

## THE BRAZILIAN WAY

The world has discovered, or rather, “re-discovered” Brazil.

Its economic success, the on-going free elections, the forthcoming Olympics ..., Brazil is in fashion and being covered extensively by the global press and is receiving fresh interest from the business community.

This special interest is certainly justified, but understanding **the Brazilian way** is still a challenge for many foreigners.

Brazil is a vast country, around the size of the USA without Alaska, populated with a little less than 200 million people.

You say “samba, soccer, the girls from Ipanema, the Amazon” ... and you cover the stereotype of this South American country. All true, of course. The first fundamental difference, however, is that Brazil is a continent in itself. By far the largest Portuguese speaking country in the world.

Brazil, which is shaped like South America, borders all the other South American countries except Chile and Ecuador; ten out of the twelve. Despite this, and with the exception of its love-hate relationship with Argentina on its southern border, communication and contacts with its other neighbors only recently started to be seriously developed. Just try to fly from Sao Paulo or Rio to Bogota' or Lima and you will be surprised by the limited choice being offered.

Brazil is special.

Yes, like other developing countries in the region, Brazil is taking advantage of its considerable natural resources, supplying hungry clients

like China. Yes, Brazil has corruption and violence, and yes, education is an issue and Brazilians have never won a Nobel prize.

But on the positive side, we also know that Brazil is a democracy, with a President that not only preceded Obama as the first mixed-race leader of a major country, but with a President that leaves office after eight years with the highest popularity score in the world. A country with a free press, a strong banking system that survived years of hyperinflation, a very strong domestic demand and a country that generally welcomes investors despite its heavy bureaucracy and complicated tax codes.

Brazil needs to improve its infrastructure, no doubt, and both the Olympics and the soccer World Cup will force them to do that; investments should be affordable, especially considering the gigantic oil fields discovered recently.

"Deus e' Brasileiro," "God is Brazilian," is a common saying that finally may be confirmed in the years to come.

For the informed reader all the above certainly does not add much, but as I try to bring you into a Brazilian mood it is **the Brazilian Way** that really interests me.

Brazil is big, thinks big, acts big, and, deservedly, its voice will become more heard and familiar around the world during this century.

When you look at other major new powers I believe that it is Brazil that possibly offers a new way to work and deal with each other in our new global environment. China is the factory, India the laboratory, but Brazil

has a way of bringing the human element into play that is probably unique and worth studying.

To work comfortably with Brazilians you need to create a personal relationship, a physical relationship, so well illustrated by the "abraco," the strong hug that men mainly give each other. Communicating by phone certainly helps better than email, but nothing can replace being together, feeling each other, touching, sharing joys and pains. In Brazil you laugh and you cry. It is not a puritan country.

Like Americans, Brazilians are optimists and can burst with energy. This positive attitude to life does not come from the Northern European influence that helped create the North American character. It is the surprising result of the original Brazilian cocktail of native Indians, Portuguese and Africans.

Portugal is and was a small country, a country that geographically turns its back to Southern Europe and faces a cold ocean. A country of tremendous navigators. By the time they discovered Brazil they were probably already very stretched with their Indians and African colonies and incapable of really mastering a region the size of Brazil. Brazil in fact never had to fight a war for independence.

As the Portuguese met the local population they had to mix and created this sexual openness that is still so visible to any foreigner that checks out a Brazilian beach. When Brazilians were asked in a recent survey what their skin color was, over 100 types of skin colors were described.

Brazil has 3 original cultures: the Portuguese, the native Indian and the West African. A culture combination that should really result in a sad and resigned character and that surprisingly translates in an optimistic mix.

The Portuguese brought what was then 'civilization', the Indians their strong relationship to nature (increasingly admired and respected by Brazilians these days) and the Africans their spirituality that, in this case too, was combined with Christian rituals in a uniquely Brazilian way.

Does this Brazilian optimism come from the natural richness of the country, this abundance of water, forests, color, sun? Does it come from a feeling of freedom due to the difficulty of establishing a real strong central authority?

To the original 3 cultures we then saw the Dutch entering Brazil, the French, the English, and early last century, the immigration of Italians, Spaniards, Germans, Syrians and the largest population of Japanese outside Japan!

Until recently, any comparison between Brazil and the USA turned in favor of the USA, with Brazilians blaming the Portuguese conquest. Portuguese being the favorite subject of Brazilian jokes, like the Belgians for the French.

Today, in a new global context where things cannot always be black or white, where solutions are complicated, patience a skill, and relationships and cultural understanding so challenging, this Brazilian formula of living together despite huge social differences, of finding common interests and

joy in such a diverse group of people, this maturing of a Brazilian identity that is less concerned with imported ideas and increasingly believes in its own way of doing things, all this may open a new approach, a Brazilian variant, to the way we deal with each other, we work together.

Companies in Brazil are less hierarchical and Brazilians tend to avoid confrontation, are flexible and ready to bend established rules or processes. The " jeitinho ", the art of finding a compromise, a solution, is an integral part of the Brazilian way of doing things, not in a corruptive way, to benefit one person versus the other, but more in a collaborative way, suggesting a solution where I give up something in return for your empathy and future goodwill. It consists in creating a form of intimacy that makes you feel good and may just be the secret of this **Brazilian way** of handling difficult situations.

It is also a way to move on, to innovate, to progress despite walls and challenges, to find common satisfaction.

Brazilians will never try to dominate the world; it does not interest them. As their influence grows they may however push us all to be more emotional, more flexible, more human. Wouldn't that be nice?