

Episode 107: Rio de Janeiro, 1995

Summary

As Nick and Wendy prepare to go to Brazil, Wendy reminisces about the time she went to Rio de Janeiro to study Portuguese as a university student in 1995.

Transcript

Nick: Today Wendy and I are talking about Brazil, because we're about to head to¹ South America and primarily to Brazil for our big trip for the year. And we've both been to Brazil once before - separately - and by a kind of fluke², we both had a similar kind of trip, which was that we both spent six weeks in the city of Rio de Janeiro. Umm, I was there in 2016 for the Olympic Games and you were there all the way back in 1995.

Wendy: Wow, was it really that long ago?

Nick: It was, so 23 years ago as we're talking now. And so that's what we're going to be talking about mostly today, is this first trip that you took to Rio de Janeiro in 1995. So what can you tell us about it?

Wendy: So it was a study abroad³ trip. I was 19 at the time, so if you want to do a little bit of math, you can figure out how old I am now, uhh, 'cause I guess we've given that away⁴. And I had just finished my first year of university. So it was the summer between my first and second years. And I knew that I wanted to go study abroad, and at that time I was actually a Spanish major⁵. So my course that I was studying at university was Spanish. Umm, and so logically I kind of assumed that I would end up studying abroad in a Spanish-speaking country, but it didn't work out that way. I mean, if I had really wanted to pursue that, I could, but ... I could have, but I came across this opportunity to go to Brazil. And my university had this program with a school in Rio de Janeiro and it looked really cool and so I signed up for it. And so I went to Rio and I stayed with a local family in Copacabana. It

¹ head to: go to, travel to

² fluke: coincidence, unplanned occurrence

³ abroad: overseas, in another country

⁴ given that away (phrasal verb: to give away): revealed that, let people know that

⁵ major: the main subject of study for university (college) students in the United States

was a mother and her two children, uhh, her two pretty much adult daughters. Uhh, one was my age, one was a little bit older, I think. And...

Nick: So just to back up a bit. So when you accepted the position, or accepted that you were going to go to Brazil, you didn't speak any Portuguese?

Wendy: Nope. Nope, I didn't. Umm, so it was for six weeks, like you said, and so that was basically half of my summer break because we get about three months of a break, uhh, in between the school years in the States. And so for the first half of the summer, I was still in Florida - I went to the University of Florida - and so I did an intensive Portuguese course, umm, for those first six weeks. And then I went to Brazil after ... right after having done that, and then I studied Portuguese in Brazil for those second two weeks. Sorry, the second six-week period.

Nick: Right. And were your parents worried that you were going to go to Brazil by yourself?

Wendy: Probably. Umm, uhh, yeah, I'm sure my Mom was worried because she worries about everything. My Dad was probably really excited about it because he always wanted to travel and, you know, ended up, kind of, travelling vicariously⁶ through me because he didn't really get the opportunity to do a lot of travel in his lifetime. But he was always really excited about me travelling. And this was one of the first times that I had travelled. I had been to Mexico, previously, again on a school trip, in high school, actually, with my Spanish teacher. And I had been to England as a graduation present right after I'd graduated from high school. So this would have been my third foreign country that I'd been to.

Nick: And do you remember what you knew about Brazil or what you thought you knew about Brazil, or did you know what to expect?

Wendy: Uhh, I didn't know very much, really. I remember a very awkward conversation with my host family that I was living with in Rio. And they started ... well, first they asked me, you know, 'What famous Brazilians do you know?' And I couldn't think of a single one. And so then they kept naming people. They're like, 'Oh, you must know this person, you must know this person.' And I didn't. And I just, I felt so bad. Umm, I should have just lied, maybe, and said that I knew one of the names, but that probably wouldn't have gone well. They would have figured it out⁷. No, I really didn't. Umm, growing up in the States and particularly in Alabama, uhh, I wasn't exposed to very much information about the outside world and, yeah, I just didn't know much at all.

Nick: And do you remember what your first impressions were when you arrived, the first couple of days? Because, I mean, you would have never been anywhere like Rio before.

⁶ vicariously: experiencing something through another person

⁷ figured it out: worked it out, found out about it, solved the problem. See also: Episodes 64, 100.

Wendy: No, certainly not. It was very overwhelming, umm, but I fell in love with it really quickly. Uhh, I do remember, yeah, the first couple of days, you know, everything was new, everything was different. And, you know, I was having some trouble communicating with my host family. They were very lovely and very understanding and it wasn't a problem, but, uhh, you know, I just felt embarrassed when I didn't understand them and didn't know what they were trying to tell me and, uhh, I remember spilling the milk at breakfast the first morning because it was a different milk carton than the kinds that I had grown up with. And just all these little things that seem so insignificant, but at the time, you know, there were things that I took for granted⁸. I thought that milk cartons were the same way all over the world and actually they're not. And so it was a big, you know, eye opener for me to see how things work in a different country.

Nick: And did the school organise trips and things for you? Did you go to Sugarloaf Mountain and to see the Christ the Redeemer and things like that?

Wendy: Umm, I went, I definitely went to both of those places, uhh, and I'm not sure if they were organised trips with the whole school group or if it was just with a few friends that I had made. Umm, you know, other people who were in my class. But, yeah, I did a fair bit of sightseeing around Rio. Umm, and then...

Nick: I guess you probably spent a lot of time at Copacabana beach as well.

Wendy: Absolutely, yes. So like I said, I was living in Copacabana. And, uhh, I believe my school was also in Copacabana. If not, it was in Ipanema, one of the two. So, yeah, I spent most of my time on the beaches of Copacabana and Ipanema and Leblon, which are three beaches that are right next to each other. But they're, they're beaches but they're also right in the centre of the city and, you know, there's lots of high rise buildings and it's a very residential area too. And that's what people in Rio do, they go to the beach and hang out.

Nick: Yeah, and so overall what was the experience like after the six weeks?

Wendy: It was an incredible experience. I left speaking Portuguese better than I spoke Spanish, which was a bit strange because I had been studying Spanish for four years at that point and, like I said, it was my major, you know. I was working towards getting a degree in Spanish. And, uhh, actually that didn't happen, because when I got back to Florida, to my Spanish classes, every time I tried to speak Spanish, it came out in Portuguese. And I got really frustrated because I kept confusing the two languages. And in the end, I decided that since I liked Portuguese better anyway, I was just going to drop all my Spanish classes and change my major to Portuguese, so that's what I did. And I now have a bachelor's degree in Brazilian Language and Literature, uhh, for whatever that's worth. Umm, I had no idea what I was going to do with it but I was, you know, I wasn't really thinking about practicalities at that age. I just did what I loved, which is a good

⁸ took for granted (phrase): accepted without questioning, assumed

thing to do, actually. I recommend that approach⁹. So I fell completely in love with Brazil. I thought that I was going to go back, you know, every year, or that I was going to go and move there. I thought that Brazil was going to be a huge part of my future. And for whatever reason, it's been 23 years and I still haven't been back.

Nick: But now you live in Portugal.

Wendy: Yes.

Nick: Which is not Brazil, but, uhh, at least there is the same language spoken. Uhh, it's spoken very differently. So you go to Portugal with your *carioca* accent, which is the accent of the people from Rio. And, uhh, that causes some confusion when we're in Portugal.

Wendy: Yep. Yeah, yeah. I've really struggled to adapt to the way that the language is spoken in Portugal because it is very different from the way that I learned it.

Nick: I've actually noticed that a lot of Portuguese people call it 'Brazilian'. They don't call it 'Brazilian Portuguese', which is what we would call it or what it should be called. They almost consider it as though it is a separate language because the differences are quite big.

Wendy: They are, and I have to say I'm very partial to¹⁰ the Brazilian form of the language. I just love the sounds. I love hearing it, I love speaking it. It's umm, yeah, it's ... I don't know how to explain it, but, uhh, I feel a really strong connection to the country and a big part of that is because of the language.

Nick: Alright, well after all these years, we're finally going to Brazil together.

Wendy: Yay!

Nick: And we'll be talking about it a lot in upcoming episodes.

Wendy: Alright, looking forward to it.

⁹ approach: method, way of doing something

¹⁰ partial to: in favour of, preferring one over the other, biased towards

Comprehension Questions

1. How much Portuguese did Wendy speak before going to Rio de Janeiro?
2. What did Wendy do with most of her free time while she was in Rio?
3. What happened to Wendy's university studies after she returned home from Rio?

Exercises

Use the words and expressions in the footnotes of the transcript to fill in the gaps.

1. He went overseas but didn't think to bring an adaptor to charge his phone, computer etc. He just _____ that the plugs would be the same all over the world.
2. She always wanted to study _____ but the right opportunity didn't come up, so she completed her degree in her home country instead.
3. She was always a very intelligent and diligent student and that's why she was able to do a double _____ of journalism and law at university.
4. They haven't planned out their holiday day-by-day. They're just going to _____ the coast and see what happens from there.
5. When the police arrived at the scene of the crime, they discovered a lot of evidence and _____ pretty quickly. The victim's ex-boyfriend was arrested and charged with the murder.
6. The teacher has an unconventional _____, which the students really like.
7. I met up with my best friend from high school in London yesterday. It was a complete _____ that we were both there at the same time.
8. Don't tell him any more secrets. He was told not to tell anyone about his sister's engagement before she's ready to announce it but he's already _____.
9. She's travelling around the world and sending lots of updates back home to her friends and family, who are living _____ through her.
10. Between Paris and Rome, I'm quite _____ Rome because I lived there. But I can understand how others might prefer Paris.

Discussion Questions

Discuss these questions with a partner or in the [English in 10 Minutes Listeners group on Facebook](#):

1. Would you like to study abroad with a host family in an unfamiliar country like Wendy did? Why or why not?
2. Wendy recommends studying what you love without being concerned about jobs or practicalities. Do you agree with this approach? Why or why not?
3. Wendy described some things about being in a different country that can be called 'culture shock' - e.g. different milk cartons! What type of culture shock have you experienced?

Answers

Comprehension Questions

1. She didn't speak any Portuguese until doing a six-week course before she left for Rio, as her major at that time was Spanish and not Portuguese.
2. She went to the famous beaches of Copacabana, Ipanema and Leblon.
3. She changed her major from Spanish to Portuguese because she preferred the language.

Exercises

1. took for granted
2. abroad
3. major
4. head to
5. figured it out
6. approach
7. fluke
8. given that away
9. vicariously
10. partial to