

July 1, 2014 Atlanta, GA

A very important component necessary to travel to Brazil is a visa. And all the web site services are clear the wait time is 7-10 business days to obtain an expedited visa. I had begun my research a few days ago, a Saturday, and of course just about every visa acquisition service was closed. I did gather that going directly to the Brazilian Consulate would afford me a realistic chance of getting a visa in time but my choices are Los Angeles, Houston, New York, or Miami. The closest is at least a thirteen hour drive and my bountiful wages for being a soccer coach don't afford me the luxury of jet setting to acquire a visa. The trip to the mecca itself will be on a shoestring budget. Even more discouraging are the fees for the visa provider and the necessary fees from the consulate itself. So my predicament is this, spend somewhere between three and five hundred dollars to acquire a visa that may not make it to me in time. Of course I have left messages and sent emails to all the services to inquire about a "quicker" way. *Surely if they know my story, they'll find a way to make it happen....*

And then on that Saturday morning I receive a call from a nice young lady working for one of the services. She kindly informs me that using any service puts my timeline at serious risk and the only chance I have is to visit a consulate. And then salvation reveals itself. She tells me, "There is a Brazilian Consulate in Atlanta, go to their site and see when you can get an appointment."

Atlanta is three hours away! So yesterday I call the consulate the moment it opens and of course, as with all bureaucracies and corporations I play the automated answer shuffle. I then send off a fax and an email that reads:

Attn- Anybody able to respond regarding World Cup Visa

Good Morning,

I have attempted to call a couple times this morning now with no success and have sent this on email as well. I'm sorry to be so forthcoming but time is of the essence. I am very fortunate to have the opportunity to attend both semi finals for the World Cup but I need to obtain the Visa this week. If the USA were to surprise Belgium, I would also have a ticket for the QF against your arch rival Argentina (I don't see the Swiss beating them) on Saturday.

In looking at the online necessities to obtain a VISA I have a few questions:

1. I have an appointment for Thursday, the soonest your site would allow and that would not leave the three days necessary to obtain the Visa, but is the walk up line in service tmrw (Tuesday) so that I could just walk in as the web site indicates World Cup Visa applicants can do?
2. My tickets are in Brazil- I do have photos of them- would this be sufficient? Let me know of another expedited way if this is not.
3. I have already filled out the application but I'm not sure if it is the World Cup specific one that is required for this line. The application # is 140628-000449, please let me know if I need to do another.

I live about three hours away in Sewanee, TN and would gladly make the trip as long as I know it won't be in vain.

Thanks so much for your attention! And best of luck against the Ticos!

PJ

I didn't just up and leave for Atlanta yesterday for one particular reason: it's necessary to present a ticket or a voucher validating the ticket belongs to the person applying for the visa. By early afternoon yesterday I received two very encouraging emails- the first was from Benefactor's brother with an attachment depicting twenty such vouchers. And then the final piece of the puzzle, a response from the Consulate stating I was in possession of everything necessary to submit for a visa face to face and it could be ready the same day I applied! So I knew an early wake up to drive and arrive in Atlanta as the Consulate door was opening would commence today's tasks.

In the pre dawn haze on I 75 heading down to Atlanta, the road is empty and I wonder why I need a visa anyway. Of all the countries visited, I've never been obligated to maneuver through a bureaucratic layer such as this. Cursing the Brazilian government for overzealous protection of their borders, I still have a general sense of relief because just three days ago it appeared I couldn't go even if I wanted. But now there's a realistic chance there will be no bureaucratic barriers to deny the junkie his fix. Being curious, I researched just why a visa was necessary and discovered that the over zealous government was my very own US of A and all Brazil was doing was practicing the eternal philosophy of, "Do unto others as they do unto you." Yes, it's a slight deviation from the golden rule, but a truism nonetheless. In government speak it's known as reciprocity and the only reason the Brazilians require US citizens to get a visa is because our lovely government forced the difficulty upon them. *We are so concerned with Brazilians fleeing their country to come to the land of milk and honey yet we have open borders with Mexico.* Learning more, what really disgusted me was the fact that in Brazil, a country nearly the size

of our own, there truly are only four consulates in the vast country and obtaining a visa is a very arduous and expensive process for the average Brazilian. Yet Brazilian tourists are one of the top five in spending and size in our known world. Needless to say, many have called upon the US to rescind the visa requirements with Brazil.

And to make my shame complete, I am treated professionally and with extreme courtesy by the consulate in Atlanta. I was the first person in a line of ten before their doors even opened today. I'm instructed to return at 3 PM and my visa should be ready. Arriving at the designated time it's there waiting for me and to finish with a bang- there is no charge. All attending World Cup matches have their fees waived. What could of cost me five hundred dollars is reduced to one day of my time and a thirty five dollar tank of gas. In my hand is a visa allowing me to leave for Brazil anytime I want.

I find the nearest hotel lobby and sit all alone by the TV as Tim Howard leads the resistance of the American team like the Rohirim at Helms Deep against the swarming Urukai wearing Belgian uniforms. Going down by two goals in overtime the Americans are nearly dead and buried but climb out of the grave with a goal and some time to heap much misery and stress on the Belgian side before they are able to celebrate. The game ends with the Americans hammering away for an equalizer that is never to come. My trip to Brazil will not be in time to see this committed and never say die US side compete. I'm going to Brazil while most of the Americans are leaving, again my unpredictable predictability causes amusement while in the mourning period immediately after the US team's dismissal.