

## Episode 119: Salvador

### Summary

Nick and Wendy visit the Brazilian city of Salvador de Bahia. They talk about the Afro-Brazilian culture of Salvador, including music and capoeira.

### Transcript

Nick: As we continue travelling through South America, today Wendy and I are talking about one of the most famous cities in Brazil, and indeed its first capital, which is Salvador de Bahia. And, like the cities that we talked about last time, this is a colonial city. It was built by the Portuguese, but it's a city that I think you can't really categorise in this way or any other way, because it's a really a unique city, not only in Brazil but in the world.

Wendy: Yeah, often when we talk about colonial cities, we're thinking mainly about the architecture, and that's the main reason to see them, is ... the main reason to visit them is to walk along the streets and see these beautiful old buildings. And you certainly have that in Salvador. There are some really beautiful buildings from the colonial era, but it has so much more than that to offer. And it's, uhh, it's really the best place to see some examples of Brazilian culture, umm, and Afro-Brazilian culture in particular.

Nick: Right, so as the first capital of Brazil or the Portuguese capital of Brazil, Salvador was a port for the African slave trade. And it's unfortunate, uhh, especially as we look back at it now, that Portugal trafficked about four million slaves to Brazil, uhh, but what's extraordinary is that the descendants of those slaves now make up just over 50 per cent of the population of Brazil, so it's a majority now.

Wendy: Right, and, uhh, it's something that, again, you might not necessarily associate with Brazil. You wouldn't think that more than half of the people in Brazil are of African heritage, but that is actually the case. And for a long time it was something that was, you know, kind of hidden and suppressed<sup>1</sup>. And many of the cultural traditions of the Afro-Brazilian population were prohibited and banned and it was something that they had to do in secret, whereas now, finally, it's starting to be promoted and even celebrated. And it's really become a drawcard<sup>2</sup>. It's something that people go to Salvador to see, umm, is these manifestations of

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<sup>1</sup> suppressed: stopped, banned, abolished (by authorities)

<sup>2</sup> drawcard: something that attracts people

Afro-Brazilian culture. And it comes out in many different things: in the music and also in dance and then capoeira, which is kind of a dance but also kind of a mix between dance and martial arts. And then candomblé, which is an Afro-Brazilian religion. So you have all these really, really interesting cultural aspects that you don't have anywhere else in the world, not even in Africa. I mean, it's kind of a mix of African and Brazilian, which is what makes it so interesting.

Nick: Yeah, definitely. And so we got to see quite a bit of this while we were there. Umm, capoeira, which you mentioned, is a very interesting concept. It's basically half a martial art<sup>3</sup> and half a dance. Umm, when people speak in Portuguese and talk about doing it, they use the verb 'to play'. They say, 'We're going to play capoeira.' And we saw this everywhere. We saw kids in organised groups doing it in the squares in the city. We went to an old fortress which is now called the Fort ... uhh, the Capoeira Fort, basically. And there's these groups of capoeira ... uhh, these capoeira groups which have premises<sup>4</sup> inside the fort. And then we also a performance by an Angolan company of capoeira performers as well.

Wendy: Yeah, and they were really good. They really knew their stuff<sup>5</sup>. So it was quite a privilege to be able to watch them and, like you said, it is also a grassroots<sup>6</sup> thing where young kids are learning it, umm, both male and female kids. And we saw ... it was predominantly men, but we saw some women, uhh, adult women, who were performing capoeira as well. So it's something that seems to be really popular among the population.

Nick: Right, so if you've never seen it, basically there are two people, so they're I guess opponents in the martial arts sense, but partners in the dance sense. So what they do are these kinds of stylistic martial arts movements. And they're not intending to hit the other person, and they don't hit the other person at all, so it's not physical in that way at all. Umm, but you'll see them do this kind of slow, rhythmical circle kick, for example, and then the other person will duck away from that kick, again in a kind of rhythmical dance move. And then this is kind of how it goes. And then often they'll just do cartwheels<sup>7</sup> right in the middle of their performance and things like that. It's really quite captivating to watch.

Wendy: Yeah, it's really beautiful. And, yeah, whereas every other martial art that I've ever seen is about, umm, you know, kicking or punching or hitting the other, uhh, the other person, this is really all about defence and about avoiding, uhh, the kicks. So it's this beautiful thing to watch, where they come really close to hitting each other but they're not actually hitting each other.

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<sup>3</sup> martial art: a form of self-defence or combat of Asian origin, such as karate or judo

<sup>4</sup> premises: land including buildings belonging to a company or organisation

<sup>5</sup> really knew their stuff (phrase): really knew what they were doing, were really good at something

<sup>6</sup> grassroots: local, common, from the bottom up. See also: Episode 32.

<sup>7</sup> cartwheels: acrobatic moves where you put your hands on the ground and wheel your body around, landing on your feet

Nick: Yeah, so that was something that was really great to watch in Salvador. We also saw and heard a lot of drumming. Umm, it's obviously a huge part of Brazilian culture, basically everywhere we've been, is that we hear drumming on the streets so often, and you can just go and watch people doing it. Umm, but in Salvador, that was taken to kind of a new level. The other thing is that we were there at the end of November, and it's about three and a bit months until Carnival. And the performers are already starting to practice for Carnival, and then they open this up to the public and you can go and watch them practice.

Wendy: Yeah, so Carnival is a big deal<sup>8</sup> in Brazil as I'm sure most people are aware. And, umm, Rio de Janeiro probably has the most famous, you know, world-wide famous Carnival, but you have Carnival celebrations in other cities all around the country as well, and Salvador is another one that has a really famous Carnival. And it has these large drumming groups. Sometimes you can have hundreds of people either drumming or dancing and performing in other ways in one of these groups. And, so yeah, we got to see one of the most famous ones, which is called Oludum. And we went to one of their practices. And you buy a ticket and then you can go in and we stayed ... I stayed for about an hour-and-a-half, but there were people that were still coming in as I was leaving, so I'm sure that it was going to continue all the rest of the day. And, uhh, these guys were amazing. They never seem to get tired.

Nick: No, they just play non-stop. Umm, you know, and after - I don't know - every 15-20 minutes, they break for like 20 seconds and then they just get right back into it again. Umm, and so that was really impressive to see. And it was also interesting to learn that Oludum plays this, umm, style of music which they call samba-reggae. And the idea is that samba itself originally also came out of this Afro-Brazilian culture, and then sort of got sidetracked or got taken over a little bit when it went down to Rio with European elements to it. And then the people in Salvador felt like it had kind of been taken away from them and then they created this samba-reggae to be something really more purely from the Afro-Brazilian culture. And so that was interesting to learn that as well.

Wendy: Yep, and, uhh, the majority of the members of the group that we saw were of African heritage. And you can see that in the colours that they wear as well. Their drums are painted red, gold and green, which are colours that you'll see a lot in association with reggae, for example. Umm, so, yeah, it was another example of the Afro-Brazilian heritage and how those two things have kind of come together to create something new and beautiful. And I had read somewhere that Salvador is the place that Brazilians think about, umm, when they're missing their country - Brazilians who are living outside of Brazil. Even if they're not from Salvador, it kind of, you know, epitomises<sup>9</sup> the whole essence of Brazil and all of the things that make their country unique and that they can't find anywhere else. And I really

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<sup>8</sup> a big deal: an important thing

<sup>9</sup> epitomises: represents, reflects

understood that once we got there, because we did ... I think I felt, you know, the Brazilian culture most strongly there and it attracted me probably more than any other that we've been. I think if I were going to move to a city in Brazil, I think it would probably be Salvador.

Nick: Yeah, there's definitely something going on all over the place, on every corner. Umm, it's a very large city, so there's lots of different parts to it, which is also interesting. So you have Pelourinho, which is the main kind of tourist area, and it's a bit touristy. But the area where we stayed was the next historical neighbourhood along, which was called Santo António, and that was a bit more authentic, a bit more local. And this was all in what's called the upper city, and there's also a lower part to the city as well, further down. Umm, and in between the upper and the lower, there's kind of a jungle that's a little bit out of control, and we saw monkeys, umm, there.

Wendy: We did, we did see monkeys.

Nick: And they're only a stone's throw from<sup>10</sup> the historical centre, so it's kind of interesting to see these urban monkeys. Umm, but then you can go down and there's beaches down in the lower city, and there are also some old forts and lighthouses and things like that. Umm, and so there's really lots of different aspects to it, and so we stayed there five or six days and I think we really enjoyed discovering these different parts of Salvador.

Wendy: Yeah, and I was sad to leave when it was over. It was a really special time.

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<sup>10</sup> a stone's throw from (phrase): very close to

## Comprehension Questions

1. Why is the Afro-Brazilian culture so prominent in Salvador?
2. Why is capoeira different from other martial arts?
3. Why were Nick and Wendy able to see the drummers of Oludum perform?

## Exercises

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

1. My daughter just started gymnastics classes last week. She has already learned how to do \_\_\_\_\_!
2. Karate is my favourite \_\_\_\_\_ because when I was young, I used to watch the movie The Karate Kid over and over again.
3. The campaign to clean up the city started at \_\_\_\_\_ level. The citizens didn't think the city government was doing enough, so they started cleaning up the city themselves.
4. Certain freedoms, such as freedom of speech and freedom of the press, are typically \_\_\_\_\_ under dictatorial regimes.
5. She got a new job that she's really excited about and the best thing is that the office is just \_\_\_\_\_ from her home, so she can walk to work and not have to deal with the stress of commuting.
6. The company was expanding so quickly that they needed to acquire a larger \_\_\_\_\_ to fit all their new staff.
7. If you go to Cambodia, the people are very friendly and the modern history is interesting, but the real \_\_\_\_\_ is the Angkor temples.
8. I went to a seminar about healthy eating last week given by the Happy Pear twins. They \_\_\_\_\_ - I learned a lot!
9. The Trump presidency \_\_\_\_\_ the current political divide in the United States. It seems everyone either loves him or hates him.
10. Her dishwasher broke yesterday but it's not \_\_\_\_\_, because she prefers washing their dishes by hand while listening to podcasts anyway.

## Discussion Questions

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

1. Would you like to 'play' capoeira? Why or why not?
2. Wendy said that Salvador epitomises Brazilian culture. Is there a place in your country that is similar in that way? Why?
3. Nick and Wendy thought that being in Salvador was more about experiencing culture than seeing particular 'sights'. Are there other places you can think of that you've visited that are like this? Why?

## Answers

### Comprehension Questions

1. Because many African slaves were brought to Salvador in colonial times as it was the capital of Brazil back then.
2. Because it's part dance and because the players don't actually hit each other.
3. Because they are starting to practice for Carnival and these practices can be viewed by the public.

### Exercises

1. cartwheels
2. martial art
3. grassroots
4. suppressed
5. a stone's throw from
6. premises
7. drawcard
8. really knew their stuff
9. epitomises
10. a big deal