

Kendra

From Georgetown to Brazil

In Brazil Lunch is like having a Christmas feast daily

I will start this off the way most exchange students do: TIME IS GOING TOO QUICKLY! I have been here for 3 months now, and can still clearly remember stepping off the plane into the “cold”, mountainous, famous-for-its-beaches region of Brazil known as Santa Catarina. After meeting the nicest group of English-speaking teenagers in the world on my flight, I walked down the steps of my little plane and my friend of the hour gave me a kiss on the cheek and said she “wanted to add me on facebook and wanted to come to Canada and was so happy to have made a new friend and I had to come visit her in São Paulo someday”. I shortly found out that this is what all Brazilians are like, and it is very hard to not make friends as an exchange student in Brazil. So, I walked into the one and only terminal of Joinville, where I met my 5th host parents, their daughter Bianca, and her friend Thaís (which you say like Tie-Ees). Even though I couldn’t speak a word of Portuguese and they couldn’t speak a word of English, I was showered with gifts of Havaianas (Brazilian flipflops), stuffed monkeys and t-shirts. From that moment, I knew I would love it here.

We made the 2 hour long journey through the mountains to reach my hometown of Rio Negrinho – complete with shacks and packs of stray dogs. I have to admit, I was a bit disappointed and apprehensive that this was where I would be spending my year, but now, it’s totally normal and I don’t know why we don’t have packs of dogs roaming freely in Canada. My city has a population of 39,000, and is in the plateau of Santa Catarina, where it can reach deadly temperatures as low as 2° C in the winter. For Brazilians, anything less than 25° is freezing, and for me, it’s also starting to seem pretty cold. I love living in one of the coldest parts of Brazil, because when I travel anywhere near the ocean, it’s sweltering hot and I feel like dying, and Rio Negrinho seems like a cold heaven when I return.

For my first week in Brazil, I lived with my 5th host family so their daughter Bianca could show me around the town and introduce me to some friends at school before she left for her exchange to Germany. It was really great to get to know some of the people I would be seeing every day, and Bianca knew a bit of English and taught me the basics of Portuguese (slang and swearing). It was sad seeing my friend leave for Germany after only 2 weeks of being in Brazil, but I knew she would love Germany as much as I love Brazil. After saying goodbye, I moved into my first host family’s house in downtown Rio Negrinho. I mainly only lived with my host mom Ketty, because her husband Zé works in another city and her two children are in university/married. Ketty was a really great host mom - she knew basic English and really

helped me improve my vocabulary past vulgar phrases. However, I was only with her for a month and a half and had to say bye faster than I would have liked.

Currently, I can pretty much communicate with my new host family entirely in Portuguese. I still have no idea what the people at school say, because they speak 10,000 miles an hour and use a lot of slang. It's a great feeling once you can begin to understand what is happening around you, and start to understand the jokes that people are saying. But, Portuguese is a VERY hard language to learn. Every verb has about 20 conjugations and lots of verbs have two meanings. For example, the verb "tomar" can mean to drink or to take. When I learned it, I learned it as "to drink". So, I was very confused when people around me started saying they wanted to drink the bath. It took me about a month to realize they wanted to TAKE a bath. But, so far, I have learned more Portuguese than I had expected to, and I think it's a really beautiful language that I am very happy to know.

Brazilian school is VERY different than school in Canada. For one, you stay with the same class all day in the same room, and you have no choice in which classes you take. It's a bit like primary school, and it took a while for me to really get used to. It also starts at 7:30 and can go as late as 5:15 in the afternoon, which also took some getting used to. But, Brazilian teachers are way better than the ones in Canada. The students consider them their friends and have no problem joking around with them, making fun of them, or just totally interrupting their class to talk about the weekend. As far as friends go in Brazil, I have a lot of acquaintances. It's hard to make really good friends here because of the language barrier, but they are all nice to me, and invite me out with them. At school, I sort of feel like The Fonz. I walk down the halls, and people whisper at me, and give me high fives, and look like they're about to faint when I smile at them. I always imagine having a bass jam playing in the background when I strut down the halls, being "the girl from Canada".

My favourite part of the day here is lunch. Lunch in Brazil is like a feast of rice and beans and meat. Every day. Everything stops in Brazil for lunch; it's like a daily Christmas. Lunch here is also always at 12:00, no families I know of show any desire to eat lunch earlier or later. After lunch, I usually stay home and sleep or sometimes I go back to school. It's hard to get out with my friends on weekdays though, because they are in the 3rd year of high school in Brazil, which means they go to school until 5:15 every day, and when they are not at school, they are studying to get into university. I am also the only exchange student in my city, which has its benefits and its drawbacks. It's hard for me to find people to hang out with comfortably since there are no other exchange students here. Weekends are a different story though - there is always something to do. Most of the time we go to parties or shopping, and sometimes my host family will take me and my host sister somewhere for a day trip.

I have been to some pretty amazing places already. A month after being here, I travelled to Florianopolis with my friend and her parents, and it was amazing. Florianopolis (or Floripa) is a city in between mountains and the ocean, and has some of the most beautiful beaches in Brazil. We spent the day on a boat sailing across the lake by the sea, and ate lunch at a small family owned seafood restaurant in a remote place off the lake. At night, we went to Joaquina beach, and I stepped in the ocean for the first time. It was really warm, but my friend said it was freezing cold, so we didn't stay to swim. I have also been to Foz do Iguaçu for a weekend with my host family, and that has been my favourite part of my

exchange so far. We visited the falls for a day (which make Niagara falls look like a dripping water faucet), and went to a show at night which was all about South American culture. It was full of dances and music that are native to Brazil and South America, so that was a really cool show. I've also been to the 2nd biggest Oktoberfest in the world with the other exchange students. We watched a 2 hour long parade full of Germans dancing, drinking, and having fun. After, we went to the party which was really amazing.

Brazilian culture is also very different than in Canada. The first day I was here, I learned that Brazilians always wear shoes in the house. I started to take my shoes off at the door, and my host family thought I was crazy or something. Brazilians also never go to parties when they start. If a party is scheduled to start at 9, we usually end up going no earlier than 11 (because that is when the party will be good). People here are also a lot more relaxed about things even as severe as natural disasters. My city was flooded for about 2 weeks, and life continued normally as my host family laughed about their street being submerged under the water... it was a very different outlook. Also, Brazilians are crazy about churrasco (barbeque). Every single house has a room dedicated to churrasco and only churrasco. My teenage friends have churrasco parties where we all spend the night dancing, listening to music, and grilling the meat. It's a very different lifestyle here, where everyone is always happy and nothing is rushed, and I really like it. If I could bring back the Brazilian way to Canada, I definitely would.

There have been so many other great things and experiences that I will never forget here, and I have only written about a few of them. Brazil is a great country, and I am already thinking about the day I have to depart my new home and how sad I will be. Of course, there have been moments where I have missed Canada, but I always try to remember to make the best of my year, since it will go so quickly. I can't wait for all that is to come and I know it will just add to the amazing experience I have been having here.

Um beijo por você,

Kendra