfully combined as one – a move that was revolutionary for the time and proved to be a spectacular publicity coup. In every movie theatre in the world, in every town or village with a film projector and screen, Rio, the Copa and Brazil were forever united as the ultimate symbols of adventure. In just 89 minutes the movie opened up a new vision of life, going far beyond the frontiers of South America. It celebrated the importance of happy memories in hard times, and of moments of lightness, imagination and fantasy. A different kind of journey, lived for its own sake.

Since the film, the hotel has been remodelled, adding an impressive pool, new restaurants and lounges and different rooms and suites. But the dream unveiled to the early audiences of *Flying Down to Rio* remains intact. As we look at the black-and-white photographs that now decorate an entire wall and contemplate the surviving films and images, we almost imagine for a moment that we can spot chorus girls dancing on the wings of planes as they soar through the skies above us.

