



BRAZIL

A Land of Superlatives



by Edward Placidi

Generalizations are not easily made about Brazil, other than to say it's an exaggeration in everything, infinitely inviting and varied. To travel the country is to be continuously thrilled by its contrasts and surprises — there is so much of it and it's always changing.

A glance at the map of South America reveals that Brazil encompasses half of the entire continent. It is an immense giant as large as Europe, and a land of topographical superlatives — the world's largest tropical rain forest, the Amazon, the widest waterfall, thundering Iguassu Falls, which is one of the wonders of the world, vast savannah grasslands with some of the world's largest cattle-breeding ranches, and over 4,600 miles of coastline bathed by the Atlantic Ocean, with beaches, beaches and more beaches of which the happy, easy-going Brazilians take full advantage.

Brazil's cities are each imbued with fascinating, distinct personalities, from the breathtaking beauty of fun-loving Rio de Janeiro, to the awesome financial metropolis of Sao Paulo, the world's fifth largest and fastest growing city, to Salvador, whose downtown has been designated by UNESCO as one of the most important intact

examples of colonial architecture in the world.

The Brazilians themselves are a harmonious fusion of many peoples — descendants of slaves brought from Africa, indigenous Indians, Japanese, Italians, Portuguese and other Europeans — who have created a country of many cultural profiles. But for all Brazilians, there's a certain rhythm to life, a uniquely Brazilian *joie de vivre*, that transcends the diversity and contrasts. It's no accident that samba music can be heard at all hours across this vast nation — the samba is almost synonymous with Brazil and the Brazilian passion for enjoying life's pleasures.

Rio de Janeiro

Travelers visiting Brazil are invariably swept up (or at least swept along) by this passion as they discover the intriguing cities, vibrant nightlife, marvelous food and natural splendor. And, of course, there's no place like carefree, happy-go-lucky Rio de Janeiro for getting in step with this Brazilian rhythm.

Rio is the most voluptuous city imaginable. Nestled between the sea and the mountains, its magnificent shoreline is whimsically indented with topaz-colored bays and coves, dotted with islands and projecting rock formations, and broken by such legendary beaches as Copacabana and Ipanema which evoke images of sensuality and fun the world over. Rio might well be called the capital of the pleasure-seeking world, a city that virtually never sleeps, where the samba was born, and site of the biggest, wildest Carnival of them all. Carnival officially lasts only four days in February, but like the famed samba schools which rehearse all year for Carnival, Rio thrives on a year-round Carnival rhythm.

And when in Rio do as the Cariocas (as Rio's citizens are called) do. Take a dip in the surf, bask in the year-round tropical sun, sip a

cafezinho (espresso) in a cafe by the sea enjoying the greatest sidewalk show on earth, have a late dinner of *churrasco* (tantalizing grilled meats) and then hit the dance floor.

Rio is an irresistible bonanza of cafes, restaurants, nightclubs, music shops and boutiques, live theater, museums and much more. Take a stroll along the shop-lined, pedestrians-only Rua de Ouvidor, visit little Sao Francisco church with its golden altar and the famous Botanical Gardens. Take a ferry ride over to charming Paqueta Island or a cruise on Guanabara Bay. Tijuca Forest, 20 minutes drive from downtown Rio, is a perfect place to spend an afternoon in the cooling shade of tropical plants, trees and waterfalls. On Sunday afternoons, you can join as many as 200,000 Cariocas at the most passionate event of their week, a soccer game at Maracana, the world's largest stadium.

Title Page Photos: Top, Ipanema; Bottom, Maracana Stadium.

Pages 152 and 153, Clockwise from Top Left: Brasilia; Sao Paulo; Iguassu Falls; Falls Hotel; Bahian woman displays regional cuisine; Salvador breathes the spirit of the past; Ouro Preto. Photos Courtesy: Brazilian Tourist Authority.



There are also several excursions that are musts. Every two hours, a cable car travels to the summit of Sugar Loaf, a massive, cone-shaped mountain of rock providing an overwhelming bird's-eye view of the city. Also towering over the city is Corcovado, a 3,000-foot peak offering another dramatic view and Rio's most symbolic landmark. Reached by car, cog train, or, for the ambitious, by foot, it is topped by a 100-foot statue of Christ the Redeemer welcoming all to Rio with outstretched arms.

There's a mountain of things to do and see in Rio, but just being there is what counts. Brazilians call Rio the "Marvelous City," and after experiencing Rio you learn that that it is an understatement.

Most of Brazil is still unfamiliar territory to the traveling public, but Rio's magical shores have long been a favorite international destination, including with medical professionals. Each year, a string of international medical congresses as well as joint Brazilian-American medical symposia are held here.

Sao Paulo

Another host to a number of medical meetings each year is Sao Paulo, a megalopolis of 12 million people less than 300 miles southwest of Rio. No visitor can fail to be impressed, even awed, by this city's towering skyscrapers, broad

avenues, four-lane highways and breakneck pace. Unlike Rio, booming Sao Paulo, Brazil's largest city and financial and manufacturing hub, moves not so much to the easy rhythm of a samba beat as to the pulsating hum of its industrial generators and the swirl of traffic on its jam-packed streets.

Yet brash Sao Paulo is not a city of all work and no play. Surprisingly, its night life rivals that of Rio and its fine restaurants are unmatched anywhere else in Brazil, or South America. And with a sizeable number of Japanese, Italian, German, Slavic, Arabic and Jewish citizens, you have a smorgasbord of cuisines to choose from.

Sao Paulo is a culture-conscious city, putting on superb concerts and art shows, and its 40 different museums are exceptional. Ibirapuera is one of the biggest city parks anywhere, the produce market and the Sao Paulo Zoo are the largest in the world, while there is probably no other snake farm in existence to rival Butantan, which houses more than 16,000 deadly snakes and thousands of spiders, scorpions and venomous lizards.

For shopping, there's no better place to find top quality but bargain-priced amethysts, opals, tourmalines, emeralds and diamonds. On Sundays, fairs, or open-air markets, are held throughout the city, such as



Liberdade in the Japanese community, an Antique Fair at the Museum of Art and the largest market, the so-called Hippie Fair, held in Republic Square and featuring the works of Brazilian artists and craftsmen.

Outside the city limits of Sao Paulo is a playground ready at hand: the magnificent island resort of Guarujá, with its immaculate beaches and glittering hotels, and dozens of other beach resorts; many quaint villages with colonial era mission churches and other buildings, and coffee plantations that welcome visitors.

A short hop by air from Sao Paulo is one of the world's great spectacles. The panorama of Iguassu Falls embraces a dozen Niagaras, with thundering cataracts along more than two miles of scalloped cliffs spilling foaming water from a height of over 300 feet. The spectacle can be viewed from pathways along the cliff, observation bays, boats or even from a helicopter, and automatic lifts take you down the cliffs to where the waters have made chasms in solid rock. The cascades send up a continuous blanket of mist, with a parade of rainbows visible through the transparent vapors.

Brasilia

Almost in the very center of Brazil is a city of stunning visual impact, of daring architectural expression. Futuristic Brasilia was built in just three years in the late 1950s in the wilds of Mato Grosso specifically to be the new capital of Brazil and to inspire development of the country's interior. Its buildings are of revolutionary design — many are among the most outstanding examples of modern architecture — and represent Brazil's faith in the future. From the air, Brasilia looks like a giant bird whose head is formed by the imposing government buildings of Tres Poderes Square. Brasilia is a great monument, and an impressive one to visit.

Salvador

On the north coast is the oldest city in Brazil, the port of Salvador, also known as Bahia, where the first Portuguese landed and where they brought their first black slaves. And today Salvador is more African than South American in flavor. The candomble, that strange mixture of African ritual and voodoo, is still alive here. Dressed in colorful headdresses and beads, women walk the hilly, cobblestone streets balancing baskets of fruits or vegetables on their heads. Vendors fill the streets, where it's not uncommon for locals to break into song or the *capoeira*, a hand dance dating back to the days of slavery; incense wafts from the churches, and the many great marketplaces are riots of color and explosions of noise.

Salvador breathes the spirit of the past. It was the country's first capital and where Portuguese, French and Dutch colonialists raised their finest achievements in Brazil. Apart from the many colonial homes and palaces, there are 76 rich and ornate colonial churches, some dating from the 16th century, crowned with gold, silver or stone towers.

Amazonia

Beyond futuristic architecture, legendary beaches and colonial legacies, there is another Brazil — a world so extensive it covers almost half of the country. Amazonia is larger than Western Europe with a population less than that of most major metropolitan areas, an unspoiled frontier with over 1,800 varieties of birds, 1,500 species of fish, one-fifth of the world's fresh water reserves and responsible for producing some 50 percent of the oxygen on earth.

Out in this fabulous show of nature, 1,000 miles up the Amazon River from the Atlantic Ocean, is Manaus, a city carved from the jungle at the turn of the century when it was the center of the boom in wild rubber. The rubber boom burst of course

when methods were found to cultivate this important product, and Manaus faded. But only for a time.

Today Manaus had re-emerged as a bustling free port, the only one in Brazil, where you will find a long list of shopping bargains from around the world, and, with the establishing of regularly scheduled flights to Manaus from Miami, Paris, Caracas and other major cities, as the tourist gateway to the increasingly popular Amazon. The opening up of the Amazon to travelers of every persuasion has happened viturally overnight, and visitors now find fine hotels and restaurants in the middle of this vast jungle, including South America's largest resort hotel complex, the five-star Tropical Hotel Manaus.

Without saying, no trip to Amazonia is complete without a jungle or river outing, and Manaus is the takeoff point for the many tour possibilities: daytrips for fishing or hunting, jungle hikes, riverboat trips, an evening cruise, an excursion to the meeting of the waters where the black Rio Negro meets the brown Rio Solimoes to form the Amazon, or even a nighttime crocodile hunt. Transamazonas Turismo has a jungle lodge within a five hour boat ride of Manaus, while the Tropical Hotel Manaus offers a floating cocktail party aboard a paddlewheel, highlighted by a side jaunt by canoe through false ceilinged floating jungle to a sparkling waterfall in a small clearing.

Medical groups usually meet in Rio sometimes in Sao Paulo, but often include Amazonia as well as a third destination on their itinerary in order to take in the full impact of diverse Brazil. Along with a wealth of free travel information, the Brazilian Tourism Authority can provide information on upcoming medical meetings and symposia. Call or write the Brazilian Tourism Authority, 60 E. 42nd Street, New York, NY 10165, (212) 286-9600. 