

# History

Brazil's population, the fifth biggest in the world, reached its lands from Africa, Asia, Europe and other parts of the Americas – diverse origins that have created one of the planet's most racially mixed societies. How they came, intermingled and developed the unique Brazilian identity that charms visitors today is a rough-and-tumble story of courage, greed, endurance and cruelty, eventually yielding a fitful progress towards the democracy the country now enjoys.

## BEFORE THE PORTUGUESE

For a fascinating look at the history of the Amazon, its indigenous peoples, explorers and stunning biodiversity, read *The Tree of Rivers: The Story of the Amazon* (2008) by John Hemming.

By the time the Portuguese rolled up in AD 1500, what is now Brazil had already been populated for as long as 12,000 years. But unlike the Incas, Brazil's early inhabitants never developed a highly advanced civilization and they left few clues for archaeologists to follow. One of the few certainties is that it wasn't the Portuguese who discovered *terra brasilis*.

It's generally believed that the early inhabitants of the Americas arrived from Siberia in waves between about 12,000 and 8000 BC, crossing land now submerged beneath the Bering Strait, then gradually spreading southward over many millennia. Researchers in the remote Serra da Capivara in the Northeastern state of Piauí (p589) have found some of Brazil's earliest evidence of human presence. The oldest traces of human life in the Amazon region can be seen on a detour from a river trip between Santarém and Belém: a series of rock paintings estimated to be 12,000 years old near Monte Alegre (p632). Other remnants of early civilizations can be found on the Ilha de Marajó (p620 and p632) at the mouth of the Amazon, and at the Gruta da Lapinha (p242) in Minas Gerais.

By the time the Portuguese arrived, there were probably between two and four million people in what's now Brazil.

## CABRAL & CHUMS

Pedro Álvares Cabral died largely forgotten in 1520. His likeness adorns those rarely seen Brazilian one-cent coins.

The course of Brazilian history was changed forever in 1500, when a fleet of 12 Portuguese ships carrying nearly 1200 men rolled up near what is today Porto Seguro.

The fleet, ostensibly bound for East Africa and Asia to set up trading posts, had headed west after passing the Cape Verde Islands, off the coast of West Africa. Increasingly it is thought that, far from having been simply blown off course, the Portuguese already had reason to suspect there was a large landmass across the southern Atlantic, which would make such a giant detour worthwhile. Whatever the motive, on April 22, 1500, Pedro Álvares Cabral and his gang stepped for the first time onto Brazilian soil. Their indigenous reception committee was ready and waiting.

## TIMELINE

c 12,000 BC

Early inhabitants of the Americas arrive from Siberia in waves between about 12,000 and 8000 BC, crossing land now submerged beneath the Bering Strait, then gradually spreading southward over many millennia.

1494

The two dominant empires of the time sign the treaty of Tordesillas, dividing newly discovered lands in the New World between Spain and Portugal. The eastern half of South America will 'belong' to Portugal.

1500

Portuguese explorer Pedro Álvares Cabral makes landfall around present-day Porto Seguro and claims possession of the land – believed at first to be an island – for the Portuguese crown.

'There were 18 or 20 men,' marveled scribe Pero Vaz de Caminha in a letter back to the Portuguese king. 'They were brown-skinned, all of them naked, without anything at all to cover their private parts. In their hands they carried bows and arrows.'

The festivities didn't last long. Having erected a cross and held Mass in the land they baptized Terra da Vera Cruz (Land of the True Cross), the Portuguese took to the waves once again. With lucrative spice, ivory and diamond markets in Asia and Africa to exploit, Portugal had bigger fish to fry elsewhere. It wasn't till 1531 that the first Portuguese settlers arrived in Brazil.

## BRAZIL'S INDIGENOUS PEOPLE

For Brazil's *índios* (indigenous people), April 22, 1500 marked the first chapter in their gradual extermination. Sixteenth-century European explorers along the Amazon encountered large, widespread populations; some were practicing agriculture while others were nomadic hunter-gatherers. Coastal peoples fell into three main groups: the Guarani (south of São Paulo and in the Paraguai and Paraná basins inland), the Tupi or Tupinambá (along most of the rest of the coast) and the Tapuia (peoples inhabiting shorter stretches of coast in among the Tupi and Guarani). The Tupi and Guarani had much in common in language and culture. A European adaptation of the Tupi-Guarani language later spread throughout colonial Brazil and is still spoken by some people in Amazonia.

Over the following centuries a four-front war was waged on the indigenous way of life. It was a cultural war, as well as a physical, territorial and biological one. Many *índios* fell victim to the *bandeirantes* – groups of roaming adventurers who spent the 17th and 18th centuries exploring Brazil's interior, pillaging *índio* settlements as they went. Those who escaped such a fate were struck down by the illnesses shipped in from Europe, to which they had no natural resistance. Others were worked to death on sugar plantations.

If the *bandeirantes* were responsible for the physical destruction of the indigenous population, it was the Jesuits who began their cultural destruction, outlawing their traditions and customs and settling them in *aldeias* (missions), though at the same time they did oppose *índio* slavery and attempted to protect the indigenous from the *bandeirantes*.

By the start of the 21st century Brazil's indigenous population had dwindled to somewhere between 350,000 and 600,000, the majority of them in the relatively isolated Amazonian forests. See the boxed text, p38, for more on how they are surviving.

## DIVIDING THE LAND

Thirty years after Brazil's 'discovery,' Portugal's King João III decided it might actually be worth settling there after all. The first settlement sprang up at São Vicente, when a fleet of five ships carrying some 400 men docked near what is now the port of Santos.

In Portuguese, the term *índios* (Indians) is not considered offensive, and is even used by indigenous groups to describe themselves. The term for someone from India is *indiano*. Spanish and English make no such differentiation.

French philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau based his optimistic view of human nature (the noble savage) in part on early Portuguese descriptions of natives who were 'innocent, mild and peace-loving'.

### 1534–36

Hoping to develop the land into colonies and bring back wealth, the Portuguese crown divides Brazil into 14 captaincies and doles them out to rich nobles. Only two captaincies prove successful.

### 1549

The king sends Tomé de Sousa to be the first governor of Brazil, to centralize authority and save the few remaining captaincies. Sousa founds the city of Salvador, which will remain Brazil's capital for over two centuries.

### 1550

Facing a shortage of labor (as *índios* die from introduced European diseases), Portugal turns to the African slave trade; open-air slave markets flourish in the slowly growing colony.