

Two Weeks is Too Short

Brazil is the largest country in South America and with its wide variety of attractions a great deal of time is needed to enjoy it. The country has the largest economy in South America and has many people of great wealth but also of great poverty, often living in the *favela* (slums). The natural attractions are numerous and include massive waterfalls, the Amazon Basin and beaches such as Copacabana. The diverse population is friendly and enthusiastically attacks even the most mundane activities.

Foz de Iguacu is an average city, but is important because it is close to the Iguacu Falls. The visitor's center has a wide range of information; it is also the place in which the bus to the falls departs. Near the falls, there are some very aggressive high-pitched raccoon-looking varmints that jump into garbage bins to grab anything and everything. Visitors can see the falls from a distance, in comparison to the Argentinean side in which onlookers get close so there is more of a panoramic view on the Brazilian side.

Rio's main attractions have traditionally included the beach, sun and partying. There are several great places to see the sun, which unfortunately I did not see during my rainy four day visit. The area of Rio called Ipanema is known for the most beautiful sunsets in Rio and has numerous runners along the beach and several swanky restaurants and shops. Copacabana is the most famous beach and is the area where many of the younger tourists stay.

The rocky hills and outcrops are also major attractions in Rio. A cog train ascends Corcovado to the statue of Christ the Redeemer. Along the ride up, there is feral flora and several



statues of religious people. The statue is awe-inspiring as is the accompanying view over Rio; however, if it is cloudy the trip isn't as worthwhile. There is a television at the base, where the train ride commences, which is connected to a camera feed near the statue, so one knows what they'll see when arriving at the peak. Another famous outcrop is Sugar Loaf, which is a higher tram ride and thus provides more dramatic views. An old streetcar, called *bondinho*, takes passengers up to the suburb of Santa Theresa. The open aired streetcar is often filled with people jumping on

and off and is a great way to see the city. In Santa Theresa, there are a lot of thin roads, brightly colored homes and cobblestone streets in this bohemian suburb.

There are other attractions in Rio apart from her natural beauty. The Metropolitan Cathedral has a teepee-like design, with arches and beautiful stain glass sloping towards the small circular roof. There is another old church, Convento Santo Antonio, which is located on a small hill and allows views over busy central Rio. The central park is where the liberator Dom Pedro declared independence from Portugal. Many of Rio's parks have animals such as capybaras, cats, peacocks, and unfortunately a lot of homeless people. The History Museum is an attractive building that has cave paintings, masks, and details the colonization and coffee periods.

Salvador provides a contrast to Rio because of its Afro-Caribbean feel. I immediately felt the difference when I landed in Salvador due to the music, festival flags and dancing that have the look and rhythm of Africa. Most African slaves were shipped to the Caribbean and Brazil and not directly to North America which explains Salvador's culture. The Museo Afro-Caribbean Brasileiro has wood engravings, clothing, large masks (owls, animals, monkeys, pigs), and funerary urns. It also has artwork largely from Congo and Benin while another museum is specifically dedicated to Benin art. Furthermore, there is a fort where Balboa landed and the Largo de Pelourinho, where slaves were auctioned and sold.



There are also attractions related to faith in Salvador. The San Francisco Church is ornate with gold leaf displays and pregnant angels. The church next door has several crypts, tiles, and statues of saints. There is also the Black Persons Church and many other churches that are more revival style.

Further north of Salvador is Recife, which can be split into three cities, Boa Viagem, Recife and Olinda. Boa Viagem is a safe, quiet area where I stayed, with a nice beach and shops. Recife felt more hectic and dangerous but had areas of tranquility such as the Republic Park and Ave Maria Church. Olinda is a hilly, peaceful area with red tile roofs and cobblestone streets. Most of the attractions are up the hill from the city center. There is a fascinating puppet museum, Museu de Mamulengo, which depict puppets as human or half human, half animal. The historical recreations on the top floor depict important historical events via puppets, including Europeans slaughter of locals. Casa dos Bonecos Gigantes displays the papier-mâché outfits people wear for carnival, including clowns and Shrek. Near Recife is the Oficina Ceramica Francisco Brennand; in which an artist revamped his family's property with weird sculptures of worms, snakes and very curvy humans.

Belem, located on the eastern part of the Amazon River, is larger and more prosperous than anticipated. I had imagined a frontier town but there are over one million people in the city. Apparently each state does a varying job of protecting the Amazon and this area does well in regards to jungle preservation. In the city, there is a large basilica, Republic Park that holds an ox festival and a fort located by the Amazon. The rebuilt port area is now a posh area that has restaurants and bars with river views. Next to the port is the Mercado Ver-o-Peso which has nuts, large shrimp, spices, fish and concoctions used in local religious festivals. The Parque Zoobotanico has toucans, hawks vultures, capybara, anta (looking like a mix between pig and anteater), manatees, flamingos and huge trees.

Manaus is another Amazon River city located well to the west of Belem. In the city there is a theater with a green, yellow and blue dome, representing the Brazilian flag. However, most travelers to Manaus go there to organize a trip into the Amazon jungle. Tours here are generally more expensive compared to other countries that have Amazon basin access such as Peru and Columbia. Also, there are fewer animals to see probably because this area has been a traditional spot to initiate Amazon tours and thus there is a lot of tourist traffic which must scare away the animals.

Despite the limitations, it was still worthwhile to take a jungle tour. Either three or four day trips are the most common but people with time and money can spend weeks in the jungle.



Accommodation is done via hammock, which is surprisingly comfortable. The trick to sleeping well in a hammock is lying on an angle across the hammock so that the neck and back does not get sore. There were only a few bugs at night so sleeping was not a problem. The activities included piranha fishing and a “red eye” crocodile night trip, but we did not see piranhas or crocs. We did a three hour march in the jungle as well and set up camp further inland and saw insects and birds and some small

capybaras but no other noteworthy animals.

Near Manaus is where the Amazon and Negro Rivers meet. It is a strange phenomenon to see one river so blue and clear and one so brown and muddy. There are pink dolphins in the area as well and they pop their heads up periodically on the boat ride to the convergence. Near the port is a poorer area of Belem, in which it is interesting to see how the people live including all the canoes and boats used for transport in place of cars.

An overnight bus trip north of Manaus is the state capital of Boa Vista. In the northern part of the city is Parque Anaua, which has gardens and a concert area that people frequent on weekends. The center has another small park with government buildings and a gold diggers monument. The best place in the city center is the area around the river called Taumanan, which has some small restaurants and nice views of the river.

Due to the vast possibilities in Brazil, two weeks is hardly enough. Even though I had several domestic flights to maximize my time, I felt a bit cheated with the time I had. But what I did see was fantastic. I sampled some of the big cities, the beach, the jungle, and the Hispanic and African culture of the country. But there is much more to see in Brazil.