

# Understand Brazil

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# Brazil Today

It's a challenging moment in Brazil. The largest corruption scandal in the nation's history has battered an economy already in recession and incited widespread protests. With unemployment on the rise, Brazil's currency in free-fall and surging crime in the cities, Brazilians are not surprisingly pessimistic about the future. There is hope, however, that the 2016 Olympic Games will bring a boost to the economy – and to the nation's spirits.

## Best on Film

**Tropa de Elite** (Elite Squad, 2007) An action film of crime and corruption as an elite police squad and drug lords clash. Don't miss the sequel (*The Enemy Within*).

**Central do Brasil** (Central Station, 1998) Walter Salles' moving tale of a homeless boy and an older woman on a road trip across Brazil.

**Reaching for the Moon** (2013) Tragic love story between an American poet and Brazilian architect, set in 1950s Petrópolis.

**Bel Borba AQUI** (2012) Colorful documentary of an artist who uses Salvador as his canvas.

**Ao Som As Redor** (Neighboring Sounds, 2012) Critically acclaimed film dealing with the wealthy and the underclass in Recife.

## Best in Print

**Brazil on the Rise** (Larry Rohter, 2010) Insightful portrait of the politics, culture and challenges of the South American nation.

**The Lost City of Z** (David Grann, 2009) Gripping journey into the Amazon to retrace the steps of lost explorer Colonel Fawcett.

**Death in Brazil** (Peter Robb, 2005) Well-written travelogue that delves into history, culture and corruption.

## A Scandal of Epic Proportions

Brazil has long grappled with corruption. Embezzlement, bribes and money laundering occur with dispiriting frequency in a country ranked 69th in the world for its perceived level of public corruption. Yet even a people accustomed to this pervasive problem were shocked at the vast size of the scandal that recently came to light. In 2014, an undercover investigation by Brazilian police unearthed a colossal kickback scheme tied to Petrobras, Brazil's massive state-run oil company.

Prosecutors allege that top officials from Petrobras colluded with a cartel of companies to overcharge on contracts, with jaw-dropping sums of money being funneled to the governing Workers' Party. The kickbacks, which allegedly began in 2004 when former president Lula was in office, total a whopping US\$3 billion. The reach of the scheme boggles the imagination, and involved phantom corporations, Rolex watches, yachts, prostitutes and helicopters, with one elderly man flying huge bricks of cash around the world (sometimes as much as €500,000 at a time).

## Protests

The scandal has already brought down major titans of industry and high-ranking government officials. By late 2015, some 117 indictments had been issued, five politicians arrested and criminal cases brought against more than a dozen companies. The fallout is damning for the ruling Workers' Party, which no one expects to survive the next major election. Many Brazilians believe that President Dilma Rousseff was also involved. She chaired the board of Petrobras for seven years, during the period when many of the bribes are believed to have occurred. Although she was quickly cleared of any involvement in the scheme, Brazilians have taken to the streets in massive protests calling for her impeachment. By late 2015,