

# Arabic Becomes Hip in Brazil

Contributed by Marina Sarruf  
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There is an increasing interest from the Brazilians to learn the Arab language in São Paulo. For three years, the Syrian Arab Cultural Center has been offering free Arabic courses, which is one of the most ancient languages in the world.

In the beginning there were only 40 pupils, one room and one teacher. Currently there are 450 pupils, four classrooms and three teachers.

According to the director at the Syrian Arab Cultural center, Mohamad Al Kaddah, a curious fact is that the majority of pupils who seek the course are Brazilians that have no Arab relatives in their family.

"There are more or less 80% of Brazilians with no Arab relatives and 20% of Arab descendants," he stated.

For Kaddah, there are three main reasons for this demand to increase every year. The first is the expansion of the Arab language in the world, which currently is one of the most spoken languages.

The second, the increasing expansion in trade relations of the Arab countries with other nations. "It is a market that is opening and people are interested in learning the Arab language to come commercially closer to the Arabs," said the director.

Another factor is the intellectual interest each one has, which, according to Kaddah, is the reason why the majority of pupils seek the Syrian Arab Cultural center. The language, according to Kaddah, is one of the official languages in the United Nations Organization (UN).

Most students' ages vary from 18 to 25 years of age, but there are also older people in the course. In the beginning there was only one period (time schedule) offered, with classes twice a week and two years duration.

Currently there are 10 periods, with classes from Monday through Thursday lasting for three years. "We are saturated already. If there is more demand I don't know what we'll do," stated Kaddah.

To ensure good fluency and writing in Arabic, the institute counts on Syrian professors, who are sent by the government of the Arab country exclusively to teach the language to Brazilians.

"We are a department of the Syrian government. The entity is kept by the Syrian Ministry of Culture," stated Kaddah, who also came to Brazil especially to direct the entity.

According to the director, the organization's aim is to promote Arab culture in Brazil. "Syria counts on four Arab Cultural centers around the world, amongst them the São Paulo one," said Kaddah. The other ones are Paris, Madrid and Iran. The Syrian Arab Cultural center in São Paulo was founded in 1980.

As well as Arabic courses, the Cultural center offers courses in folkloric dances, Arab film exhibits, art exhibits, intellectual conferences and a library with 14,000 books about history, literature, law, sciences, sociology, and philosophy amongst other topics. The entity is also sought by people interested in getting more tourist information about Syria.

## More Information

The enrollment for the Arabic course starts in February at the entity's headquarters. The classes start in March in two periods, from 5 pm to 7 pm and from 7 pm to 9 pm.

Contact  
Syrian Arab Cultural center  
Rua Augusta, 1053 - São Paulo  
Telephones: (+55 11) 3259-4727 or (+55 11) 3259-4880

Anba - [www.anba.com.br](http://www.anba.com.br)