

Travel Outlook

South America offers interesting destinations

Hands up, any student who can name the three largest countries of South America.

If you said Brazil, Argentina and Peru, go to the head of the class.

Canadians aren't noted for their knowledge of South America - the diversity of its countries, cultures, political systems and so on. Naturally enough, South Americans resent being thrown together, figuratively, into a giant melting pot.

Brazil occupies half of the total area of South America. It's the world's fifth largest country in terms of area, and eighth in population (more than 120 million).

Rio de Janeiro is a 13-hour flight from Toronto on Canadian Airlines International. Daytime temperatures there in summer (Canada's winter) tend to go as high as 35C, and even business people dress for the weather - that is, no ties.

In Sao Paulo, on the other hand, business attire is customary. It is the main industrial and manufacturing centre (with a population of 13 million vs. Rio's five million), and the weather is more moderate.

Capital is Brasilia, a planned city founded in 1960 and famous for its architectural wonders.

BEFORE YOU GO

English isn't spoken widely in Brazil, nor in most other South American countries.

Before flying down to Rio, buy a Portuguese-language cassette and try to learn a few everyday words, phrases and figures. If you know some Spanish, keep it to yourself -

many Brazilians resent hearing it.

While a "walkable" cassette player probably is acceptable, it's prudent to leave behind most electronic products, since customs officers can be zealous about prohibiting the entry of products that are considered to be competitive with Brazil's own.

Also best left safely at home are valuable items such as jewelry and your watch; wear a cheap watch instead, in case you are unlucky enough to encounter a thief. Use a moneybelt for your walking-around money and take advantage of your hotel's safe to protect the bulk of your cash as well as credit cards, tickets, passports, etc.

GETTING AROUND

Brazil is one of those countries in which North American visitors should set aside their rugged independence and allow themselves to be guided by local people.

Large travel agencies in major Brazilian cities can arrange for the services of a guide-chauffeur with car, the cost of which is likely to be offset by savings in time that might otherwise be wasted - in Sao



Vince Egan
Travel

Paulo's mammoth traffic jams, for instance. Besides, Brazilians are reputed to be among the world's most unpredictable drivers.

A good guide would probably help you still further by steering you to the best place to exchange dollars for cruzados. Rates on the so-called black market can be as much as 35 per cent higher than the official exchange rate for cash.

Next to cash, the best form of exchange is travellers cheques, which also bring more cruzados than the official rate. Credit cards bring no premium.

When taking a taxi in Rio, it's essential to reach an agreement on the fare beforehand - so you had better know a bit of Portuguese. Most cabs in Sao Paulo have meters (unlike Rio's) but the metered fare has to be increased in accordance with a rate chart displayed in the cab.

A service charge is added to restaurant bills, but patrons are expected to tip an additional 10 per cent.

GAUCHO COUNTRY

Argentina's land mass is about one-third the size of Brazil's and its population of an estimated 28 million is less than a quarter size of its neighbor's.

Buenos Aires, the capital, has a European flavor and a moderate climate throughout the year - with no rainy season. It is noted for its luxury hotels and outstanding restaurants that serve both international cuisine and local.

Steaks are served everywhere in Argentina, but another local favorite is the Argentinian empanada, a savory meat pie. The country is also noted for its wines

such as Valmont, Chateau Vieux. Tipping is expected.

Shopping is high on the must-do list of many visitors. Rio's main shopping thoroughfare is Calle Florida, where traffic is banned.

Argentina's position as a cattle-raising country is reflected in the array of merchandise found in the luxury shops - leather and suede and high-quality shoes, as well as furs and jewelry.

Peru, South America's third largest country, is divided by the Andes into three well defined regions - the arid coastal strip, the Sierra (or highlands) and the Amazon jungle.

Lima, at sea level, is a metropolis of some six-million people, or one-third of the country's entire population. Average temperatures in the capital range from 13C in August to 28C in February.

While Lima seldom sees rain, other areas of the country experience a rainy season from December to February. And in the Iquitos (Amazon jungle), there are about 200 days with rain each year.

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