

Cycle Touring Brazil - Part 1

An account of a cycle ride from Uruguay to Rio de Janeiro



Leana Niemand

It's the most wonderful feeling: getting up in the morning, knowing all I have to do that day is ride the bike.



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2 337 Km – 49 Days

Thank you

As always when cycle touring, I was amazed and humbled by the kind generosity of strangers and the random acts of kindness bestowed on us by the people of Brazil.

A huge thank you to Eben Human who suggested I write this book. Without his help and support, this book would never have been published.

Thanks also to Ernest Markwood for allowing me to use his photographs in this book.

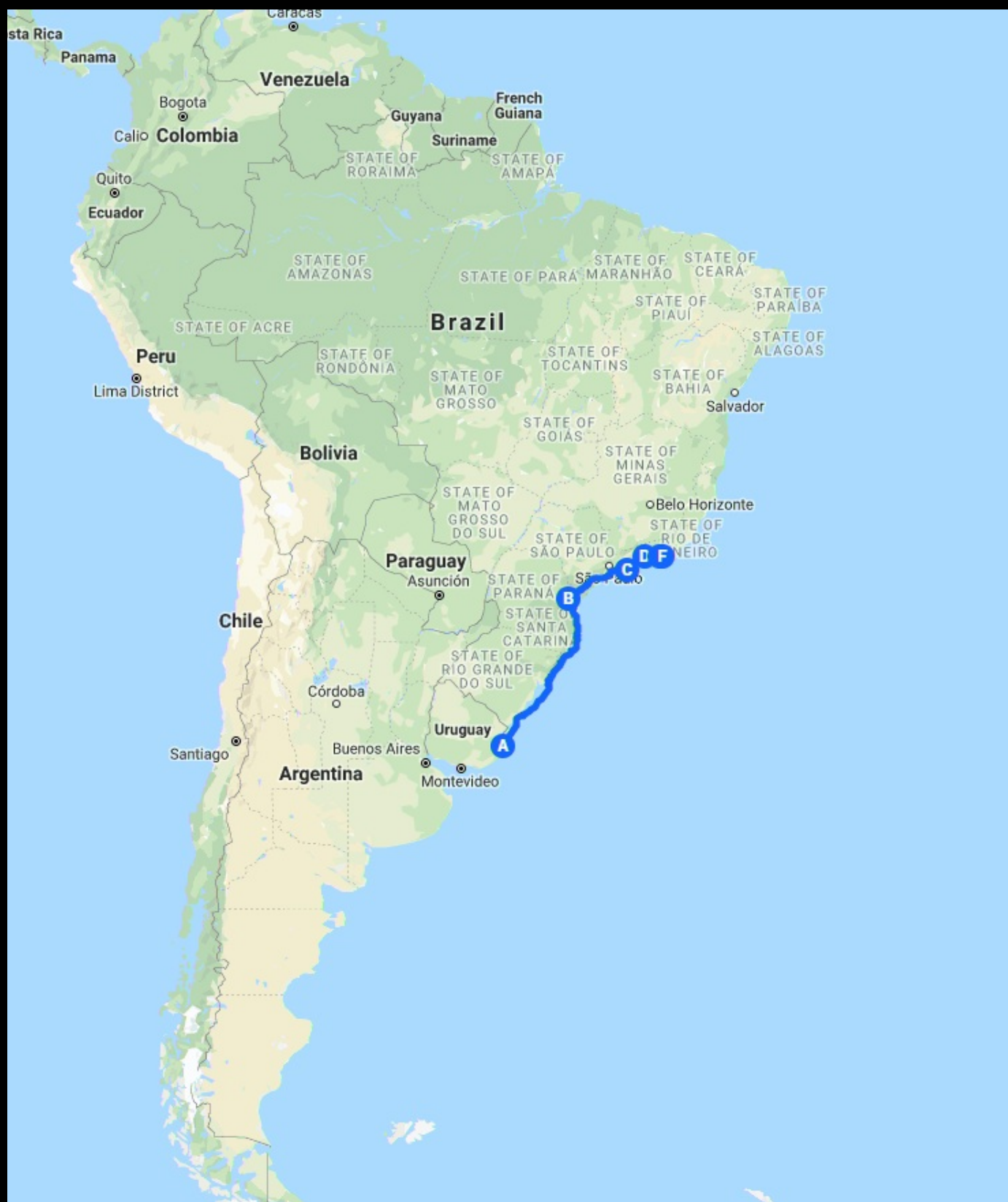
I'm also immensely grateful to my sister Amanda who, through the years, selflessly, kept my journal entries and photos well-organised. Without her, there would have been no record of my travels.

As always, I'm much indebted to my friend Val Abrahamse, who kept my personal and financial matters at home in good order while I travelled the globe. It would have been impossible to achieve this without her conscientious efforts.

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BRAZIL PART (1)

Chuy, Uruguay – Santa Vitoria Do Palmar, Brazil – 25 km

Brazil was one of the more relaxed border crossings, and a simple stamp in the passport allowed entry into this new country. Our first day of cycling in Brazil came with bucketing rain, and Santa Vitoria Do Palmar made a perfect spot to get out the weather.

Amazingly enough, the town boasted a large lighthouse at the entrance. The lighthouse was no more than a welcome gate as Santa Vitoria was located 16 kilometres inland from the coast. The ATM spat out a few Brazilian reals, granting a comfortable night at Hotel Brasil, sporting an en-suite bathroom, decent breakfast and Brazilian TV. The TV wasn't very useful as the little Spanish picked up biking through Argentina, Chile, and Uruguay was replaced by Portuguese - our next challenge. Still, it was evident it wasn't merely raining in Santa Victoria but that the entire area further north was flooded. TV further showed the earthquake and tsunami in Japan - how horrific and there I was complaining about a spot of rain.

Ernest wanted to update his blog, and one more day was spent in Santa Victoria.





Santa Vitoria Do Palmar – Curral Alto – 90 km

Getting Ernest going in the morning was like preventing Uruguayans from drinking mate. I felt he did this deliberately to annoy me, and it was midday before we finally biked out of Santa Vitoria. Our late departure meant bearing the full brunt of the headwind, as well as the heat, and I thought it a pretty stupid thing to do, but there's no cure for stupidity.

Brazil's coastal southern part was flat, hot, humid and wet, perfect for growing rice. Once again, the road led past pastures and rice paddies, and one could easily imagine being in Vietnam.

Finally, the tiny settlement of Curral Alto was reached shortly past 5 o'clock. Taking its location on Lake Mirim, the fish factory was an excellent place to pitch a tent. Factory staff offered us an empty storeroom, and albeit a tad smelly (it was a fish factory, after all) one could close the door and keep the bugs at bay, which seemingly grew to monstrous proportions in Brazil. (At least I learned the Portuguese word for fish).

Curral Alto – Pelotas – 157 km

Ernest must've read my thoughts, or the fishy smell got him going, and before ten a.m. we closed the door and thanked the staff. A tailwind pushed us past vast areas of wetlands, rich in birdlife with storks, herons, sacred ibises, raptors, and numerous other water birds. I didn't particularly care for the many snakes and kept a beady eye on the road.

The wind drove us right past the turn-off to Rio Grande and onto remarkable Pelotas. The town featured an ensemble of old buildings and cobbled streets and, thus, had a considerable amount to discover.

By morning, the long overdue laundry was handed in, and we took to the streets to investigate the historic city centre.

Pelotas

I planned to depart on this day, but I discovered our unwashed laundry behind the reception counter. Maybe the staff considered it old clothes no longer needed. And there I imagined I'd picked up a few Portuguese words!

We took the washing to the laundry ourselves and the rest of the day was spent meandering the historic areas. In the nineteenth century, Pelotas was Brazil's primary area for producing dried meat, a staple made by slaves to feed other slaves working on sugarcane, coffee and cocoa plantations.

Pelotas – Camaqua – 133 km

With clean laundry we continued to Porto Alegre. Expecting a headwind, it came as a pleasant surprise to find the wind slight and the way gently undulating.

The area was very much Gaucho country, and farmers on horseback rounded up cattle aided by their working dogs. I watched in fascination as they commanded the dogs by whistling, a task they made look easy. In my mind, there's nothing more beautiful than watching skilled people at work.

At the Camaqua turnoff, a petrol station made it a convenient place to pitch the tents. However, it turned out to be a popular truck stop resulting in a noisy night.





Camaqua – Guaíba – 104 km

Even in Brazil, mate drinking remained prevalent, meaning hot water was readily available. Morning coffee was, thus, made easy as one could fill your mug from the hot water dispenser.

Due to our noisy night, we were on our way remarkably early. The weather was hot and humid, and the route became hillier and more forested while crossing a multitude of rivers. At Guaíba, Ernest spotted a bicycle shop and bought a new rear tyre. A conveniently located hotel sporting air-con, cable TV and a shower made it a natural choice.

Guaíba – Osorio – 125 km

We emerged to a drizzle, which continued throughout the day. Nevertheless, it wasn't altogether unpleasant once we were on the bikes as sometimes cycling in the rain can be pretty enjoyable.

Soaked and covered in road muck, Osoria came after 125 kilometres of biking. A hotel provided a warm shower and a place to rinse away the day's drizzle-fuelled road dirt and hang our wet clothes.

Osorio – Capao Da Canoa – 47 km

The following day, the sun was out and the wind in our backs as the road followed the coastal route north. The way was dotted by small villages, all relatively quiet as the carnival was over. Kids had returned to school following a three-month summer holiday, and just a few holidaymakers remained.

So quiet was it, on finding a campsite at Capao Da Canoa, the owners offered us one of the chalets at no extra charge. How nice of them.





Capao Da Canoa – Torres – 62 km

The South Coast of Brazil was scenic, and a pure pleasure to pedal. En route, a man and his dog on a horse-buggy caught our attention. He had a flat tyre but, at first, we didn't notice the problem as he addressed us in Portuguese. But, once we passed, he made a big enough noise for us to realise he had a problem. Fortunately, his wheel size was similar to ours, and Ernest could give him a tube to see him on his way.

In general, Brazilians were amazed at our lack of Portuguese. "Nao Portuguesa?" was usually uttered in total astonishment. The fact that we hailed from South Africa was equally surprising to them. "What, Africa?" they repeated, looking at us like we'd dropped from Mars. If you further explained that it took four years of cycling to get there, they laughed, shook their heads, and it appeared something they couldn't comprehend.

Torres – Ararangua – 60 km

The campsite where we'd spent the night was so peaceful, I was reluctant to leave and it was, therefore, late morning before we departed.

The wind picked up and the pleasant road surface deteriorated, with roadworks and narrow sections. Ararangua turned out significantly more extensive than anticipated and, in no mood to battle the wind, the town made a perfect place to find a hotel and escape the wind.

Accommodation in Brazil was generally pricier than in Argentina, Chile or Uruguay. Still, this one had cable TV, air-con, an en-suite bathroom, sparkling white linen, and a sumptuous buffet breakfast, and I thought it was money well spent.







Ararangua - Tubarao – 62 km

Being rice harvest time in the South of Brazil, farmers were feverishly bringing in the crop. Flocks of birds were hanging about, waiting for an easy meal. The day turned out a grind into a gusty breeze and, being slightly hilly, I called it a day at Tubarao.

As Tubarao was a sizable town, finding lodging was effortless and a conveniently located supermarket provided ingredients which became a massive potato salad.

Tubarao – Imbituba – 55 km

Breakfast was included in the room rate - a good thing, as once on the road, a strong headwind made us work hard up the hills. At least the new road was completed along that stretch, making cycling more comfortable. It was, however, heads down, grinding into the wind for the best part of the morning. The beach and harbour town of Imbituba came as a welcome surprise, as it sported a decent sheltered campsite, Wi-Fi, and a lovely lawn.

The relentless wind never abated, not even at night, and we stayed an extra day, which was perfect for doing laundry, restocking our dwindling food supply, oiling our bikes and airing the sleeping bags.



Imbituba – Tijuca – 129 km

Luckily, we packed up before the rain came and a tailwind drove us north. It became a delightful ride past small communities still using the horse and cart and past lush green hillsides until the turn-off to Florianopolis.

Florianopolis and Sao Jose were high-rise cities with Florianopolis on Isla de Catarina and Sao Jose on the mainland. They were sprawling cities and skyscrapers spread as far as the eye could see. Giving them a wide berth, we followed the coastal route with beautiful ocean views and nearby islands.

It drizzled all day, but we were tailwind-assisted and continued biking until Tijucas, a small settlement with both a supermarket and a hotel. Afterwards, Ernest cycled to the market and returned with the ingredients to make one of his favourite pasta dishes.

Tijucas – Barra Velha – 85 km

From Tijucas the route ran north, over hills, down valleys, through tunnels, past large resort cities revealing upmarket condos, and past humble timber homes next to rubbish dumps. A Brazilian couple, out in a camper van for the weekend, stopped us at a sugarcane juice shop and literally “topped us up”. Sadly, the conversation was limited due to no one speaking the other one’s language. But, amazingly enough, we understood each other well enough to have a simple conversation.

In Barra Velha, and with the villagers’ help, an unofficial camping site was located alongside the river. The tents were barely up and food prepared when it started raining. Soon, a full-blown storm hit the area, and I discovered my tent not as waterproof as it used to be. It soon turned into a small swimming pool. Mercifully, the weather passed quickly and I could clear most of the water.







Barra Velha – Joinville – 58 km

The next morning dawned bright and sunny making it a peaceful Sunday morning. The previous night's storm was forgotten, apart from large pools of water. In the company of birds that came out to dry their feathers, we sat in the sun waiting for our tents to dry. It turned out a beautiful morning, and people came equipped with boats and fishing gear to try their luck in the river. Eventually, the tents were dry and bags repacked. Day campers waved us goodbye and, following a photo session with the estate agent across the road, we biked out of Barra Velha.

A slight tailwind made for pleasant cycling as the road turned away from the coast and headed inland, over wooded hills. A strong forest smell filled the air, making it pleasurable riding. But, spotting a sign to Joinville, our curiosity got the better of us and we turned off to see what was in a town featuring such an English name.

On closer inspection, Joinville turned out an unusual place. History had it that Joinville was established on land given as a dowry by Emperor Dom Pedro to his sister, who had married the Prince of Joinville, the son of Louis-Philippe of France. A deal with Hamburg timber merchants meant that, in 1851, 191 Germans, Swiss and Norwegians arrived to harvest wood from the forest area. During our visit, I noticed many blond and blue-eyed residents, which I understood were of German, Swiss, Norwegian, and Italian descent.

Joinville – Garuva – 41 km

Like the previous day, our route veered away from the coast and headed inland over the mountains. Unfortunately, it continued raining, and on biking into Garuva, the weather over the forward pass to Curitiba looked even worse.

Instead of keeping it going, I persuaded Ernest to settle for digs in the small settlement of Garuva and hoped the weather would improve by morning.



Hotel Recanto-Eliza at the edge of town was a wonderfully comfortable choice in a lush forest setting with a river running right past it. Feeding the fish was a pleasant way to while away the time, and they came out in hoards to snatch it away. Unfortunately, it rained hard throughout the night, and there seemed no end to the rainy weather.

Garuva – Curitiba – 95 km

After breakfast, while the mist hung low over the mountains, the road led out of Garuva en route to Curitiba. It rained the entire day as our path climbed over hills, leading us up a 25-kilometre-long climb and through a beautifully lush green setting. However, all uphill eventually ended, and the rest of the day was pleasantly undulating. Finally, Curitiba rolled into view, and we were wet, cold and tired. The Formula 1 hotel in the historic centre, provided a hot shower and space to dry wet clothes.

Curitiba was one of the world's best urban planning models. I loved the story of its mayor, Jaime Lerner, who transformed a six-block stretch of street into a pedestrian zone in the '70s. This move was solely the start, and later express-bus avenues featuring tubular boarding platforms were added. Add to that recycling and planting trees and parks on an enormous scale, and you get what Curitiba is today.

The tourist bus was a novel way of exploring the town and one could (in one fell swoop) see all Curitiba had to offer. From the lovely and peaceful botanical garden to the 110-metre-high telephone tower with a 360-degree city view.

The next morning dawned overcast and rainy, making it a no-brainer to stay the following day. The day was spent eating cake and drinking Brazilian coffee, a pleasant way to spend a rainy day.







Curitiba – Parana/Sao Paulo State Border – 111 km

Thank goodness the weather cleared, and even though drizzling occasionally, it wasn't bucketing down like the previous night. The route remained hilly, but felt mainly downhill (it must've been the two rest days). Unfortunately, Ernest had two flats from truck tyre debris and discovered his rear rim cracked. Luckily, the road was in perfect condition, making it easy pedalling until the light faded. The overcast and rainy conditions made for a short day's cycling before pitching the tents on a grassy patch on a hill behind a petrol station. Unfortunately, when the tents were up, it started raining again. Mercifully, the petrol station shop provided a convenient supper.

State Border - Registro – 110 km

Following the usual breakfast of coffee and biscuits, our route took us through a national park, which meant stunning scenery and big hills. The road continued across numerous tropical-looking rivers and through forests overgrown by ferns, moss and creepers, revealing only the odd wooden home peeking through dense bushes. Finally, a 20-kilometre descent led to lower ground. The weather was more tropical and humid and home to vast banana plantations. Registro provided a comfortable hotel - so large was the room one could dry clothes and tents.

Interestingly enough, Registro was named so as in its heyday it was the port where early settlers had to register the gold they shipped from Brazil to Portugal. I love these little snippets of history.

In the morning, Ernest washed the bikes at the car wash around the corner. Nevertheless, there was a method to his madness as he needed a new rim. He spent the rest of the day spoking the wheel, a lengthy process that he was good at by then. The rim was slightly different from his previous one, which required shorter spokes. Ernest returned to the bike shop the next day and we spent an additional day in Registro.









Registro – Peruibe – 109 km

More than happy to get on the bike, the day turned out superb biking as the way mainly led downhill, the scenery was sublime and a slight tailwind made it easy biking. We ate fruit from roadside stalls and filled our bottles at mountain streams.

After about sixty kilometres, I persuaded Ernest to turn off the crazy trucking highway and head southeast towards the coast. Ultimately, a route ran over the mountains, reaching the shore at Peruibe (meaning 'shark' in the Tupi language). Out of season, camping was available on the beach, where one could fall asleep listening to the sound of the waves.

Ernest wanted to straighten his new wheel and fix punctured tubes, and an extra day was spent kicking back in, what felt like, my private little paradise.

A day at leisure allowed for sniffing around and discovering all the exciting sights and attractions. In the process, I found the Abarebebê Ruins. In the sixteenth century, the story was that Portuguese settlers enslaved the Tupiniquim Indians to work in sugarcane plantations. Father Leonardo Nunes (Abarebebe, as the indigenous people called him) was against this practice. The first church in the region was built on the rock of Abarebebe, where he was often seen walking.

Peruibe – Guarujá – 122 km

The further north we proceeded, the lush the landscape and the more vicious the mosquitos. The coastline was picture pretty revealing white sandy beaches; this was, after all, Brazil's Costa Verde. After missing the shortcut to Guarujá, the alternative road turned out hilly but stunning and ran around the port of Santos.

Guarujá was, in fact, an island as the area was surrounded by water. Being a touristy beach town, it provided plenty of hotels but no camping. Instead, people strolled the beachfront and sat at sidewalk cafes; the balmy weather made it perfect to be out. At first, I thought of climbing to the viewpoint, but I had no energy.

Guaruja – Bertioga – 37 km

A scenic road led to the ferry port and ran beside white sandy beaches and idyllic palm trees. Unfortunately, the path reached the ferry to the mainland far too soon.

Once off the boat, the weather took a turn for the worse and came with thunder and lightning. Our route into Bertioga led past the Forte Sao Joao de Bertioga, constructed in 1532 by Portuguese settlers, making it Brazil's oldest fortress. Construction started in 1532, but the fort was only completed in 1702. Today, it's a prominent landmark in town. Still, we didn't explore as the weather was terrible and we thought it best to find shelter. Luckily a budget room appeared just as it started bucketing down.

Bertioga – Boicucanga Beach – 70 km

Ernest and I weren't getting along, making life an absolute misery. Though the route featured picturesque beaches, al fresco oyster bars, and lush forests, I was in a foul mood and unable to enjoy it. Then, towards the end of the day, I spotted a pousada opposite a beautiful beach. I thought it would make a more pleasant evening. It was, however, not the case and money wasted.

Boicucanga Beach – Sao Sebastiao – 41 km

I left early, leaving Ernest to his own devices. The Serra characterised Brazil's Costa Verde do Mar, a 1,500-kilometre-long mountain range, making it not simply an immensely scenic ride but also a hilly one. I felt mentally and physically tired, and struggled up hills usually easily scaled, even pushing my bike up a few. Nevertheless, it was gorgeous, and I wish I were in a better frame of mind to enjoy it all.



Ernest later caught up as he always did. I was unsure why he did that - maybe his actions were purely to annoy me. I, again, discovered a lovely guesthouse overlooking the Canal of Sao Sebastiao and Ilhabela Island and thought a pizza would improve my mood. Unfortunately, my order of a large vegetarian pizza from the pizzeria across the road came with tuna. This was obviously not my day!

Sao Sebastiao – Maranduba – 52 km

My knees were sore from the countless hills the previous day. Fortunately, it dawned a bright and sunny morning. I still felt fatigued but, once underway, felt a great deal better. Gone were the sore knees and it became a beautiful day past waterfalls and caves. Nevertheless, a small campsite on the beach stopped me in my tracks and I couldn't bring myself to cycle past such a lovely spot. Its white beach and tiny islands off the coast resembled a small paradise.

Maranduba - Ubatumirim – 61 km

There was no rushing that stretch of coastline, and I ambled on (Ernest in tow) from one beach to the next and crossed the tropic of Capricorn. It was, in fact, the third time I had crossed this line by bicycle. I found it quite ironic that between Brazil's two largest cities was a beautiful coastline featuring some of (I'm sure) Brazil's finest beaches, and mostly unknown to foreign tourists. Moreover, the beaches seemed even prettier the closer one got to Rio. The ocean was a bright blue-green and at least 25°C. Wonderfully comfortable, to say the least.

Towards the end of the day, I turned off the road via a sandy path and came upon a rustic beach offering all the necessary facilities. Camping was on a small grassy patch overlooking a long stretch of beach, and it felt like I could sit there forever, watching the small waves roll in.



Ubatumirim – Paraty – 49 km

Paraty turned out a lovely surprise after nearly missing the turnoff. The town was blessed by a beautiful beach and a historic old town, still revealing cobblestone roads so rough I had to walk the bike. The local campground was across the street from the beach. Food and drink carts were right on the water's edge, making it a perfect place to watch the calm, warm water of the Atlantic.

Paraty was picture pretty and a great place to spend an additional day doing laundry and lounging about. So pleasant was it, I could easily have stayed one more day.

Paraty – Tarituba – 37 km

We waited until our clothes had dried before heading out. Scarcely on our way, an interesting-looking turn-off lured me off our route. The detour revealed an idyllic beach and a cottage in a jungle setting on the water's edge.

We offloaded the bikes and sat on the beach eating our "pastel" (a fried pastry with a filling). I thought it was one of the most idyllic settings in Brazil. By evening, a sweet aroma filled the air, crickets chirped, and the moon shone brightly. Sadly, mosquitos came out, and one had to retreat indoors.

This was what cycle touring was all about. Regrettably, my cycling partner preferred to do distance, primarily by following the highway - a dreadfully monotonous task. Each tour in their own way and I liked discovering new things without a destination in mind. Ernest was out to "cycle around the world" and wasn't interested in exploring. Our different views of cycle touring, and life in general, didn't make for harmonious cycling, and I thought it best to go my own way.



Tarituba – Angra Dos Reis – 66 km

Breakfast was served under the trees outside our cottage. A full spread of bread rolls, ham, cheese, salami, coffee, juice, fruit and biscuits was served, and I felt like a royal family member. But, all good things came to an end. I thanked the owner and we continued our journey.

The road was slightly hilly but offered unique views of the Costa Verde. Even the nuclear power plant looked idyllic amongst the lush forests. Being entirely different from the rest of the coast, Angra Dos Reis was quite a surprise. Houses clung to the wooded mountainside overlooking the picturesque bay, and narrow cobblestone streets weaved through the old part of town.

Angra Dos Reis – Mangaratiba – 66 km

Albeit a scenic coast, the road was all but flat. I churned my way hill after hill, and sweated buckets in the hot and humid conditions. Nevertheless, the hills provided stunning views. One could see colossal oil tankers anchored in the sheltered bay, waiting their turn at the off-shore oil rigs.

At the turnoff to Mangaratiba, our route headed up one more large hill and I thought it best to head into town. After a few kilometres, the small, picturesque village of Mangaratiba, spread out along a steep peninsula, rolled into view. Unfortunately, Mangaratiba didn't offer budget accommodation or a place to pitch the tents as the town was one of the jumping-off points to the touristy Isla Grande. Returning to the highway, a more suitable option was located on the outskirts of town.











Mangaratiba – Barra Do Tijuca – 93 km

The route to Rio was hilly, but later flattened out somewhat. At Santa Cruz, a minor road turned off the highway and followed the coast. Following one last hill and dodging roadworks and heavy traffic, our path eventually spat us out at the beach. Barra Do Tijuca was near Rio and, contrary to where we came from, the entire area was built up. Remarkably, Tijuca had a campsite.

Barra Do Tijuca – Rio De Janeiro – 55 km

Barra Do Tijuca was located on the southwestern outskirts of Rio, and what a relief to find a twenty-kilometre-long cycle path running next to the beach in the direction of the city.

At the spectacular Jao bluff, no bicycles were allowed onto the bridge which ran through two tunnels connected by an elevated highway over the ocean. We pedalled across the bridge anyhow. Our illegal route spat us out close to the famous Ipanema and Copacabana beaches where another bicycle path was situated. After snapping a few pics of these famous beaches, the hunt to find accommodation was on.

To our surprise we found it at the start of Easter Weekend in one of the world's most prominent holiday destinations. All budget accommodation was choc-a-block full, but a room/flatlet was eventually uncovered only a few blocks from Copacabana Beach. Our digs came at quite a cost, and the condition was that it had to be taken the entire weekend, allowing for plenty of time to discover the city.

Easter Weekend - Rio De Janeiro

Rio was spectacular, with abundant natural beauty and many interesting people. I still claim it's one of the world's most beautiful cities. I walked the beach, swam in the ocean and took a bus to all the touristy places. But, of course, the beaches were crowded, and one could hardly move. Still, it remained a beautiful city.







Soon the time came to move along. Personal problems between Ernest and I forced me to make a long-overdue decision. It wasn't an easy choice as I enjoyed myself in South America. Still, I felt I had to put distance between Ernest and myself.

Rio

I moved to a cheaper hostel while deciding what to do next. After much deliberation, a flight was booked to South Africa. However, they needed a cash payment. Unfortunately, I could only draw half the money at a time and had to wait until the following morning to draw the remainder.

The rest of the day was spent chatting with people at the hostel. What a remarkable place a hostel can be. People from all over the world gathered there and had fascinating stories and reasons to travel.

It felt like I wasn't meant to leave, as all sorts of difficulties arose as I tried to organise my "escape". Firstly, I discovered one of my fellow travellers had dipped into my wallet and helped themselves to my money. How and when it happened, I wasn't sure. I thought it all quite weird as not all the money was taken, only about half. There wasn't anything I could do but return to the ATM and draw the necessary funds to pay for the ticket.

The travel agent booked the flights, and I was told to collect the tickets later. On my return, I learned they couldn't reserve an Air Malaysia flight in Brazil and refunded the money. The trip from Rio to Buenos Ayres was scheduled but to the wrong airport and the booking was cancelled and a new ticket issued. The Air Malaysia ticket (Buenos Ayres to Cape Town) could be bought online. Still, my visa card had a security setting that prohibited online purchases. I decided to go out on a limb and buy a ticket at the airport once in Buenos Ayres. With that, I left the Americas, and it would be four months before I returned to Rio.



EUROPE

I made use of the summer in the northern hemisphere to cycle Europe, starting in Budapest and ending in Lisbon from where I returned to Rio. I had a great time in Europe and felt confident and healthy by the time I arrived back. In the meantime, my sister Amanda decided to join me for a few months of cycling in Brazil.





About this Book

This book accounts for my cycle ride from Uruguay to Rio de Janeiro. There are hundreds of different ways and the course described is by no means the best. If the intention is to use this book as a cycle touring guide, then please keep the following in mind:

The distances

Daily distances in this book may not be the shortest as we tended to deviate occasionally. The daily kilometres recorded were, however, accurate according to my odometer. The reading often varied from markers and maps, and sometimes over- or under-read. I always noted the kilometres at the end of the day, which might have included going to the market or searching for accommodation.

Time of year and date

This book accounts for my visit to Brazil between March and April 2011 and many things could have changed; roads may now be in better or worse condition. Places, where I stayed may now be upgraded or demolished. The hills may or may not be as steep as described, but it sure felt like it at the time.

Insurance

A travel insurance policy is necessary to cover theft, loss and medical problems. Some policies specifically exclude "dangerous activities", including scuba diving, motorcycling and even trekking. I don't think cycling is considered dangerous but check the small print.

Clothing

We spent most days in the saddle, so make sure you have good quality, padded cycling shorts. I cycle in ordinary sandals, but one can use any comfortable footwear. Summers in Brazil are sweltering, but it can get quite cold at elevation, so pack accordingly. Personal toiletries should include insect repellent and anti-chafe cream. I recommend using a cycling helmet.

The bicycle

Any bicycle will do as long as you are comfortable. I use an ordinary mountain bike with a Merida frame fitted with Shimano Deore bike parts, Alex wheel rims and Schwalbe tyres. The bicycle is fitted with Tubus bicycle racks. Panniers are expensive but essential items, and Ortlieb panniers are world-renowned. Make sure that you know how to fix a punctured tube. A phone holder for the handlebar is convenient for navigation as I use Maps.ME or Google Maps. Furthermore, a handlebar bag is essential for holding a camera and other items needed during the day.

Recommended further reading

Lonely Planet: The e-book is less expensive and a handy guide.





ABOUT BRAZIL (Please refer to the Internet or your favourite travel guidebook for a more in-depth overview.)

Capital City

Brasilia is the capital city with a population of 2.9 million, making it the country's fourth-largest city. The largest city in Brazil is Sao Paolo, with 12.4 million inhabitants.

Currency

The currency is Real. 1 Real=100 centavos

Language

Portuguese is the official language.

Religion

Mainly Christian (Roman Catholics 65%, Protestants 22%)

Location and size

Brazil lies in South America and shares borders with all South American countries except Chile and Ecuador. The longest borders are shared with Bolivia and are 3,400 km long. Brazil is the world's fifth-largest country and covers three time zones. The country has almost 7,500km of coastline and thus have many great beaches.

Population

209 Million people live in Brazil (2017)

Travel Tips

Weather Overview

The country is split into four distinct climatic regions: The Amazon Basin, the Brazilian plateau, the coastlands within the tropics and the southern states.

The Amazon Basin is the largest area in the world with a typical equatorial climate. Rainfall in some places can exceed 2000 mm, and there is no real dry season. Tropical temperatures (27 - 32 °C) are typical.

The Brazilian Plateau is another vast region but being south of the Amazon Basin, and at a moderate altitude, it has a very different climate. There is a distinct wet season, with almost all the rainfall (about 1500 mm) falling between October and April.

The tropical east coast (including Rio de Janeiro) has a typically hot tropical climate, although there are significant differences in the seasonal rainfall from north to south.

Finally, the southern states have a warm temperate climate, although cooler along the coast in winter. The difference between the seasons is determined by temperature rather than rainfall.

Festivals & Religious Ceremonies

January 1: New Year's Day

Early February: Carnaval (varies year to year.)

April 21: Remembrance of Tiradentes

May 1: Labour Day

May or June: Corpus Christi

September 7: Independence Day

October 12: Nossa Senhora Aparecida

November 2: All Souls Day (Day of the Dead)

November 15: Proclamation of the Republic December 25: Christmas Day

Visas and border crossings

Always check the embassy website of the country you visit for visa requirements and border crossing procedures as these can change unexpectedly.

At the time of writing the following applied:

U.S., Canadian, Australian and New Zealand nationals need a visa to visit Brazil. British citizens and EU passport holders do not need a visa. To enter Brazil, a valid passport that has six months or more before expiration is required along with a return ticket.

Traffic and Road conditions

Please remember that Brazilians drive on the right side of the road. The tropical heat can make long-cycle touring a challenge. Most of the main roads are in excellent condition but have heavy traffic. The rural roads are narrow but with light traffic.

Health and safety hazards. (please check the CDC website <https://wwwnc.cdc.gov>)

The diseases of most concern are mosquito-borne infections, including malaria, yellow fever and dengue fever, which are not a significant concern in temperate regions.

Inoculations

However, becoming ill on the way is relatively common and may include respiratory infections, diarrhoea, and dengue fever. Most of these illnesses can be either prevented or treated locally. Always pack personal medication. Getting a rabies shot before going on a cycling holiday may be a good idea. If we encounter a rabid dog, he will most likely go for those pedalling legs! Under normal circumstances, a chasing dog will soon lose interest when you stop pedalling.

Recommended Vaccinations

Most travellers only spend a few, if any, days in areas that have a high risk. For those travellers, little precautions and probably no immunisations must be taken. Wearing clothing that covers your body and using bug spray should decrease the chance of catching one of these diseases.

The information on this page is simply a collection of general precautions. Please consult your doctor for medical advice.

Yellow Fever

A yellow-fever vaccination is recommended for all passengers returning from endemic areas. Officially, there are no "infected" areas of yellow fever within Brazil. But these could be said to include: the rural areas of Acre, Amapa, Amazonas, Goias, Maranhao, Mato Grosso, Mato Grosso do Sul, Para, Rondônia, Roraima and Tocantins, and some areas of Minas Gerais, Parana and Sao Paulo.

International Yellow Fever vaccination certificate:

Applicants who have visited any of the countries listed below within the previous 90 days before entry in Brazil are required to present a valid International Yellow Fever vaccination certificate: Peru, Bolivia, Colombia, Ecuador, French Guyana, Venezuela, Angola, Benin, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Congo, Gabon, Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Liberia, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, Sudan.

Malaria

Some risk of malaria is present in all nine "Legal Amazonia" states Acre, Amapa, Amazonas, Maranhao (western part), Mato Grosso (northern part), Para (except Belem City), Rondônia, Roraima and Tocantins. Check with a knowledgeable source about the risk in the particular area you are visiting.

Transmission is higher in jungle areas of lumbering, agricultural and agricultural development that are less than five years old where multi-resistant *P.falciparum* strains are common. Major cities, including Pôrto Velho, Boa Vista, Macapa, Manaus, Santarem and Maraba have a lower transmission rate.

Protection treatments vary according to the risk of contracting malaria, the dominant species of the malaria parasite in an area, and the possible risk of severe side effects from the prophylactic drugs.

The WHO's - World Health Organization's - recommended Malaria prophylaxis: mefloquine.

Hepatitis A

A hepatitis A vaccination is recommended for travellers who drink non-bottled water.

I'm no medical expert, but best follow the above ideas as we don't want to be sick; we want to cycle.

Natural Disasters in Brazil

Brazil is one of the world's largest territories and is exposed to various natural hazards. Drought and excess rainfall, resulting in recurrent floods and landslides, are the most frequent and disruptive events and significantly impact urban areas. In 2011, floods, landslides, and mudslides in Rio de Janeiro claimed about 1,000 lives and incurred total losses of 1.35 per cent of the state's gross domestic product. Climate change is projected to increase the frequency and severity of these events.

Do's and Dont's

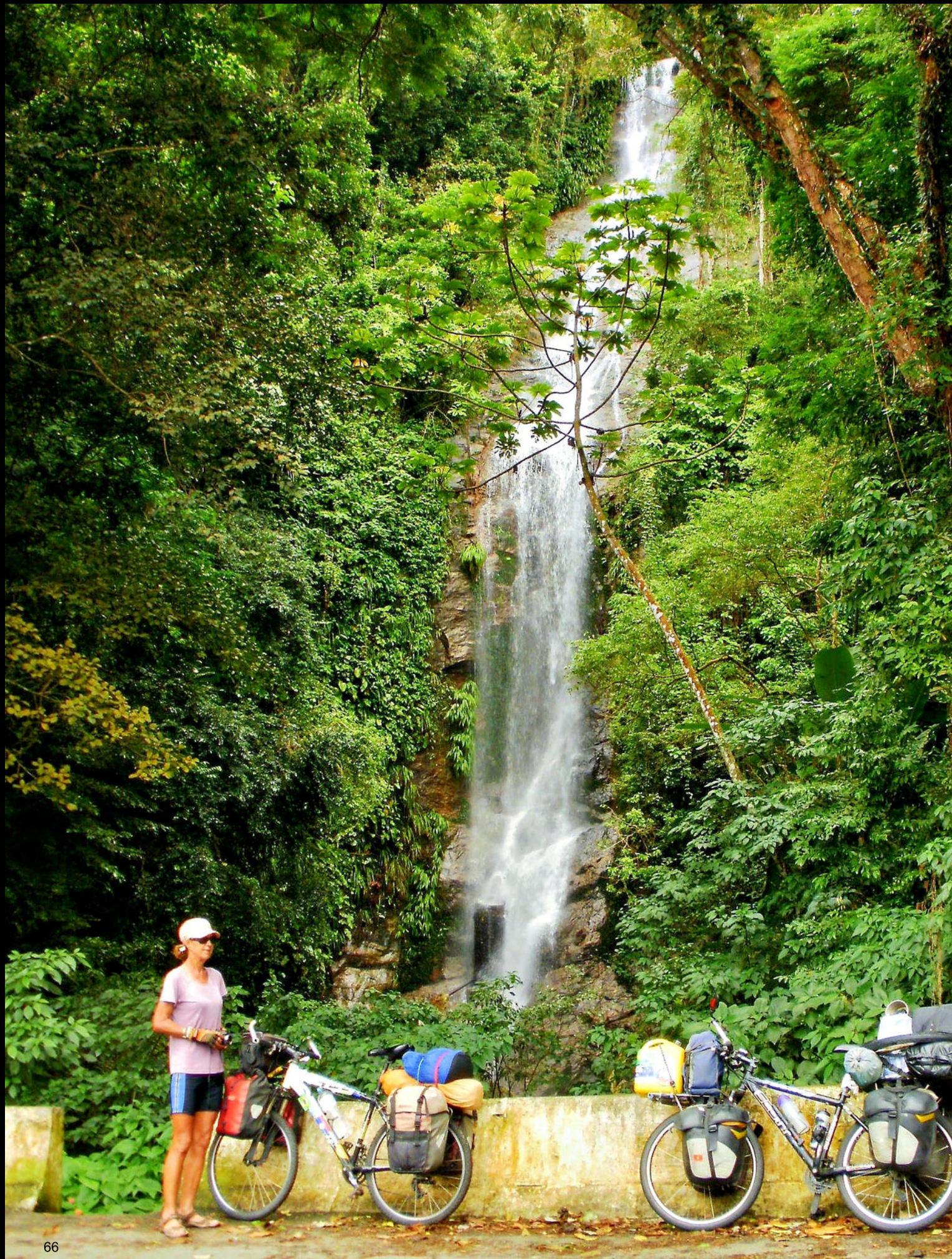
DO:

- Make eye contact with those around you, even as you walk through the streets and marketplaces, or travel on public transport. This is considered normal and polite. It is also a safety measure, as pickpocket thieves are known to prey on those who do not make eye contact (since they can, presumably, not identify the people around them and the perpetrator of the crime).
- Be an alert pedestrian, looking carefully before crossing the street. This is a busy country, with plenty of traffic.
- Leave the bulk of your money and essential paperwork (passport, driver's licence, etc.) in a safe place at your accommodation. Carry only the money you need for the day with you. If necessary, make photocopies of your paperwork to carry with you and leave the originals at your hotel.
- Pickpocketing is, unfortunately, a threat, particularly in bustling areas full of locals and tourists making their way around the beautiful cities of Brazil. Therefore, when visiting a very busy area, do not wear valuable jewellery (including wristwatches) or carry cameras, money and wallets anywhere in or from which they can be seen or taken.
- If you are the victim of any crime, be sure to report it to the tourist police immediately.
- If you will be visiting a busy area, wear your backpack backwards so it hangs on your chest, not behind you.
- Always check with your hotel if certain areas are safe, or if they advise you not to visit them. Take their advice to heart.
- Get a taxi rather than a bus for long-distance travel. They are reasonably priced and safe.
- Brazilian locals are generally accommodating and often quite friendly. Accept their help if they offer it to you
- If you need to draw money, choose an ATM inside a mall or bank rather than one on the street.
- Wear walking shoes (not hiking boots), shorts and a plain T-shirt to fit in with the locals.

DON'T:

- Get drunk. Brazilians are not often drunk and do not respect others who consume too much alcohol.
- Do drugs. It is illegal to use or have drugs in Brazil.
- Make use of prostitutes. They often supplement their income by robbing their clients.
- Opt for really cheap accommodation. Small accommodation providers are generally unwilling to provide lodging for foreigners (which they may do, but begrudgingly) and may not offer the safety and conveniences of larger establishments.
- Leave your luggage, shopping or any other personal possessions unattended.
- Give money to beggars and street children. Although these pose little or no physical danger to you, they should not be supported financially.
- Walk in the streets or along the beaches after dark.





About the Author

Born and bred in Cape Town, South Africa, Leana was never much of a cyclist. Her love for cycle touring started in 2005 when she participated in the Tour D’Afrique, a race from Cairo to Cape Town. She bought a bicycle, flew to Cairo, and had no idea what she was letting herself in for. To her surprise, she cycled every inch of the way to Cape Town. On her return, she found it surprisingly difficult to return to regular life and decided to continue travelling by bicycle.

Leana, accompanied by Ernest Markwood, left Cape Town at the end of March 2007. What was intended as a long bike ride became an around-the-world cycle ride. In the beginning, they cycled together most of the time. Eventually, each found their own pace and direction in life and on the road.

In the process, Leana has cycled Africa twice, the Middle East, Europe (including the UK), Eastern Europe, the Caucasus, the Indian subcontinent, China, Southeast Asia and Australia. From Australia, she flew to Ushuaia, Argentina and spent the next few years cycling South, Central and North America. Afterwards, a year was spent visiting the larger islands, including Cuba, Jamaica, Sri Lanka, the Philippines, South Korea and Taiwan.

At the time of writing, Leana found herself back in Southeast Asia.

Picture Credits

Ernest Markwood (p7), (p8), (p12 top), (p14 bottom), (p18 top), (p21 bottom), (p24 bottom), (p25 top), (p41 bottom), (p46), (p51 bottom), (p52 top), (p53 bottom) and (p66)



**There's an immense sense of freedom in
carrying with you all you need.**

