

## Saturday, May 12, 2018

Today, Isabel Strasser and Gwendolyn Deas left from two different airports and arrive in Miami, FL about the same time. We picked up our luggage and made our way to the free bus that would take us to the Town Place Suite Hotel by Marriott. By mid-afternoon, we were in our hotel suite.



Later this evening, Ronald Deas, Jr. and his family joined us in the hotel and cooked us both a Mother's Day dinner. By the time he finished cooking it was 9:00 PM. We enjoyed a delicious dinner around the hotel pool.

Isabel and I moved to our suite and talked about the upcoming journey we were both about to start. Neither of us had ever been to Brazil, so we both were excited. We both had many questions and neither one of us the answers. We finally fell asleep ready to start a new adventure in the morning. *Gwendolyn Deas*

## Sunday, May 13, 2018 Travel Day to Manaus, Brazil

Isabel and I got up and had a pretty good free morning breakfast at the hotel. Then, on to the Miami airport to meet the rest of the ambassadors and American Flight # 1265 departing at 5:30 PM for the 5½ hours to Manaus in Brazil. Upon arrival, we cleared customs and retrieved our luggage. We met our representative and our bus that transferred us to the Wyndham Garden Manaus Hotel. The ride was pleasant and a great introduction to the landscape of Manaus. *Gwendolyn Deas*



## Monday, May 14, 2018

We awoke up bright and early for our trip down the Amazon River. The Rio Negro, a river that goes into the Amazon started out as the bottom of the ocean and there are still remains of salty ocean life in this river. We passed the largest floating island in the Rio Negro along the way where many jacana birds nest. Then we arrived at the meeting of the waters. This was an amazing site. You could actually see the difference between the Rio Negro and the Amazon River. Two distinct colors, two distinct temperatures and the waters never blend although someone in Belo Horizonte told me that sometimes when



there is a lot of rain a huge wave is created here and many people go river surfing during the phenomenon. The waters of the Amazon are too dense to let the waters of the Rio Negro pass through. The two rivers have their own ecosystem also. There are many plants floating in the rivers and they help keep the rivers clean. Then we passed the floating village of Catalan. Half of the year the people live and work and travel on the river and the other half of the year when the water is too high they move their houses elsewhere. There is a yellow school boat to take the children to school each day although some older students take their own canoes to school, I guess like our high school seniors here!! We passed many houses where manioc was being ground. We also saw many water hyacinth, mureu plants and Amazon kingfishers.



We took a lunch break at a floating restaurant on the Amazon and there was also a lovely craft market there where many parted with their money. Before lunch we took a short walk on an elevated trail and saw many spider monkeys and lots of vegetation. At the end of the walk there was a large lake with a field of Victoria Amazon lilies. These lilies come in three colors of flowers. At night these plants trap beetles when they close but when they open in the morning the beetles come out again. We saw a huge Celia tree with a humongous lower trunk. The people use the fibers of these trees to make mattresses and pillows for people who are allergic to regular mattresses and pillows. These trees are also used to make



canoes. There are over 2500 varieties of butterflies in the Amazon area. We also saw the malacca tree which always renews its bark and is used for making cosmetics. Lunch was a nice buffet of typical Brazilian foods. That turned out to be the kinds of lunches we encountered on most of our stops.



After lunch the boat spent some time going through an area of calm water which is known as canoeing waters. When we got back to Manaus the guide talked us into taking a guided tour of Manaus. It was really a tour of the market place which we could probably have done on our own although she did point out many interesting products. She showed us an oil from the jungle that is used in making Chanel 5. and anaconda oil which is used for healing cuts. We passed a cemetery on the way where the Christian part is all filled up but there are still



places in the Jewish section. The final part of the trip was to go and see the opera house but unfortunately there was something going on in there so we couldn't go in and only saw it from the outside. We



took a fun picture in a carriage across the street from the opera house and then walked down to the square where we saw the 4 continents monument. There was a lovely craft store near the square and we spent a little time shopping and looking again before heading back to the hotel.

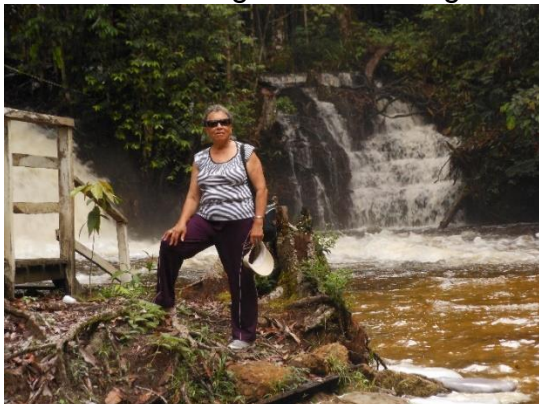


*Isabel Strasser*



**Tuesday, May 15, 2018 Manaus**

This is day 3 of our visit to Brazil. After breakfast we are meeting with our tour guide in the lobby of our hotel (Blue Tree), and heading out to the Amazon rainforest, and the Presidente Figueiredo Waterfalls.





We traveled to the Santuario Ecological Waterfall Reserve. Once there, we hiked through the primary Amazon forest. We stopped for a



swim, some of us brave enough to risked slipping on the slippery slopes and stones and roots of old trees. Some of us played it safe, took pictures and watched. We hiked



of the undulated hills of the upper Amazon Basin, before returning to Manaus. Before returning we did stop and had lunch at an outside restaurant. Since we were leaving on a flight a 4 a.m. the next morning, we thought it might be a good idea to take it easy for the rest of the evening and get some shuteye. *Val Bolan*

**Wednesday May 16, 2018**

**Iguazu Falls**

This was to be a day of travel (Manaus to Iguazu Falls) and a day of rest and leisure, but it was not. It was a day of adventures!

We were up at 1:00 AM to catch our first flight leaving Manaus for Sao Paulo. It left on time at 4:00AM, landing in Sao Paulo at 9:15. Our departure was also on time at 10:05 AM, landing at 11:50 AM. We did not have to wait more than 15 minutes for our luggage.

Our guide, Oliver, was waiting for us. He was to take us to the hotel for rest and our day of leisure; however, he gave us a choice to do just that or to see the Brazilian side of Iguazu Falls today. He felt that doing both sides tomorrow was too much for one day.

We chose to see the Brazilian side today. We were not prepared and as a result



many of us had to get into our suitcases for appropriate clothing and rain gear. The Iguazu Falls National Park from which we would see the falls was in one direction and the hotel in the opposite direction; thus, we traveled with our suitcases.

We had to drive through the Iguazu Falls National Park to get to the falls. The speed of the vehicles in the park is closely monitored. The driver

must carry a device through which the park officials are able to know the speed of the vehicle. This is how both the animals and people are protected. Our first stop at the falls was to have lunch, we were starved. The lunch





was a large buffet at a restaurant in the park. We had lots of choices. While having lunch we had a glimpse of the falls, but that in no way prepared us for the spectacular site we were about to view.

A quarter of Iguazu Falls are on the Brazilian side of the border and three quarters are on the Argentinean side. The word Iguazu (3 different spelling – all correct) comes from an indigenous word meaning “Big Water”.



This spectacular waterfall system is comprised of approximately 275 different falls. Although the falls can be experienced in either Brazil or Argentina, the majority of the falls are actually on the Argentinean side.

We walked for approximately 1.5 km (just over 1 mile) looking at the falls on the other side of the river (this being the Argentinean side). We then walked another km (2/3 of a mile) to see the falls on the Brazilian. The walk was quite easy with several down hills and uphill climbs.

This led us to the

walkway over the falls. On the walkway we could feel the

power as we looked at the gigantic falls, rainbows in the mist, and green on the steep riverbanks. Amazing!!



It was in this area that the movie “Mission” starring Robert De Nero was made. This movie dates back to the 1980's.







We decided to add a “wet boat” ride to our adventure. Again, we had to dig into our suitcases for our ponchos. The ride, of approximately 20 minutes, took us to an area where we were under the falls. We got soaked! I had expected a close-up of the falls, but this was a ‘thrill’ ride.

Finally, after driving for approximately 1.5 hours, we arrived at our hotel. We reached the hotel approximately 6:45PM. Although everyone was exhausted, we had a great day! *Lorraine Cleveland*

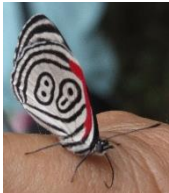
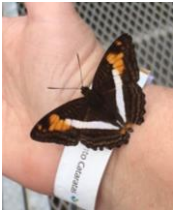
**Thursday, May 17, 2018**

Before entering the parks, the guide collected our



passports to enter Argentina because the falls is located in both Brazil and Argentina. Upon entering the parks, we boarded a little train to the entrance and while waiting for

tickets, we saw coatis or coatimundis all over the place foraging for food. The guide called them Brazilian raccoons. Butterflies were all over the place and had no fear of people, they would come and perch on you. I had one



perched on me

for over 15 minutes. Iguassu Falls is certainly a favorite of all the natural sights I have seen. I was ready to view the falls, but I never imagined I would see and hear the roaring amount of water cascading down the falls. From every scenic view point I couldn't get enough of the sights and where to look first! Rainbows were everywhere providing wonderful photo opportunities. After viewing the falls, we had a buffet lunch at a restaurant.



The following is some information about Iguassu:

The exquisite Iguazu Falls are also known as the Iguassu Falls and the Iguazu Falls. The magnificent spectacle of these 275 individual drops has awed tourists, locals and indigenous inhabitants for centuries. They originate from the Iguazu River and are located on the border of Brazil (in the state of Paraná) and Argentina.

In fact, the Iguazu Falls are what divides the river of the same name into its upper and lower portions, a fact that has given rise to several myths and legends as to their origin. This river forms the boundary between Brazil and Argentina, making it a significant part of the political and geographical structure of the continent of South America.

The name of the falls originates from the Tupi or Guarani language, and means “big water”. While the ancient Brazilian tribes knew of its thunderous beauty, it was only



officially ‘discovered’ in 1541, when the European explorer, the Spanish Conquistador Álvaro Núñez Cabeza de Vaca, came across its awe-inspiring beauty.

*Full view of the cascade of Iguazu Falls, Brazilian side.*

Today, the Iguazu Falls are owned by the two UNESCO World Heritage Sites: the Iguazú National Park in Argentina and the Iguazu National Park in Brazil.

On the Brazilian side, the best-known falls include:

- Benjamin Constant
- Deodoro
- Floriano

The Iguazu Falls stretch in width for 2.7 kilometres (or 1.7 miles). Their height varies between 60 metres (200 feet) and 82 metres (or 269 feet). This makes the Iguazu Falls taller than Niagara Falls and twice as wide.

A large proportion of the water is thrust down Devil’s Throat, a long chasm that is 82 metres high, 150 metres wide and 700 metres long. This chasm has a distinguishing



U-shape. Interestingly, there are several islands within the river and the falls.

. In terms of accessibility, tourists need to confirm the possible VISA requirements when entering from either the Brazil or the Argentina side, as the falls comprise both countries. Visitors can reach the falls from Foz do Iguazu in Brazil and Puerto Iguazú in the Argentina, or from Ciudad del Este in Paraguay.

Special walkways have been built around the Iguazu Falls to allow visitors to get close up to this wonder of their natural beauty and power. A long pathway along the canyon (on the

Brazilian side of the falls) is easily accessible to view the fall. *Paulette Edmonston*



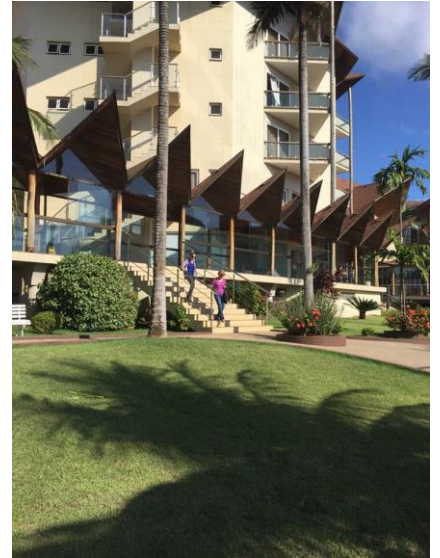
## Friday, May 18, 2018 Travel Day to Campinas



Today we are travelling by air to the city of Campinas for our first homestay. After breakfast at our lovely hotel, the Recanto Cataratas in Iguacu, we were picked up at 12:15 PM by our guide Oliver and our driver and headed for the airport for our 3:35 PM Azul Airlines flight to Campinas where we are meeting our hosts for the next week.

Once we reached the airport, Oliver helped us with our luggage and boarding passes. We said our goodbyes to Oliver and headed for the gate, had lunch and met up with Suzanne at the gate. Boarded our flight and arrived at 5:05 PM in Campinas. Collected our luggage and found our hosts all waiting for us outside with a sign saying, "Sue Hoke." After greeting my host Dorival, we headed for his home in Veneto about an hour away. There I met his wife, Neia, daughter Debora and 4-year-old grandson Miguel.

I rested for about an hour before attending our welcome dinner about an hour away that was being hosted by a member in her beautiful penthouse. Very lovely home and lot to eat and drink. We were each given a gift bag. After a wonderful evening the party broke up around 10pm, Went home and went to bed.



*Fay Harrison*



## Saturday, May 19, 2018



Our hostess, Aparecida (Ceda) Chiaperini, a retired pediatric surgeon, greeted us with a beautiful breakfast of coffee, juice, toast with jams and cream cheese, cheese bread, yogurt and fresh fruit!

Our planned morning outing to the craft fair was cancelled due to rain with some lightning and thunder. Later we met at the rendezvous point where our shuttle was waiting to take us to the Vineyard, the Jayme Ferragut Municipal Park, to participate in a celebration



of the Japanese community's arrival in Brazil 110 years ago (1908-2018).

Tables were arranged for our picnic lunch where we each had the ability to choose from the many stands offering a variety of Japanese food selections. My lunch choice was delicious! But I can't remember what it was! While lunching our group was visited by a representative of the Vinhedo government. Many



origami cranes suspended above and blowing in the wind added to the festivities. There was also a small craft market to stroll through. During the cultural and charity event we were entertained with a celebratory program consisting of the opening of the Sake barrel where small cups of Sake were passed out to the audience to toast Brazil and Japan, music by the Musical Corporation of Vinhedo, drummers and demonstrations of many forms of the martial arts including Kung-fu, Tai Chi, Knives, and Swords ending with the appearance of two dragons doing their routine. This lively entertainment was followed by a favorite male singer who had us on our feet dancing. Unfortunately, it was time for us to depart to our rendezvous point to meet our hosts.

That evening Ceda (our host), Val and I joined 2 other hosts and their

ambassadors for a fun evening of pizza!! And my introduction to the Drink of Brazil (Caipirinha) made with Cachaça. MMMMM This is the recipe: Place lime and sugar in bottom of cocktail shaker. Muddle lime to release all the citrus juice. Pour shaken cocktail into an old-fashioned glass and serve with a garnish of fresh lime wedges. As I was told by the server: "It packs a punch so only have one if you've never a Caipirinha before!"

On the way home I noticed the area had many speed bumps and if you approach a red light and there is no oncoming traffic you are able to pass through without the worry of a ticket. *Sande Benscoter*





## Sunday, May 20, 2018

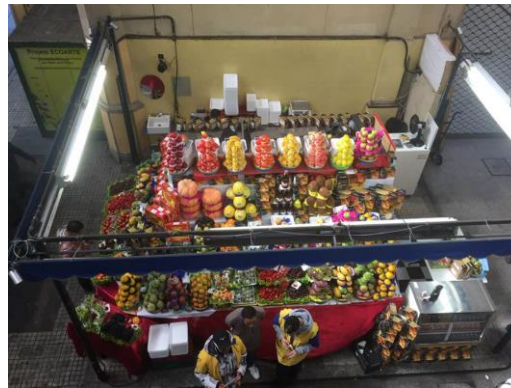
We woke up at 5:30 am, ate breakfast and out to the car at 6:40 to pick up Gwen at Vasconcellos' at 6:50. Arrived at meeting place at 7:10 – we were early! Starting off at 7:35, along the way picked up Fay and Marcos and lone Oselo who were in charge of the days adventure. Along the way we passed the highest point in the state called Jaragua.



We arrived at the Mercado – Municipal Market of Sao Paulo 9:25. The market has been in existence for 80 years and has



a variety of products ranging from fresh produce, spices, meats, cheeses, etc. The massive mortadella



sandwich, famous for its size, is also sold there. We walked around the market for about an hour taking in the sights, sounds and smells. Many of us bought coffee to take home.

Back on the van at 10:20 on our way to the Sinfonia we passed many parts of the city – lots graffiti, homeless people living on the streets and some trash. We arrived at the Awe-inspiring Sorocabans Railway station where we very much enjoyed the Sao Paulo Orchestra conducted by Marin Alsop, playing four movements composed by Tchaikovsky.



Keeping to our time schedule, we left at 12:15 for lunch at a barbecue all-you-can-eat restaurant – very good lunch. After lunch, we walked to Ave. Paulista which was closed to traffic for the







day. Our guide, Viviane, met us and told us about the early days of Sao Paulo: first houses built in 1891-2. Today only five houses are left from that era. In 1952 tall buildings started to be built. The buildings today can only be 22-25 floors high because of the close-by airport. We all went up to the 18<sup>th</sup> floor in the Sesc Na Virada Cultural building to enjoy the view of the Ave. Paulista and the surrounding area. We walked down Ave. Paulista which is the highest point in Sao Paulo to the Trianon Park which has only native trees and said good-by to Vivian at 5:30. We arrived back at the meeting place at 8:10.

*Sue Trout*

### **Monday, May 21, 2018      Campinas, Brazil**

My roommate Sue Trout and I awoke in Maria Thereza's fascinating, never-ending, labyrinth of a house. For breakfast that morning, she presented us with an exotic fruit salad containing papaya, bananas, mango and pineapple; banana cake; bread with homemade marmalade and various cheeses; and of course, topped off with cup after cup of the wonderfully unique Brazilian coffee.

We optimistically left the house on the early side (or at least on time) for our visit to the Preparatory School of the Brazilian Army, known as the Cadet School. Maria Thereza's car did not cooperate with our bright plans. It simply refused to start. Our host tried again and again, but the engine

would not quite "catch." Now what? If I were at home in the U.S., I would be making a desperate call to AAA. No worries! Our host merely went into the street in front of her house and hailed a passing car. The kindly driver of that car soon had our car running and we were off to the Cadet School, Maria Thereza warning us that after our visit to the school, we would need to stop at a gas station as the car required oil.

The school was set in the lovely, park-like grounds of a former mansion, with a welcoming open-air entrance. There we were greeted by a group of young people, predominantly male, clad in their camouflage uniforms and berets. We were directed to pair off with one or two cadets so that we could get acquainted with one another. Sue and I became acquainted with two female cadets, Annie and Martinelli





who were part of the second class of women to be admitted to the school. They were smart and engaging, explaining to us that 40,000 students applied to the school, while only 400 are accepted.

Then, under an elegant portico, the cadet band played rousing renditions of both the US and Brazilian anthems, as well as “Happy Birthday” to Val to celebrate her birthday. When the band began playing danceable music, we all began moving to the music, including the cadets. We were directed to a “photo op” setting near the cannon standing on grass. The cadets were reluctant to step on the grass as this is considered



to be “sacred ground”.

During a reception in a “grand ballroom”, I met Cabbia, a male cadet who also wanted to become acquainted with an American ambassador(me). Cabbia is a smart, friendly, open and unassuming young man from Sao Paulo, whose home is close enough that he can go home on weekends. Cabbia enjoyed answering questions and explaining everything in detail. He likes having a regimented day, starting with formations on the parade grounds. Every day there is a briefing for the day, using the white board for illustration.

We toured some of the rooms used by the cadets, including a visit to the women’s quarters, a new experience for the young men who were a bit shy about



entering them. Everything there was highly polished with perfectly made beds and large packs on the floor being readied for upcoming exercises. In addition to their structured life, cadets have the opportunity to participate in clubs, including religious, hiking and diving clubs. They also have the opportunity to share their cultures, religions and ethnicities with one another. When Cabbia attends the academy in Rio next year, he hopes to specialize in artillery, whose need for precision interests him. His philosophy is

that it is important to take advantage of every opportunity that is presented to him.





Visiting the cadet school and meeting the cadets was a moving experience for me. It is impossible to not be impressed by the friendliness and freshness of these young people. Can we hope that they will hold on to some of that freshness and enthusiasm and maybe become Brazilian leaders of tomorrow?

We were now headed toward the equestrian club for lunch. But, oops, we had to make sure to get that precious oil for the car. As we approached the club for lunch, we drove through a beautiful setting with lovely trees and plants. It was held in a large dining room with entrees of beef, chicken or fish accompanied by salad. After lunch, we further celebrated Val's birthday with a lovely cake and the singing of "Happy Birthday". We then toured the stables and the very elegant and large clubhouse.



That night Maria Thereza prepared a comforting vegetable soup for Sue and me. It was followed by sweet

and tart desserts, consisting of two homemade relishes: ground papaya and lemon with orange juice. *Lucie Lenore*

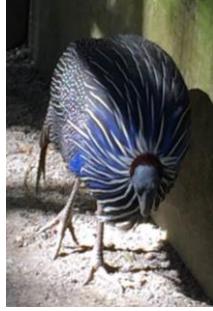
## Tuesday, May 22, 2018

We drove about 45 minutes until we got to Itatiba Sanctuary. It was begun many years ago I believe by an Austrian as a place to breed animals but now it is more a conservation and educational center. The owners now believe in the total conservation of nature too and do all they can to protect the environment. There was Brazilian coffee waiting for us before we began our walk.

The facility was beautiful. It is highly recommended by TripAdvisor too! We walked through a rainforest like area and saw so many different kinds of birds and animals. Some were Araras which looked like parrots, many varieties of toucans in beautiful natural settings, owls, ibis, ganso orinoco, tadorna tricolor, anhuma, and many many other varieties of birds. There was an absolutely beautiful blue bird, rather big, with white striped feathers, but I don't remember the name of this bird. There were also many animals too. Some beautiful giraffes, about 6 rhinos, all kinds of monkeys, antas (tapirs), capybaras, lobo guaras, and even elephants although I didn't see any there. There was one beautiful bird, a Faisoa Lady (Lady Amherst's pheasant.) Unfortunately, all the animal descriptions were only in Portuguese so we didn't know the English translation of those animals that we were unfamiliar with.







The park area is divided in two kinds of diversity found in Brazil. One area is the Atlantic region which represents the southwest area

of Brazil and the other area is the Bioma Pantanal. which is southwest of the Bioma Amazonas. The Patanal area is sort of a marshy region which is the smallest regions and only covers 1 percent of the area of Brazil. The Atlantic area covers 13 percent of the area of the country. The largest bioregion is the Amazon which covers almost half of Brazil. Again, there was wonderful signage explaining all these areas but they were only in Portuguese.

After another delicious buffet lunch, we returned to our host homes. At night we took our hosts out to dinner. Paulette and her host, Val and Sandra and their host met at a lovely restaurant in Campinas and had a delicious dinner. It was restaurant week in Campinas so we had a lovely meal at a lovely price.



*Isabel Strasser*

**Wednesday, May 23, 2018**

After breakfast at about 9 AM in the morning our hostess Aparecida (Cida) Chiaperini drove us to the meeting place, where we climbed on the bus for our first visit



to the city of Vinhedo. At 10 a.m. we met with City Officials at City-Hall. We learned that Vinhedo is the 6<sup>th</sup> largest city in Brazil. The city is still developing. The city is also in the County of Sao Paulo – Brazil.







After the meeting we visited a vineyard. The owner of the vineyard was very entertaining and we all had good time. The vineyard also had a restaurant where we ate a fantastic lunch.

After lunch we headed to the Cultural Center and visited a ceramic studio, a music studio, a dance studio, and a paint studio. Very educational. We were entertained with drums, dancing and singing. Lots of fun.



After returning we had dinner at a member's home. Val Bolan



Thursday May 24, 2018

Campinas

This was to be our free day. Everyone had different experiences. One person was up early to go to a flower market, some had a leisurely morning followed by a walk, and others drove through the university campus.

This morning Alcione, my host, wanted to take me into the country. However, she had very little gas in the car. Due to the 'strike' very few service station had gas. Alcione





did have enough gas to take us to drive to Portugal Park, which was in central Campinas.



The park had a large manmade lake, Taqual Lake. We walked around the lake stopping to take several pictures – the lake, flowers, and the capybara. From here we drove to explore a church. It was here that we met Isabel,



Suzanne and 4 members of FF Campinas.

We drove to have lunch at a restaurant that specialized in

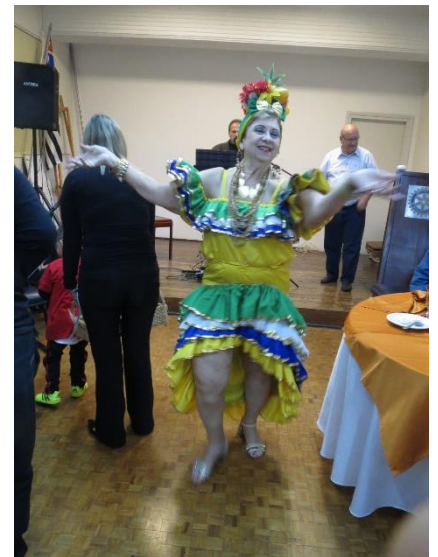


“crushed chicken”. This is a whole chicken, bones removed, flattened, seasoned and grilled. It was delicious!

Our group then doubled up (to conserve on gas, Alcione’s car was left here) on a ride to downtown Campinas. In the downtown tour, we saw Metropolitan Cathedral (constructed by slaves in 1883 for Barons and Caucasians – Once constructed, the slaves were not allowed in, not even on

the steps. This cathedral had all columns, alters, doors, and pulpits made of carved, polished wood.), Rosario Square, Baron Rosario’s mansion, statue of Carlos Gomes (who composed a famous ballet, Il Guarany, in the 1800’s), the bar frequented by Carlos Gomes (Tenico’s Boleco), and the point from which Campinas was said to start (Campinas started as a result of being an excellent overnight stop for mule trains on their way to the mines in the mountain.).

While I showered, got some packing done and got ready for the Farewell, Alcione was able to obtain gas. At the farewell dinner (a buffet) and party there some speeches. Once this was over the fun began! Our group muddled through the ‘Electric Slide’, and then we were joined by many of our Brazilian host. Dorival, Fay’s host, dressed in her Carmen Miranda [Carmen Miranda (9 February 1909 – 5 August 1955) was





a Portuguese-born Brazilian samba singer, dancer, Broadway actress, and film star who

was popular from the 1930s to the 1950s. She was nicknamed "The Brazilian Bombshell". She is noted for her signature fruit hat outfit she wore in her American films] costume and danced for us. This was followed by a mini carnival atmosphere – lots of dancing and laughing. The party ended approximately 10 PM.

We returned to our hosts' homes, did packing in preparation for our departure in morning.

*Lorraine Cleveland*



### Friday, May 25, 2018

We left Campinas for a flight to Belo Horizonte for our last week in Brazil. Upon arriving at the airport in Campinas, we were told twice our flight to Belo Horizonte was cancelled. No one knew what was happening to the airlines, as it turned out, the airports were able to operate and flights were able to resume.

Upon arriving in Belo Horizonte, we were met by two members of the club and boarded a bus for a 40 min. bus ride into town. We were met by the members of the club and introduced to our hosts. Despite the inconvenience of the gas strike, everything seemed to be organized and things were going smoothly.

Sue Trout and I were hosted by Joao Chochimbo who lived in the hills of Belo Horizonte. Joao lived in a most interesting home built by him and designed by his friend who was famous in Brazil. I felt very comfortable staying at Joao's because it reminded me of Hawaii, the weather, plants and flowers were similar as grown in Hawaii. From the back porch, I saw mango, papaya, lemon, etc. trees growing, just like my home in Hawaii.

In the afternoon, Joao and his son John, who until recently lived in the US (Cape Cod area for 18 years and returned in 2017)), took us on a tour around the area where he lived. We drove around a park which had a good-sized amusement park and a large Ferris wheel for all to enjoy. We stopped by a lake where we saw a pair of capybaras, apparently there were many living in the lake. They are vegetarians and eat all the water plants and grass. We also saw a church and community center designed by the architect of his home.





We saw the growing lines of cars waiting to buy gas and I am sure praying the station would not run out of gas. One day, Joao's son waited 3 hours in line and another waited 2 hours to just pay for groceries. He explained that this was the first time he in his memory that Brazil has ever had a strike. We saw the miles of cars grow longer each day of the strike. *Paulette Edmonston*

**Saturday, May 26, 2018** Belo Horizonte, Brazil

During my stay here, the country was experiencing a truckers' strike. This means that gasoline, produce, etc was hard to find. There were long lines at the gas stations and supermarket shelves were going empty. My hostess wanted so much to take me to visit her farm but because of the gasoline situation, we did not go.

Nevertheless, I had a hearty breakfast of fresh fruits [from her farm], cheese bread, omelet and coffee with my hostess Nelsi who



lives in a penthouse with her daughter, who is a dentist. After a tour of her penthouse garden where she had a variety of plants such as, orchids, cactus, roses, herbs, papaya, tomatoes pomegranate, etc. plus the beautiful view of the neighborhood, it was time to pick up Isabel Strasser



and her hostess, Haidee who lives close by

for the drive to visit the Mercado Central market downtown. Met up with the others at the market, except for Lorraine and Suzanne. They went off to some other place. At this



market we saw the usual local produce, fresh fish, nuts, fresh fruits, notably the fresh cashew fruit with its cashew nut hanging from the bottom.

Sampled some of the local items. Most of us bought Brazilian coffee, Brazil nut and raw cashews to take back home. Took a group picture and everyone went their separate ways. Back home, Nelsi prepared a lunch of rice, okra with sausage, black beans with hot pepper and a cornmeal dish (much like polenta).

Her oldest son, Christian joined us for lunch. The rest of the day was

spent quietly and restful in anticipation of taking my hostess to dinner. It was arranged that all the Ambassadors host dinner at the Amadeus





Restaurante. We had a choice of polenta w/mushroom for appetizer, Beef w/risotto or Salmon w/mashed potato for main course and guava or pineapple w/vanilla ice cream. Everyone had a great meal and a grand time together. Got home around 11 o'clock and went to bed.

Note: Every night Nelsi and I would sing "You Raise Me Up". She sings in a choral group and I taught her this song which she will now add to her repertoire. *Fay Harrison*

### Sunday, May 27, 2018

Today we are at our second host's, Luiz and Consuelo (Con) Telles, home in Belo Horizonte. Since it's a family day Con and daughter Natalia took us to a large fair.



With the truckers strike still on, we took an Uber to the fair. Because of the strike, Con told us it was not as crowded as it normally is. There were still a large number of people there!

The fair was divided by sections and each section was noted by a different color (or stripe) tents: Leather – belts, shoes, purses, etc. one color; Jewelry, a different color; children's clothing a third or stripe, etc. Unfortunately, I was on the hunt for 3 T- shirts for my 3 grandsons and there was only one vender with T-shirts. Not a great choice (but the boys are happy with the ones I brought back!).

Indigenous people of the area sold their crafts along the fence. One of the men insisted (with a smile) I take his picture! And I did! While walking at the fair we met Faye and Isabel.



Upon returning home we discovered Luiz set the table and prepared our late lunch. By the way, he also does dishes! We had a few hours to relax or nap. I chose to read the book I brought. Val discovered the massage chair in the upstairs sitting room!

Con showed us her display cabinet with all her souvenirs from each trip. They travel extensively. In fact, they are leaving for Morocco the same day we are flying home.

The evening dinner was served poolside. Joining us were Tatiana (oldest daughter), Breno (son-in-law), and Laura (year old granddaughter) who is the apple of Granddad's eye!! It was fun meeting the whole family. *Sande Benscott*





**Monday, May 28, 2018**

Up early! Had a really nice breakfast while talking with Joao and Andres, one of the students living in the house. Got ready for the day while Joao called Uber (because of the gas/trucker's strike) and arrived in the city at 9:45. We met at the Banco do Brasil Cultural Center for a tour of the building. Our guides Natasha and Nina told about the

building – it is symmetrical – each side the same and is on the highest point in the planned city of Belo Horizonte. There were two artists featured. We saw two expositions by Brazilian artist Cristus Nobrega who visited China in 2015. The first exhibit was like a maze with drawers, cubicles and pull-out pictures of what he saw in China. The second was an exhibit of the visual narrative of the journey taken by the artist. The second artist was Athos Bulcao. Three rooms of works containing, paintings, many tiles and masks made out of many different materials.



The tour ended at 12:00.

We then walked to the Minas Tennis Club for a buffet lunch. In the dining room, the paneling was made of

Jacaranda wood in the art deco style. We all sat and talked and laughed while we ate. After lunch, Manoel

Osorio showed us the club's six pools, tennis courts, volley ball and soccer areas. Five of us, Manoel, Lelia, Gwen, Paulette and Sue walked to the Osorio's home. Lelia served us cake, cheese and coffee and

we spent a very pleasant afternoon there. Gwen had a beautiful view of the setting sun and we took pictures.





We left at 6:30 to have dinner at Jose Antonio and Ligia's home. Lorraine, Terezinha, Lucie, Elza, Soraya, Paulette, Sue, Joao and Suzanne were treated to a typical Brazilian menu of soup, beans cassava, meat with tomato sauce and seasonings. There were many sweets for desert. It was a very congenial evening for all. We left at 9:30. Joao was finally able to get a taxi at 9:55 and we arrived home at 10: 25. *Sue Trout*



**Tuesday, May 29, 2018**

Trip to Ouro Preto City! Our morning began in the midst of the truckers' strike. This meant that Soraya, who is sports editor at a local newspaper was fast asleep after a very late night coping with strike issues. So her mother Elza (with limited English but armed with a Google translator) and I were eating alone. We had the usual fruit, bread and delicious, subtly flavored cheese accompanied by Elza's Brazilian coffee—the best coffee ever!

With persistence, and in spite of the scarcity of gas, Elza was able to locate a taxi ride for us. We arrived early at our downtown Belo Horizonte meeting place. I said "Ciao" to Elza as I entered the bus (luckily it had gas) and met our guide Luciana who would show us around Ouro Preto later that day.

Our lovely drive through the rolling countryside was briefly interrupted so that we could use the facilities at a roadside restaurant. The signs for the female and male restrooms were cute and explicit, thus surmounting any language barrier.



Soon we arrived at the dramatically large cobbled central square in Ouro Preto. When I looked around from this square, my impression was of a nearly vertical, exquisite storybook town. Ouro Preto is named "black gold" because the rock which was originally discovered was black and was later found to be gold. This city was a center of gold mining and was the first capital of the state of Minas



Gerais. Wealth and art were in abundance. As the riches receded, the art remained. It is one of Brazil's most visited tourist attractions.

We followed Luciana down a steep cobbled street lined with shops to the Church of Saint Francis of Assisi. Light colored and ornately decorated in baroque style, the church stands majestically overlooking the valley below. It was designed by the renowned architect and sculptor Antonio Francisco Lisboa, who never formally studied architecture. He is commonly known as Aleijadinho, meaning "little cripple" due to his disfiguring illness, maybe leprosy,





which destroyed nearly all of his fingers and toes. This church is considered to be his masterpiece.

In the richly decorated interior, Lisboa produced sometimes life-sized sculptures made of soapstone and wood. The women he produced resembled the women he knew, shapely and dark-skinned, not blonde angels. Another prominent artist, Manual da Costa Ataide, painted the panel on the nave ceiling representing the Virgin's glorification.

Across the street from the church, there is a market featuring many items produced from soapstone. There were mugs, bowls, candlesticks, plates and many other beautifully made products sold from stalls.

Our group followed Luciana up and down more twisty streets until



we arrived at a shop where we could sample cachaca, the very strong local sugar cane liqueur. Luciana then led us to a shop which featured topaz stones. Our incentive to visit this shop was the raffling off of a topaz stone which would occur in the bus on the way home later that evening.

We walked to the Contos de Réis restaurant, which overlooked a valley surrounded by mountains. With its beamed ceilings, it had a rustic feel.



There was a large dining area and a grand buffet, filled with a huge amount of traditionally presented meat, fish and vegetable dishes.

After lunch, our group separated into a couple of smaller groups. As I looked



down the nearly vertical cobbled street in disbelief, I needed to quickly decide whether I had the courage to walk down there with the rest of my group. As I barged ahead, I thought that it wasn't so bad. We continued downhill until we approached the unassuming yellow building which houses the Ouro Preto Theater. Established in 1770, it is the oldest still functioning theater in South America. Though darkish in the interior, it is still pretty impressive with three tiers of balconies. While exploring the empty stage, we began to practice our "electric

slide".

We were now in the charming historical center of Ouro Preto. We walked a little further to a museum called Casa dos Contos. A beautiful old, colonial house, it served as the National Mint from 1016 to 1017. Representative coins and furniture are



displayed upstairs. In the basement, it was shocking to see the area which had once been slave quarters as well as some of the instruments of torture.

Now we had a little free time before we needed to gather at the square and return to Belo Horizonte. On the way home, the scenery was beautiful but we were tired,



many of us dozing off and on. Then it was time to find out who

would be the lucky recipient of the lovely gemstone from the jewelry store. When her name was called, Paulette had to be woken up from her nap. When the truth sank in, she was very excited.

I've seldom been so happy to see anyone as I was to see my host, Elza when we arrived back in Belo Horizonte. She and Terezinha, Lorraine's host, soon hailed a taxi and Lorraine and I piled in the back to return to our respective apartments as this long day neared its end. *Lucie Lenore*



### Wednesday, May 30, 2018

Other than the trip to Iguasu Falls, making many new friends, being affected by the first national strike in Brazil, Inhotim turned out to be a major highlight of our journey. Although travel distance to Inhotim was almost half of the distance that it took to get to Ouro Preto the time taken to travel to each was the same. The latter was reached by traveling on a highway whereas to get to the former we needed to jump over 47 speed bumps as access was via a local road and speeding trucks had to be discouraged. The property where Inhotim now stands was once a farm owned by an Englishman named Sir Timothy and somehow the name came from some sort of translation of his name. Inhotim is an art museum, outdoor sculpture garden and a beautiful botanical garden. There are





galleries spread around 147 hectares rather than one art museum. There was a lot of walking but it was possible to get from one gallery to another by an internal transport system.



In the morning most of us walked but in the afternoon, we used the golf carts that ferried us from one gallery to another. The botanical gardens contained 1400 varieties of palm trees in total 20000 beautiful palm trees. Inhotim officially opened in 2006 and our tour guide said that it is actually more famous out of Brazil than inside Brazil. All kinds of artists from 30 different countries are exhibiting here and there are many permanent exhibits and some that change. The landscaping was designed by the famous landscaper Roberto Burle Marx. It recently became a public institution rather than a private institution. The facility employs more than 1100 people; 200 are involved in just the landscaping care.

There were so many wonderful exhibits that we saw but I will highlight just a few. The red shift was very impressive with everything in this area as well as water coming out of a sink was

red. The singing of a 16th century English song by a choir was beautiful. If you stood



in the center of the room you heard the whole choir singing but when you walked to individual

speakers you heard each voice individually when it was their turn to sing. A round building on top of a hill had microphones buried 200 feet into the earth and you could hear all noises coming from down in the earth. One gallery had wires strung in all directions and was supposed to represent sunbeams and as you walked around the wires seemed to change directions. I loved the multicolored VW bugs. The story was that 3 people went on a trip with their Volkswagens and each time they made a stop they exchanged a part of the car until the cars were all mixed up. The other exhibit I really liked was walking into an area with all kinds of broken glass pieces on the floor which made crackling noises as you walked over them. The room had all different kinds of barriers representing barriers we faced in life, some easy and some hard, and when you got to the middle there was a big ball of glass pieces fused together. The flowers in bloom were just beautiful and the park was



filled with amazing benches carved from Brazilian trees which were the perfect place to rest one's tired feet along the way.

On the drive to Inhotim Paulette won a beautiful blue topaz donated by a jewelry shop that we had stopped in the day before. She had it set in a beautiful setting on her last day in Brazil. All in all, it was an absolutely amazing day. I returned to Haidee's house and was met by an amazing bowl of carrot /potato soup which was perfect as we had all had a big lunch at the restaurant at the museum. *Isabel Strasser*



## Thursday, May 31, 2018

After breakfast we packed our suitcases – not certain whether we were going to another host's house after our 'Good Bye' dinner until Friday when our flight departs.

Luiz and Con gave us each a mug with our picture on it as a memento of our Brazil trip to Belo Horizonte.

Val, Natalia, and I went for a walk in the neighborhood visiting a grocery store and a pharmacy. Upon our return, Luiz decided we should all go sightseeing for the afternoon. The strike was over, and gas was available once again. It was a beautiful day with sunshine and fluffy white clouds.

Luiz drove pass the Pontifical Catholic University which encompasses 10 square blocks. The weeklong March for Jesus Christ was in its final day and we saw people leaving with pillows and blankets. We visited Pampulha next.



In 1940 Minas Gerais's Governor and the Mayor of Belo Horizonte commissioned Oscar Niemeyer, a well know Brazilian architect to develop a new suburb north of Pampulha. Originally farmland the complex was to include a casino, restaurant/dance hall, yacht club, golf club and a church situated around a new artificial lake.

This offered Niemeyer the opportunity to "challenge the monotony of contemporary architecture." He was seduced by the sensual feeling of the





curve and using concrete as a building material was conducive for the new type of structures. This is evident in the complex, especially in the design of the Church of Saint Francis of Assisi. The church was the first listed modern building in Brazil. The authorities of Minas Gerais refused to consecrate the church until 1959 due to its unorthodox form and the altar mural which depicts Saint Francis as the savior of the ill, the poor and most important, the sinner. Afterwards you notice buildings designed by Niemeyer had a round fullness to them void of the traditional square. This was an attempt to show his devotion to the female form.



Currently the lake suffers pollution due to rapid urbanization and the discharge of untreated sewage from surrounding neighborhoods into the lake.

We stopped for lunch at Farroupilha, a Brazilian BBQ restaurant, and ate until almost bursting! With the servers coming around constantly with skewers of different meats, it was almost impossible not to try everything. And try we did!!



On the drive home we rode down the main street of Belo Horizonte to see the Christian observance of Corpus Christi, which honors the Holy Eucharist. The island down the center of the street stretching for blocks and blocks had Christian symbols created with wood chips and colored sand. We were told it was only on display for that one day.



The evening was our farewell dinner. Everyone was in a joyous mood celebrating our new friendships as we ate, drank, laughed,

danced and reminisced about our trip. We found out we were able to stay at our host's home for the evening and ride with Luis and Con to the airport the next day. They were leaving on a trip to Morocco as we were heading back to the states! *Sande Benscoter*







### Friday, June 1, 2018 – Travel Day to Miami or Rio de Janeiro

Most of the ambassadors went back to Miami then onto all parts of the United States and Canada. Gwendolyn Deas, Fay Harrison and Suzanne Engelmann went onto Rio de Janeiro.



Debret Hotel is a very lovely hotel 50 years ago. Now, it is just a nice hotel if you are in the right room. We were moved to a two-bedroom suite with a wonderful view of Copacabana Beach. After we finally settled into our rooms, we took a long walk back into time. We walked

from Copacabana Beach down to Ipanema Beach trying from time to time to sing the chorus of "THE GIRL FROM IPANEMA."

We were able to tour FORT de COPACABANA which was originally built as a small chapel.



In 1908, the Brazilian army started to change the chapel into a modern coastal defense fort to protect both the beach of Copacabana and the entrance into the harbor of Rio de Janeiro. It was completed in 1914. Brazil disbanded the fort in 1987. It became a very informative museum with many buildings, cannons, and several artillery pieces. Gwen Deas

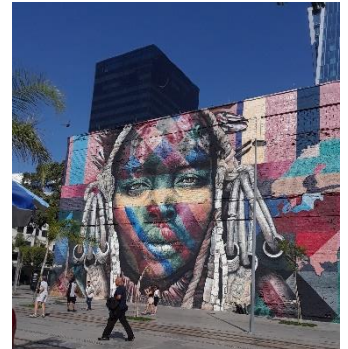




**Saturday, June 2, 2018 Copacabana Beach, Rio de Janeiro**

Today is our first full day in Rio. Gwen, Suzanne and I arrived yesterday afternoon for a 3-night stay. We are staying in the Debret Hotel on the Copacabana Beach. We are on the top floor in a 2-bedroom suite. We enjoy a beautiful view of the beach and ocean.

After breakfast we were met by our guide and driver for our 4-hour tour of the city of Rio. We travelled to the City Centre and visited the Sao Bento Monastery, the Candelaria Church, the Imperial Palace. Also visited the Town of Santa Teresa, where we climbed the beautiful Selaron Steps made from colorful tiles from all over the world. Took some pictures and went to lunch at a local restaurant. Our tour bus took us



back to our hotel where I went for a walk on the beach and had fresh coconut water from a

local vendor.

Later Gwen and Suzanne and I walked to the town of Ipanema and walked on the beach. It was time for dinner so we had dinner there then walked back to our hotel and called it a night.



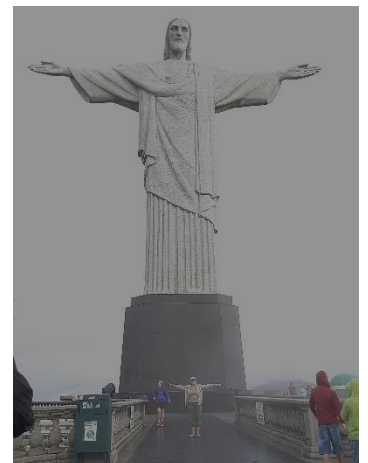
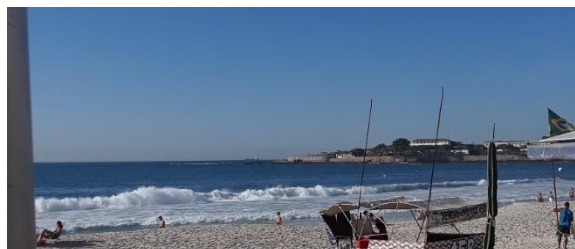
*Fay Harrison*

**Sunday, June 3, 2018 Rio, Visit Christ the Redeemer**

Today it's raining. We were picked up by our guide and driver after breakfast for our ride up the side of the mountain to visit Christ the Redeemer. We took the train up the mountain in the pouring rain. Once we got there we could not see anything due to the fog, mist and the pouring rain.

Tried to take a few pictures, had a cup of hot chocolate and took the train down the mountain again. Due to the rain, our guide got permission to take us again on Sunday to do this all over again in better weather. Walked on the beach and had my daily fresh coconut water. Went to dinner with Gwen and Suzanne

at a local restaurant then went back to the hotel for the night. *Fay Harrison*





**Monday, June 4, 2018**

On June 3<sup>rd</sup>, we went to see the Christ the



Redeemer. It was raining so hard that we could not see anything. So, today we had an opportunity to visit again. Our guide took us to some of the same places. We were back in Santa Teresa walking the street again. Then the reason I came to Rio in the first place - Christ the Redeemer.



It was time to go back to the hotel and finish packing and Fay wanted to get her last coconut drink.

American Airlines flight # 904

departing at 8:40 PM back to Miami. The trip was over.

We have really met some wonderful people on this trip. We were glad to have Paulette travel with us again. It was nice to get to know our own club member Sande Bencoter, a somewhat new member, a Canadian named Lorraine Cleveland who is a great example of what an ambassador should be and a photo-journalist, Suzanne Engemann from Greenville, SC. *Gwen Deas*

