History and Government
About 1,000 American Indian groups lived in present-day Brazil when Europeans arrived. These groups were hunter-gatherers.

Portugal Claims Brazil
In 1500, Pedro Álvares Cabral and his crew became the first Europeans to reach Brazil. They claimed the land for Portugal. In the 1530s, Portuguese colonists began to grow sugar cane along the northeastern coast. They forced American Indians and Africans to work as slaves. Colonists looking for gold moved to other areas of Brazil in the 1600s. Many started farms and ranches.

Brazil Becomes Independent
In the 1820s, many Brazilians wanted Brazil to be independent. Pedro I made Brazil an independent monarchy. His son Pedro II modernized the country by building railroads and helping cities grow. In 1888, the Golden Law made slavery illegal.

A More Modern Government
In 1889, Brazil became a republic led by a president, but few people could vote. In 1988, leaders wrote a new constitution that made Brazil more democratic.

Brazil’s Government Today
Like the United States, Brazil has three branches of government. The congress is the branch that makes laws. The president heads a branch that makes sure the laws are followed. The courts form a third branch that settles disagreements about laws.