

Good Morning!

Mike and I are back from Brazil. It was off the plane on the plane for me since I just got back from Oklahoma on Friday at 1:00 a.m. because my plane in Texas had mechanical problems and I had to get off the same plane twice and finally they got the passengers on another plane. Was glad to get home since it took me 15 hours just to get home from Oklahoma.

Saturday we left home for our long trip to get to Sao Paulo. From Sao Paulo we flew to Campo Grande then our group gathered and we were loaded into two vans to be transported to a lodge located in the southern Pantanal. This trip took about three hours but most of it was on smooth roads. It was a nice lodge on private land owned by a family that raise cattle. There are many birds and animals on the ranch so it is being used as a wonderful place to observe wildlife for tourist. The Pantanal is a large land mass that floods in the summer (wet season) and in the winter (dry season) the water soaks into the ground and dries up. The high areas where the trees are don't flood. Ponds are left in the low areas after the floods where the caimans thrive. Many neotropical rainforest mammals and birds use this area to eat and live in.

We had a mixed group on this trip. Our group of 19 were split up in two groups to make observing the wildlife easier. We spent the first half of the trip grouped up with some blue bloods from MA and a dentist and his wife from NC. Every morning and afternoon we had activities planned by the lodge.

On our first day our group was taken on safari excursion by truck through the Pantanal forest. We were very fortunate to see two ocelots which is quite unusual because ocelots are nocturnal animals and are rarely seen in the day time. We observed packs of white-lipped & collared peccary; capybara and native deer. On several other outing we saw the giant anteater, lesser anteater and agouti. Many caimans were in the ponds and the river. The caimans in the river were very funny because they would be in the river facing the flow with their mouths wide open just waiting for fish to come by and eat them.

Many birds to see....colorful tanagers, woodpeckers, parrots, owls, warblers and my favorite the hyacinth macaws that are being reintroduced to the forest by a special project. More birds than I can name here.....

On our spotlight safaris at night we saw a tapir and many nocturnal birds a coral snake and tarantulas. We did not see the jaguar the ultimate find! We went canoeing and horseback riding and one night we had a special cowboy BBQ in our honor.

We departed the lodge to go to Campo Grande and boarded a plane to go to Iguazu to see the famous Iguazu waterfalls. We saw the falls from the Brazil side and then took a bus to the see the falls from the Argentina side. The Argentina side was fantastic! We got very up close and personal with the falls by many footbridges and paths through the forest filled with many beautiful butterflies. The next day we took turns flying over the

falls by helicopter. The falls were flowing because it had been raining many days before we got there.

From its source in the Serra do Mar, not far from the Atlantic coast, the Rio Iguazu (or Iguassu) flows westward for about 820 miles across southern Brazil. Gathering tributaries, the river grows steadily in volume as it meanders across the uplands of the Parana Plateau. Step by step it makes its way toward sea level, tumbling over some 70 waterfalls that interrupt its course.

But the river takes its grandest leap just a short distance above its confluence with the Parana, where the Iguazu forms a boundary between Argentina and Brazil. Plunging at last off the edge of the plateau, the river thunders down in what one observer likened to the "awesome spectacle of an ocean pouring into an abyss." The thunderous roaring of the water can be heard from miles away.

Strung out along the rim of a crescent-shaped cliff about 2.5 miles long is a series of some 275 individual cascades and waterfalls separated by rocky, densely wooded islets. Some of the cascades plummet straight down for 269 feet into the gorge below. Others are interrupted by ledges and send up clouds of mist and spray, creating a dazzling display of rainbows.

The Falls, which would be memorable in any setting, are made all the more beautiful by their lush surroundings. The luxuriant forests are filled with bamboo, palms, and delicate tree ferns. Brilliantly feathered parrots and macaws flit through the foliage, competing for attention with the exotic blooms of wild orchids, begonias, and bromeliads.

After the falls the main trip was over and the blue bloods from MA and one lady named Ruth left for the USA. The rest of the us got on a plane to go to Rio De Janeiro for the extension part of the Brazilian trip to see the Atlantic rainforest. We were greeted at our hotel with some drinks called caipirinhas made with cachaca a distilled beverage made out of sugar cane. At dinner Mike and I had a few more caipirinhas and some after dinner. To say the least I didn't feel good the next day and stayed at the hotel. The drinks were made with lots of limes and we had seafood for dinner and I ate lots of native peanuts so later my stomach didn't like the combination. But I felt OK later and joined the group for dinner. Didn't miss much because Mike and I were staying on two more days in Rio De Janeiro after the extension part was over.

The group was in Rio De Janerio just the one day and then we went in two vans to see the Atlantic rainforest. We went to a area called Poco das Antas and observe the golden lion tamarin monkeys. This was the highlight of the extension! We observed five golden lion tamarin monkeys in the rainforest. There is a special organization in Brazil to reintroduce the golden lion tamarin monkeys back to the rainforest and protect them. Special guides from the organization took us to see the tamarins. We also saw on this extension, white tufted and brown tufted marmoset monkeys.

The next day we went to Serra dos Orgaos National Park and walked in the rainforest and saw our first sloth ever. Mike and I have been wanting to see a sloth and never have till now, in fact we saw two and many brown tufted marmoset monkeys. These are very small monkeys like the tamarins. We saw the capuchin and holler monkeys in the Pantanal. As many of you might know monkeys are my favorite mammals and I always like to see them in the wild.

Some of the other mammals we saw that were new to Mike and I was the south american coati that is part of the raccoon family and the crab eating fox that were really cute. One crab eating fox came to the cowboy BBQ for a handout and just sat and watched but did not bother anyone or the food. But watch out for the south American coati...when we were eating breakfast at a very fancy hotel in Iguazu Falls a coati jumped on the table right in the middle of a group of five people that WERE eating their breakfast till the coati took over.

Mike and I said goodbye to the group at the airport and went back to Rio De Janeiro and went sightseeing on our own for a few days. We walked up and down Ipanema and Copacabana beaches and had a wonderful lunch at a restaurant called Marius Degustare. I missed this wonderful lunch the day that Mike and the group were touring Rio De Janeiro when I didn't feel good so Mike was determined to take me when we got back to Rio from the extension. Mike loved this place...you had a combination of a large seafood bar with everything on the planet you could think of and then waiters came to the table with every meat on the planet to serve to you. The Brazilian steak houses served you the meat straight from the kitchen skewed on large swords sliced at your table. They brought boar, lamb, beef, chicken, sausage, pork and more. We had to beg them to stop! Then dessert Mike said I had to have was made with papaya, tasted like ice-cream.

Mike and I went to Corcovado by incline railroad to the top to view the city of Rio De Janeiro and see the famous Jesus Christ statue. Then we went to the top of Sugar Loaf mountain by cable car to view the sunset over Rio and back to our room.

Left the next day for the long trip home, 21 hours straight, seemed long but we have done longer. Back home safe and sound....

Hope all is wellgotta catch up on my mail and everything else before we go back to work to pay for all of this!

Talk to you later,

Audrey and Mike