

Michael Palin's Brazil

In a quarter of a century of globe-trotting, Michael Palin had barely touched Brazil. He has put this right with a new TV series about the country.

For a long time I thought of Brazil as a state of mind. A fantasy of sun, sea and samba! I partly blame Terry Gilliam, for in 'Brazil', his 1985 film; he uses the lilting samba beat of their native song to accompany the final crushing of his hero by the mad, dysfunctional world around him. The song represents pure unproductive pleasure - Brazil as the ultimate distracting image.

The Latin American mind-set is one with which we Brits can't easily identify. China we can relate to because it's single-minded and industrious; India and the sub-continent is crazy and colourful and quite a bit English. Russia is dark and impenetrable but good at putting up with things, which we admire. The Brazilians on the other hand don't have to put up with anything. They have everything. Spicy seafood stews, fruits of the forest and luscious cocktails. Even as we read about drug gangs and watch violent films such as 'City of God', we give Brazil the benefit of the doubt. There is bound to be some bad 'uns in a country that plays such beautiful football!

So, for me, Brazil's mystique grew, hot and steamy and lush with the jungles that cover most of the country. Even its location seemed a touch other-worldly; most of it in the southern hemisphere and not exactly on the way to anywhere, except possibly Peru or Paraguay. My early attempts to learn more about it only strengthened the mythology. Brazil's northern border was the setting of Conan Doyle's 'Lost World'. The explorer Colonel Percy Fawcett who went deep into the rainforest to discover El Dorado, was never seen again. Peter Fleming, who went to find him, got lost too and just about made it out of the jungle alive.

...The fifth-biggest country in the world by land area, Brazil is roughly 3,000 miles from north to south and from east to west. Despite its extent, most of its 205 million people live in towns and cities on or within 100 miles of the coast. The vast and fertile interior comprises millions of hectares of farming land as well as the biggest rainforest and the biggest river system in the world – the Amazon pours into the Atlantic at the rate of 57 million gallons a second. To travel there means to somehow deal with this imbalance between the thin sliver of human Brazil and the gigantic natural splendours surrounding it.

I can say now that Brazil is more than just a state of mind and yet, after a year steeped in the country, I still haven't completely figured it out. In many ways the Brazilian way of life seems to live up to all the clichés. It is seductive and easy-going. The sun shines on mile upon mile of sparkling clean ocean-washed beaches. Delicious fruits grow in Eden-like profusion. Brazilians of every age and shape exercise in tiny slips of clothing, caressed by sea breezes. Music and dancing is hard-wired into the system. Drinking seems to make them happy without tipping them over into aggression. They are tolerant and informal, and live very much in the present. Socrates – the footballer, not the philosopher – described his fellow countrymen as "a shrewd, vain, happy people".

Yet Brazil is perceived by many outsiders as a dangerous place, where crime and corruption are high and there is every chance of being mugged as you walk the streets. These fears seem to be based on the image of the overpopulated favelas (Brazilian slum), some of which do have a fearsome reputation. Here, favelas accumulate on the hillsides overlooking Copacabana and Ipanema beaches, frightening people who live down below in some of the most expensive real estate in the country. Vik Muniz, one of Brazil's most celebrated artists, described it to me as "Saint-Tropez surrounded by Mogadishu". However on my visit, I didn't get that 'dangerous' feel. For me it really was paradise on earth and I cannot wait to return!

Read again the first part of **source Ac**, lines **X to X**.

Choose **four** statements below which are TRUE.

- Shade the boxes of the ones that you think are true
- Choose a maximum of four statements.

A. Latin American countries are very dangerous place to visit.

B. Brazil is one of the biggest countries on the planet.

C. There are over 200 million Brazilian citizens.

D. The writer believes that British people cannot relate to Brazilians.

E. Many people go missing in the Brazilian rainforest.

F. Palin believes Brazilian football teams are extremely good.

G. The Amazon river pours into the Pacific Ocean at a rapid pace.

H. Slater argued with his mother about her cooking skills.