

Brazilian Opal

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Brazil is considered to be the world's second largest producer of opal. This gem comes almost entirely from the municipalities of Pedro II and Buriti dos Montes in the State of Piauí. The opal from Pedro II is known the world over for its extraordinary beauty, high resistant to temperature change and elevated hardness; attributed to low water content (about 5.7%). In the region of Pedro II deposits have already been found in an area some 80 km², in which there are *garimpos* and mines with resources estimated at 1,200 tonnes. The white opal is the most usual type, with varieties pinfire, broad-flash and harlequin. For commercial purposes, the opal of Pedro II is classified by the *garimpeiros* and buyers in six main types: noble opal, extra opal, strong opal, medium opal, weak rough opal, and very weak or waste opal. The opal deposits known to date may be grouped into four distinct generic types on the basis of their litho-structural controls and genesis: hydrothermally mineralized veins associated with alkaline rocks; mineralization associated with basalt; and in recent alluvial deposits. Although there are small hand craft industries, jewellery and lapidary, most of the production is sold as rough gem to distant points of Brazil, as well as to other countries. Opal price varies greatly, depending on the quality and size of the gems. The better gems are sold for up to US\$ 60/ gram.