

# Three Things I Have Learned From Living in Brazil

I live in Brazil. What image does that conjure up in your mind? Perhaps you think of pristine white beaches and coconut trees. Maybe your first thought is of the amazing soccer talent in this country. Maybe you are imagining a country populated by ridiculously good looking, surgically enhanced people.

There's a kernel of truth to all those things, but most of my life here is not particularly exotic. I doubt my day-to-day existence would be very different if I was still living in my native United States.

I miss my homeland, but after nearly two years here I've started to adapt. Brazil is a country beset by problems – notably crime and corruption – but there are also many upsides.

Here are three things I've learned from living in Brazil:

## 1. Chill Out About Politics

Brazil recently had a highly divisive presidential election. A right-wing candidate eventually won, prompting a global media meltdown. Sound familiar?

President Jair Bolsonaro of Brazil is a lot like Donald Trump. In fact, he's often nicknamed the "Trump of the Tropics." However, once Bolsonaro was elected, Brazilians moved on. They're not still incandescently angry. They don't lie awake at night plotting how to remove him from office. They realize that Bolsonaro is only a politician, and there will be another election soon enough.

When I tell Brazilian friends about how families in the U.S.

are divided over Trump, they're amazed. "Why would you ever fight with your family about politics?" they ask. That's a healthy perspective.

## **2. Paid Domestic Help is OK**

In Brazil, either you employ a cleaning lady or you are the cleaning lady. Domestic help is considered a normal and even essential part of life.

I understand that, in large part, this is a function of Brazil's income inequality. Domestic workers get paid very little, so even the lower middle classes can afford to employ them. That's not something I condone, but I do appreciate that Brazilians don't impose unrealistic expectations on women in this area.

In the United States, paid domestic help is still a very awkward topic. When an American friend says she employs a cleaning lady, she is usually very defensive about it. Brazilians, however, acknowledge that a woman cannot simultaneously build a career, be a great mom, and also maintain an immaculate home. I welcome their honesty.

## **3. Take Care of Yourself as You Age**

Brazil has a reputation for producing super models and being the Mecca of cosmetic surgery. Yes, there is a preponderance of beautiful people here.

What is more striking to me, however, is the way Brazilians take care of themselves as they age. Self-care is a priority for the middle aged and seniors. They get regular exercise, often with a physical therapist or personal trainer.

They also dress well – and in a manner that is appropriate for their age. I'm inspired by how elegant many older Brazilians look. I hope to emulate them in the decades to come.

Brazil is a massive and diverse country. My own experiences are mostly limited to Sao Paulo, where I live. If you visit another part of Brazil, you may have very different observations, but these are three lessons I've learned during my time here. This country is far from perfect, but there are some areas where Brazilians are getting it right.

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