

Exchange in São Paulo, Autumn Semester 2014

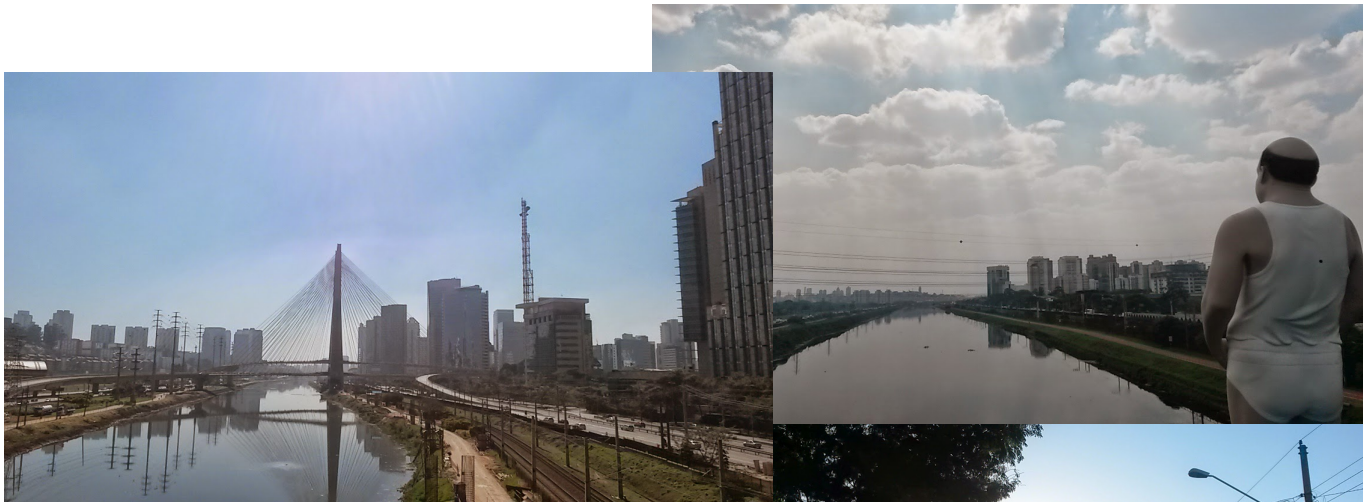
Konni Dumell

Background

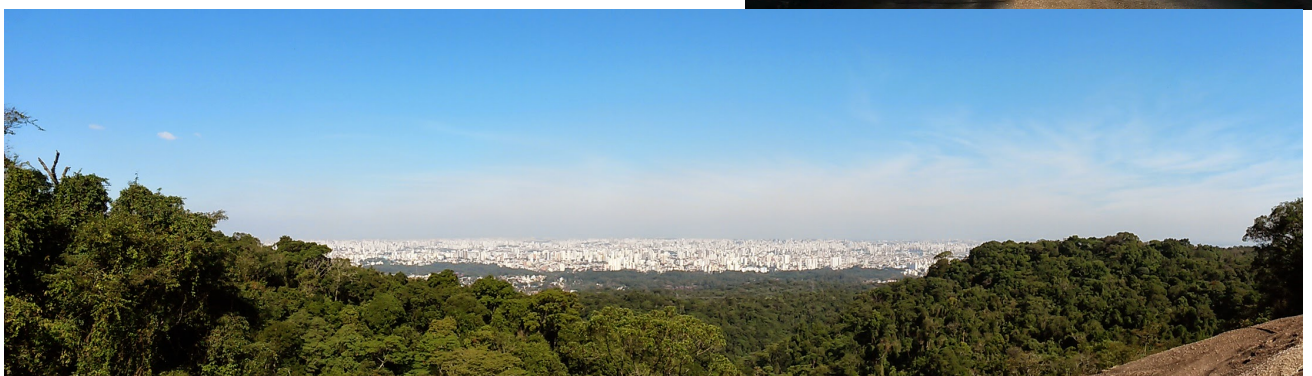
South America has always fascinated me. The rhythm, the people, the danger, the culture, the history, the nature etc. whatever you want, you will find around every corner. There is something magical already about the name of the place, South America. When I went to Brazil I thought of myself as a somewhat well travelled young man, my background as a sailor and having backpacked throughout most of the worlds continents I felt fairly secure about what I was getting myself into.

I knew many people who travelled in South America and Brazil and everyone said the same thing; the only bad day you will have is the day you have to leave. Now saying goodbye to my nomad life a couple of years ago to go back to school was one of the toughest decisions I have ever made, today I see I made a good choice but there was days I could have dropped everything and just left.

I'm writing this so you would get an insight into how I felt before I left. Not really scared of going alone as it was nothing new, sure of that it would not be a problem not speaking Portuguese. Thinking that you've been in dodgy situations before, which I truly have, but thinking how bad can it be. Now what I had not thought of was that this was Brazil.



Pictures of São Paulo. The mighty Pinheiros river going through the city and the famous Octávio Frias de Oliveira bridge.



Language

There is one thing one should understand when going to Brazil. You can go to tourist Brazil (Rio De Janeiro, Ilha Grande, Salvador etc.) or you can go to Brazil. To travel and live in what I will refer to as Brazil (we'll call the other part tourist Brazil) you will have to speak Portuguese. I can count on two hands the amount of people I could have a conversation in English with during the seven months I lived in Brazil. Believe it or not but in the most powerful city on the Southern Hemisphere, home to 22 million people, you will actually be completely handicapped if you move out of the absolute center of the city. To take a bus, regular bus not tourist, will be impossible. Small things like going to the grocery store can become problems in your life, not even mentioning dining out.



Saquarema, "A place for a happy life"

Senac offers a course in Architecture and Urbanism in Portuguese and only Portuguese. There is no way around it. I went to Brazil not speaking a word of Portuguese. I took some lessons before I went but I could just as easily spent it on sitting in Botecos in São Paulo. That is where I learnt my Portuguese. Having a beer in the sun and talking to people I'd never met before. Senac offered a very intensive language course and it gave me the basic grammar. Portuguese grammar is no joke and it does take a lot of work to get a hang of. Luckily since everyone only speaks Portuguese or a few words of English you will be very motivated to study.

When I left Brazil I spoke fluent Portuguese. Today, two months to the day after I left Brazil it is rusty. It feels sad, but I still speak to myself and count in Portuguese. I listen to Brazilian music and speak Portuguese with my Brazilian friends of which I luckily have some in Copenhagen. As a last note, don't go speaking Spanish in Brazil. It's an insult and you will not make many friends.

Preparations and Money

How do you prepare yourself for Brazil? I really don't know. I can't help anyone with that question. We are all different. I will however say you can live in Brazil a very secure and boring life. Not being able to go out or travel or see what Brazil actually is. You can stay in rich areas with guards around you and only go out in the nicer bars and it's fine. You will still enjoy the weather and nature and food.



Brasilia in its glory and horror

This is what you will be offered from Senac. A safe environment that has very little to do with the country around you.

Like I mentioned before I have travelled a bit before and was absolutely not interested in any of that. I threw myself out there and had a hell of a time. Yes we are talking about one of the most dangerous countries in the world and one of the most dangerous cities in the world, more of that later though.



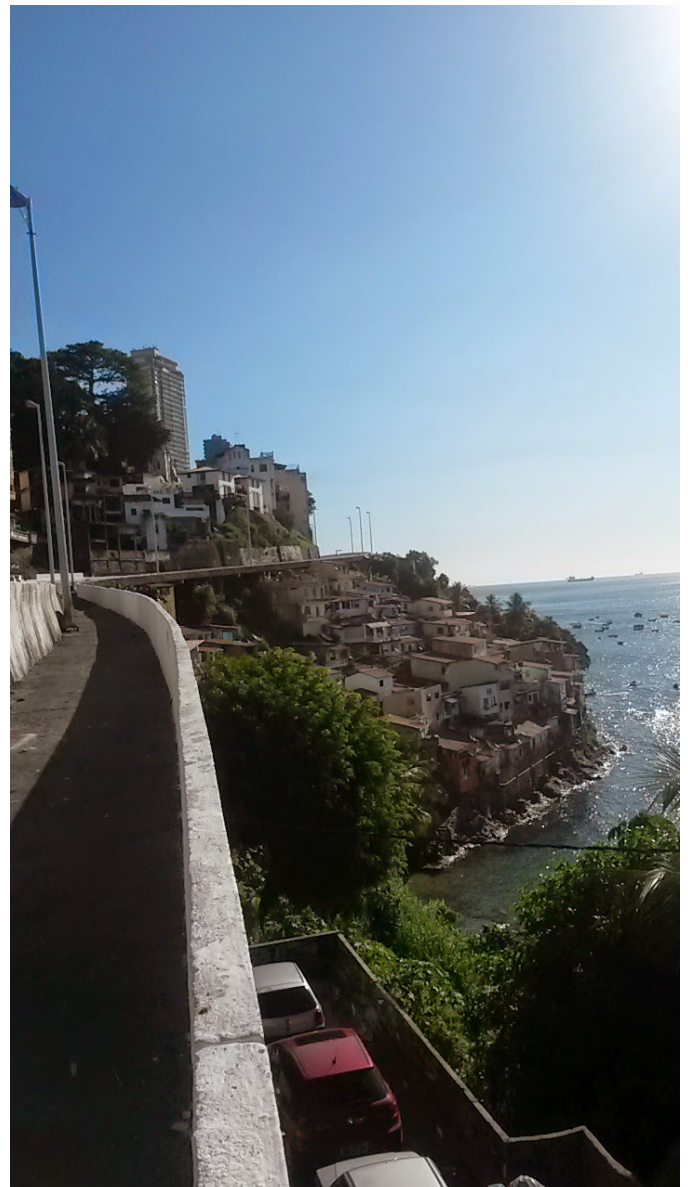
Somewhere between São Paulo and Rio De Janeiro.

My only advice is to really think it through before you go; will you get what you want out of this? Will you actually dare to just go? Are you willing to put yourself in mega uncomfortable situations and sometimes very dangerous? Because if you are, you will have the time of your life!

More practically do a language course, you will get a little bit of the language and more importantly learn more about the culture. You will need a temporary residency permit; Sophia has a note I wrote about it for those who are interested. About money, Brazil is cheap but much more expensive than other third world countries, especially São Paulo. You will however manage on your SU, but will want to have more money for travelling around.



Rio Claro.



Salvador.

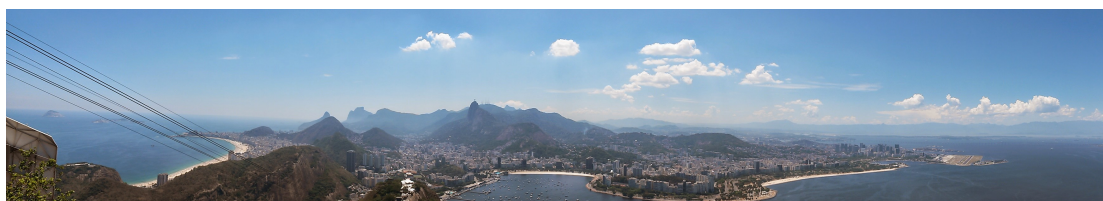
“O meu Brasil é um pais tropical..”

To describe Brazil would take much more than this little scribbling I am writing today. It is something you study for a lifetime. It is a combination of great wealth and unthinkable poverty. A vast country of rainforests, beaches, prairies, some of the biggest cities and forgotten civilizations unknown to man. 200 million people living in an area bigger than Europe all of foreign descent coming together creating a nation of happiness and laughter that we call Brazil



Ubatuba.

The lyrics quoted on top are very famous lyrics from a song called “Rap de armas”. It means my Brazil is a tropical country. This song was written in the Favelas, slums of Rio De Janeiro and tells about the weaponry used against police trying to come into their territory. It is striking how happy and proud Brazilians are. They love their country and will make a party of soap and a rusty nail if they have to. Everyday is supposed to be worth living even thou you are poor. It genuinely is inspiring and unique. I have travelled in India, Nepal, Cambodia, China, Bangladesh, and other very poor third world countries and never have I encountered anything like Brazil. The happiest people in the world without a doubt in my mind!



Rio De Janeiro.

Having said this in all honesty one thing I find so hard to understand in the peoples joy is a the unfairness common people suffer through everyday. Common people being poor, well everywhere else but São Paulo where an actual middle class is evolving. Brazil has one of the most unequally divided societies in the world. The rich are filthy rich and the poor have nothing. Yes this sounds like India but here they all live on the same street, the rich in their gated and guarded high risers and the poor in a cardboard box 15 meters down the road. A good idea is to read a book on Brazilian history before you go. It is very complicated but you will understand the problems and greatness of Brazil and it's people today.

Brazil is an incredible country. One of the hardest to grasp and understand but also one you will fall completely in love with. With all its chaos and charm, nothing ever working the way you think it will but somehow all melting into this amazing dance of laughter and fun under a blazing sun.

Living in São Paulo

What do you know about São Paulo? It's the biggest city in Brazil. It is not as much fun as Rio De Janeiro and you have never met anyone who visited and liked it. That is what I knew when I went. São Paulo is one of the most insane cities in the world. This is the most diverse and insane place you will find on this planet. 14 million registered inhabitants and unofficially 22 million. It will take you roughly an hour to take the train from one side of the city to the other and at least a month to even grasp the size of this place.

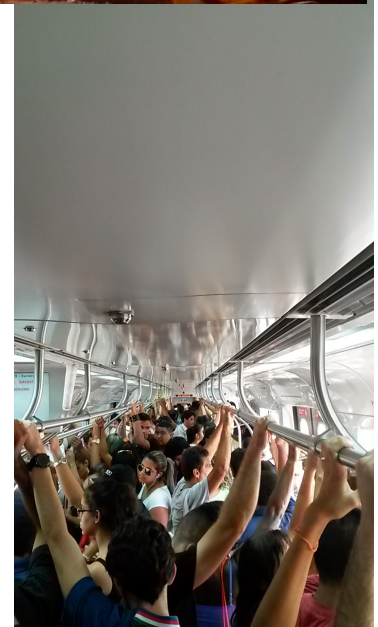
I came to São Paulo a month before school started, yes in time for the world cup, and spent a whole month walking around and exploring the place. For you who will do the architecture course São Paulo is probably the most complex urban environment you will ever encounter. When I was young I fell in love in New York once and lived there for a while. New York is peanuts compared to this monster of a city. However be aware of where you live, which street you walk down and what you do. This is truly a gangster city.



Bonfire night.

São Paulo trains.

The ugly truth is very visible in São Paulo.



First month

My arrival in Brazil was, as you might have understood not very well planned. Nor controlled or thought through. I came to one of the biggest cities in the world without even really knowing where I lived or anything about the area. Having landed, taken two trains and finally a taxi I arrived on Avenida Nossa Senhora de Sabará. My house was full of graffiti and I can honestly say everyone, the few people out where pretty much staring at this Gringo who just ended up in a place very few Gringos had been before. Gringo is the name for foreigners in all of South America. Now if you will go to Brazil, don't be stupid about a situation like this, you will end up in trouble. Being in trouble in Brazil is the last thing you will want. Trust me. If you go to Brazil be open and happy! I went out and sat down in the Boteco (like a bodega here) and just tried to speak the none- existing Portuguese I knew and within a week everyone knew the Gringo in the neighborhood and I was safe and friends with everyone. This is how it works in Brazil. Again real Brazil where there are no tourists. I lived in Zona Sul, where Senac is located and also the biggest Favelas in São Paulo and Brazil. Here when the police come looking for a lost Gringo, the whole population of the area suffers. What one has to remember also is that 99% of the people are just normal workers not robbers. Anyway this was my first touch to Brazil and yes I fell in love at first sight. I didn't get to know many people the first month due to the obvious language difficulties. Seriously, no- one speaks English! So I concentrated on exploring my new city. Walked 8-10 hours everyday and saw it all. I used to sit in Ibirapueria, a very big park designed by Oscar Neimeyer and try to read Folha de São Paulo, the daily news paper, a good tip for everyone wanting to learn the language. This was the middle of winter in Brazil so 25-27 degrees and sun all day. Horrible. I went to Rio De Janeiro for a long weekend but already after three weeks in São Paulo felt as I left Brazil for a tourist vacation.



Zona Sul.

School starts

How does it sound to go to school every morning, have lunch, play some tennis and then do your homework/ project work in the afternoon? Welcome to studying in Brazil! After the stressful, long, frustrating hours you put in at KEA coming here will be paradise. I'm not saying school is a walk in the park and the only thing you do is lay in the sun. You are required to participate just like anyone else. We did a lot of group projects but the projects are smaller and more intensive so it becomes clearer who is working and who's slacking off, for the teachers that is.

Senac is a very expensive private school in a rich neighborhood in São Paulo. Next to the school a villa area is located and in every other direction favelas. This is the strangeness that is São Paulo. You will have favelas and luxury villas and high risers next to each other. It's a completely absurd situation and everyone knows it. Back to Senac. The facilities are amazing. Classrooms modern and functional, three cantinas in on the premises, two tennis courts and a gym including a swimming pool. There is a whole workshop just for you models and other projects that need tools and materials. For the IT people there is roughly 100 Mac:s on one side of the computer room and Pc:s on the other. There are numerous video-, or system cameras to use. For you in fashion there are workshops and everything you will ever need as well. In all this school is incredible. We who did Architecture and Urbanism had two teachers present at every lecture, I don't know about the other courses but I can imagine it holds the same standard.

Having said all this, which sounds like paradise bear in mind, everything is in Portuguese. I was as lost as one could be in the beginning and through out most of the semester.

Portuguese is not the easiest of languages. Luckily I met some students, who later came to be my very good friends who took me in and helped me in many ways. School was very good and fun and learning but let's be honest it's the weekends everyone wants to hear about.



My favorite palm trees to lie under at campus.



Churrasco about to start.

São Paulo Nightlife

Going out in São Paulo can be the most fun or really boring. To really have fun you need someone local. It's too big to stumble over something. Every Neighborhood is the size of half of Copenhagen and has it's own bars and clubs. Some streets are sure and easy like Rua Augusta or going out in Vila Madalena. Me personally I always liked Botecos and hanging out with locals. Parque Ibirapueira has free concerts on Sundays in the summer that are really fun to go to. The best weekends in the city for me were the ones we had big churrascos, BBQ parties in one of the guys houses.



Vila Madalena after Brazil beat Colombia in the world cup.

Ubatuba

Think green tropical mountains steeply going straight into a crystal clear ocean. White sand and amazing waves, blue skies and not a soul in sight. This is Ubatuba! This small surfer city nicknamed "Capital do Surf" is where I spent most weekends. Located between Rio De janerio and São Paulo it takes about three hours to drive out of the city. Amazing people, amazing nature, amazing food. This is Brazil at its best!



My second home in Brazil. Paradise on earth. Ubatuba.

Guarujá

Only an hour away from the concrete jungle, Guarujá is the closest beach to São Paulo and easy to reach. Mega long beautiful beaches but very upscale prices. Next to Santos which is totally worth visiting too.

There are numerous of amazing small places on the coast of São Paulo state that are amazing. Generally known as Rio- Santos this coastal stretch is the most beautiful part of the coast in Brazil. Rent a car!

Travelling in Brazil

Brazil is and ridiculously big country. Like I mentioned before it's bigger than Europe. Still in their wonderful Brazilian way they still sell bus tickets everywhere, if you are a very sill person you can sit on a bus for over 40 hours straight. Flying is the same price and a lot faster. The price of flights is roughly the same as flying in Europe, affordable if you book ahead. Depending on when you go prices vary a lot, hit low season and guesthouses or pousadas as they are called are half the price, so are flights. Try to learn enough Portuguese to go off the beaten track. Go up the coast and see amazing small surfer and fishing towns. Get involved meet real Brazilians who will make you dance samba and drink cachaça until you can't walk. Be careful and smart but if you are scared the whole way you will not understand what Brazil is. Rio De Janeiro was the worst part of Brazil for me. You will understand.



Saquarema.

Peace, Konni