

Introduction

For hundreds of years, Brazil has symbolised the great escape into a primordial, tropical paradise, igniting the Western imagination like no other South American country. From the mad passion of Carnival to the immensity of the dark Amazon, it is a country of mythic proportions.

Perhaps Brazil is not the paradise on earth that many travellers once imagined, but it is still a land of staggering beauty. There are stretches of unexplored rainforest, islands with pristine tropical beaches, and endless rivers. And there are the people themselves, who delight the visitor with their energy, fantasy and joy.

Roughly the size of the USA (excluding Alaska), Brazil is a vast country encompassing nearly half of South America, and bordering most of the continent's other nations – Ecuador and Chile are the exceptions. After 40 years of internal migration and population growth, Brazil is also an urban country; more than two out of every three Brazilians live in a city. São Paulo, with over 17 million inhabitants, is the world's second most populous city.

Destination Facts

Full country name: República Federativa do Brasil

Population: 175,000,000

Area: 8,514,215 sq km (3,286,487 sq mi)

Capital city: Brasília (pop 2,040,000)

People: 55% European descent, 38% mulatto, 6% African descent (according to the 1980 census). In reality, these figures are skewed by whiteness being equated with social stature in Brazil.

Language: Portuguese

Religion: 70% Roman Catholic; also a significant proportion who either belong to various cults or practice Indian animism

Government: Federal republic

President: Luiz Inácio Lula Silva

For more information, check out Lonely Planet's extensive range of [Brazil books](http://shop.lonelyplanet.com) (<http://shop.lonelyplanet.com>).



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Activities

Surfing is popular all along the coast and waves are especially good in the southern state of Santa Catarina, although there is also plenty of good surf close to Rio. Inland, the Rio Araguaia in Goiás and Tocantins is known as a fishing paradise. Hiking is great along the coast and in some of the national and state parks. **Futebol** (soccer) is the national obsession, and if you can play the game or talk about it meaningfully you'll become an instant hit with the locals.