



# Brazil

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## *cultural note*

Brazilians do not consider themselves to be Hispanics, and they resent being spoken to in Spanish. Be sure all your documentation-including business cards- is printed in both Portuguese and English.

## Country Background

### History

In 1500 the first European, Pedro Alvares Cabral, reached Brazil. Brazil was colonized by Portugal and became one of its most important, and by far the largest, colonies. When Portugal was occupied by Napoleon, members of the Portuguese royal family fled to Brazil. Rio de Janeiro was the seat of the entire Portuguese Empire from 1808 to 1821, but the Portuguese emperor became increasingly unpopular. After the emperor returned to Lisbon in 1822, Brazil declared independence. The new Brazilian Empire experienced instability until its second emperor, Dom Pedro II, came of age. Ruling from 1840 to 1889, Dom Pedro II proved to be a dedicated, enlightened and modest ruler. He was also the final emperor; the military overthrew him and proclaimed Brazil a republic in 1889. Subsequently, there was a succession of presidents and military coups until the 1980s. Ex-president Fernando Collor de Mello, who was impeached, became the first directly elected president in twenty-nine years.

### Type of Government

Brazil is a multiparty federal republic. The president is both the chief of state and the head of the government. There are two legislative houses: an 81 -member Senate and a 503-member Chamber of Deputies.

### Language

Portuguese is the official language. Some segments of the population speak Spanish, Italian, or various Amerindian languages.

### Religion

There is no official religion. The predominant religion in Brazil is still Roman Catholicism, espoused by 90 percent of the population. Within that group are various Catholic sects. Some 16 percent of Brazilians practice Afro-Brazilian religions that combine tribal and Catholic beliefs (they are sometimes known as Spiritist Catholics). Evangelical Catholics make up 9 percent. Protestant sects have been making many

converts in Brazil, although they still account for less than 9 percent. Judaism, Buddhism, and other religions exist in Brazil as well.

## Demographics

Brazil's population of approximately 146 million is concentrated on its two hundred miles of east coast. Over 90 percent of the people live on 10 percent of the land, and over 15 million live in São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro. Brazilians' cultural heritage is rich and varied, with 55 percent of European descent (primarily Portuguese), 38 percent a mixture of cultures (African, German, Japanese, Amerindian, and so forth), 6 percent African, and only 1 percent Amerindian (about 150,000). Nearly 50% of the population is under twenty years of age.

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despite massive economic problems, Brazil is often regarded as a potentially rich country with a strong industrial sector, large agricultural production, and rich natural resources. An example of its potential for efficient utilization of resources is its processing of sugarcane into ethyl alcohol for fueling 1.5 million Brazilian cars. Its natural resources include gold, nickel, tin, oil, and timber taken from its tropical rain forest in the Amazon River basin—a practice now regarded as controversial and cause for international concern.

## Cultural Orientation

### Cognitive Styles: How Brazilians Organize and Process Information

Brazilians are open to discussions of most subjects, but home and family are very private matters and are not a topic for acquaintances. Brazilians tend to be more analytical and abstractive than other Latin Americans. They look at the particulars of each situation rather than looking to universal rules or laws.

### Negotiation Strategies: What Brazilians Accept as Evidence

Brazilians tend to approach problems indirectly, allowing their feelings to dictate the solution. Facts are admissible as evidence, but they may change with the needs of the negotiator, and they seldom overrule subjective feelings.

### Value System: The Basis for Behavior

There are large groups of Germans (who kept their own language) and Japanese (who learned Portuguese) who have their own value systems, which differ somewhat from the Brazilians'. The following three sections identify the Value Systems in the predominant culture—their methods of dividing right from wrong, good from evil, and so forth.

### Locus of Decision Making

The individual is responsible for his or her decisions, but family loyalty is the individual's highest duty. Nepotism is the influential family member's first obligation. The family is more important in Brazil than in any other Latin American country. It has been the single most important institution in the formation of Brazilian society.

## Sources of Anxiety Reduction

The most significant kin group is the parentela-the relatives one recognizes from both families-which may include hundreds of individuals, all related to an illustrious ancestor. This creates a social structure that gives the individual a great sense of stability. The Catholic church is an essential part of the culture and social life. Although most Brazilians are only nominal Catholics, the church gives structure to their lives.

## Issues of Equality/Inequality

The concepts of class and status are strong and may determine what job a person will have. Class is described in economic terms. There is a strong color bias. There are extreme contrasts between rich and poor, but the concept that powerful people are entitled to special privileges of office is being questioned. The macho male image prevails, and Brazilian men continue to expect women to be subordinate.

## Business Practices

### Appointments



### *punctuality*

The lack of punctuality is a fact of life in Brazil. Become accustomed to waiting for your Brazilian counterpart.

- Avoid any business transactions around Carneval, which always precedes Ash Wednesday, the beginning of Lent.
- Make appointments at least two weeks in advance. Never try to make impromptu calls at business or government offices.
- Business hours are generally advertised as 8:30 A.M. to 5:30 P.m., but decision makers usually begin work later in the morning and stay later in the evening. Try making appointments between 10:00 A.m. and noon, and 3:00 and 5:00 P.m. If your business runs into lunch, be prepared to spend at least two hours.
- Be prepared to commit long-term resources (both in time and money) toward establishing strong relationships in Brazil. Without such commitments, there is no point attempting to do business there at all.
- Brazilians conduct business through personal connections and expect longterm relationships. Before you invest in a trip, hire an appropriate Brazilian contact in your industry to help you meet the right people. Your Brazilian contact (called a *despechante* in Portuguese) will be invaluable. Contacts can be found through the U.S. Department of Commerce, the American Chamber of Commerce in Brazil, or international organizations to which you may belong.



### Negotiating

- Be patient. It will usually require several trips to get through a bargaining process.
- During negotiations, be prepared to discuss all aspects of the contract simultaneously rather than sequentially.
- Seemingly extraneous data may be reviewed and re-reviewed. Try to be as flexible as possible without making definite commitments.

- Sometimes Brazilians find U.S. aggressive business attitudes offensive-do not expect to get right to the point. Avoid confrontations, and hide any frustrations.
- If you change your negotiating team, you may undermine the entire contract. Brazilians value the person they do business with more than the firm name.
- Make sure you have a local accountant and *notario* (similar to a lawyer) or lawyer for contract issues. Brazilians may resent an outside legal presence.
- It is nonTial for a conversation to be highly animated, with many interruptions, many statements of "no" being interjected, and a great deal of physical contact.
- Brazilians are enthusiastic soccer (called *futebol*) fans, and soccer provides a lively topic for conversation.
- Avoid deep discussions of politics and any topics relating to Argentina (Brazil's traditional rival).
- Brazilians use periods to punctuate thousands, and use commas to delineate fractions.
- Be aware that Brazilians consider themselves Americans also. Do not use the phrase "in America" when referring to the United States.



### Business Entertaining

- Ask your prospect s secretary to recommend a prestigious restaurant.
- Do not expect to discuss business during a meal. You should participate in the conversation, but not try to direct it too much. Wait until coffee is served to begin any business.
- Stay at a first-class hotel, and entertain there if the hotel has an excellent restaurant.
- If you are invited to a party, it will probably be given at a private club rather than at a home. Arrive at least fifteen minutes late.
- A snack consisting of cookies, cake, and beverages is usually served at 4:00 or 5:00 P.m.
- Brazilian dinners take place any time from 7:00 to 10:00 P.M. Dinner parties can easily continue until 2:00 A.M., but it is not unheard of for dinner parties to break up as late as 7:00 A.M. the next morning!

### Time

- Most of Brazil is three hours behind Greenwich Mean Time (G.M.T. - 3), or two hours ahead of U.S. Eastern Standard Time (E.S.T. + 2). Western Brazil is four hours behind G.M.T., or one hour ahead of U.S. Eastern Standard Time.

### Protocol



### Greetings

- Greetings can be effusive, with extended handshakes common during the first encounter, progressing to embraces once a friendship has been established. Women often kiss each other on alternating cheeks: twice if they are married, three times if single. The third kiss is supposed to indicate "good luck" for finding a spouse.

- It is polite to shake hands with everyone present in a group, both upon arrival and upon departure.



### Titles / Forms of Address

- When available, titles such as *Doctor* or *Professor*, and so forth, are used to address business acquaintances, or the term *Senhor* (Mister) or *Senhora* (Mrs.) is used to precede the surname. Be aware that people may sometimes introduce themselves using their titles and their first names (e.g., *Doctor John*).



### Gestures

- Brazilians communicate in extremely close proximity. They may keep in physical contact by touching arms, hands, or shoulders during the entire conversation. They are friendly and outgoing, and physical interaction is simply an extension of the Brazilian persona--do not back away.
- The sign for "O.K." in the United States (a circle of first finger and thumb) is totally unacceptable in Brazil. It is considered vulgar.
- To signal "come here," extend your palm face down and wave your fingers toward your body.
- Snapping your fingers while whipping your hand up and down adds emphasis to a statement, or can indicate "long ago."
- To invoke good luck, place your thumb between your index and middle fingers while making a fist. This is also known as the "Fig."
- Flicking the fingertips underneath the chin indicates that you do not know the answer to a question.



### Dress

- Brazil is a tropical country, so expect the weather to be hot. Clothing made of natural fibers will be cooler and more comfortable. (The seasons in Brazil are opposite to those in North America--July is midwinter, and January is summertime.)
- Sometimes three-piece suits carry an "executive" connotation, whereas twopiece suits are associated with office workers.
- The colors of the Brazilian flag are green and yellow, so avoid wearing this combination in any fashion.
- Conservative attire for women is very important in business. Any misstep in clothing or behavior will reflect upon your firm, and may even determine whether or not anyone will do business with you. Also make sure your nails are manicured.
- Only young people wear jeans (always clean and pressed). Men should wear slacks and long sleeved shirts for casual attire.



### Gifts

- Avoid giving anything black or purple, since these are colors of mourning.

- Avoid giving knives, which symbolize cutting off a relationship, or handkerchiefs, which connote grief.
- Giving a gift is not required at the first meeting. Instead, buy lunch or dinner, and then consider the individual's tastes for future gift giving.
- Wait until after the formal meeting is over to present a gift. A relaxed social situation is the best time.
- Small electronic gadgets are appreciated-for example, calculators (scientific calculators for important clients), electronic address books and day-timers, pocket CD players, and so forth.
- Tapes and CDs of popular U.S. entertainers are expensive in Brazil and make good gifts.
- Inexpensive cameras and name-brand pens are appropriate.
- When invited to a home (an important occurrence), bring candy, champagne, or scotch. Also bring something for the children-U.S. university T-shirts, and so forth.