



COUNTRIES IN BRIEF ... On assignment in BRAZIL

By Anne Dean, Editorial Director

Sending an assignee abroad? Then, the IGM country profiles should be of interest to you. This month we profile **BRAZIL**

"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.

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

When packing for Brazil, bring along a sense of humor and a determination to know, understand and communicate with the people. The country offers many attractions, such as beautiful beaches, lively music, variety of night spots and generally an enjoyable style of life.

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 (a main course, "Feijoada," comes from early cultures), music and dance ("Capoeira" is a dance from the slave era). The national language of Brazil is Portuguese, not Spanish, and, English is its second language.

São Paulo is not only Brazil's largest city, it is the cosmopolitan core of the country. It is compared by many to New York, with immigrants from around the globe coming to find success, enjoy the wide variety of cultural offerings and partake of the vibrant nightlife. The Avenida Paulista is Brazil's main financial district, where banks and other businesses have their main offices.

Climate

The climate of Brazil, especially in the northern regions, is tropical and quite humid. The rainy season, depending on the region, can last from December to May. The southeastern region, home to the large cities of São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro, can be cool during the South American winter (June through September).

The Culture

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

The people of Brazil are known for being extremely friendly and passionate. To outsiders, their enlivened discussion about some topic or another may appear as anger, but it usually is not. This is merely the way Brazilians express themselves.

When making introductions, Brazilian men will usually shake hands. Women may offer their hands or a kiss on the cheek, depending on their level of intimacy. In most social situations, you will find that Brazilians position themselves very close to one another, particularly when conversing. Although you may be unaccustomed to this at first, do not step back from someone who is speaking to you, as they may be offended.

When attending a social function or a small party, it is common courtesy to greet everyone in the room (likewise, it is customary to say goodbye to everyone before departing). It is also considered respectful to use formal titles when addressing another. Brazilians enjoy conversation about family life, their country and sports, especially soccer.

Brazilians are extremely fashion conscious and the most recent European styles can be found in urban areas. Regardless of wealth, they project an image of caring about their appearance; always being neatly and cleanly dressed. Although casual dress is preferred, it is important to never appear slovenly.

Religion

The majority of Brazilians follow the Roman Catholic religion, but Brazil is open to new religious influences. Religious freedom is written into the constitution and the country has a wide diversity of religious followers. In fact, Indian animism represents the first form of spiritual practice in the country. Global religions, such as Judaism and Islam, have representative groups in Brazil and major cities all have appropriate places of worship.