

Brazil: 190 million people, five films to watch

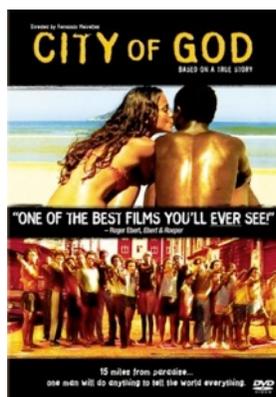
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Yesterday was Independence Day in Brazil, its 185th anniversary of self-rule since Portugal let it go in 1822 after three centuries of colonization. With 190 million people, Brazil is the most populous nation in Latin America and the fifth-most populous in the world. It's also a huge country, covering 8.5 million square kilometres, slightly less than the United States.

Brazil has produced some great movies, too, and been the setting for many others. Here are five that are available on DVD.

The Mission (*Britain, 1986*) A good start to understanding Brazil, one of the locations where this adventure tale from director Roland Joffé was filmed. It's set in the 18th century, when Spain and Portugal held sway in South America. Jeremy Irons and Robert De Niro are Jesuit missionaries defending the native Guarani people from slavery. Warner's two-disc edition includes a fascinating making-of that's an hour long.

Central Station (*Brazil/France, 1998*) Winner of many awards, this neo-realist-style road movie tells the story of a sad old woman (Oscar-nominated Fernanda Montenegro) who writes letters for illiterate people at Rio de Janeiro's central railway station. One day, she meets a 9-year-old boy who has lost his mother in an accident. Together, they set out to find the boy's father. The Columbia Tristar DVD is a nice transfer.



City of God (*Brazil/France/U.S., 2002*) A stunning film by Fernando Meirelles. In Rio's favelas in the 1960s and '70s, youths with nicknames like Shaggy, Goose, Clipper and Little Dice learn that a little thievery, intimidation and drug dealing buy time and prestige. But young Rocket wields a camera, not a gun, and sees behind the transient glory. The Buena Vista DVD features a one-hour doc called *News from a Private War*.

Bus 174 (*Brazil, 2002*) Rio, June 12, 2000. A street kid with a gun takes a city bus's mostly female passengers hostage in broad daylight. The bus is surrounded by police and media, and the standoff drags on into the night as negotiations go nowhere. This riveting documentary by

Felipe Lacerda and José Padilha exposes Brazil's twin scourges: homelessness and crime. A fine DVD from Arts Alliance America.

House of Sand (*Brazil, 2005*) No, this isn't the 2003 American psychodrama *House of Sand and Fog*. This is Brazilian director Andrucha Waddington's epic about a mother (Fernanda Montenegro again) who ekes out an existence with her daughter in remote Maranhão between 1910 and 1969. Over time, their house gets more and more isolated by the drifting sand dunes. A visually stunning film in a gorgeous DVD transfer by Sony Pictures.

Also worth a look: Black Orpheus (*Brazil/France/Italy, 1959*) The myth of Orpheus and Eurydice is transposed to samba-infused Rio during carnival in Marcel Camus's classic film; the Criterion DVD is bare-bones.

Still waiting: Kiss of the Spider Woman (*Brazil/U.S., 1985*) A prison drama about two dissimilar cellmates: an effeminate homosexual (William Hurt) and a macho political prisoner (Raul Julia). A DVD is long delayed and long overdue; info at kissofthespiderwoman.com.

