I can’t say very much on the basis of 4 days in one city, Belo Horizonte, but I will give some impressions. The stereotype of Brazilians is that they enjoy themselves and I have seen plenty of evidence of that. People are very nice and smile a lot. There is also striking poverty (and crime). Favelas (English shanty towns/Dutch sloppenwijken) are everywhere as are really rich neighborhoods (usually behind fences and walls). It is also an incredibly huge country: it covers half the South American continent and is the 5th most populous nation. There are huge differences in areas/cities, e.g. the cariocas from Rio, the bahianas from the NE, the Paulistas from Sao Paulo, and the Gauchos from the south - all with their own varieties of Brazilian Portuguese.

Over 3.5 million slaves from Africa were taken to Brazil (as a comparison, the US number is half a million). There were many other waves of immigration: the Dutch briefly had a colony, Jews and Africans came from Portugal, and people were attracted by the gold rush in the 1690s. The way people look is fascinating: very different from Europe or the US even though there is incredible variation. The estimates of indigenous populations that survive are a mere 250,000. The one gene that survives regularly is wavy hair, blue eyes, but not much red hair. Because of the racial intermarriages and certain government policies, the country is said to be a ‘racial democracy’ but this is doubted by many. On the plane from Houston to Sao Paulo, there were many Japanese and that is a huge group of relatively recent immigrants and the Chinese are another group. Brazilians move away themselves too, e.g. to the US, Paraguay, Japan, and Suriname.

Belo Horizonte is a relatively new city: it was envisioned as the new capital of the state of Minas Gerais at the end of the 19th century to replace Ouro Prieto and was very ‘planned’, at least initially. The grid in the centre is east-west and north-south but also diagonal which means that certain squares have 8 streets coming out onto them. The churches are very noticeable as well as the parochial schools and other services. The modernist highrises dominate them, however. I had wanted to see some of the work by Oscar Niemeyer, his Francis of Assisi Church and the building on the Praça da Liberdade, and they were both absolutely stunning: the church was built in 1943 and the apartments in the late 1950s.

![Igreja Sao Francisco de Assis, Pampulha, EvG](http://wikimapia.org/3542166/)
Niemeyer, the architect, is in his nineties and still active. His work dominates the country’s capital Brasilia, which I’d love to see. I didn’t get to see any of the modern art museums - many important modern visual artists are from Belo Horizonte, e.g. Lygia Clark and Rivane Neuenschwander.

The reason for going to Brazil was to attend an International Workshop on Grammaticalization and, although the workshop was supposed to be international, all papers (except those by 2 of the invited speakers) were given in Portuguese (the world’s 7th language). I understood a lot as long as the papers had handouts or powerpoints. Brazilian linguists are worried that their work is not noticed because it is written in Portuguese. I had expected more German but there was only one person who spoke that; many of the linguists spoke French better than English. Generally, communication is a real problem. There were people at the conference that answered questions patiently but it is hard not to be able to talk to people waiting around and on the street. That gives such a better picture of a place. Proficiency when it is there varies a lot.

Trees are gorgeous: flowering ones, rubber trees, etc; and they grow very fast. In the Ecological Park, I saw an interesting and cute creature (see picture on the right).

Parque Municipal

Unknown?

The Soccer Worldcup will be in Brazil (Belo Horizonte, Rio, and Sao Paolo) in 2014 and I think they have some work ahead of them. I walked past two stadiums that they are going to use in Belo Horizonte and hotels are being built as we speak. The graffiti is beautiful: not so much tagging but actual paintings; some of it with a bible quote underneath. I mentioned the churches; there are a few beautiful ones, e.g. the Lourdes Church with a small recreation of the cave.
There is a wonderful Mercado with so much for sale. It is bazaar-like with areas of specific merchandise: meats, sugarcane, roosters to fight for 50 real, herbs from the Amazon, several bars and fast food places. The food at Xapuri was wonderful and very Minais. I also had a great Acai paste with bananas and nuts, dried bananas, and caipirinha (a drink with rum and crushed limes). Fresh coconut milk is very popular but I missed that! The sweet coffee is a bit much but I have noticed that many people nevertheless have beautiful teeth! The streets where I was were very clean and many people are employed. For instance, airports will have a lot of ‘extra’ people around, which is handy!

I smelled smoke in the mornings and evenings and it was very hazy on flights. There were many fires but am not sure what was being burnt: garbage perhaps? One also smells ethanol and that is certainly cheaper than gasoline (see picture). There are many open mines too, visible on flights. People are starting to recycle. Some recycle cans were around at the university but I saw many workshops where furniture, cars, and shoes are repaired and visited a Friday craft market with crafts (necklaces, towels, toys ...) made from old magazines, paper, and rags made by cooperatives to provide jobs to women, refugees, etc. There was a real sense of pride in their work. A man that came begging was told that he could get a job.

The university (UFMG) is in Pampulha; it is expanding a lot. The technology in classrooms is somewhat comparable to that at ASU. The campus is locked up at night and there is no PR for itself in the form of t-shirts and mugs, and no signs of a university football stadium. Education is free at all levels, also university and the students seemed to me very motivated and serious. Real estate taxes are high but I couldn’t find out for sure where they are going. There are lots of schools, some better than others but it seemed complicated about which ones were private and public and parochial.

Lots of ideas for future trips!