

Brazil



Map



Background

- **Land and Climate:** Brazil is the fifth largest country in the world and the fifth most populous. 8,511,965 sq km, it is larger than the continental United States and comprises half of South America, bordering every South American nation but Chile and Ecuador. Forests cover slightly more than half of Brazil's territory and include the world's largest tropical rain forest in the Amazon River Basin. Brazil has five distinct regions: north, northeast, southeast, south, and central-west. The *Rio Amazonas* (Amazon River) is the longest in South America, and it traverses lush rain forests in northern Brazil. Tropical grasslands and savannas extend across the sparsely populated central-west region. The northeast's vast stretches of land are commonly subject to droughts. The southeast, which is the most populated and industrialized region, is rich in minerals and natural resources. Agriculture and manufacturing are common in the south, which boasts one of the world's

largest hydroelectric dams, near Iguacu Falls. Less than 5 percent of Brazil lies above 3,000 feet (914 meters). Brazil is south of the equator and has a mostly tropical climate. Humidity is high in the forest and coastal regions, but the highlands (such as those around São Paulo) have a more moderate climate. The warmest month is January; the coolest is July. The south is more temperate than the north. Temperatures in the far south sometimes drop below freezing.

People

- **Population:** The population of Brazil is approximately 190 million and is growing annually at a rate of about 1 percent. More than 80 percent of the people live in cities. Along with their greater municipal areas, São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro hold some 30 million people. Brasília, the new capital, was completed in 1960 after having almost every detail of the city planned by the government; its population now numbers more than two million.
- **Language and Greeting:** Portuguese is Brazil's official language. It differs slightly in pronunciation from the Portuguese spoken in Portugal. English is popular as a second language. Spanish is also becoming more popular in some circles as Brazil establishes stronger trade ties with its neighbors. (Although Portuguese speakers generally understand Spanish, some Brazilians are offended when deliberately spoken to in Spanish.) In southern cities, some descendants of European immigrants also speak German or Italian. Indigenous peoples may speak any one of more than a hundred local languages. Superiors and authorities may be addressed formally with the titles *Senhor* (Mr.) or *Senhora* (Mrs.), followed by their surnames. In less formal situations, first names are commonly used, sometimes preceded by *Seu* (for men) or *Dona* (for women). In formal situations, Brazilians greet each other with a handshake.
- **Religion:** Brazil traditionally has been a strong Roman Catholic country. At one time, nearly 95 percent of the population claimed membership in the Catholic Church. However, membership has dropped to around 70 percent, and other Christian churches are growing rapidly. Since the founding of the republic in 1889, there has been a separation of church and state, and religious freedom has been guaranteed. Although Brazilians consider themselves quite religious, most attend church only on special occasions. Some in the northeast and in urban areas countrywide practice Afro-Brazilian religions that combine various indigenous African beliefs with Catholicism. These Afro-Brazilian religions, such as Candomblé, Macumba, and Xangô, share many similarities.
- **General Attitude:** Brazilians are warm, fun-loving, and free-spirited. They are also outgoing and enjoy being around others. At the same time, they are hardworking. Brazilians are proud of their country's natural resources and diverse culture. One point of pride is the "Brazilian way"—their ability to find creative ways around seemingly insurmountable problems. Brazilians often are opinionated and will argue for their convictions with vigor. In spite of economic difficulties, most Brazilians are hopeful about their country's future.

- **Personal Appearance:** In general, Brazilians are fashionable and like to dress according to the latest styles. People in urban areas like to wear brand-name clothing. People in the warmest and most humid regions dress more casually, and colors are lighter and brighter year-round. In rural regions, more traditional clothing is common, especially among the native peoples.

Lifestyle

- **Diet and Eating:** Brazilians value mealtime with family and friends. Extended family members often gather together for lunch on Sundays. Brazilians eat in the continental style, with the knife in the right hand and the fork in the left. Staple foods in the Brazilian diet include meat, bread, rice, beans, cheese, and eggs. Breakfast usually consists of *café com leite* (coffee with milk), fruit, and bread with butter. Lunch is the main meal and often includes beans, rice, meat, salad, potatoes, bread, and fruit. Dinner is lighter and may include a bowl of soup with bread, followed by coffee or milk with a piece of cake.
- **Recreation:** The national sport and passion is *futebol* (soccer). Businesses and schools may even close during the World Cup. Basketball and volleyball are also popular. People enjoy boating, fishing, swimming, and visiting the country's many fine beaches. Brazilians are avid fans of auto racing. During leisure hours, people commonly visit friends or watch television, particularly *telenovelas* (nighttime soap operas). Traditional dances and festivals are popular and vary by region. Brazilians will celebrate any occasion, and get-togethers often include singing and samba dancing. Weekend and holiday barbecues are common.
- **Holidays:** *Carnaval* is a five-day festival preceding Ash Wednesday; it is the most famous holiday in Brazil. It is marked by street parades, samba and *bloco* (group) dancing, parties, drinking, costumes, conga drums, and music. Some people spend months preparing costumes and saving for *Carnaval*. Tiradentes Day (21 Apr.) celebrates the death of Joaquim José da Silva Xavier (known as Tiradentes); he was a dentist and nationalist who died in the struggle for independence. The *Festas Juninas* (June Festivals) coincide with the feasts of St. John and St. Peter and are celebrated with local fair-type activities. Other holidays include Easter, Labor Day (1 May), Independence Day (7 Sept.), Memorial Day (2 Nov.), and Republic Day (15 Nov.), New Year and Christmas.
- **Commerce and Currency:** Most stores open from 8a.m to 6p.m daily and until noon on Saturdays. Neighborhood stores that sell basic food items open as early as 5a.m daily. Bank hours vary by state. The currency used in Brazil is the Brazilian Real. The exchange rate is 1 US dollars to 2.4 Brazilian Real.

Society

- **Transportation and Communication:** Domestic air travel is well developed between hundreds of local airports. Travel by intercity bus is more common, although buses tend to be crowded. São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro have rapid transit systems. City buses do not

stop automatically; people must hail them with the wave of a hand. Readily available in large cities, taxis with red license plates have fixed meter rates. Brazil's media are highly developed and include one of the world's largest television networks. Televisions are found in even the poorest areas. The country also enjoys a large film and music industry. Urban telephone service is good. Pay phones are operated by tokens or phone cards, not coins. Cellular phones are ubiquitous. Most people have access to the internet.

- **Health:** Brazil's healthcare system provides universal coverage. However, rural areas rarely have adequate facilities. Excellent private care is available in large cities to those who can afford it. Some water is not potable. Sanitation in some areas is insufficient. Yellow fever and malaria are found in some areas. More than 10 percent of the population suffers from malnutrition. A grassroots effort is dispatching mobile healthcare workers to rural areas to fight infant mortality through education and basic care.