

My name is... Bruna

RIO DE JANEIRO

Even though she is 13, Bruna Figueira doesn't mind that she rarely leaves home by herself.

Bruna lives with her mom, dad and two younger sisters in an apartment building in the city of Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. There's a big playground, a tennis court and two swimming pools that are part of the complex, which is surrounded by many tropical fruit trees where little monkeys come daily to seek lunch.

The squirrel-sized monkeys jump over walls and through the court where Bruna and her sisters, Bárbara, 8, and Bianca, 9, have tennis and soccer classes. Just beyond the walls is one of Rio's favelas, an area where some of the city's poorest people live in handmade houses that often have no running water. The favelas are dangerous places, often run by gangs. They can be found in poor areas of Rio

as well as in much nicer neighborhoods like Bruna's.

From her apartment's balcony, Bruna can see two sides of her city: the poverty of the favelas and the majesty of the famous statue of Christ the Redeemer.

Violence that is common in the favelas is one reason that Bruna rarely goes out alone.

She can play inside the apartment complex, but must be accompanied by an adult to go most places in town.

"Sometimes I stay alone at home, but just for a short time," she says while playing with Teca, a Calopsita bird that is native to Australia. Teca had her wings cut; so while she can't fly, she can roam in the apartment.

Bruna goes to one of the best private schools in town, not far from her home. In many schools students choose to study either in the morning or in the afternoon. Bruna goes to school from 1 p.m. until 5:30 p.m.

She gets a ride from her family's

driver, which is not uncommon, but other families join together to rent a small van to transport the children.

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Fun Facts

Name: Brazil is named after a tree popular in the region when Europeans arrived. Red paint from the tree was used to dye cloth.

Weather: Summer in Rio de Janeiro can be really hot. Temperatures go up to 105 degrees Fahrenheit (though they are measured in Celsius). Winter and summer seasons are the opposite from the United States because Brazil is on the other side of the equator. When it is winter here, it is summer in Brazil. The hottest months are December, January and February; the coldest ones are June, July and August.

Sports: Soccer is HUGE in Brazil. The country has won the World Cup five times, more than any other country.

“I’m not the type of student that wants to be the first in class, but I do well,” she says in Portuguese, the official language of Brazil, which used to be a colony of Portugal.

Bruna also has studied English at school and in extra classes for two years. “When I watch movies in English with subtitles in Portuguese I can recognize some of the words spoken,” she says.

Bruna doesn’t think much about what she would like to do for a living. “Maybe a lawyer,” she says, “but I don’t know yet.” She still has some years to go before she has to decide what she will study in college.

To get into a university, 17-year-olds must take a difficult public examination. They usually study for the exam for at least a year. It’s very hard to get into public universities because the schools are good — and free. Usually, by the time they are 16, students have decided what they want to study in college so they can do well on that exam. Medicine, communication, law, management and engineering are the most popular courses.

On weekends, Brunna often goes

to a swimming pool with her family. Occasionally they all go to one of the famous beaches in town. One of her favorite after-school activities is street dancing. She also likes to read novels and listen to music on her iPod on the balcony of her apartment. In the morning, before school, she studies and does her homework. After school, Brunna usually watches TV.

Whenever she can, Brunna uses her computer to watch videos on YouTube or chat with friends. But her parents allow her to use the computer on week-ends and for only a limited period during the week. “If I could,” she says, “I would be on it always!”

— *Sabrina Valle*

About Brazil

Capital: Brasília.

Population: 186 million people; a little more than a fourth of them are younger than 15.

Size: 3.2 million square miles, a little smaller than the United States.

Geography: Brazil has 4,600 miles of coastline on the Atlantic Ocean. The northern half of the country is the heavily wooded Amazon River Basin. The Amazon flows for more than 2,000 miles in Brazil.

Currency: real (pronounced heh-ow).

History: Only native Indians inhabited Brazil until 1500, when Europeans arrived. The Portuguese colonized the country and made it part of their empire. In 1889 Brazil became an independent republic.

School: Kids are supposed to go to school from age 7 to at least 14.

Religion: About 75 percent of the population is Roman Catholic.

Television: There are 33 TVs for every 100 people in Brazil, compared with 84 for every 100 people in the United States.