



Boundary representations are not necessarily authoritative.

BACKGROUND

Land and Climate. Brazil is the fifth largest country in the world and the fifth most populous. At 3,286,488 square miles (8,511,965 square kilometers), 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. Concerns over the destruction of the rain forests have prompted a global conservation effort. However, illegal logging and slash-and-burn clearing continue.

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 Iguazu 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.

History. Brazil does not have a written history prior to the arrival of Europeans, but various groups inhabited the area when Pedro Álvares Cabral arrived in 1500 and claimed the region for Portugal. The Portuguese colonized Brazil; French and Dutch groups both attempted to establish colonies but eventually were driven out by the Portuguese. After Spain conquered Portugal, it controlled Brazil from 1580 to 1640. Colonization took several decades, and expansion into the interior of the country did not really begin until after 1650.

When Napoleon captured Spain and Portugal (1808), the South American colonies were initially liberated from European control. However, the Portuguese royal family soon fled to Brazil and established Rio de Janeiro as the seat of the Portuguese Empire. Brazil then ceased to be a colony and became part of the Portuguese kingdom. The royal family returned to Portugal in 1821, leaving Dom Pedro I to govern. He declared Brazil's independence in 1822 after people in Portugal demanded that Brazil be returned to colonial status. His son, Dom Pedro II, was deposed in an 1889 military coup.

The military would eventually seize control three more times, although with relatively little violence. With military support, the dictator Getúlio Vargas ruled from 1930 to 1945, followed by elected presidents. A 1964 coup gave the military control until a return to civilian rule in 1985. A new constitution was ratified in 1988.

Elections in 1989 brought Fernando Collor de Mello, a conservative, to office. Collor was the first president to be directly

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elected in 29 years. His economic austerity campaign and corrupt activities crippled the economy. In a historic test of democracy, Brazil succeeded in removing the president from office by legal, constitutional means. Before impeachment proceedings could be carried out, however, Collor resigned in December 1992.

Vice President Itamar Franco assumed the presidency until elections in October 1994. Franco's finance minister, Fernando Cardoso, introduced an anti-inflation plan so successful that the economy began to boom in 1994. Cardoso, who had spent years in exile after the 1964 military coup, eventually upset the front-running presidential candidate and later became the first Brazilian president to be elected to a second consecutive term.

In 2002, the first left-wing president in 40 years came to power and was reelected in 2006. Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva promised to reform the economy and to eradicate hunger. However, the nation still faces stark inequality of wealth and a weak economy.

THE PEOPLE

Population. The population of Brazil is approximately 188 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.

About 45 percent of the population is younger than age 20. Brazilians of European (mostly Portuguese) descent comprise 55 percent of the population, while 38 percent is of mixed heritage and 6 percent is of African descent. The indigenous population numbers only about 300,000. Many of these peoples inhabit the Amazon region (a few groups have never been contacted by modern society). Many people of mixed heritage have some indigenous blood through intermarriage. Groups of German, Italian, Lebanese, and Japanese immigrants who settled in the south maintain ethnic communities. In fact, Brazil is home to the largest cohesive community of Japanese outside of Japan. The black population descended from African slaves brought to Brazil before the 1880s; they live mostly in northeastern states like Bahia.

Language. 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.

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 less than 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 Attitudes. 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.

Social status commonly is measured by one's power to acquire possessions. People tend to view time more as a sequence of events than as a matter of hours and minutes. Therefore, people in most regions (except São Paulo) appear to have an extremely casual attitude about time. Brazilians in the north and northeast regions and small inland towns are traditionally more conservative. Folklore is stronger in these areas; traditional religious and military celebrations are also more common.

Personal Appearance. In general, Brazilians are fashionable and like to dress according to the latest styles. People in urban areas like to wear European (particularly Italian) fashions. People in the warmest and most humid regions dress more casually, and colors are lighter and brighter year-round. In São Paulo and parts of the southern region, people often dress in black, white, and other neutral colors. Stylish suits or skirts with jackets are common business attire.

Both men and women pay careful attention to their appearance. Shoes are well kept and polished. Manicures and pedicures are popular. People like to dress up for special occasions and parties. In rural regions, more traditional clothing is common, especially among the native peoples.

CUSTOMS AND COURTESIES

Greetings. In formal situations, Brazilians greet each other with a handshake. A common greeting among friends, except from one male to another, is to embrace and kiss on alternating cheeks or touch cheeks and "kiss the air." In some regions, three kisses are exchanged. Common verbal greetings include *Olá. Tudo bem?* (Hello. Is everything fine?) and *Como vai?* (How are you?). Young friends greet each other with a simple *Oi* (Hi). When one joins or leaves a small group, it is polite to shake hands with all who are present. Common parting terms include *Tchau* (Good-bye) and *Até logo* (See you soon).

Superiors and authorities are often 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).

Gestures. Brazilians often use gestures to communicate and express feelings. Gestures often accompany greetings. One beckons by closing the fingers of the hand into the palm facing up. Pulling down the lower eyelid with an index finger signifies disbelief or caution. One may tap the fingers horizontally under the chin to indicate that another person does not know what he or she is talking about or is exaggerating. The "okay" sign used in the United States, with the thumb and index finger forming a circle, is an offensive gesture.

Brazilians tend to stand close and touch each other often during conversation. Eye contact is important. Passing between conversing individuals is rude. Men tend to stare at

and make comments about women passing by. This is generally ignored by the women.

Visiting. Brazilians enjoy visiting. The tropical climate allows for much time outdoors, including chatting outside late into the evening. If a meal or snack is in progress, it is considered impolite not to ask visitors to join in eating. Most people will politely decline the invitation *Está servido?* (Will you join me?) with *Bom apetite* (Enjoy). Hosts generally also offer coffee or other refreshment toward the end of a visit. In rural areas, not accepting refreshments may be considered rude. If invited to dinner, one might take candy, wine, or a small gift to the hosts. Invited guests commonly arrive up to a half hour late, except perhaps in São Paulo. Guests are generally expected to stay at least two hours. While Brazilians enjoy conversation, they avoid controversial subjects (like politics and religion) at social gatherings. Asking personal questions about one's age, salary, etc., is considered inappropriate.

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. One wipes the mouth frequently throughout a meal before drinking. After-meal conversation often takes place over a cup of strong *cafézinho* (black coffee). In restaurants, diners call the server by holding up the index finger or by softly saying *Garçom* (waiter). While the bill usually includes the tip, one may leave extra change. If the tip is not included, leaving 10 to 15 percent is customary.

LIFESTYLE

Family. Families traditionally are large and may include the extended family. However, smaller nuclear families, with one to three children, are becoming more common. The family is led by the father, but the mother influences decisions, especially those affecting the home. Women, including those who work outside the home, are responsible for household duties. Middle- and higher-income families often hire domestic help. Children rarely leave home before they marry. Unmarried men may leave early for employment reasons, but they usually live at home until they are 30. The elderly who cannot care for themselves live with their children because it is considered improper to send them to a nursing home.

Family ties are strong; members rely on each other for assistance and enjoy being together. Among the urban youth, however, some of these values are becoming less important. Among the poor, women and children often work to help support their families.

Housing. In Brazilian cities, most people live in houses or apartments built in a style similar to U.S. townhouses. Homes typically have a kitchen, a half-bathroom, and a living room on the ground floor and two bedrooms and a full bathroom upstairs. Plumbing works well most of the time, but, to deal with water shortages, many Brazilian families buy their own water tanks and place them on the roof. In high-crime urban areas, there is an emphasis on home security. Tall walls, which were first introduced by Portuguese colonists, and a security gate are often built in the front of a house. Many homeowners go further, keeping guard dogs and even placing broken glass on top of the walls. The poor commonly lack the basic necessities of life, including food, sanitation, and shelter.

The Brazilian term *jetinho* describes the Brazilian talent of making do in difficult circumstances. Brazilians find a way to use whatever materials they have to repair and make improvements to their homes. A little ingenuity and a coat hanger can

save money that would otherwise have to be paid to a professional repair person.

Dating and Marriage. Group dating starts around age 14; couples gradually emerge from the group. Traditional families expect the young man to ask the girl's father for permission to be her boyfriend. Serious dating and engagements may last two or three years. Traditionally, Brazilians married young. However, today, many wait until they are older (perhaps in their 30s) to marry. Weddings often include two ceremonies: a civil ceremony and a religious one. Wedding parties are lavish and elegant, with much food, drink, and music.

Life Cycle. Rituals marking major life events invariably provide Brazilians with an opportunity to dress up, dance, sing, and spend time with their family and friends. Pregnancy is celebrated in Brazilian culture, and there is no attempt to hide a pregnant woman's growing stomach. Babies are often given names identical to or derived from the names of their parents. The first birthday is one of the most important and is celebrated with a large party. A young woman is traditionally introduced to society at a ball held on her fifteenth birthday. There, she dances the first dance with her father and then is free to be invited to dance by any young man. Due to the high costs of such a ball, this tradition has survived only among the wealthy.

When a Brazilian dies, the nature of the funeral arrangements depends in large part on what the family can afford. In most cases, burial occurs within 24 hours of death. At first, headstones tend to be quite basic, and little may be done to the burial plot. However, both may be improved in time, when families have been able to save money for the purpose.

Diet. 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. Pastries are typical snacks. Favorite foods vary by region. In Bahia and other states, foods may be spiced with *dendê* (palm oil). In Rio de Janeiro, the favorite is *feijoada* (black beans with beef, pork, sausage, and sometimes a pig's ears, feet, and tail). *Churrasco*, which originated in the south, is a barbecue with a variety of meats. *Bife à cavalo com fritas* (meat with egg and french fries) is popular in many areas. Common drinks include lemonade, milk, fruit juices and shakes, soft drinks, coffee, and an herbal tea called *mate* (MAH-tay), which is enjoyed in southern states.

Recreation. The national sport and passion is *futebol* (soccer). Businesses and schools may even close during the World Cup or important national competitions. 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.

The Arts. All cultures within Brazil have influenced its music, dance, and festivals. For example, Samba is the most popular music and dance, and it uses African rhythms blended with European-style singing. Bossa Nova combines Brazilian popular music with jazz. Pottery, often made by hand and painted with religious or domestic scenes, is popular. Weaving is also a common art. Brazilian art and literature has been influenced

Brazil

by European movements, and artists and writers often combine traditional and modern styles in their work. Brazilian folklore features different mythical characters, such as *Cobra-Grande*, a huge snake living in the Amazon that frightens people by changing shape.

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*. During this week, crime and car accident rates are unusually high.

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.).

On Christmas Eve, people eat a big meal (turkey or ham) and exchange gifts, some of which are brought by *Papai Noel* (Father Noel). New Year's Eve is a time for large parties. In some areas, Candomblé believers dress in white and blue to honor the sea goddess Iemanjá and gain energy for the new year. People place flowers and candles on beaches as part of the celebration.

SOCIETY

Government. Brazil is a federative republic consisting of 26 states and one federal district (Brasília). Technically, each state is autonomous with a legislative body and elected governor, but the federal government reserves all rights not delegated to the state. President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva is head of state and government. A 1997 constitutional amendment allows presidents, governors, and mayors to run for two consecutive terms. The National Congress has an 81-seat Federal Senate and a 513-seat Chamber of Deputies. Voting is universal and compulsory for ages 18 to 70. It is optional for 16- and 17-year-olds and those older than 70.

Economy. Brazil has the largest economy in South America and one of the largest economies in the world. However, income distribution is highly unequal, and poverty affects roughly 20 percent of the total population. Inequitable land distribution is a contributing factor: nearly half of all private lands are owned by only 1 percent of the people. Many of Brazil's landless live in *favelas* (shantytowns) on the outskirts of urban centers. Hyperinflation and low growth marked the 1980s and early 1990s. The introduction of the new currency, the *real* (BRL), in 1994, helped to dramatically cut inflation. Despite an economic crisis caused by weakened investor confidence and a subsequent currency devaluation, the Brazilian economy has remained relatively stable, spurred on by government spending cuts, tax increases and other emergency measures. Unemployment is moderate in some areas but high in larger cities such as São Paulo.

Brazil is largely self-sufficient in food and consumer goods. Agriculture employs about 20 percent of the population. Brazil is one of the world's largest producers of coffee, oranges, and bananas. Much of Brazil's sugarcane is used to produce ethyl

POPULATION & AREA

Population	188,078,227 (rank=5)
Area, sq. mi.	3,286,488 (rank=5)
Area, sq. km.	8,511,965

DEVELOPMENT DATA

Human Dev. Index* rank	69 of 177 countries
Adjusted for women	55 of 140 countries
Real GDP per capita	\$8,195
Adult literacy rate	88% (male); 89% (female)
Infant mortality rate	32 per 1,000 births
Life expectancy	67 (male); 75 (female)

alcohol, a fuel used in approximately one-third of Brazilian cars. The industrial sector exports automobiles and parts, textiles, minerals, and metals; other industries include cement and chemicals. Despite large reserves, Brazil lacks the capacity to refine the oil it mines on its own soil. Consequently, the country must import a fourth of the 1.8 billion barrels of oil it uses daily. Much of Brazil's natural gas is also imported. Brazil is a member of Mercosur, a regional free-trade pact that includes Argentina, Paraguay, and Uruguay.

Transportation and Communications. 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.

Education. Education consists of eight years of compulsory elementary education (to age 14) and three years of secondary education. About 40 percent of those who enter school proceed to the secondary level. Entrance to Brazil's top universities is difficult and is preceded by a special college-preparation course and entrance exams. About half of secondary school graduates go on to trade schools. Brazil has many fine libraries and research centers. There are hundreds of higher education institutions. A national adult literacy program has raised the literacy rate substantially.

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. AIDS is a growing problem.

AT A GLANCE

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