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Selling Canadian Books in Brazil

A Guide for Canadian Publishers

Selling Canadian Books in Brazil: A Guide for Canadian Publishers

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Introduction

In 1941, Austrian writer Stefan Zweig published his book *Brazil: A Land of the Future*.¹ Today, the title has become a kind of mantra in Brazil, reflecting the country's potential and its everlasting struggle to establish itself as a global economic power. During the last five years, we have witnessed the retraction of the Brazilian economy yet again despite continued hopes and expectations for the creation and stabilization of what could be a global economic power. Seventy years later, Zweig's words continue to resonate with Brazilians who suggest, tongue-in-cheek, that "Brazil is the land of future, and it will always be."

During Dilma Rousseff's first term as president between 2011 and 2014, Brazil's GDP grew by 2.2 percent a year on average. The rate was slower than most of the country's South American neighbors.² In 2015, the economy shrank by 3.8 percent, and by the end of 2016 the market was expected to have shrunk a further 3.5 percent. It is hoped that 2017 will bring some relief since, according to a report published on February 10, 2017, the Brazilian Central Bank's Focus Bulletin anticipates the GDP to grow by 1 percent.³

In an article published in January 2016, the *Economist* summarized: "Brazil's suffering, like that of other emerging economies, stems partly from the fall in global commodity prices. But Ms. Rousseff and her left-wing Workers' Party (PT) have made a bad situation much worse. During her first term, in 2011–14, she spent extravagantly and unwisely on higher pensions and unproductive tax breaks for favored industries. The fiscal deficit swelled from 2% of GDP in 2010 to 10% in 2015."⁴ In addition, 2015 and 2016 saw the emergence of several corruption scandals involving the state oil company Petrobras, the largest construction companies, and politicians across all levels of the legislative and executive powers. In 2016, the "Lava Jato operation" resulted in the imprisonment of several high-level businessman and politicians and the impeachment of President Rousseff, who was removed from office by the Senate in August of that year for breaking budgetary laws. With the oil and construction industries severely affected by the corruption scandals, the economy has continued to suffer.

The Brazilian currency, the real, has also encountered challenges. At the end of 2011, 1 real (R\$) was worth US\$0.51. Five years later, in January 2016, its value was even further reduced to US\$0.24. In the subsequent months, the Brazilian real recovered some value and reached levels of US\$0.30 by mid-December of that year.

¹ Stefan Zweig, *Brazil: A Land of the Future* (Riverside, CA: Ariadne Press, 2015).

² "Brazilian Waxing and Waning," *Economist*, April 18, 2016, <http://www.economist.com/blogs/graphicdetail/2016/04/economic-backgrounder>.

³ Banco Central do Brasil, *Focus Relatório de Mercado*, February 10, 2017, <http://www.bcb.gov.br/pec/GCI/PORT/readout/R20170210.pdf>.

⁴ "Brazil's Fall: Disaster Looms for Latin America's Biggest Economy," *Economist*, January 2, 2016, <http://www.economist.com/news/leaders/21684779-disaster-looms-latin-americas-biggest-economy-brazils-fall>.

The Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics estimated that the Brazilian population was around 207 million people in 2016.⁵ For reasons of economic development, the population is heavily concentrated along the coast and across the south and southeastern areas. In 2010, 24 percent of the population was younger than 14 years of age, but this share has diminished over the course of the decade.

The predominant religion in Brazil is Roman Catholicism, but Protestantism, particularly Pentecostal denominations, have experienced growth. Consequently, priests and pastors are the authors of several bestselling books in the Brazilian market.

Reflecting the age distribution of the Brazilian population, there were 28 million students in the Ensino Fundamental—meaning grades 1–9—in 2015. In that same year, 17.5 percent of the students from grades 1–5 went to private schools, while 14.5 percent of those in grades 6–9 attended private institutions. This reflects the income distribution and class divisions in Brazil. Most middle- and high-income families choose to send their kids to private schools, which offer better teachers, infrastructure, security, and education. In 2015, there were 8.1 million students across 28,000 schools in the first three years of high school—Ensino Médio, as it is known in Brazil—13 percent of which attended private schools, which in turn represented 29.1 percent of all the institutions.⁶

Things are quite the opposite at the university level. With few exceptions, the best Brazilian universities are state-run and publicly funded. These institutions require difficult entrance exams, and paradoxically many of the admissions are allotted to those students whose families can afford private schooling, while less privileged students wind up paying for private colleges that may offer a less prestigious education. In 2015, there were 8 million university students in Brazil attending 2,364 institutions. Of these, 2,069 were private universities and only 295 were public. It is important to note that college education is growing steadily in Brazil. From 2005 to 2015, the number of college students increased by 73.6 percent. However, most of this growth happened in the private sector, with 75.7 percent of students attending a private institution in 2015.⁷

According to the last available figures from 2014, the official literacy rate in Brazil is 91.7 percent.⁸ However, Brazil suffers deeply from functional illiteracy. The Functional Illiteracy Indicator (Indicador de Alfabetismo Funcional), a research program run by the Paulo Montenegro Institute, estimated in 2015 that 23 percent of the Brazilian population was functionally illiterate, with rudimentary or non-existent reading capabilities. Only 31 percent of the population was considered to be of intermediary and proficient literacy, the levels required to functionally read a book. Consequently, literacy continues to present a significant challenge for the Brazilian book industry.

⁵ "Projeção da população do Brasil e das unidades da federação," Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística, December 2016, <http://www.ibge.gov.br/apps/populacao/projecao>.

⁶ "Censo Escolar 2015," Ministério da Educação; INEP, 2015. <http://portal.inep.gov.br/censo-escolar>.

⁷ "Censo da educação superior 2015," Ministério da Educação; INEP, 2015. <http://portal.inep.gov.br/censo-da-educacao-superior>.

⁸ Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística, *Pesquisa nacional por amostra de domicílios 2014*, <http://www.ibge.gov.br/home/estatistica/populacao/trabalhoerendimento/pnad2014>.

Brazil is a monolingual country. The population speaks Portuguese, with the exception of a handful of isolated native ethnic groups. Spanish is spoken only in cities that border countries such as Argentina and Uruguay, but even then it is considered a second language.

The vocabulary, grammar, and accents of Brazilian Portuguese are different from the continental Portuguese spoken in Europe. There was recently an orthographic reform conducted by the Portuguese-speaking countries that eliminated spelling differences, but the remaining disparities in grammar and vocabulary still make the Brazilian language quite unique. It is not without reason that the French sometimes call the language spoken in Brazil “Brésilien.” For licensing purposes, in publishing, Brazilian Portuguese should be treated as a separate language.