

Brazilian Christ Is One of the World's New Seven Wonders

Contributed by Elma Lia Nascimento
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Brazil's most famous post card, Christ the Redeemer, the open-arms statue that is a symbol of Rio de Janeiro, has become one of the new Seven World Wonders. The results of the choice, which was made through a quite flawed voting system on the Internet and text messaging, was announced in Lisbon, capital of Portugal, this Saturday, July 7.

The Brazilian wonder has been chosen together with six other monuments: China's Great Wall; the Petra monument, in Jordan; the Inca city of Machu Picchu, in Peru; the pyramid of Chichén Itzá, in Mexico; the old arena of Coliseum, in Rome; and the Taj Mahal mausoleum, in India.

The ceremony in Lisbon counted on the participation of US's former astronaut Neil Armstrong, the first man to walk on the moon, as well as the UN's ex general secretary Kofi Annan, who were joined by actress and singer Jennifer López. Portuguese premier, José Socrates, acting president of the European Union (EU) was also present.

British actor Ben Kingsley and American actress Hillary Swank hosted the extravaganza. UNESCO, the UN organ in charge of the world's cultural patrimony, wasn't in favor of the promotion and opted out of the event.

Brazilian President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, as soon as he heard about the news, released a note congratulating Rio and Brazil for the choice.

"Christ the Redeemer was always a Rio de Janeiro's and a Brazil's wonder. From now on it is also one of the world's Seven Wonders," says the note.

Rio governor, Sérgio Cabral, also celebrated the accomplishment and thanked his fellow Brazilians who voted for the statue: "It is a victory that boosts Rio de Janeiro as one of the most desired and admired destinations in the world. Thank you, Brazil."

The contest, promoted by a Swiss foundation, got about 100 million votes.

The Christ the Redeemer's statue is about 38 meters (125 feet) high and rests on the top of the Corcovado hill, which is 740 meters (2428 feet) above sea level.

The sculpture made of soapstone from the Corcovado hill was designed by engineer Heitor Silva Costa, who won a contest that chose the best project. Another Brazilian, plastic artist Carlos Oswald, was responsible for the final drawing. But it was Polish-born French artist Paul Landowski who sculpted the statue.

It was in 1922, the year when Brazil celebrated one hundred years of its independence from Portugal that Rio had the groundbreaking ceremony for the Christ. The monument would be finished only 9 years later, however.

The statue was finally dedicated on October 12, 1931. The monument's construction had been a dream of the Catholic Church in Brazil since the middle of the 19th century, when ecclesiastical authorities started talking about a giant image of Christ to be erected in Rio, then capital of Brazil.

Bel Noronha, the great-granddaughter of the engineer who designed the Christ is excited about the contest's result: "The choice is a sign that Brazilians are capable, that we can be proud of our achievements. Brazil doesn't do only wrongs. It is perhaps a start to recognize our people. I always thought that we need to have more self-esteem,"

Noronha is the author of "Christo Redemptor" a documentary that tells the story behind the building of the monument with testimonies from people who took part in the project and archive images never made public. The film that was presented recently in New York hasn't yet been seen in Brazilian theaters or TV.