

Indigenous peoples of Brazil - Definition

This article is part of the [Brazilian History](#) series.

The **indigenous people of Brazil** (*povos indígenas* in [Portuguese](#)) comprise a large number of distinct ethnic groups who inhabited the country's present territory prior its discovery by [Europeans](#) around [1500](#). Like [Christopher Columbus](#), who thought he had reached the [East Indies](#), the first [Portuguese](#) explorers called them *índios* (*Indians*), a name that is still used today in Brazil.

The Brazilian indigenous peoples were mostly semi-nomadic tribes who subsisted on [hunting](#), [fishing](#), gathering, and migrant agriculture. Many of the groups which existed in 1500 died out as a consequence of the European settlement, and many were assimilated into the Brazilian population. The indigenous population has declined from a pre-Columbian high of an estimated 5–6 million to just 100,000 in [1950](#). Only a few tribes still survive in their original culture in remote areas of the [Amazon Rainforest](#). However, changes in government policies over the past 50 years have managed to afford some protection to the remaining native Brazilians, and the population has risen again to some 300,000 ([1997](#)), grouped into some 200 tribes.

Brazilian Indians made substantial and pervasive contributions to the country's material and cultural development—such as the domestication of [cassava](#), which is still a major staple food in rural areas of the country.

Information found at: http://www.wordiq.com/definition/Indigenous_peoples_of_Brazil







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