

“ISSI Conference in Rio” - Thoughts from an ISSI member who has visited Rio three times for vacation, and who is delighted to have another chance to visit Rio.

I, an American, and my wife, an Italian, regard Rio as clearly the best vacation destination that we know of. There are plenty of places that we haven't visited, but we have visited more than 80 countries (the advantage of being in a very international field). Our favorite vacation destination of them all is Rio. Why?

- Spectacular scenery. Probably the most dramatic sitting of any city in the world.
- Wonderful food. Better than anything that I know of in Europe (and I have been to all of the E.U. states except one, and most of the non-E.U. European countries). (see below)
- Great museums.
- Great Music - the Samba Schools; samba, bossa nova, choro, pagoda, tropicalia, forro, ... and the list goes on.
- Friendly self confident people (see below)

Do you need to worry about crime?

Don't be put off by the worrywarts. Yes, there is some crime, but there is in all large cities. Just take normal good sense precautions. Don't go into squalid areas. Read the advice in your guide books. Make sure you keep money, credit cards, etc. in a place on your body that is hard to get to – get a pouch that fits between you and your belt for example. Don't put valuable stuff in your pants pockets. (Particularly not in your rear pants pocket). Follow the same advice you used in Madrid or Chicago.

Food: Two things in particular stand out

Fruits. Probably the greatest variety found anywhere in the world. There are wonderful Juice bars, serving juices and Batidas (aka Liquados, Smoothies). My wife and I counted 45 different fruits at one such juice bar.

Meat. Excellent meat, on a par with Argentina or the U.S. Churrascarias are restaurants specializing in meats (usually also with excellent salad bars). The meat is typically barbecued and brought to the table on skewers and you point to the piece that you want cut off for you. Usually there are beer mat size tags that you set red side up when you want to slow down a bit or just chat, and set green side up when you are ready to receive more.

Entertainment

Hang Gliding: Just behind Sao Conrado beach (only a couple of miles past Ipanema beach) is Pedra Bonita (100+ meters taller than Pao de Acucar, the Sugarloaf,), the site of great hang gliding. You don't need experience; you go on a two person glider with an experienced pilot, and land on the beach. The view and the experience, I did it a few years ago at age 62, are spectacular. The price is reasonable, about \$100, including pick up and return to your hotel.”

People

Brazil is an interesting contrast to Spanish speaking Latin America. Spain pursued a policy that its colonial officials must be Spanish born. This was to

guarantee that officials felt loyal to Spain, rather than to Mexico or Chile for example. The result was, and to a surprising degree still is, something of an inferiority complex about being new world and not Spanish, often evidenced by a reluctance to admit to any, even partial, ethnicity other than Spanish. (When I went to school, and the Catholic Church still prescribed fish on Friday, my Cuban and Venezuelan classmates would insist that they could eat meat on Friday because they were Spanish.)

Brazilians by contrast (rather as Americans thought of themselves as Englishman and took up arms, not to secure independence, that was an accidental consequence of ill-advised British policy, but to maintain the rights they believed themselves to already have as Englishman) never thought of themselves as second class citizens to Europeans. Indeed, after the Portuguese government, some 15,000 strong, fled Napoleon, courtesy of the British navy, they quickly discovered that Rio was more attractive than Lisbon, and even after Napoleon was incarcerated, they stayed in Rio and ruled Portugal from Brazil. When the elderly king Dom Joao reluctantly returned to Portugal to put down unrest, he declared his son Dom Pedro the dual monarch for Brazil. Soon the son reasoned that if Portugal had a king, then Brazil, far larger and more important, deserved something more; Brazil deserved an emperor. He therefore declared himself Emperor, along with declaring independence for Brazil.

The result is that Brazilians enjoys a very comfortable and welcoming self-confidence that is unique in South America.

Best, Mike
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