

Episode 109: São Paulo

Summary

Nick and Wendy begin their South American trip in the mega-city of São Paulo, Brazil. They talk about their expectations before they arrived and how São Paulo turned out to be a big surprise for them.

Transcript

Nick: Today Wendy and I are coming to you from São Paulo, which is the first stop on our trip in South America. So we're finally back in Brazil!

Wendy: We made it! Yay!

Nick: And, so we're talking about São Paulo today. It probably wouldn't have been our first choice of places to arrive, but when we compared the prices for flights going to Rio and going to São Paulo, it was much, much cheaper to come to São Paulo. So we decided to do it that way. Umm, and so Brazil is one of these countries which has two dominant cities, Rio and São Paulo, in the same way that Germany has or Australia has or Spain has. Umm, and they're very different.

Wendy: Yes.

Nick: And we've both been to Rio as we talked about last time and Rio has all the glamour and all the fame and all of that. And so it's been interesting for us these past few days to be here in São Paulo and to discover this city a little bit. Firstly, it's a mega-city.

Wendy: Yep.

Nick: I was just looking up some stats. Umm, the metropolitan area population is over 22 million.

Wendy: Wow!

Nick: So it's the largest city in Brazil, it's the largest city in the Southern Hemisphere, it's the largest city in the Western Hemisphere, or in the Americas.

Wendy: Oh yeah, wow.

Nick: Umm, uhh, just larger than Mexico City. It depends how you count this kind of stuff because there's often different interpretations of population. But basically, no matter how you count it, São Paulo is absolutely massive.

Wendy: Mmm-hmm. And one of the largest cities in the world.

Nick: And one of the largest cities in the world. Umm, so it's a bit daunting¹, when you come in, when you arrive at five in the morning after flying all night. Umm, you're tired and you've got to kind of negotiate the city a bit, but I think we've done it OK so far.

Wendy: Yeah, and we were probably a bit nervous coming into it too, because it has kind of a bad reputation of, you know, being a violent place where, you know, there's a problem with crime. But now that we've arrived here, I feel very safe and we've been walking around even after dark and, you know, it hasn't been a problem at all.

Nick: Yep, so we arrived, as I said, very early in the morning, and we took a bus and then took the metro to get to where we're staying. And that was quite an experience, because we hit the metro right at rush hour². And there was one stop in particular where every train that came past was absolutely packed beyond belief.

Wendy: Yeah, and there was a train coming, it seemed like, every minute or two. They were very, very frequent, but they were all full once they arrived at the station where we were. So...

Nick: And it's quite well set-up on the platform. They've got these barriers which let you know exactly where the doors are going to be, and then so you have all these lines, these individual lines, at the different spots where the different doors are. And we had to wait for about four trains because we got on one.

Wendy: Mmm-hmm.

Nick: Uhh, because the others were just absolutely packed and you just couldn't even get in at all.

Wendy: Yeah.

Nick: Uhh, it's a very good metro system but, yeah with 22 million people, as you can imagine, uhh, it was just absolutely fuller than you could believe, really.

Wendy: Yeah, but we've taken it several times since then at other times of the day. And we've been here on the weekend. And it hasn't been like that at all. And it has

¹ daunting: scary, intimidating

² rush hour: when people are commuting to or from work. Also: peak hour.

been very efficient and a great way to get around and to see lots of different parts of the city.

Nick: Yeah it's actually a very good system, it's very clean, umm, you know, there's quite a lot of lines (routes) and so, yeah, it's a thing that's invaluable in terms of getting people around. Because the traffic is terrible...

Wendy: Yes.

Nick: And so, you know, that's one way to avoid it, obviously, is to go underground. But, umm, yeah, certainly we've talked to local people here who've said how impressed they are with their own metro, and so that's always good to hear.

Wendy: Mmm-hmm.

Nick: So the first day we kind of were recovering from the flight and all of that, so we didn't do a lot. Umm, this morning we took a walk to an area which is called Batman Alley, in English, which is quite an interesting name. We heard about it and didn't really understand exactly what that was all about. But basically it's out in the suburbs of São Paulo, and it's an alleyway with all of these murals³ and all of this street art. And it's quite popular for, I guess, local people, or perhaps, uhh, more likely, domestic tourists, who are Brazilians who are visiting here, to go and visit and they go and take their selfies in front of all the murals and all of that.

Wendy: Yeah, it seems to be quite a popular attraction but, yeah, I think we were the only foreigners there. All of the ... you know, everything that I heard, just eavesdropping on conversations, it was all Portuguese, uhh, spoken by Brazilians. Umm, so ... but there were quite a few people who were there to, yeah, take their selfies. Also because the art changes on a regular basis⁴. Umm, you know, I think any particular piece of art will be up there for a few months and then someone will come and paint over it and paint something new. So maybe it is something that the locals here in São Paulo also like to come and see because it's going to be different every time you go.

Nick: Yeah, and it was quite interesting because it was in this suburban area. It was very quiet, umm, there were houses nearby and trees and all sorts of things. So it was quite a contrast from what we did yesterday, (was) when we were walking around the city centre, and that's where you see just the enormity of the city. The high rises⁵ are just so huge and there's just so many people and, umm, you can really imagine the 22 million people, for sure.

³ murals: large paintings directly on walls, often outside

⁴ on a regular basis (fixed phrase): often, regularly

⁵ high rises: skyscrapers, tall buildings used as offices or apartments

Wendy: Yeah, yeah, it, uhh, it has a real energy, this city. And I've actually really enjoyed our time here, more than I expected to. Umm...

Nick: Yeah, I've got to say I kind of had this idea that we would just be walking along these huge roads and trying to cross these huge roads that would be three or four lanes each way and there would just be bumper-to-bumper traffic. And there'd just be pollution and smog and it would just be a disaster of a city to walk around in, because we really like to walk around cities, umm, because it's a great way to get to know them and to get your bearings⁶ and to make little discoveries and all this kind of stuff. But actually, yeah, it's been weirdly pleasant, umm, to walk around, although there are some confronting things as well. There's a lot of homeless people in São Paulo and you see that. You will see people sleeping on the streets right at the base of this enormous residential, umm, high-rise building. And so you just see these contrasts. And that's, uhh, always difficult to see but that's the reality of life in a city like this.

Wendy: Mmm-hmm, yep. There are lots of contrasts that I could point out in São Paulo. Umm, but yeah, it is a really interesting city. And I have to say I was probably a bit prejudiced against it because my previous experience in Brazil had been in Rio de Janeiro and as you mentioned, those are the two main cities in the country and there is quite a big rivalry between the two of them, which often happens. You know, like in Australia you have a big rivalry between Sydney and Melbourne or, uhh, well, in Portugal, there's a big rivalry between Lisbon and Porto. So here it's been São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro, and so everything I'd heard about São Paulo had come from *cariocas*, from people who are from Rio, and they had said, 'Oh, you don't want to go there, there's nothing to do there. You know, the people just stay in their offices and work all the time and they're no fun, and Rio is where you have all the fun. This is where, you know, people know how to play and enjoy life.' So that was my impression of São Paulo.

Nick: Right, and we actually even had a friend, an English friend, who then moved to São Paulo. He doesn't live here anymore unfortunately - he's gone back to England - umm, but he loved it here, and we always thought, 'Oh God, that's weird, isn't it? São Paulo must be, you know, not a great place.' But it turns out, yeah, I could see how you could enjoy it.

Wendy: Yeah, like today, umm, is a Sunday, and so we went to a huge street called Avenida Paulista, and on Sundays it's completely closed off to traffic and so you have all kinds of musicians and street performers and lots of people there just, you know, going for a walk or bicycling, cycling, uhh, along the street. And there was just so much life, so much activity, so many different things, like we just saw all different kinds of musicians. We saw country music, we saw, you know, really hard heavy metal, we saw, uhh, ballerinas, dancing ballet. Umm, just, like I said, so many contrasts and so much energy. That's the, I think, the most appropriate word I can think of to describe this city. It has a really positive energy and just there's so much happening here.

⁶ get your bearings: begin to understand directions, locations etc in a new place

Nick: Yeah, and it's that ... Brazil is one of those places where it's just all about, yeah, the people, the street life, and it's just the vibe⁷ of the whole place just comes through so easily. You know, you just walk down this one street and you just feel like you're in a special kind of country, I guess. Umm, so, yeah, it was really interesting walking down that street. There were guys who were juggling with, umm, pins from ten-pin bowling, but they were doing it while they were on a rope.

Wendy: Yeah, like a tightrope⁸.

Nick: A tightrope suspended ~~above~~ (in) the air. I mean, they did have a contraption⁹ to ... if they fell, that they wouldn't fall all the way down to the ground that was all the way down below them.

Wendy: Yeah, they were attached by a rope or something. Umm...

Nick: But still, it was pretty impressive to watch them do it and not fall.

Wendy: Yeah, yeah, absolutely. And they were very high up and there was a road beneath them, so yeah, it looked really, really scary and, umm, yeah that was just one of the many great performances we saw on our walk down Avenida Paulista. So, yeah, São Paulo's been full of surprises and I really enjoyed it.

Nick: Right, so we're off to a good start and we'll see what else Brazil has in store¹⁰ for us.

Wendy: Yep.

⁷ vibe: atmosphere, feeling. See also: Episode 84.

⁸ tightrope: a rope used by acrobats to do balancing tricks (e.g. in the circus)

⁹ contraption: device, gadget. See also: Episode 67.

¹⁰ has in store: has to offer (in this case), has planned

Comprehension Questions

1. What was the first thing Nick and Wendy had to negotiate when they arrived in São Paulo?
2. Why did Wendy think she wouldn't like São Paulo before she arrived?
3. What did Wendy like about walking down Avenida Paulista?

Exercises

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

1. All the kids designed and painted several _____ to go on the walls of the school. Now the school looks so much brighter and more colourful.
2. It's been a crazy year already and it's only April. Let's see what the rest of the year _____ for us.
3. We have so many electronic devices to charge that we bought a _____ that can charge several at the same time via USB ports.
4. When you arrive in a huge city like London for the first time, it can be difficult to _____, because everything is so spread out.
5. Developers wanted to build some new _____ overlooking the beach, but the locals complained, so the project was cancelled.
6. One of the main benefits of working from home is that you don't have to deal with the traffic during _____ every day.
7. The new café in town has a really cool _____, with candle-lighting, live music and comfortable cushions and bean bags to sit on.
8. At parks these days, you sometimes see people tie a _____ to two trees and perform balancing acts on it.
9. If you move from a small village to a big city, it can be quite _____ to have to deal with all the noise, people, traffic etc.
10. I used to see him _____, but it's been quite a while since the last time we caught up. Maybe I'll give him a call.

Discussion Questions

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

1. Have you been to São Paulo? If so, did you like it? If not, would you like to go? Why or why not?
2. Nick and Wendy said the metro system in São Paulo was good (although packed during rush hour). Think of some other metro systems around the world that you're familiar with - what makes them good or bad?
3. Where you live, are there street musicians and street performers like Nick and Wendy described in São Paulo?

Answers

Comprehension Questions

1. The metro during morning rush hour, when the trains were very full.
2. Because people in Rio de Janeiro had told her that São Paulo wasn't very interesting.
3. She liked all the different kinds of live music being played and the energy of it all.

Exercises

1. murals
2. has in store
3. contraption
4. get your bearings
5. high rises
6. rush hour
7. vibe
8. tightrope
9. daunting
10. on a regular basis