

# Brazilian Starbucks CEO dies in car crash

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SAO PAULO --

The businesswoman who opened the first Starbucks stores in the world's top coffee-growing nation has died, the company said Tuesday. Brazilian news media said she was in a car crash.

Maria Luisa Rodenbeck, 49, died Monday in Rio de Janeiro after the taxi she was riding in collided with a bus, the O Estado de S. Paulo newspaper reported.

Rodenbeck, the chief executive of Starbucks do Brasil, unveiled the first Starbucks in Brazil in a Sao Paulo shopping mall in December along with executives from Seattle, Wash.-based Starbucks Corp.

South America's largest city now has five Starbucks outlets, meaning Rodenbeck and Starbucks correctly gambled that the hip shops would be a hit among Brazilian coffee drinkers used to paying a pittance for super-strong espresso.

Two more stores are planned for Sao Paulo, Starbucks do Brasil said in a statement that also confirmed Rodenbeck's death.

The Brazilian Starbucks operation will be run for now by Buck Hendrix, president of Starbucks Coffee Latin America, until a successor is named, Starbucks Corp. said in a statement.

Sao Paulo is home to tens of thousands of small coffee shops, where Brazilians at all hours sip espresso, the preferred coffee style.

"Looking ahead, we continue to be extremely confident about our future growth and success," Starbucks said. "We plan to continue to execute our business strategy in Maria Luisa's spirit."

Before teaming up with Starbucks, Rodenbeck was chief financial officer of Outback Steakhouse Brasil, introduced in 1997 by her husband, Peter.