

# Brazil Has More Lebanese than Lebanon

Contributed by Marina Sarruf  
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Lebanese immigration to Brazil began officially in around 1880, four years after the visit of Brazilian emperor Dom Pedro II to Lebanon. Most of the immigrants came escaping the lack of economic perspectives of the region, then dominated by the Turkish and Ottoman policy.

Brazil, at the time, was going through its first phase of urbanization and industrialisation, a fact that made new business possible.

Different from the European immigrants, who were looking for land to farm in Brazil, the Lebanese found in the cities the right place to establish industries and locations for trade.

Most of them started their lives in the country selling from door to door, as travelling salesmen. The money collected with this activity ended up as the kick-start for small garment and fabric producers.

Despite the official date of immigration being 1880, before that some Lebanese immigrants were already living in Brazil. In 1808, for example, when the Portuguese royal family arrived in Brazil, it was a Lebanese immigrant, Antun Elias Lubbo, who offered his house so that king D. João VI could make it into the imperial residence.

The Lebanese was a landowner, had a lamb meat butcher's shop, and a dry goods store. The site became the Brazilian Imperial House, where Dom Pedro II was born, and it later became the Quinta da Boa Vista national museum.

Many Lebanese immigrants who live or lived in Brazil also collaborated for the development of Lebanon, sending money to the country so that hospitals, schools and libraries could be built.

In Brazil, they also made important constructions, among them the Syrian-Lebanese hospital and the Monte Líbano athletic club, both in São Paulo.

Lebanese cuisine is an example of how the Lebanese culture became popular. Kibbehs and sfihas are sold at bars, restaurants and snack bars throughout the country.

There are currently 7 million Lebanese descendants in Brazil, most living in São Paulo, but they are spread out all over the country.

## The story of the Lebanese

With such a great colony, immigration is full of stories. Some came and returned to Lebanon, then returning to Brazil again, others came and never returned to their motherland.

One of the families that arrived in São Paulo at the end of the 19th century was the Massud family. Doctor João Massud Filho, a grandson of immigrant Amin Massud, explained that his grandfather was a political dissident from the time of Turkish dominion and, for this reason, decided to escape to Brazil together with his wife.

Like many of his compatriots, Amin started working in trade together with his brothers.

"My grandfather had three children here. He stayed in Brazil for 65 years and then returned to Lebanon," he explained.

Later, Amin decided to return to Brazil for good, with his children.

"My father (João, Amin's son) had a registry office and was even the mayor of the city of Getulina (in the interior of the state of São Paulo)", stated Massud Filho.

He explained that his mother, Hania Massud, also left Lebanon and came to live in Brazil, where she met and married his father.

"My mother went to the United States at the age of 16 so as to marry an older person, a man she did not know. It was an agreed wedding. When she got there and saw the man she ran away to France, and then Brazil," he said. "My parents never returned to Lebanon," he added.

A more recent story is that of Tanos Nabhan, who is also Lebanese. He came to São Paulo at the age of 29, in 1979, together with wife Marie Nabhan. They both left the city of Fharzabed due to the civil war, which lasted 15 years.

Nabhan, who was a teacher of Arabic, history and geography arrived in São Paulo without speaking a word of Portuguese, but little by little he learnt and started working in trade.

"First of all I opened a clothes factory in Maringá (in the interior of the southern state of Paraná), but that did not work out. Later I returned to São Paulo, where I opened a small store, in the Brás neighborhood, selling clothes and accessories for kids," he said.

In 2003 the immigrant opened a children's jeans factory, Parizi, also in the Brás neighborhood.

Nowadays, at the age of 55, Nabhan says that his is used to Brazil.

"I have already returned to Lebanon to visit the country twice. But the Brazilians are very loving, different from the people in other countries, that is what made it easier for us to stay here," he said.

Translated by Mark Ament

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