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São Paulo, August 17, 2007

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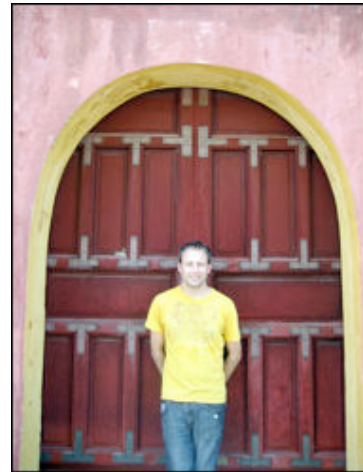
Brazil Through Foreign Eyes

August 17, 2007

Meet Kevin Raub, from the USA, who regularly travels to Brazil and the rest of the world. Read the following interview where he tells us about some of his most memorable experiences from Brazil and gives some useful advice to newcomers.

1. Tell us a little about yourself, where are you from, what do you do etc.?

I'm an American currently dividing my time between Los Angeles and Fernando de Noronha, Brazil, where my new wife runs an ecotourism agency. I'm originally from Atlanta and have spent the last 10 years scouring the globe as a travel and entertainment journalist for publications like Travel+Leisure, Town & Country, American Way, New York Post, Stuff, FHM, Organic Spa, and Lonely Planet. I'm just back from three months in Brazil's Central West (Brasilia, Goias, Mato Grosso and Mato Grosso do Sul) for the next edition of Lonely Planet's Brazil guide, due out in January, 2008.



2. When did you arrive in Brazil and what brought you here?

Brazil was a long time dream vacation to me, probably stemming from watching Blame It on Rio late at night on HBO as a child. I first went for holidays during Reveillon in 2001. My first experience was landing in Rio cashless and quickly learning that foreign ATM cards don't work so well, even at American banks like Bank Boston. Exasperated and running out of options, a Carioca in line behind me at what was probably my 6th bank noticed my Citibank card and told me in very good English that he could take me to the Citibank, located downtown. Of course, the first thoughts running through mine and my friend's mind was that he would rob us, but we went anyway. It turned out to be the best travel decision I ever made as he spent a whole week showing us sides of Rio we would have never otherwise seen. I have loved Brazil and the Brazilian people ever since.

3. What were your first impressions of Brazil?

My first impressions were probably the usual: How beautiful the people were, how laidback and relaxed everyone seemed to be, how hospitable everyone we met was, and how a few caipirinhas can sneak up on you in a hurry. And the first time you see Rio from Corcovado is something you can never forget. I have traveled all over the world and it is still my favorite height attraction anywhere.

4. What do you miss most about home?

When I'm in Brazil, the only thing I really miss is the general smoothness in which everything operates. In Brazil, it seems everything that can go wrong, inevitably will whereas in the States, it's more the opposite, things generally work as they are supposed to and it's an exception when they don't. But it's nice to be away from news dominated by suicide bombings and what brand of toilet paper Paris Hilton used today.

5. What has been your most frustrating experience in Brazil?

There's no one specific experience but in general, dealing with the bureaucracy in Brazil is endlessly tiring for an American. I feel like this part of Brazil can be summed up as follows: Brazil spends entirely too much time and effort creating unnecessary jobs for otherwise unemployable people, then forces the educated population to need those people to get whatever they need done, totally screwing up their day in the process. Sometimes you just have to take a deep breath and walk away.

6. What has been your most memorable experience in Brazil (specific incident)?

There are so many. Watching the sunset with my wife in Jericoacoara, seeing the skyline for the first time from the top of Skye bar in Sao Paulo, every time I eat pizza, looking out at the unbelievable landscapes of Chapada dos Guimaraes, etc. But the one biggest memory I have is probably the first time I went to see a soccer game in São Paulo: Santos vs. Corinthians. Pure insanity!

7. What do you most like about Brazil (in general)?

I think Brazil's two biggest assets are its people and its landscapes. The people are beautiful, so full of life and passion. A Brazilian can turn brushing their teeth into a moment of passionate bliss. And the landscapes: The beaches, notably in Noronha and in the areas surrounding Paraty, are greatest in the world (and I have been nearly everywhere, so I can say that with some degree of credibility). The food ain't too shabby, either.

8. What is your favorite restaurant/place to hang out here?

I would say my favorite restaurant is Pizzeria Braz in Moema. For me, it's always a beeline straight there from GRU. There is simply no pizza like it in the world. Period. I love the whole atmosphere of the pizzeria, the chopp, the pao de linguica, the service, everything. It's funny to me because I meet people all the time who visit São Paulo and know nothing of the pizza. It's the world's best kept culinary secret. My favorite place to hang out is Oscar Freire - I just love all the deals I can snag with the favorable exchange rate, though that is becoming a thing of the past.

9. Do you have any funny stories/incidents to tell about your time in Brazil?

As a matter of fact I do! This should probably be a whole article for Gringoes.com, but here goes anyway. When I was first getting to know my wife, we went for a moqueca in Noronha. She went to university in the States so she has a handle on both cultures. Anyway, we had some food left over and she asked me, "Do you want to get the rest to go?" I didn't really care either way, but I said yes anyway. So she then turns to the waiter in Portuguese (thinking I wouldn't understand - this was early on) and tells him specifically that I want the food to go, clearly in such a way as to distance herself from the whole doggie bag thing. So I ask her why she did that and she says because it's considered cheap to ask for food to go in Brazil but she knows that Americans do it all the time. So of course, I didn't want to be the one who appeared cheap and I made the mistake of telling her I didn't really care either way and that I wasn't going to eat it, anyway. Long story short, she flipped out that I put her through that embarrassment for food I wasn't even going to eat, and we ended up in the worst fight in our history because of it - all because of a culture clash about getting food to go.

10. What difference between your homeland and Brazil do you find most striking?

There are many, good and bad. In addition to the bureaucracy and lack of general efficiency I mentioned before, the average Brazilian in the street doesn't seem to have the same respect for

animals that we do, which I find sad. Brazilians are also the worst at admitting guilt and taking responsibility for their own actions, even when it's quite clear they made a mistake. "Nao fui eu" is so totally true. On the other hand, the Brazilian lust, whether it's bit about sex, soccer, food - whatever - is pretty unparalleled in my travels. Another big difference is this Brazilian habit of making out in public but then going their separate ways at the end of the night. In the US, it's the opposite. Almost nobody would ever make out in public, but they'll go home with you in a heartbeat. And when I was single, I love the whole napkin thing in São Paulo. It's very 6th grade, but I think it takes a lot of the pressure off about meeting people and making first moves. It's very sweet in a fun and playful way.

11. How is your Portuguese coming along? What words do you find most difficult to pronounce/remember or are there any words that you regularly confuse?

It's finally starting to approach decency. This past trip through the Central West forced me to learn more as my wife wasn't there to bail me out! But I have a background in Spanish and Italian and languages generally come pretty easy to me. The word I mix up the most is mas (the Portuguese word for 'but') and pero, the Spanish word for the same. It's even more confusing since 'mas' actually means something else in Spanish. Also, I find that the fact that there are two ways to say the number 'two,' duas and dois, totally irritating!

12. What advice do you have for newcomers to Brazil?

Don't be a stereotypical traveler (for Americans that means loud, demanding, and running around wondering why nobody speaks English). Learn the basics in Portuguese: *Obrigado, Por Favor*, etc. and get to know some Brazilians. They are one of the warmest people you will ever encounter once they let you in.

13. What are some things that you would recommend for a visitor to do in São Paulo (or anywhere else in Brazil)?

As I said before, pizza! That's No. 1. Also, sipping on a caipirinha da fruta at Hotel Unique's rooftop Skye bar is truly mesmerizing. You have just simply never seen that many skyscrapers in your life. Take a stroll through the Mercado Municipal. Fantastic! But the single best piece of SP advice is to make a friend. The city is gigantic, totally un-tourist friendly, and absolutely overwhelming in every way. But if you have a local to show you around, you will quickly see that it is a world-class city with some of the world's best restaurants, shopping, and people.

Are you a foreigner who has lived in, or is living or travelling in Brazil? Are you a Brazilian who has a lot of contact with foreigners and/or lived outside of Brazil? Are you interested in telling your story? If you would like to volunteer for our interview series, or if you would like to recommend someone, please send a blank email to gringoes@gringoes.com with "Interview" in the subject. We will send you the interview questions by return email.

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