Culture Box

BRAZIL

Center for Latin American Studies

VANDERBILT UNIVERSITY
INTRODUCTION

Brazil, officially the Federative Republic of Brazil (Portuguese: República Federativa do Brasil), is the largest country in both South & and Latin America, with over 200 million people living in an area that is bigger than the contingent U.S. While Brazil was inhabited by various native tribes at the time of its so-called “discovery by the Portuguese, when Portuguese explorer Pedro Alvarez Cabral landed there in 1500, he claimed the territory for Portugal. On September 7, 1822, the country declared its independence from Portugal.

Some of the largest cities in Brazil include Sao Paolo, Rio de Janeiro, Salvador, and Brasilia. Sao Paolo is the largest with nearly 12 million people, and serves as the economic powerhouse of Brazil. Rio de Janeiro, one of the best known cities, is also considered the “heart” of the country. Brasilia is the capital of Brazil, while Salvador is considered its “soul.”

Brazil is a country rich in culture, and this culture box aims to offer resources for understanding both Brazil’s history and present.
THIS BOX INCLUDES:

1. Portuguese - English Dictionary
2. Flag
3. Currency
4. Bahia doll - small
5. Toucan magnet
6. Decorative bowl
7. Capoeira
8. Map
9. Typical Brazilian Music CD
10. Pernambuco book and CD
11. Japanese Tea Towel
12. Acai beads
13. Portuguese booklets
14. Bahian Scene Depicted on Textile
15. Brazilian Wish Bracelet
The item is a Portuguese to English dictionary. The official language of Brazil is Portuguese. Yet, Portuguese is not the only language spoken in Brazil. More than 150 languages and dialects are spoken by the Indigenous peoples in Brazil today. Before the arrival of the Portuguese, however, that number was probably close to 1,000. Due to the geographic proximity to Spanish speaking countries, many can understand Spanish, although English is more prominent than Spanish as a second language.
The item is a large Brazilian flag. This design was started in 1889 with 21 stars, and this 27 star version was adopted in 1992. The stars in the celestial sphere at the center represent the states of the country, and the white banner across the middle which reads “Ordem E Progreso,” which means “Order and Progress.” The constellations being depicted include: Procyon Canis Major, Canopus, Spica, Hydra, Crux Australis, Sigma Octantis, Triangulum Australe, and Scorpius.

The yellow represents the wealth of the country, in particular the Brazilian soil and the country’s gold reserve. The green stands for the extensive nature, fauna, and flora that Brazil is home to, especially the Amazon rainforest and the Pantanal. During the Brazilian Empire, Brazil had a different flag and the colors had different meanings. The blue and white of the past flag represented the Virgin Mary, highlighting the country’s deep roots in the Catholic religion.
CURRENCY

DESCRIPTION

The Brazilian centavos are the sub-units of the Brazilian real (reais, pl.). In Portuguese, the real translates as both real and royal. Modern Reais were adopted in 1994. Its sign is R$. If you are traveling to Brazil, you should know what the currency is, and also how it compares to the U.S. dollar. Instead of using a decimal point for their decimal separator, Brazilians use a comma. For example, one thousand dollars and twenty cents in the U.S. is written as "$1,000.20." In Brazil, one thousand reals is "R$ 1.000,20." Essentially, periods and commas are opposite in Brazil.

Now, in the Brazil currency, the coins are available in 5, 10, 25, and 50 centavos (percents of one real) and 1 real coin. Each coin has the constellation Crux, also known as the Southern Cross, printed on it. The Brazilian word for the Cruz is cruzeiro.
BAHIA DOLL

DESCRIPTION

This miniature Bahia doll models the types of blouses, skirts, and head wraps worn by women in the Bahia state during past centuries. The style of dress is a blend of ancient European Baroque and Afro-Islamic roots. They also wear a camino, which is a white, long, voluminous skirt and a bodice that gathers at the waist and typically hangs over the top of the skirt. While this type of dress may not be worn today, it may be found more likely in ceremonial and folk holidays or events. These are popular tourist items from Bahia.
TOUCAN MAGNET

DESCRIPTION
A colorfully painted and crafted wooden toucan (tucano) with a magnet attached to the back. The name “toucan” is derived from the Brazilian term for the bird (Tucano). The red-breasted toucan is the most common in Brazil.

The Toco Toucan ‘Ramphastos toco’ is the most well-known and largest member of the toucan family and is commonly found in zoos. Toco Toucans live in South American rainforests and Cerrado savannah. They are native to: Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Guyana, Paraguay, Peru and Suriname. There are 37 species of Toco Toucans ranging from Mexico to Amazonia. There are more than 30 species worldwide.
DESCRIPTION

Made from a gourd vegetable, this beautifully decorated item has been painted brown with a floral design inside that has been sealed to protect the paint.

Though this particular bowl was unlikely used for more than decoration, the soup tacacá, from Belém, is always eaten out of a gourd, as part of the tradition. The broth that is at the center of tacacá is seasoned with tucupi (the liquid that results from squeezing grated manioc root), thickened with manioc starch, also known as tapioca. The broth is enlivened with with a dash of hot chili peppers preserved in tucupi. Cooked in the broth are leaves of the anesthetic jambu, which deadens the mouth and makes the tongue tingle, and dried shrimp.
CAPOEIRA

DESCRIPTION

This is a miniature instrument of the dance capoeira [kæ-pu-ê-ra] called the berimbau [bē-reem-baw]. Capoeira was created partially as a martial art and partially as a dance with roots in cultural traditions in Angola and the Congo in Africa. The abilities of its practitioners may have been seen as a way to defend oneself against slave catchers in 16th or 17th century Brazil. Its parts include the long bowed verga, the steel string, or arame, and the hollowed-out gourd at its base, the cabaca. The cabaca takes the sound of the arame and verga and amplifies it. The accompanying stick and plate represent a baqueta and a dobrão, respectively, and are used to resonate the whole instrument.
This tourist pamphlet gives a great example of the type of information one might expect or want as they go to a Brazilian city for the first time. The Recife prefecture is the capital city of the Pernambuco state in the country, and it offers a wide variety of attractions, shopping, lodging, eating, and more. The pamphlet is also helpful for comparing English to Brazilian Portuguese.

There are several important tourist destinations in Brazil, with the most prominent being “Christ the Redeemer” in Rio de Janeiro. The Christ the Redeemer statue stands 39.6 meters (130 ft) tall, including its 9.5 meters (31 ft) pedestal and has become an icon of Rio and Brazil.

Another popular - and breathtaking - spot in Brazil is the Iguaçu Falls is situated on the border between Brazil and Argentina. The waterfall system consists of 275 falls along the Iguazu River, and is one of the most visited sites in the country.

This pamphlet is just one of the many documents that was made for the booming tourist industry that continues to grow in Brazil!
TYPICAL BRAZILIAN MUSIC CD

DESCRIPTION
Founded as an African block of the carnival in Salvador in 1979, Olodum is currently a cultural group considered a non-governmental organization. After their first run in 1980’s carnival, the band acquired almost two thousand associates and began to talk about historic themes about African and Brazilian culture.

The music of Brazil is one of the more iconic parts of its rich history. Some musical styles include: samba, axe, MPB, choro, forro, frevo, Bossa nova, brega, afoxe, and maracatu, to name a few. Brazilian music is also noticeable for its use of distinctly Brazilian instruments, such as the Ganza, Alfaia, Atabaque, and Pandeiro. Several of these instruments are used throughout the CD, and were prominently featured in Oludum’s music videos.

They also participated in the Michael Jackson song, “They Don’t Really Care About Us.” Jackson also collaborated with the 200 members of the cultural group Olodum, who played music in the video. The media interest surrounding the music video exposed Olodum to 140 countries around the world. It brought them worldwide fame and increased their credibility in Brazil.
PERNAMBUCO BOOK AND CD

DESCRIPTION

This magazine highlights a number of social and historical destinations and commercial interests for consumers or residents in Recife, Pernambuco and Pernambuco as a state of Brazil in general. The CD that comes with it is an 11-minute video with mixed Portuguese and English speaking samples about the cultural areas and history of Pernambuco.
JAPANESE TEA TOWEL

DESCRIPTION

There are more people of Japanese descent in Brazil than anywhere in the world outside of Japan itself. This tea towel, purchased in a market in Brazil, shows how Japanese culture has also been merged into Brazilian culture.

The end of feudalism in Japan generated great poverty in the rural population, so many Japanese began to emigrate in search of better living conditions. By the 1930s, Japanese industrialization had significantly boosted the population. However, prospects for Japanese people to migrate to other countries were limited. The US had banned non-white immigration from some parts of the world on the basis that they would not integrate into society; this Exclusion Clause, of the 1924 Immigration Act, specifically targeted the Japanese.

Despite initial hardship that the Japanese faced, they have become a significant part of Brazilian history and society. They also started commercial cultivation of pepper, setting Brazil on the road of becoming the world's fourth largest producer of the spice according to The International Pepper Community, an inter-governmental organization of pepper producing countries. Today, those of Japanese descent in Brazil continue to make contributions to Brazilian society, culture, and innovations.
Acai Berry Necklace

DESCRIPTION

Acai is a Brazilian fruit which is a type of berry that grows on the açai palm trees and is native to the Amazon region. Acai berries are purplish-black berries that are similar in appearance but larger than a blueberry. The fruit has been eaten by natives of the Amazon for generations.

Now you can find juices and ice cream of acai everywhere in Brazil and steadily moving into other countries.

Acai is rich in a number of vitamins and athletes have found it a good and quick source of energy and also because of the many health benefits, açai is used in juices, smoothies, drinks, powders, supplements, energy drinks, and in weight loss products.
EDUCATIONAL BOOKLETS

DESCRIPTION

Cordel literature (from the Portuguese term, literatura de cordel, literally “string literature”) are popular and inexpensively printed booklets or pamphlets containing folk novels, poems and songs. They are produced and sold in street markets and by street vendors in Brazil, principally in the Northeast. They are so named because they are hung from strings to display them to potential customers.
BAHIAN SCENE DEPICTED ON TEXTILE

DESCRIPTION

The scene depicted on this colorful textile is typical of the Bahia region of Brazil, which is particularly known as the “African capital of Brazil.” In fact, home to the coastal city of Salvador, the first ever capital of Brazil, Bahia is filled with history, atmosphere, and culture that has led many to claim that they very soul of Brazil resides in this area.

Following its “discovery”, Salvador de Bahia soon became the site of the first slave market in the New World, leading to a unique blending of European, African and Amerindian cultures. African slaves were used heavily on the region’s sugar plantations, which led to the area becoming the center of sugar cultivation and the slave trade between the 16th and 18th centuries. Strong links to Western Africa are evident throughout Bahia, as is indicated in the pictures in the textile.

Looking closely at the textile, you may notice fish, coffee beans, and people of the region completing typical agricultural tasks. Though the industrial sector comprises the most significant portion of the GDP, the agricultural sector follows closely behind. Bahia produces and exports more cacao than any other state in Brazil. Today, Bahia continues to play an important role in the economy and spirit of the region.
BRAZILIAN WISH BRACELET

DESCRIPTION

Bahia Bands have been around for a very long time. Fitas, or Bonfim Ribbons, as they were originally called, were silk and the writings on them were done by hand with ink or silver. They were worn on the neck as a necklace, upon which were hung medallions and holy images.

Today, ribbons are still worn but the tradition of tying the Bahia Bands on the church gates and wearing them for luck has lived on! To practice this tradition, wrap the wish ribbon around the wrist, and make 3 knots, making a wish for each of the 3 knots tied. Once the Brazilian Wish Bracelet falls off the wrist on its own, it is believed that the 3 wishes will come true.

Worn by generations, Bahia ribbons are a symbol of faith and good luck! The Bahia Bands are more than just a fashion accessory; they are a good luck charm (this is similar to the decenarios bracelet). The writing on the ribbon says “Lembrança do Senhor do Bonfim da Bahia. They come from Nosso Senhor do Bonfim, Salvador Bahia’s most important house of worship. Built in the 18th century, Senhor do Bonfim became a place of convergence for the African and Catholic faiths, and inevitable
intersection and intertwining of religious beliefs based on the culturally mixed of the state of Bahia.