

## *Bus travel in the Andes – an adventure you will never forget....*

Stepping onto a bus at the beginning of a journey in the Ecuadorian Andes can be an unnerving experience. Maybe it's the sight of those shiny, bald tires which look as if they haven't seen tread since the driver was last in short trousers. Or maybe it's the comprehensive collection of religious imagery decorating the driver's cab, leaving one to contemplate prayer as the best means of ensuring a safe trip. On the other hand, it could simply be the fact that the bus is packed to suffocation point. For you can bet your last banana pancake that, on board there will be enough passengers, luggage and livestock to fill your average super-tanker. Overcrowded, it seems, is a word not included in the Andean vocabulary.

As the bus heads off and you settle down into your 10 sq cm of available space, thoughts may turn to the road. In the Andean backwoods roads tend to range from badly potholed dirt tracks, barely wide enough for two buses to pass, to badly potholed dirt tracks, barely wide enough for two anorexic llamas to stand shoulder-to-shoulder without one of them falling off the side.

Such a prevalence of potholes does have its compensations, though. It makes for some amusing near head-on collisions as your driver veers back and forth across the carriageway in an attempt to avoid them. In places, the potholes join up, so that the road becomes one giant pothole with the driver veering wildly from one side to the other in a desperate attempt to avoid hitting the few remaining bits of original road that stick up like stalagmites, but potholes are only a minor distraction. Rather more worrying are the crosses that all-too frequently appear by the side of the road. These are placed by the relatives of those who have perished in road accidents at the precise spot where the vehicle plunged over the side. This means that they can serve as some macabre point-scoring system to indicate the degree of difficulty of any particular bend. On the most dangerous bends, there may be so many that they form a makeshift crash barrier, prevent-

ing others from suffering the same fate.

Guiding you along these thin strips of mountain roads which coil their way through the Andes are people you will come to fear and respect – the drivers. At times you may be convinced that many of these drivers are members of a strange religious cult whose sole aim is to wipe out the entire traveling public. What other explanation could there be for hurtling at breakneck speed along roads that would make a tortoise slow down?

Some drivers manage to combine their formula one racing skills with a nice line in sadistic humor. There you'll be, crawling along behind an excruciatingly slow-moving farm vehicle on a road as straight as a pool cue. Then, as you approach the first bend for miles, the driver will suddenly pull out to overtake. Just as suddenly, he pulls back in, comfortably missing the onrushing 10-ton truck by, oh, at least 2 mm. You have to laugh.

Though you will often curse the driver's apparent disregard for your well-being, you'll also have occasion to sing his praises. For when the bus breaks down (as it invariably does), he can display his breathtaking mechanical genius. More often than not, this will happen in the middle of the night, far from the nearest dwelling, with the



*Novel parking protocols in the Andes.*

temperature outside well below zero. The engine has blown up, the wheels fallen off and the driver disappears into a cloud of black smoke wielding nothing more than a metal pipe, an old cigarette packet and a length of string. Miraculously, an hour later, you're on your way once more. Uncanny.

But it's not all discomfort and near-death experiences. The intimacy of bus travel makes for some interesting encounters and, if your Spanish is up to it, can prove the beginning of many a beautiful friendship. Buses can also be a unique insight into Andean life. And at dinner parties in years to come, it'll be these experiences that have your guests glancing anxiously at their wristwatches and reaching for their jackets.

*Article provided by Footprint Handbooks.*

## *In This Issue*

Letter from the Editors .....	2
Travel With a Different Point of View .....	2
Savory Web Content for Hungry Learners .....	3
Country Close-up: México .....	4
Before You Go, You NEED To Know .....	5
Music Review .....	6
Ecuador "A-OK" .....	6
Program Profile: Sucre, Bolivia .....	7
AmeriSpan: Off the Wire .....	8



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THE BRIDGE BETWEEN CULTURES

## Letter From The Editors:

Hello Friends,



Preparing for your language travel trip is the theme of this Translator after focusing on Latin culture in the last issue. In fact, we are working hard on adding a large section on our web page dedicated to this theme. We would like to thank, Bi-Lingual America and Footprint handbooks for their contributions to this issue of the Translator.

By the time you read this our web site re-design should be completed. There are three primary areas of improvement to the site. First, we are adding additional information and photos for each language program listing. Second, we have re-organized most of the site to make it easier to find what you need fast. Third, we are adding an "AmeriSpan Community" section which combines our travel resource center, articles written by AmeriSpan staff, travelogues by past AmeriSpan participants and additional content licensed from other organizations specializing in travel & education. Throughout this newsletter, you'll see some examples and additional information about the new "AmeriSpan Community" section of our web site.

Besides our improved web site, AmeriSpan has other news:

- We have begun to offer Portuguese programs in Brazil
- STA offices in the UK, Australia and New Zealand, Travel Cuts offices in Canada, USIT offices in Germany and JDJ offices in Poland will be offering AmeriSpan programs bringing the total number of student travel agency offices offering AmeriSpan to more than 300 worldwide
- AmeriSpan and Languages Abroad are opening a joint European sales office in Madrid, Spain.

We hope you enjoy this issue and we wish you a happy summer!

John Slocum & Dorioara Pinku  
Co-Directors

## Travel with a different point of view

Tired of the same travel and leisure magazines that focus on expensive premium resorts and uniform packaged tours? *trips* magazine is a fresh alternative on newsstands. *trips*, which premiered in 1997, says that its focus is neither on the tourist nor on the sightseer. Rather, it is focused on the traveler.

Each issue has a featured travel destination, ranging from San Francisco to Nepal and everywhere in between. Many of them discuss off-the-beaten path travel destinations and unique travel experiences and most are written from a first person point of view. *trips'* unique style really gives the reader an insider's perspective.

Although the majority of *trips'* readers are in their 20's or 30's, the magazine includes helpful hints which are useful to budget travelers of any age. Cultural cues, cautionary notes on world destinations, and suggested website travel resource pages are also helpful to any traveler for planning their trip.

*trips* is available on newsstands or via subscription. 1 year (6 issues) is \$11.95. 2 years (12 issues) is \$17.95. Back issues are also available for \$5 per issue (including postage).

To subscribe, write to:  
*trips, a travel journal*  
155 Filbert Street, Suite 245  
Oakland, CA 94607-2524

## Quizo Olé Winner

Margie Cole from Monticello, Florida was the lucky winner of our Quizo Contest. She won 2 free weeks of classes and homestay at our Cordoba, Argentina program.



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## Savory web content for hungry learners

We are cooking up some tasty content for our web site and you, our readers, are our guests of honor. Don't worry, it's low calorie and high energy, and it's perfect for those mid-afternoon or midnight cravings to feed your brain! So put on that bib, take a seat and get ready to dig in...

Let's whet the palette first to properly pique your appetite. How about a quick and light daily lesson to keep those language skills polished? Want more, then toss down a few fascinating facts about Latin America served up by Footprint Handbooks. (Besides, it's a great way show off to friends!).

OK, clear those plates and get ready for the main course. You can elect between Spanish articles written for beginner, intermediate or advanced students or language acquisition tips – sound advice on how to cook quality, not quantity, into your learning recipe. The dishes are continually updated and prepared by our partner chefs Parlo, Inc. and Bilingual America.

Yeah, we know you're feeling a bit stuffed by now, but our dessert slides right down (and goes perfect with a good coffee). Why not bite into our travel journal series, provided by *Trips* magazine. Raft down the Bio Bio

River in Chile or travel through Guatemala through the eyes of *Trips*' expert guides.

Feel like something with many layers and textures? Delve into our interview series, highlighting intriguing Latinos making a difference in the world we share. Our first in the series was with Isabel Allende, the acclaimed author of *The House of the Spirits* and other books. We will prepare more in time for the summer and fall.

Finally, how about a sprinkling of eye candy? Click onto our on-line photo gallery and see some of the best pictures from recent AmeriSpan travelers. Mmmm, the exquisite flavors of learning and travel. OK, who's going to clean the dishes?

For these calorie-free and guilt-free pleasures anytime, click onto [www.amerispan.com](http://www.amerispan.com). ¡Buen provecho!

# ALTERNATIVES TO MASS TOURISM

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## Country Close-up: México

**Public Safety:** Intermediate. Street crime, assaults, and kidnapping are all hazard in Mexico City, and to a lesser degree in Guadalajara. The third main city, Monterrey, is generally considered safer. A number of taxi drivers have been responsible for armed holdups of their customers. Always avoid unregistered or unmarked vehicles. In Mexico City it may be prudent to avoid flagging down even legitimate taxis on the street, instead using those secured at organized stands known as *sitios*. Official airport or hotel taxis are the safest (and most expensive) option. Caution is also advised in crowded markets, bus and metro stations, where pickpockets and bag snatchers tend to congregate. Holdups along the nation's highways are another hazard; intercity travel by car or bus is safest during daylight hours. Insurgents remain active in the southern state of Chiapas, regularly setting-up roadblocks, but there has been little associated crime or violence.

**Health Risk:** Low. No recent developments.

**Weather & Nat. Phenomena:** Hurricanes caused a total of 17 deaths and considerable property damage in late Aug in the northern states of Monterrey, Tamaulipas, Coahuila, and Baja California Sur. Normal climatic conditions prevail elsewhere. High levels of pollution are an ongoing problem in Mexico City and surroundings.

**Travel Costs:** Daily travel budget: luxury \$321, 1<sup>st</sup> class \$184, economy \$34, basic \$13. Hotels: luxury \$105, 1<sup>st</sup> class

\$57, economy \$19, basic \$7. Restaurants: luxury \$33, 1<sup>st</sup> class \$22, economy \$5, basic \$2. Airfares \$0.24/km, \$0.39/mi. Bus \$0.037/km, \$0.06/mi. Taxi \$0.43/km, \$0.70/mi. City bus fare \$0.27. Gasoline \$0.50/l, \$1.89/gal.

**The Economy:** US\$1=9.20 *Nuevo Peso* (official cash), 9.20 (official TC's), 9.20 (parallel cash). Inflation 1.2%/mo. Minimum wage \$104/mo. Cost of living index \$292/mo. Gradual recovery continues, with official estimates for growth in GDP recently revised upwards from 2.9% to 3.2%. The important petroleum sector suffered a setback however, when Mexico agreed to limit production in Aug, in order to help maintain world prices. The growing cost of financing the national debt is also of concern, up from 13.3% to 18.7% of the federal budget over the past year. Overall, while macroeconomic indicators are generally in line with government forecasts and the expectation of international financial organizations, many Mexicans continue to talk of an ongoing economic crisis. Unemployment in particular, remains an important problem.

**Political Situation:** Stable. Constitutional Democracy. President Ernesto Zedillo (term 12/94 to 11/2000). Intensive political maneuvering is underway in anticipation of next year's presidential elections. The incumbent *Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI)*, will hold primary elections on Nov 7. The two front-runners for the candidacy are Roberto Madraza, the controversial governor of the state of Tabasco, and Francisco Labastida Ochoa, an ex-cabinet minister. After 70 continuous years in power, the *PRI* is still considered unassailable, unless the two main opposition parties can form a united front against it. This alliance has been illusive however, as neither Vicente Fox, leader of the right-ist *Partido de Acción Nacional (PAN)* nor Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas of the centre-left *Partido Revolucionado Democrático (PRD)* seem eager to give up their own presidential candidacy in favor of the other. Five months of protest by students of the large state university *UNAM*, continue in Mexico City. The politically-inspired unrest which was sparked by an increased in tuitions, has divided the student body and sporadically degenerated into violence.



*Vacationing on the Mexican coast.*

For additional details regarding 17 countries in South and Central America you may contact The Latin American Travel Advisor by calling toll-free from the U.S. or Canada, 1-800-327-3573, by sending e-mail to [LATA@pi.pro.ec](mailto:LATA@pi.pro.ec), or by visiting their web site ([www.amerispan.com/lata/](http://www.amerispan.com/lata/)).

### More México Facts

- **Population:** 96 Million.
- **Location:** Pacific Ocean on the west, Gulf of Mexico bordering the east. Borders the U.S.A.
- **Area:** 1,972,000 sq km (769,080 sq mi).
- **Weather:** Mexico's climate varies according to its topography. It's hot and humid along the coastal plains on both sides of the country, but inland, at higher elevations, such as in Guadalajara or Mexico City, the climate is much drier and more temperate. The hot, wet season is May to October, with the hottest and wettest months falling between June and September over most of the country. December to February are generally the coolest months, when north winds can make inland northern Mexico decidedly chilly, with temperatures sometimes approaching freezing.
- **Languages:** Spanish and over 50 indigenous languages.
- **Capital:** Mexico City.
- **Religion:** 90% Roman Catholic.
- **Ethnic Makeup:** Approximately 80% mestizo (mixed European and Indian descent) and 10% indígena (Native Americans or Indians - including Nahua, Maya, Zapotecs, Mixtecs, Totonacs, and Tarascos or Purépecha).

## Before You Go, You Need To Know...

Wow, you're getting ready to go, or thinking about going, to a Spanish-speaking country for an "in-country" Spanish learning experience. This will be one of the best experiences of your life if...

If what, you ask? If you go properly prepared. I'll tell you one thing, if you go to your country of choice (and there are some amazing choices!) knowing zero or little Spanish you're in for a huge shock. Think about it, you're going somewhere to learn something you don't know, in a place you don't know, with people you don't

know. That, mi amigo, is called "Spanish shock."

Here's what you NEED to know before you go, ¿listo? (ready?)....

- 1000 of the most used words in Spanish, and
- At least 6 verb structures (preferably more) in which you can put all those vocabulary words.

The real question is HOW do you learn 1000 of the most important vocabulary

words in Spanish before you go and HOW do you learn 6 of the most important verb structures in the Spanish language?

1000 words are plenty to "get by" if you learn the **right** 1000 words. What are the **right** words? If I were you I would learn 200 words from each of the following five areas: family, business, personal care, travel/transportation, food/dining. This will give you balance and an ability to go "cross-situation." To get these words you can write down what you think are the most important words in each area in English and look them up in Spanish and then memorize them. Another option is to find a packaged version of this approach.

As far as structure is concerned, either dust off your old grammar books (boring and a pitiful way to learn structure) or find a different approach to learning structure. On the Internet version of this newsletter (on the AmeriSpan website), I will continue detailed discussion of how to quickly learn structure through the use of what I call "patterns". I think that you will find it very, very helpful if you have a sincere desire to learn to communicate well in Spanish.

Well, those are the two things you NEED to know before you go. It would be great if you knew more, but these are NEEDS if you're going to "sacar el jugo" (get the juice out) of your trip from a learning standpoint. Have a great trip!

*This article was written by Ricardo González, CEO of Bilingual America, a U.S. based national Spanish provider.*

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### Program Changes and Updates

**Buenos Aires, Argentina:** We have partnered up with a new school. It's the same organization that has operated our program in Santiago (Chile) for many years. The new arrangement should make for an improved overall experience for those choosing to study in Buenos Aires. Feel free to call or email for details about the new location, facilities, etc.

**Sucre, Bolivia:** Now, both small group classes, and private classes are available here - to suit both preferences. Private classes are often a bit more intensive and personalized. They work out best for students who need to cover specific topics and vocabulary; students who only have a very limited time in the program; and last but not least, students with a good attention span. Please note that the availability of private classes is limited and they are held in the afternoon from June to August.

The small group program is more dynamic and lively compared to the private classes. Students normally do not feel they are missing out on personal attention, especially not in the Sucre program since the maximum class size is only 4 students per group.

**Spain prices:** If you are familiar with our price sheet, you will notice that the Spain section looks a bit different nowadays. We have expanded on it and listed all the different accommodation options and the related costs. Well, we all wish it were simpler to figure out the Spain prices, however, we are hoping this addition will be helpful to our future language students. If you feel it's confusing, please do not hesitate to give us a call and an AmeriSpan language travel consultant will help you calculate the total cost according to the choices you made.

### Passports In A Hurry

For a reasonable service charge, Passport Express reduces the hassle and speeds the process of obtaining/renewing a passport. Some of our staff members have used Passport Express and highly recommend it. Web: [www.passportexpress.com](http://www.passportexpress.com), tel: 800-362-8196

### Car Insurance Experts

Planning on driving into Latin America? You'll need car insurance and Sanborn's is the expert on this matter. They offer insurance valid in most Latin American countries, sell maps and much more. Web: [www.sanborninsurance.com](http://www.sanborninsurance.com), tel: 800-222-0158

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## Online Trip Advice

The Experienced Traveler is a portal dedicated exclusively to traveler's needs: <http://www.tripadvice.com>. This web site provides travel resources, chat, forums and free advice via e-mail. Responses are guaranteed within 8 hours. Let their experience help you plan your trip. Here is what one of the viewers has to say:

*" Thanks a lot for the quick reply to my travel requests, you have put me about 10 huge steps ahead of where I was yesterday in planning my trip. Knowing that you can give good (and what appears to be experienced) advice on a moments notice, makes me feel a little more secure traveling alone as a female. Hope to meet you in person one day. Keep up the good work with the website and thanks again for your 'online' help!!! "*

## Music Review

There are many great Spanish language bands around right now. "Aterciopelados" hails from Colombia to feature the throaty lead singer, Andrea. Their album, *Pipa de la Paz*, although not their latest release (1997), is one of their best.

The lyrics are smart and sexy with a mixture of alternative rock, reggae and folk with a splash of flamenco. My favorite: *Chica Difícil*. So infectious, you'll find yourself humming the tune all day. What a great way to practice your Spanish, especially popular phrases!

– Highly Recommended by Carol LaMastra

(AmeriSpan's Volunteer/Internship Program Director)

### Other AmeriSpan Favorites:

- Cubanismo - ¡Cubanismo!
- La Oreja de Van Gogh - Dile al Sol
- Afro-Cuban All Stars - Toda Cuba Le Gusta
- Maná - Sueños Líquidos
- Afro-Peruvian Classics - The Soul of Black Peru



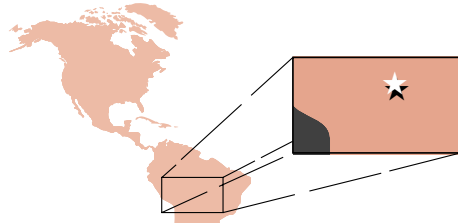
Of course all these CDs, including Buena Vista Social Club are available at our online store:

[http://www.amerispan.com/au\\_store\\_fr.html](http://www.amerispan.com/au_store_fr.html)

## Ecuador "A - OK"

Ecuador was in the news quite a bit at the end of 1999 and early this year. Basically, the country has been in a difficult economic situation for several years and the President (now ex-President) was trying to push through some radical changes to stabilize the country. Well, after several transportation strikes, some demonstrations and the resignations of the President, many of these changes have been implemented by the new President. The biggest is the dollarization of the Ecuadorian economy. This means the Sucre, Ecuador's national currency, is being retired and the country will begin to use US dollars (similar to the way Panama uses the US dollar). Unfortunately, the short-term effect is hard on the less fortunate in Ecuador but the long term benefits of increased investment from abroad and a stable economy should benefit Ecuador in the long run. Three people from AmeriSpan's staff recently returned from Ecuador and report that things have returned to normal (no more strikes). More importantly, they report that the Ecuadorians are just as friendly and hospitable as always!

## Program Profile



### Sucre, Bolivia

#### School:

Casa de Lenguas - Sucre

#### Country:

A land-locked country, which straddles the Andes, Bolivia is known as the Tibet of the Americas. From the snow-capped peaks of over 21,000 feet, the land descends through stark plateaux to the semi-tropical jungle. Its phenomenal landscapes, colonial architecture, indigenous cultures and the legacy of its ancient mysterious civilizations combine with a quiet political climate to offer an extraordinary travel experience. In addition, Bolivia has large cities and remote villages; Lake Titicaca, the highest inland sea; a fascinating culture and history. While there are relatively few tourists, it is easy to travel throughout the country.

#### City:

Known as the white city of the Americas, Sucre is the beautiful colonial judicial capital of Bolivia. The city of Sucre was founded by Pedro de Anzures, Marqués de Campo Redondo, on November 30th, 1538. A center of culture and learning; offering many museums, a university, a lively central plaza, shops and restaurants. Nearby is Potosí, which once was the most important silver mining centers in the world with the largest and richest population in Latin America. It is an integral part of Bolivian history.

The city of Sucre is located at an altitude of 2,790m above sea level. Its weather is mild and pleasant, around 20 degrees Celsius or 68 Fahrenheit.

#### School Atmosphere:

The school is located downtown, within walking distance to the town center. Classes are held in a beautiful colonial building with 5 classrooms, administrative workspace, a salon for viewing videos, and a kitchen. There is also a swimming pool, a roof patio, and a terrace with a small garden for relaxing or studying.

Most program participants are independent travelers and students of all ages from Europe and North America.

#### Language Program:

Covering all aspects of language learning (speaking, listening, writing, reading skills), the Spanish course is specially designed for foreign students and is taught in Spanish. Textbooks and guidebooks published by school staff are supplemented by others from universities around the world with emphasis on grammar and vocabulary. Books and materials are provided on arrival.

Class groups are organized in a way that they always consist of students possessing the same level of Spanish. Furthermore, private classes are offered. All the teachers are native speakers of Spanish, trained in teaching Spanish to foreigners.

#### Homestays:

Most homes are located in neighborhoods usually a 20-30 minute walk from school. Students have their own bedroom and share the bathroom with other members of the family. The family provides two meals daily (breakfast & lunch), and laundry service. Normally, there are only one or two language students staying with these families, which means there are lots of opportunities to practice your Spanish. Families belong to Bolivia's middle class, although students should take note that living standards in Bolivia are much lower than Europe or North America.

#### Activities/Excursions:

Activities and small excursions are organized 2-3 times per week. These are normally included in the program cost. Examples: city tour, movies, going away

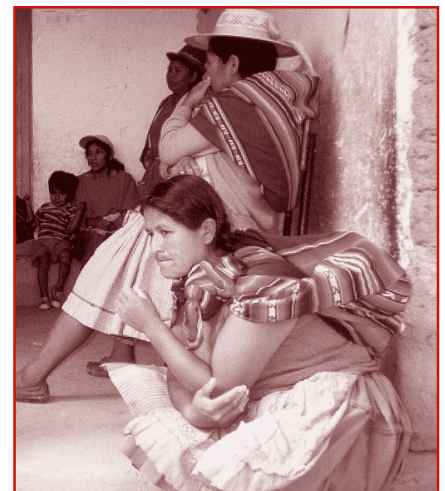
party some Fridays, tourist info, games, small lectures, trips in/near Sucre (museums, indigenous markets, dinosaur tracks, archeological sites, hiking, etc). Student pays for own transportation and entrance fees, if any.

There are also optional cooking and dance classes at a small cost (\$1-\$3). In addition, more extensive trips to places outside of the city are offered at a cost of \$10-25 per person, and go to interesting towns, villages, and areas with attractions such as endless numbers of archeological sites, high altitudes, very large salt deposits (including a hotel with its beds made of salt), folkloric traditions, man made "lagoons", natural thermal baths, ancient tunnels, active mines open to visitors, old and impressive architecture, churches, night life, mountains, hiking, camping, rivers, the list is long.... These trips usually include bus, meal, and guide.

#### Other Comments:

The city of Sucre is also known as the City of Four Names, being those names La Plata, Charcas, Ciudad Blanca (White City), and Sucre.

On December 13, 1991 in Carthage (Tunisia) the UNESCO declared the Historic City of Sucre a "World Heritage Site" in recognition for its rich history and its wealth of colonial architecture. By June 1999, Sucre had 157,775 inhabitants.



*Prominent indigenous culture in Bolivia.*



## AmeriSpan: Off The Wire

### *Daily Spanish Lessons*

Parlo.com, the premier online language and cultural destination, and AmeriSpan have teamed up to offer a daily Spanish lesson delivered via email. If you are interested, you can sign up for these free lessons on the AmeriSpan website.



### *We are opening an office in Europe!*

As of May 2000, AmeriSpan is able to better service its European clientele. The European AmeriSpan office is based in Madrid, Spain. Address: Alberto Aquilera # 26, 2<sup>nd</sup> floor, 28015, Madrid, Spain. Tel/Fax: ++(34-91)591-2393. Our friends on the other side of the Atlantic can finally say good-bye to

having to deal with the annoying time differences when arranging their language program.



### *AmeriSpan programs more readily available*

As some of you may have noticed, AmeriSpan programs are now sold by many large travel and education organizations, including the student travel agencies STA Travel and Council Travel. This means the AmeriSpan programs are readily available at about 100 student travel agency offices in the USA. Just pop in to one of these nationwide offices, and a sales agent can help you with the program arrangements in person if you wish.

STA Travel in the UK with its 40 offices launched our programs a couple of weeks ago. STA Travel in Australia, and USIT in Germany are planned to be next. This also means you will see an increased diversity of the program participants' nationalities!



### *Portuguese in Brazil*

Brazil is truly a wonderful country to visit. It is inexpensive compared with North America/Europe, has some of the best beaches in the world and some of the hottest music and dancing. After receiving many requests over the years, we have finally decided to offer Portuguese language programs in Brazil. For more info, check out our web site.



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