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Brazil, a Nation of Extremes

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"What we are told of the inhabitants of Brazil, that they never die, but of old age, are attributed to the tranquility and serenity of their climate; I rather attribute it to the tranquility and serenity of their souls ..." Michel de Montaigne (1533-1592), French essayist, *"Apology for Raimund Sebond."*

Brazil, the fifth largest country in the world, and largest in South America, is bigger than the continental United States. With the exception of Chile and Ecuador, it shares common borders with all South American countries. Brazil has a population of approximately 160 million, of which half are under 25 years of age.

Brazil is a nation of extremes: open-air markets and chic boutiques; sprawling slums and sumptuous skyscrapers; horse carts and high-speed traffic full of luxury cars. Such differences and complex cultural issues have an enormous impact on the new arrival. However, if you realistically appraise the differences in Brazilian life, and accept them as part of the daily existence in Brazil, you should have an enjoyable stay.

When packing for Brazil, bring along a sense of humor, an open mind, patience and a determination to know, understand and communicate with the people. There are many beautiful things to be learned about the Brazilian culture; find them and thrive on the experiences. The country offers many attractions, such as beautiful beaches, lively music, variety of night spots and generally an enjoyable style of life. Brazil is distinguished from its neighbors by its native language of Portuguese and colonial ties to Portugal.

Brazil's population is a blend of many ethnic backgrounds. The country was colonized by the Portuguese, who intermingled with African slaves and native Indians. Subsequently, a large number of immigrants arrived with German, Italian, Japanese and Polish roots. All of Brazil's ethnic groups have made significant contributions to Brazilian religion, food (traditional main course called "Feijoada," comes from early cultures), music and dance (the "Capoeira" is a very beautiful dance from the slave era).

São Paulo is not only the largest city of Brazil but also its cosmopolitan core. Many immigrants from around the globe come to this capital city to find success as well as to enjoy the wide variety of cultural activities São Paulo has to offer. Paulistanos, as the natives are called, enjoy a high standard of living that is the result of vigorous industrialization and economic development. Avenida Paulista is Brazil's main financial district, where banks and other businesses have their main offices.

One result of the rapid growth and expansion of São Paulo is a somewhat haphazard street layout; visitors are advised to purchase a street map, such as the "Guia Quatro Rodas". This guide can be bought at any newsstand and contains bus and subway route information in addition to street diagrams. It is a worthwhile investment even for visitors who plan to rely on taxis for transportation, as even drivers sometimes do not know all of the minor streets.

Visas are required for each individual requesting entrance into Brazil. Visitors from many countries must obtain visas before arrival; however, some travelers may obtain theirs upon arrival. Visas are granted through the Brazilian Embassy or Consulate General in your home country; contact either office for the proper procedure to obtain a visa. Allow several weeks for the completion of the necessary paperwork if your visa must be obtained in advance. Visas are valid for 90 days.

No vaccinations are required for travelers to São Paulo. The necessary childhood immunizations are similar to those received in your home country, with one exception: BCG is given due to some incidence of tuberculosis in the country. BCG is also recommended for all children arriving in Brazil before the age of seven. Be sure to check with your pediatrician before departing.

As São Paulo is located directly on the tropic of Capricorn, seasons are the opposite of those in the northern hemisphere. The average summer temperature in January is 25-30 degrees Celsius (77-86 degrees Fahrenheit); in the mild winters of July, the temperature drops to 15-20 degrees Celsius (59-68 degrees Fahrenheit).

The Culture

Brazilian culture is a mixture of European, African and indigenous influences. São Paulo still reflects the Portuguese heritage. Although a relaxed Latin pace typifies the Brazilian lifestyle, this is less prevalent in the busy metropolis of São Paulo.

Brazilians are generally a friendly and exuberant people. Life is primarily centered around family and friends. In poorer areas of the country large and extended families often live under one roof. Be aware that family commitments may be as important as business dealings in Brazil.

The official language of Brazil is Portuguese, and English is its second language. Although understood by much of the population, Spanish should not be used, as it may injure national pride. German and French may also be spoken by some portions of the population.

Doing Business

When conducting business in Brazil it is necessary to learn a few introductory phrases in Portuguese as an appropriate courtesy.

Handshakes are the most common form of greeting. Always present a business card (preferably one printed both in your native language and in Portuguese) upon introduction. Address colleagues as *senhor* (Mr.), *senhora* (Mrs.) or *doutor/doutora* (Dr.), followed by his/her first name. No formal invitation is needed to address a colleague by their first name once a relationship is established.

Casual conversation is appropriate and expected at the beginning of a business meeting. Refrain from asking personal questions about your colleague's finances or family, although inquiring if he or she has children is acceptable.

Punctuality is expected, although Brazilians may be late themselves; it is advisable to keep a flexible schedule to avoid conflicts. Talking about business at lunch is also very common. Multiple trips may be necessary to finalize business dealings, as Brazilians wish to thoroughly analyze a business proposition before making a commitment. Pressure for a response is acceptable, but overly aggressive sales tactics should be avoided.

Tipping

In Brazil a ten percent service charge is customary in restaurants and most of them already add it to the bill. Taxi drivers are not tipped, although it is customary to round up your bill to an even amount. Tip the last porter who carries your luggage at the airport, for it will be divided up among all of them. Parking attendants, doormen, ushers and washroom attendants will expect a small tip. Chambermaids should be tipped per day.

Social Customs

Giving a gift upon meeting with a business contact is appropriate in Brazilian culture. Items such as a desk set or spirits from your home country will be greatly appreciated.

Many executives have drinks with their colleagues after work generally on a Friday evening. This form of socialization is an excellent opportunity to make and keep contacts. Deals might be made and contract details finalized on these occasions. Attending such gatherings is not mandatory; however, Brazilian executives value these opportunities to develop relationships in a more relaxed environment.

Airport Information

São Paulo is serviced by two airports. The smaller of the two, Congonhas Airport, is used for shuttle, regional and air taxi services. The long-time pool of TAM and Varig shuttle service to Rio de Janeiro has been broken up into airline-specific shuttle services between the two cities. But there is expanded frequency of flights, making it very easy to show up at the airport and board a plane for Rio de Janeiro. A number of other domestic flights to the south of Brazil also depart from Congonhas. This airport is located on Av. Washington Luís, in the southern part of the city.

Guarulhos or Cumbica is the International Airport of São Paulo. It is located about 30 kilometers (18 miles) north of the city and used for international and domestic flights. To reach the airport from a hotel or other transportation terminal, you can use the Airport System, an excellent bus service. These are special buses, comfortable and air-conditioned, to transport luggage and passengers. Tickets for the buses and taxis must be purchased from booths near the airport exit.

Viracopos or Campinas is located in Campinas (a city near São Paulo) and works as an alternative international airport, especially if Guarulhos is fogged in.

Public Transportation

The subway in São Paulo is an excellent alternative to chronic traffic jams in which buses and taxis can be delayed. The system is clean, cheap and efficient, and its daily hours of operation are from 5:00 a.m. to midnight. Unfortunately, the subway is limited to only three lines, which leaves out much of southwestern São Paulo. You should avoid taking the subway during rush hours, as it tends to be very crowded, and pickpockets may act.

Common taxis (taxis comuns) can be hailed on the street, but there is a peculiar way to pay for them. Normally you pay the meter fare. However, sometimes when a fare hike is granted, the government authorizes the use of a conversion list that converts the meter units to the correct price. When this system is being used, you do not pay the amount listed on the meter. This list is taped to the back window of the taxi, and the driver should explain this process to you when telling you the rate. It is advisable to remain inside the taxi while paying the fare.

Radio taxis are more expensive but safer. You can book them in advance and they will tell you what the price will be prior to picking you up. If you contact them during rush hour, it will probably take them approximately 15 minutes to get to you.

If you are in São Paulo and wish to use a taxi to take you to Guarulhos Airport, do not be surprised if you are asked to pay a 50 percent premium for the driver to return to the city, as these drivers are not licensed to pick up a fare at the airport. To avoid surprises, ask in advance what the fare to the airport will be.

Tourist Information

There are a number of tourist information offices throughout São Paulo; the main office is located at Praça Antônio Prado, 347. Its hours are Monday to Friday, from 10:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. This office can provide you with a map of the city, but for more extensive information you should consult the tourist information desk at every Brazilian airport upon your arrival.

Health Care

Although a major city like São Paulo is not as much of a target for tropical infections like malaria, precautions should be taken against another mosquito-borne illness dengue fever, which is endemic in Brazil. You are particularly advised to follow these precautions during the summer months (November through February), especially in areas with high incidence of dengue fever:

Although Brazilian water is treated, it is advisable not to drink it straight from the tap. You may wish to drink bottled water (água mineral) or filtered water instead. Mineral water, carbonated and non-carbonated, can be purchased in supermarkets or delivered directly to your home.

Travelers should take precautions when dining out, as local water in some areas of the country may be improperly treated to remove harmful microbes. Common sense should be used when going to restaurants: don't go into places that seem dirty or messy, since food and beverage may not receive the proper care. Since inadvertent consumption of contaminated food or water can put you at risk for hepatitis A, it is a sensible precaution to receive a gamma globulin injection before leaving your home country (booster shots will be needed every six months thereafter if you plan to remain in or return to Brazil).

Dining

Breakfast is a light meal in Brazil, consisting of coffee with milk and bread. Lunch is the main meal of the day and often consists of an entree, a main course of meat, chicken or fish, rice and beans, a salad, a fruit salad and coffee. Dinner, eaten between 7:00 p.m. and 9:00 p.m., is a substantially lighter meal. Most restaurants open after 7:00 p.m. for dinner; however, usually stay open until late in the evening.

Local Cuisine

São Paulo is considered the Gastronomic Capital of the World. Its local cuisine is very diversified. Food of all parts of the world can be found in São Paulo restaurants, as well as Brazilian food. The unofficial "national dish", feijoada, are various cuts of pork served with black beans, rice, kale and farofa (dish made of golden-fried manioc flour) can be found in most restaurants. There are a number of churrascarias, traditional meat-based South American barbecue restaurants that also offer a wide variety of salads and seafood.

One of São Paulo's most famous regional cuisines is its Japanese food, said by many to be the most authentic food outside Japan itself. In addition, countless good Italian restaurants thrive in the city. Quick meals can be found at lanchonetes, which serve snacks and light meals for diners on the go.

Entertainment/Shopping

The diversity and affluence of São Paulo have given rise to a plethora of upscale shopping centers and freewheeling markets (mercados). The most spectacular shopping experiences are to be found in the southwestern districts of Cerqueira César and the Jardins, both of which are accessible by bus and metro. These centers feature high quality designer goods in opulent surroundings.

At the other end of the shopping spectrum are the mercados. These places are ideal for finding souvenirs, local produce and handicrafts. Mercado Municipal (Rua da Cantareira 306, Centro) features what is said to be the most extensive variety of fresh produce in the country. The Feira de Arte e Artesanato (Praça da República, Centro), offers art and handicrafts, as well as jewelry and Brazilian food, and is only open on Sundays, from 8:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m.

A cultural offering which is worth visiting is the Museu de Arte de São Paulo (MASP), located at Avenida Paulista 1578. The museum houses an impressive variety of art, and it is said to be the best in Latin America. However, the collections on permanent display are primarily European, with very little emphasis placed on national artwork. The museum is open Tuesday to Sunday, from 11:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m., and it is open until 8:00 p.m. on Thursdays.

When it comes to performance art, São Paulo has a great deal to offer to visitors. The Teatro Municipal (Praça Ramos de Azevedo, Centro) is the center of São Paulo's classical music and opera scene. Its ornate auditorium is not open to visitors; you must attend a performance in order to see its lavish display of marble and gold leaf. Tickets for performances may be obtained by calling the theatre.

Brazilian folk and popular music are featured at the Centro Cultural São Paulo (Rua Vergueiro 1000), amongst other spots. São Paulo has a thriving jazz scene, as well.

So whether your stay is short or long term, take the time to enjoy Brazil, take the time to embrace the tranquility and serenity of their climate and souls!

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