

Brazil – people, culture, language

A guide for businesses



The country

Brazil is the fifth largest country in the world, with an area of eight and a half million square kilometers.

The culture of Brazil is the result of the melting pot of races and cultural influences that helped shape this country. Brazilian culture has been shaped not only by the Portuguese, who gave the country its religion and language, but also by the country's native Indians, the considerable African population, and other settlers from Europe, the Middle East and Asia.

Brazil is officially a Catholic country, but in practice the country's religious life incorporates Indian animism, African cults, Afro-Catholic syncretism and Kardecism, a spiritualist religion embracing Eastern mysticism, which is gaining popularity with Brazilian Whites. The Brazilian constitution guarantees absolute freedom of religion.



Fast facts

Location: South America, bordering Argentina, Bolivia, Colombia, French Guiana, Guyana, Paraguay, Peru, Suriname, Uruguay and Venezuela

Capital: Brasilia

Population: 188 million

Ethnic Groups: white 53%, “mulatto” (mixed white and black) 39%, black 6%, other (includes Japanese, Arab, Amerindian) 2%

Religion(s): Roman Catholic (nominal) 74%, Protestant 15%, Spiritualist 1%, Bantu/Voodoo 0.5%, other 2%, unspecified/none 7.5%

Currency: Real (BRL)

Dialling Code: +55

Time: -3 hours GMT

Language

Talking the talk: the positive impression you will make by speaking a few basic Portuguese phrases cannot be overestimated. Below are some commonly-used phrases – if you want to learn more, why not download our **FREE Talk the Talk™ podcast** with essential words and phrases in Portuguese? Go to www.rlnpodcast.com. Alternatively, you can search for quality-assured trainers and courses at www.blis.org.uk.

Did you know...?

- That Brazil got its name from the nut, not the other way around?
- That Brazilians do not consider themselves Hispanic in any way? They will resent being spoken to in Spanish.
- That Brazilians love to talk football. Apart from the national team most will have an opinion on international football or one of the national sides such as the Corinthians, Santos, Sao Paolo and Flamengo.
- That Brazilians leave little space when speaking to others? They are a very “touchy-feely” people and may often hold arms, touch hands or pat shoulders.
- That the “OK” sign (circle made with first finger and thumb) is considered to be rude?
- That to invoke good luck you place your thumb between the index finger and middle fingers while making a fist? It is known as “the fig”.

English	Portuguese	Pronunciation
Hello	Olá	<i>o-laa</i>
Good Day	Bom dia	bong <i>dee-aa</i>
Good Evening	Boa noite	<i>bo-aa noy-te</i>
Goodbye	Tchau	chow
How are you?	Como vai?	<i>Ko-mo vai</i>
Fine, and you?	Bem, e você?	Beng e vo-se
Pleased to meet you	Prazer em conhecê-lo (m) Prazer em conhecê-la (f)	praa <i>zerr</i> eng no nye se lo praa <i>zerr</i> eng ko nye se laa
Yes	Sim	seem
No	Não	nowng
Please	Por favor	por faa-vorr
Thank you	Obrigado (m) Obrigada (f)	o-bree-gaa-do o-bree-gaa-daa

The importance of relationships

- Brazilians want to know who they are doing business with before they put their trust, money, time or effort into anything.
- Although initial feelers can be put out using emails or phone calls, ultimately a face-to-face meeting with potential partners in Brazil is crucial. It is no underestimation to say that the individual they deal with is more important than the company. Try and always use the same people during any meetings or negotiations.
- Investing time in building a good relationship is critical. Simply chatting about personal issues goes a long way in achieving this.
- It is important to protect the relationship at all costs; this means protecting others' honour and face by avoiding criticism or drawing attention to faults in public.

Communication styles

- Compared to their neighbours Brazilians communicate with a slightly more blunt cultural style. However, this is often determined by the level of a relationship, i.e. the warmer it is, the blunter it gets.
- They also place a lot of emphasis on non-verbal gestures to enhance their point.
- Communication is generally very polite however their conversations can be held at break-neck speed, with plenty of animations, frequent interruptions and lots of physical contact.
- Brazilians like depth, background and context so if you are more comfortable with direct, brief communication style, you would be well served to consider offering more information than you normally would.



Meeting and greeting

- Shake hands at the start and end of a business meeting. Brazilian handshakes can be prolonged. A woman should extend her hand first.
- Maintain good eye contact.
- Once a relationship warms up, expect a kiss on the cheek.
- Move to first names upon invitation only.
- When titles are used it is with the first name not surname.
- Business cards are exchanged during introductions with everyone at a meeting. It is advisable, although not required, to have the other side of your business card translated into Portuguese.

Business negotiations

- In Sao Paulo and Brasilia punctuality is important. In Rio de Janeiro and other cities it is acceptable to arrive a few minutes late for a meeting, although one should always strive to be on time.
- You may be kept waiting; if so do not appear impatient. Brazilians see time as something outside their control and the demands of relationships take precedence over adhering to any schedule.
- Meetings are generally rather informal and should always start with some small-talk. Remember to keep building that relationship on a personal level. Wait for the Brazilian party to bring matters back to business. Expect to be interrupted while you are speaking or making a presentation.
- Avoid confrontations, public criticism or overtly negative responses. Diplomacy is key.
- Brazilians take time when negotiating. Do not rush them and do not expect things to happen overnight.
- Brazilians are thorough and spend time reviewing information. Providing well presented and detailed information will help speed this up.
- Brazilian business is hierarchical. Decisions are made by the highest-ranking person so more often than not the people you negotiate with will not have decision-making authority.
- It is advisable to hire an interpreter if your Portuguese is not fluent.
- Use local lawyers and accountants for negotiations: Brazilians resent an outside legal presence.
- Brazilians negotiate with people not companies. Do not change your negotiating team or you may have to start over from the beginning.

Further resources

UK Trade & Investment: Support for those wanting to do business in/with Brazil. www.uktradeinvest.gov.uk
Brazilian Chamber of Commerce: Promoting trade between the UK and Brazil. www.brazilianchamber.org.uk/
Foreign & Commonwealth Office: Up to date travel advice for Brazil. <http://www.fco.gov.uk>
The Economist: Thorough economic, financial and political information. <http://www.economist.com/countries/Brazil/>
The BBC: Country Profile on Brazil. http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/americas/country_profiles/1227110.stm
Podcast: RLN East-Midlands Podcast on Doing Business in Brazil. www.rlnpodcast.com

RLN East Midlands: promoting a greater national capability in language and cultural skills for business and employment.
Tel: 0115 9888478
Fax: 0115 8533666
www.rln-eastmidlands.com

Please note: While every effort is made to ensure accuracy, the Regional Language Network does not take responsibility for the content of this briefing. Opinions expressed are not necessarily those of the Regional Language Network or of CILT, the National Centre for Languages.