Brazil

Country Facts
Population: 198,739,269
Languages: Portuguese
Predominant Religions: Christian (Roman Catholic, Protestant), Animist
Time Zone: Two to five hours behind Greenwich Mean Time. Daylight Saving Time is observed in eastern Brazil.
Voltage Requirements: 110 volts, except in Brasilia and some regions of the north, where it’s 220 volts.
Telephone Codes: 55, country code; 21, city code for Rio de Janeiro; 11, city code for Sao Paulo

Introduction:
Everything in Brazil seems larger than life. It has the world’s greatest waterfall, biggest wetlands, mightiest river and largest rain forest, as well as one of the most unique and diverse cultures on the planet, including the world’s wildest party —Carnival — an extravaganza that occurs before Ash Wednesday.

On the other hand, Brazil’s problems, including poverty, crime and environmental recklessness, can also seem larger than life. Although it is one of the industrial powerhouses of South America, Brazil has trouble feeding all of its people. Also, deforestation of the Amazon basin proceeds at an ominous rate.

The country is taking on some of its seemingly unsolvable problems. Most noticeably, improvement is being made in the dangerous crime situation in Rio de Janeiro.

Compassion in Brazil:
Compassion International’s work in Brazil began in 1974. As of 2009 more than 37,500 children participate in 150 child development centers. The Leadership Development Program serves more than 60 students. Compassion partners with churches to help them provide Brazilian children with the opportunity to rise above their circumstances and become all God has created them to be.

Cultural Information:
- Remember that the cultural heritage of Brazil is Portuguese, not Spanish. Statements and actions that tend to lump their culture in with that of the Spanish-speaking nations of South America will not be well received.
- For first impressions, wear conservative clothing, avoiding green and yellow in combination, as these are the colors of the Brazilian flag. Shake hands with everyone and maintain steady eye contact. If your acquaintance has a professional title, you will learn it when introduced.
- Until directed otherwise, use the professional title or the more standard titles [senhor — sir, senhora — ma’am] along with the person’s last name. Note that it is typical for a person to have two surnames: one from the mother, followed by one from the father. The
father’s surname is used to address or speak of the person. Thus, “Senhor Joao Gaspar Figueiredo” would be addressed as “Senhor Figueiredo,” though people often use Senhor and Senhora with first names as well, as in “Senhor Joao” or “Senhora Joanna.

- Brazilians usually greet each other with long handshakes and noticeable eye contact; close friends will often embrace.
- Hugging and backslapping are common among Brazilians, but sometimes some Brazilians will refrain from using these gestures with foreigners, who may not be as receptive to this kind of contact.
- Women will often greet each other by touching cheek to cheek, then kissing the air. Women will often kiss each other by alternating cheeks—twice if they are married and three times if they are single.
- Frequent touching of the arms, hands, or shoulders sometimes occurs during the course of a conversation.
- Maintain a soft-spoken manner.
- Brazilians are easy to approach and anybody will talk to you on the streets, despite the language barrier.
- Body space tends to be close, with polite gesturing and touching common.
- Be aware that the use of the “OK” sign (thumb and forefinger touching in a circle) is a vulgar gesture in Brazil. Instead use the thumbs-up sign.
- When things are going well, it’s acceptable to use the “thumbs up” sign.
- Brazilians often snap their fingers while flailing their hands up and down to add emphasis to a statement or indicate that something occurred “long ago.”
- During conversation, standard cautions apply. Avoid politics and religion, and ask questions about Brazilian culture rather than offering opinions. A recent national survey found that Brazil has one of the highest incidences of anti-U.S. sentiment in the world. For this reason, visitors from the United States should be careful not to exhibit any attitudes that might be perceived as nationalistic or chauvinistic.
- Yawning or stretching in public is frowned upon. Burping in public is also considered very bad manners.
- Although there are lots of smokers in Brazil, smoking is illegal in most public places.
- People never eat on public transportation. A hot dog can be eaten on the street, but nothing more than that!
- Don’t push or shove people in lineups—even if others are doing so.
- Be careful when crossing the street, since traffic is chaotic and extremely fast!
- Machismo in Brazil takes a milder, more subtle form than in other Latin American countries. Moreover, it’s important for men to appear self-assured and “in control” at all times.

Dos and Don’ts:
- Do learn at least a few words of Portuguese. Your efforts will be appreciated — many Brazilians will go far out of their way to help you. For greetings and farewells say bom dia [BOM JI-a] for “good morning,” boa tarde [BO-ah TAR-dji] for “good afternoon” and boa noite [BO-a NOY-tchi] for “good evening/night.” For “goodbye,” tchau [chow] is
popular and casual. *Atay logo* is “till next time.” *Por favor* is “please” and *onde ee* (*ON-jeel ee*) is “where is.” Men and women say “thank you” differently: He says *obrigado* (*oh-bree-GAH-doh*), and she says *obrigada* (*oh-bree-GAH-dah*).

- Do carry a photocopy of your passport when you leave the hotel as proof of citizenship and identification.

**Travel Tips**

**Personal Safety:**
Crime remains a problem in main cities, so exercise caution. Carry a photocopy of your passport, and leave the original and all valuables in your hotel’s safe. Dress simply and wear clothes that will allow you to blend in. Avoid flashing cameras around in public or wearing expensive-looking watches or jewelry. If you’re carrying a laptop, use a backpack or some other type of luggage that doesn’t resemble a computer bag. After dark, it is wise to take a taxi instead of walking. Theft is a problem at many airports and bus stations — keep a close eye on your luggage.

Leave at home all unnecessary credit cards, social security card, library cards and similar items you may routinely carry in your wallet. Do not take more cash than you reasonably require for that day. Use the room safe or hotel safe to secure valuables as well as additional cash. Secure cash in multiple locations – wallet, various pockets, money belts. Carry items in front pockets, not back pockets. Do not display large sums of money in public; only make visible the amount of money that approximates your purchase. Maintain a close awareness of your purse, wallet, backpack, etc. as well as the people around you. It’s a good idea to keep one hand or arm in constant contact with these items especially in areas of high people traffic. Never leave items with cash in them (purse, wallet, backpack, etc.) on a bus, car, or any other location, even if the vehicle is being watched by Compassion staff or Compassion-hired contractors. Stay alert and be cautious at all times. Don’t take safety & security for granted.

**Health:**
In general, sanitary conditions in Brazil are quite good, particularly when visiting major cities and the south and southeast regions. Most hot, freshly cooked food should be safe. Extreme precautions are only necessary when you get way off the beaten track. Tap water is said to be safe in most cities and major towns, but nobody drinks it. Mineral water is available in all restaurants and bars as well as supermarkets, pharmacies and bus stations.

If you are going to be in the Amazon region, it’s recommended that you get vaccinations for hepatitis and yellow fever. Yellow fever vaccinations are required for those entering Brazil from other South American countries with Amazon territories, as well as certain African nations. Malaria, including chloroquine-resistant strains, is present in northern Brazil and Amazonia. Dengue fever is common in the Brazilian summer, even in large cities and upscale neighborhoods, so bring mosquito repellent and avoid receptacles in which water can collect.
and stagnate. Once a major threat, AIDS has been brought somewhat under control by a benchmark public safe-sex campaign.

Prescription drugs can usually be purchased over the counter at a pharmacy, but if you need a special medication, bring it with you. The sun can be very strong, so use sunscreen liberally and wear a hat. Although sunscreen is available everywhere, it is considered a cosmetic and is thus expensive. Stock up before you go. Effective mosquito repellent is available everywhere in the country.

Despite having free health service available to all, health care in Brazil is often beset by overworked doctors and nurses, public hospitals that can be terribly run-down and lineups of poor, ill and wounded people who wait for hours for treatment. However, if you don’t have medical insurance — or money — you can get free emergency treatment. Most middle-class and wealthy Brazilians opt for health insurance, which gives them access to state-of-the-art private hospitals and clinics. In major cities, this is where you should head if you find yourself with a medical problem. In the event of an emergency, dial 192 for an ambulance.

We strongly advise you to contact the CDC [www.cdc.gov] or check with your personal physician for more information about your specific health needs while traveling, including any recommendations for immunizations. *Hepatitis and yellow fever vaccinations, as well as anti-malarial medications, may be recommended.*

**Money:**
The Brazilian currency is the *real*. Although you can change money at major bank branches (where the rates are more advantageous than at *cambios*, or exchange offices), the best, safest and easiest method is to withdraw Brazilian currency directly from ATMs using your international bank card (with a four-digit PIN code).

**Weather:**
March through November is the driest time to visit the south and southeastern regions, including Rio de Janeiro and Sao Paulo. December through February can be rainy and humid. The evenings and winter days in the south (June through September) can be fairly cool (40 F / 5 C), and sweaters and even light winter coats are needed. The Amazon region is always hot and humid, but the best time to see it is July through August. The northeast is quite warm throughout the year, though the coastal regions see frequent rainfall April through June.

**Dress:**
In general, lightweight clothes made from natural fibers work best. Except in summer, it is always a good idea to pack a light sweater or jacket. During winter or in the mountains, a jacket or even a light overcoat might be necessary.
All information taken from Weissmann Reports, the World Factbook and Compassion International.