

Brazil alive With buzz of excitement

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WE will hear a lot about Brazil in the next four years. In 2014, it hosts the World Cup and in 2016 the Olympics. Brazil is also alongside China, India and Russia as one of the top emerging countries of this century. I have visited the other three so when I had an invitation to speak at a franchising conference in Brazil in June this year, I was keen to go.

The other motivating factor was it was a chance to add to my list of countries visited, as I have set myself a goal to keep the countries visited ahead of my age. So my good friend "The K-man" (my wife calls it a bromance) and I set off to South America.

We only had a limited time to fit in a few countries around attending the franchise show in Sao Paulo so we chose Argentina, Brazil, Peru and Chile. My expectations of the franchise show were very low, a small event with lots of international brands on offer. I had been asked to speak at an international conference on franchising being held concurrently with an expo by the ABF (Association of Brazil Franchising). I was also keen to

see how South America was travelling and compare it with Australia as we both occupy a large part of the Southern Hemisphere.

We spent a couple of days in Buenos Aires, Argentina, looking at retail and checking out their local franchise brands. It was as I had expected: a country emerging from its turbulent past of military rule, still scarred by galloping inflation with lots of potential but not totally recovered.

After arriving in Sao Paulo late at night, we noticed the difference and felt the pulse of the place, which was vibrant, confident and very self-assured. Sao Paulo has a population almost equal to Australia's total. It's a huge place that never stops. The traffic is a big issue so the taxi drivers try to avoid the logjams by rat running down dodgy streets. You need to hold your nerve and not think you are being taken somewhere you don't want to be.

The next day we presented ourselves at the expo and what a surprise. There were three huge halls packed with local franchise brands and punters.

So much for my expectations. I was due to speak as part of a panel of international speakers from Russia, France, Mexico and lots of South American countries.

I was the last speaker so I decided to lighten things up and compare the many similarities of our great southern lands.

At the end of the day the organisers were thrilled to announce that their expo was now the largest franchise show ever held - in size, exhibitors and people attending. It was also the ABF's 25th anniversary and "The K-man" and I were invited to the official dinner.

We were taken by bus to the tallest building in Sao Paulo and on the top floor was a well-known Italian restaurant with views of miles of skyscrapers. The party got under way with Caprioskas cocktails all round and I found myself in deep conversation with a local. I asked him why Brazil was such a vibrant place compared with the rest of South America.

One of the key things he told me was that the Portuguese royal court moved en masse to Brazil to avoid Napoleon's invasion, so Brazil was the centre of Portuguese commerce and culture and not a colony (like Australia and all the other South American states).

Brazil is booming. Let's hope we can forge closer ties over the next decades as we have a lot in common.



GOOD TIMES: Brazil is celebrating the securing of the World Cup and the Olympics.