Getting a Kick Out of São Paulo&#
8217;s Soccer Museum

Futebol. Out of Brazilian mouths the word for soccer sounds something like Footchy-Baow. In other words it's as fun and crazy as the game itself. And long after this so-far madcap Brazilian World Cup ends, São Paulo's Museu do Futebol is a can't miss for anyone trying to understand o jogo bonito, the Beautiful Game. Even if you've never seen a soccer game in your life, you'd be entranced by the superb six-year old museum built right inside Pacaembu stadium in the Higienópolis district.

As you wander among vintage posters and watch archival footage you know the Brazilian kids you see there live for the game and aren't being corralled by sports dads trying to relive their past. Long before touring the exhibits they have lived and breathed, for example, stories of their nation's shocking and crushing 1950 World Cup defeat by Uruguay. Like those kids, if you're game while you're there you can even kick a ball into the net and have your speed clocked digitally.

n one hall you'll encounter a series of hologram-like images of star players most of whom you've likely never heard of. We all know Pelé of course, but the sport in Brazil has been filled with outsized characters like the great captain of the 80's teams, Sócrates, who was a bearded, intellectual fighter for democracy, as well as a medical doctor whose chain smoking surely contributed to his early death a few years ago. And who knew that it was a Scottish Brazilian named Charles Miller in the first place who brought a few balls back from England and set off a craze for the game in the late 19th century.

I popped over to the soccer museum last year while I was a guest at the Hotel Unique, architect Ruy Ohtake's funky watermelon slice-shaped hotel in Jardins district. The hotel's chic pool deck Skye Bar on the rooftop is just the place where you might encounter Brazil's stars on a day off the pitch. A twenty minute walk from the Unique also takes you to what is maybe Latin America's greatest urban green space, Ibirapuera Park, filled with skateboarders, joggers, cyclists and plenty of budding futebol stars practicing their moves. Among several of the late Oscar Niemeyer's works is an edifice that holds the brilliant decade-old Afro-Brazilian Museum whose massive collection touches on the sport as well.

For all the usual dire warnings of chaos in the run up to the World Cup, many commentators are already calling these games the tops in memory. For its part, the high-tech, visually compelling museum is also a reminder that Brazil is one of the world's great plugged-in nations and you'd expect nothing less for a shrine to their national pastime. You'd be forgiven in the United States if you skipped the treks out to the sports halls in Canton, Ohio, Springfield, Massachusetts, or Cooperstown, New York. But if you come to São Paulo, the economic engine of all Latin America, you deserve a good kick if you don't spend a few hours in the museum of Footchy-Baow.

Forbes (30/06/2014)