

Sao Paulo: Gateway to Brazil

Jamie Ditaranto

In Sao Paulo, Brazilians may mean business, but that doesn't mean they don't know how to have fun. Here's how to embrace the best of Brazilian culture in this massive metropolis.

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Sao Paulo is a city of staggering size. Sprawling outward and upward with crisscrossing freeways and towering high-rises, it is home to an astounding population of 12 million and is the largest city in the western hemisphere.

Settled by the Portuguese in the 16th century and expanded by the coffee barons of the 19th century, Sao Paulo today is where business in Brazil gets done and has historically been the country's entry point for immigrants looking for new opportunities. The city is a true melting pot of diverse influences, particularly from Italian, Japanese, and Arabic immigrants, as well as influences from the northern states of Brazil.

Sao Paulo is like a sample platter for everything Brazil has to offer, from boundary-pushing dining and art to the treasured traditions of samba, soccer, and Brazilian coffee. When you're from Sao Paulo, you're a Paulistano, a term residents wear with pride.

Coffee and Dining

In Brazil, coffee is so popular that Brazilians changed the Portuguese term for breakfast to *cafe da manha*, which literally translates to "morning coffee." Brazilian coffee is typically strong, sweet, and served in small cups. And in Sao Paulo, especially, the Brazilian obsession with coffee is built into the city's DNA. Brazilian coffee is typically strong, sweet, and served in small cups. You can seek your morning *cafezinho* at long-running shops like **Cafe Floresta** or embrace your inner coffee snob at **Coffee Lab**, where the expansive menu educates patrons on the many varieties of coffee grown around Brazil.

Long established as a coffee superpower, Sao Paulo is now on the precipice of a new era of reinvention. Although the city has always welcomed influences from its immigrant communities and has no shortage of pizza, sushi, or kibbeh, Brazil's gastronomical revolution is all about embracing indigenous ingredients. Thanks to Michelin-starred restaurants like Alex Atala's **D.O.M.** and Helena Rizzo's **Mani** leading the way, a trip to Sao Paulo is an opportunity to taste the esoteric flavors of the Amazon like *jambu*, an herb known for its tongue-tingling effect.

It's an exciting time for Brazil's culinary arts, but at the same time, you'll find most Paulistanos sticking to the traditional cuisine and its protein-rich cornerstones of meat, beans, and root vegetables. Not to be missed is Brazil's national dish: *feijoada*. This meaty bean stew takes hours of preparation to make

and therefore, most restaurants serve it once a week; Wednesday is the most typical day. However, at **Bolinhas**, which serves some of the most famous feijoada in the city, the dish is served whenever the restaurant is open. You'll also want to try a classic *churrascaria* like **Barbacoa**, where Brazil's famous rodizio-style barbecue is served by waiters carrying slabs of meat on long sword-like skewers. If you're not into meat, but love the idea of Brazilian rodizio, you can enjoy a similar experience at **Bacio del Nonni**. This pizzeria offers over 70 sweet and savoury pizzas, which are served straight out of the oven and out onto the floor. All you have to do is point to the piece that sparks your fancy.

Shopping

In Sao Paulo, eager shoppers will find so much more to indulge in than bikinis and flip flops. The city has plenty to offer fashion-lovers from the big-name designers on **Oscar Freire Street** to the **Pinheiros District**, where you can peruse the latest styles at the boutiques of Brazilian-born designers like **Joao Pimenta** and **Fernando Yamamoto**. For a unique purchase, you can also check out **Insecta**, a shoe brand that up-cycles vintage clothing to create stylish and colorful shoes that are a hundred percent sustainable.

The exchange rate in Brazil is already pretty favorable, but if you want to find the best deals in the city, follow the Paulistanos to **Rua 25 de Marco**, or March 25th Street. (The unusual name commemorates the signing of the Brazilian constitution.) There is plenty of activity on this hilly street, which is lined with shops selling apparel crafts, home goods, electronics, and just about everything else you can think of at discount prices. It's the perfect place to pull together a last-minute outfit or to stock up on souvenirs for friends back home.

If you find yourself in Sao Paulo over the weekend, make a point to visit the Saturday market at **Praca Benedito Calixto**. At this weekly flea market, you never know what treasures you might find in the jumble of crafts and antiques.

Sports

In a city as large as Sao Paulo, one soccer team is not enough. If you'd like to catch a local game, make yourself familiar with the city's three rival clubs: Corinthians, Palmeiras, and Sao Paulo FC. When it comes to Brazil's love of soccer, what you see at the World Cup is just the tip of the iceberg. Just wait until you see them cheering for their local team. If you're a fervent soccer fan yourself, make sure to pay a visit to the **Museum of Football**, which is housed in the city's oldest and still-working stadium.

If you feel yourself coming down with a case of football fever and would like to kick a ball around, head to one of the city's many green spaces, where you'll find Paulistanos at play. **Ibirapuera Park** is the largest in the city and nicknamed "the lungs of Sao Paulo." Here, you'll find running trails, bike rentals, pick-up soccer and volleyball, as well as skateboarders, yogis, and sunbathers.

Heritage and Museums

Ibirapuera Park is also a fantastic place to begin your tour of Sao Paulo's many museums like the **Museum of Modern Art** and the **Afro Brazil Museum**. Take a short walk from the park to **Avenida Paulista**, which closes every Sunday for pedestrians, and visit the **Sao Paulo Museum of Art**, which is commonly referred to as MASP.

In the center, you'll also find some of the city's most treasured monuments like the **Monument to the Bandeiras**, which commemorates the expeditioners who ventured into the Brazilian interior and the **Monument to the Independence of Brazil**, that marks the spot where the King Dom Pedro I declared Brazil's independence from Portugal in 1822.

Other landmarks of Sao Paulo's heritage can be found throughout the city, such as the neo-gothic **Se Cathedral**, located in the city center. For something more colorful, step inside the **Nossa Senhora do Brasil**. This modern cathedral pays tribute to Brazil's heritage with hand-painted Portuguese tiles and a frescoed ceiling that depicts the biological and cultural diversity of Brazil.

Street Art

For contemporary art in Sao Paulo, one only needs to go for a walk. The city has become one of the world's premiere destinations for street art and has launched some of the most famous street artists in the world. You'll find the works of Kobra, Nina Pandolfo, Cranio, and more throughout the city.

In the bohemian neighborhood of **Vila Madalena**, you can walk through **Batman Alley**, which has become so popular the city officially closed the street off to cars to give pedestrians the freedom to linger and pose for photos with the colorful murals. As the talent overflows in the neighborhood, new alleys like **Aprendiz Alley** are also establishing themselves as major points of interest.

Although Vila Madalena is at the heart of Sao Paulo's street art scene, it's worth visiting other neighborhoods like **Liberdade**, where you'll find murals that reflect the culture of the neighborhood's Japanese population and **Cambuci**, where you can track down the original works of **Os Gemeos**, a team of twin brothers from Sao Paulo whose larger-than-life murals have become instantly recognizable and pop up throughout the world from Milan to Mumbai.

Night Life

As you might suspect, Sao Paulo is a work hard, play hard kind of town and has some of the best nightlife in all of South America. From electric dance clubs to hipster cocktail bars, and everything in between, there's a perfect night out in Sao Paulo for everyone and the best way to find yours is to follow the music.

Live music, no matter the genre, is always preferred in Brazil and there's something to suit everyone. For Bossa Nova, you can lounge in a sultry jazz club like **Madeleine Bar** or **Baretto** at the Hotel Fasano. For Samba, you can practice your footwork at **Bar Mangueira** or **Bar Camara**. And if you're looking for the kind of party that doesn't really get started until well past midnight, night clubs like **D.EDGE** and **Love Story** are the clubs for you.

Whichever you choose, make sure to begin the night with dinner and a drink at a traditional and ultra-casual *boteco* bar. You'll know one when you see one; just look for the plastic chairs and tables marked with beer logos. For a nightcap, or a warm-up drink if you're hitting the clubs, the **Skye Bar** at Hotel Unique has a great rooftop with panoramic views of Sao Paulo's boundless skyline.