



SMEAL International Programs Newsletter

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Alex Jaffe, Finance major, studied abroad in Salvador, Bahia, Brazil, Summer 2005.



**Summer Education
Abroad**

BRAZIL
**Culture, Economics, &
Language**
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www.outreach.psu.edu/summerabroad/Brazil/

My name is Alex Jaffe, and I am a junior studying finance, with a minor in international business. Recently, I accepted an internship with PricewaterhouseCoopers LLP this summer to work in New York City. I am also involved in PSIA and am a member of the Penn State Rugby Team. In addition, this semester I am a teaching assistant for different sections of BA 242.

With all of my activities during the school year, I found it hard to leave campus for a full semester. I simply did not want to miss out on everything that PSU has to offer here. So, I investigated a summer study abroad program: I chose to study in Salvador, Bahia, Brazil for six weeks the summer after my freshmen year. Little did I know that these six weeks would change my global outlook in a major way.

For the Brazil program, each student is placed with a local family. I thought that this might be difficult, trying to adjust living under the roof of a family that I would hardly know. However, I found my experience to be quite the opposite. My host family went out of their way to accommodate me into their home. They spent the first weekend showing me around Salvador, making sure that I was comfortable walking to class, finding things to do, and pointing out the best restaurants in the city.

One of the funniest memories I have with my family was when I would teach them English, and they would teach me Portuguese. Every few days we would sit down for about an hour and help each other with pronunciation and grammar. Most of the time was spent laughing at one another because our language skills were poor at best. To this day, I cannot say "Sao Paulo" like a true Brazilian. I also

became good friends with Yuri, the family's son, who was about my age. He would always take me out at night with his friends, and in Brazil people go out a lot. He made sure that I was experiencing Salvador with a distinct local perspective.

In addition to becoming close with my host family, I became good friends with many of the 15 other Penn State students who went with me to Salvador. We all lived relatively near each other and would often go to the beach or get dinner together after class. The other great thing about the Brazil program is that all of the host families knew each other. My family would routinely be invited to dinner or parties with other PSU kids and their host families. One time in particular, I spent the weekend at another family's beach house, along with four other PSU students.

In Salvador, everyone plays *futebol*. There are pick up games in the street, professional teams in each city, and constant beach matches. I was there when the Brazilian national team was playing for World Cup seeding, and to be at a sports bar during the match against Argentina was above and beyond the Super Bowl experience. *Futebol* is a religion in Brazil.

However, besides *futebol*, Brazilians play a game called *Capoeira*. It is a mix between martial arts, break dancing, and gymnastics all wrapped into something special. I started to take lessons twice a week at a gym that was near my home. The instructor was the equivalent of a profes-



Students travel for two weekends to two nearby towns, one of which is Praia do Forte, an internationally famous beach location north of Salvador.





... the one overarching idea in Brazil, which is reflected in Capoeira, is the fact that you 'play' Capoeira. You do not compete, fight, or battle but you play. The connotation 'play' reflects how the people in Brazil view life as a time to celebrate and enjoy their days.



In Brazil there is some kind of magic. It is not like in Venice, Italy, when you walk out of the train station and see all the streets filled with water, or in Bali, Indonesia, when you realize that you have found paradise. Brazil has a much more subtle magic. Brazil provides surprise after surprise of elegance, friendliness, and excitement like no other country I have ever seen.

All photos in this issue courtesy of Javier Escudero

Questions/Comments about this newsletter
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sional athlete in the United States and helped me to develop some basic skills. Probably my fondest memory was towards the end of my stay. I was invited to a ceremony by my instructor with ten other *capoeiristas* (persons who practice *Capoeira*) and had them practice with me. I could barely do a hand stand and these guys were doing back flips with ease. I was extremely intimi-



dated but all of the *capoeiristas* could not have been more encouraging. The humility that the *capoeiristas* showed is something that I will never forget.

One of the major surprises, at least for me, was that the **food** in Brazil is spectacular. There must have been ten to fifteen different kinds of fruits and vegetables that we do not see for sale in the United States. Each one was better than the previous one. The meat was unbelievable, as evidenced by the many Brazilian-style steak houses that are now opening in the United States. I would recommend anyone try one of these Brazilian-style steak houses but make sure you go hungry: you sample various cuts as the waiters bring skewers of meat to your tables as long as you have a "yes" signal. Additionally, seafood was incredible since Salvador is on the Atlantic Ocean. Brazilians know how to eat and eat well.

On a related note, the **coffee** in Brazil was sensational. It put Starbucks to shame, since much of the Brazilian coffee is produced within Brazil, making it that much fresher. For cold drinks, I became accustomed to drinking coconut milk right from the gourd. A street vender would hack the coconut in half and insert a straw. The best part about all of the food and drinks was that prices were cheaper than in America.

During the six weeks that I lived in Salvador, I was never really bored. There was always something to do or see. I learned about *condomble*, which is a religion dating back to Africa. Many of the descendants are from slaves, who were brought over to Brazil, and continue to practice *condomble* in Salvador. During the course of a *condomble* ceremony, different priests dance and are said to be possessed by Orixas, who are god-like figures. I did not believe in things like *condomble*, until I saw one of these ceremonies in person. I will never again make fun of superstitious rituals after witnessing the *condomble* experience.

It is not as if Salvador is just an old place. Salvador is an industrialized city, just as modern as any in the United States. There are many famous persons to come from Salvador, and we specifically learned about the well-known author, Jorge Amado. The professor for my Brazilian Business class was quite impressive, able to speak almost half a dozen languages. He also talked about business from a perspective different than the North American viewpoint. I also took a Brazilian culture class, taught by two Penn State Faculty members who stayed with us while in Brazil. In this class we learned about the culture and history of Brazil. Many topics were supplemented with field trips to museums and performances, making the class one of a kind. These classes I took while in Brazil were both interesting and helpful for me to understand my new home.

My trip to Brazil lasted only six weeks. When I think back upon my experiences, I recall more memories from those six weeks than I do during most semesters at PSU. I will always look back on my trip as one of the best decisions I have made in my life. Studying abroad, especially in a non-traditional site, taught me a lot about myself but it also opened my eyes to the vast world around me. Studying abroad has clearly been an integral part of my PSU education and has affected me forever. - Alex Jaffe

