

# Brazil

The largest country in South America, Brazil has a population that is greater than the combined total for the rest of the continent. The majority of the Brazilian people live along the coastline in large sprawling cities such as Rio de Janeiro, Salvador and Recife, while large areas inland remain largely unpopulated, offering a unique opportunity for visitors to observe the local flora and fauna.

Nearly one third of the country is made up of the Amazon rainforest - one of the largest areas of tropical rainforests on earth - which is still home to a number of native American tribes, such as the Yanomami and Waimiris, who continue to live as they did before the arrival of European colonists. The expanse of rainforest is so huge that large areas remain relatively unexplored and the area remains one of the least populated on earth. A number of exotic species live in the Amazon rainforest such as jaguars and tree frogs, while freshwater dolphins live in the Amazon river.

The Amazon River, whose name is derived from the native American word *amassona*, meaning boat destroyer, provides the primary means of transport through this area and the city of Manaus in the heart of the jungle can only be reached by air or boat. The city is a major port, despite being so far inland, and is often the starting point for travellers wanting to take trips into the heart of the rainforest.

Amazonian music and dance is celebrated annually at the Festival of Boi Manaus and other examples of Brazil's rich and varied cultural heritage can be seen during the numerous festivals held throughout the country. The most famous of these is the carnival held every year in Rio de Janeiro that features the samba school parade and originates from an ancient Roman and Greek festival celebrating the Rites of Spring. During this four-day period, three to five thousand people from each samba school in the city parade through the streets with elaborate costumes and decorated floats.

Visitors to Rio de Janeiro can see some of Brazil's most famous sights during their stay there, including Sugar Loaf Mountain and the Hill of Corcovado, where the statue of Christ with outstretched arms blessing the city is situated. The statue is 30 metres high and was a gift to the city from France. At the base is a chapel that offers panoramic views of the whole city.

The city is also home to the Maracanã football stadium, which was built in 1950 for the World Cup and, with a capacity of 150,000 people, is the second-largest in the world. Football is a national obsession in Brazil and the Brazilian team is known worldwide as the first team to win the World Cup five times in 1958, 1962, 1970, 1994 and 2002. Football fans throughout the world revere the Brazilian footballer, Pelé, who is claimed to be the greatest football player of all time.

Another national sport which can most commonly be seen practised in the city of Salvador is the ritualised combat-dance form called Capoeira. A mix between a martial art and a dance, Capoeira is derived from a fighting style originating in Angola and adopted by the black slaves brought to Brazil by early colonisers. Combatants move in a series of cart-

*'I've never beheld such a paradise. Negroes and whites and Indians all dwell together in a peace that passes describing.'*

Stefan Zweig, Austrian writer (1882-1942),  
Letter from Rio de Janeiro



wheels and whirling handstands in an attempt to deliver blows to their opponent using only their legs, feet, heels and heads, accompanied by traditional music.

Brazil boasts a wide mix of cultures, starting with the indigenous Indian population and including successive waves of Europeans and Africans from the 16th century onwards. More recently, Brazil has received immigrants from Lebanon and Japan and their cultural influences can be seen in some of the cities such as São Paulo, which has one of the largest concentrations of Japanese people living outside of Japan.

With heavy gastronomic influences from its many and varied immigrant populations, São Paulo has a reputation for being a city with a vibrant food culture. Various districts of the city offer a variety of different restaurants serving traditional dishes from the Mediterranean, Europe, Scandinavia, Asia and the Americas.