

2014 South America Emails

November 1, 2014

Hello from Peru

Hello friends,

We thought we might send roughly a photo a day to a small group of friends while we travel thru South America -- when we have internet access, which should be most of the time except the 5 days when we're in the jungle.

We arrived in Lima at 5 this morning, after no more than 3 hours sleep; it's now 3 p.m. and we're fighting to not take a nap; we'll go to bed early, sleep long, and hopefully be relatively on schedule tomorrow. This morning we took our excellent travel agent to breakfast and then walked around the upscale Miraflores section of town for a few hours. Tonight's activity is dinner out and not much else.

The snap was taken on a boardwalk overlooking the Pacific Ocean looking back toward town with paragliders enjoying the updrafts along the cliffs. I *almost* got the ocean in; trust me, it was there, to the right. (How can one miss the Pacific Ocean!) Overcast and in the high 60s.

Tomorrow another walk in the morning and a city tour in the afternoon.

- John (and Barbara)

Sent from John's iPad

(Unfortunately we can't compress the photo with the iPad, as we wish we could. We have no phone connection so we're using a Sony camera and then transfer photos to the iPad back at the hotel to send with their wifi.)



November 2

Day 2 in Lima

Hello all,

Today was our first day in Lima (not counting yesterday, when we were in a mental fog), and in the morning we visited humongous mud-brick ruins of a temple complex from the time of the Roman Empire; here our guide is explaining how priests would smash pots as offerings. Later cultures sacrificed women and children; we thought pots was a better choice (what the gods thought we don't know).



In the afternoon we had a private city tour of the downtown area. I'd send a pic of the piles of bones in the catacombs but photography wasn't allowed, so here's the next best thing: Francisco Pizarro's tomb in the main cathedral.



Tomorrow is a free day, so a museum and a walk.

- John (& Barbara)



November 3

Museo Larco, Lima

Hello friends,

Today a visit to the Museo Larco -- a fabulous collection of native materials from prehistoric times to the conquest. This was one of the showpieces -- a unique gold costume. We found that you can look at only so much gold. We were also amazed at the detailed textiles, some dating to the period of the Trojan War and in excellent condition. The one shown here is from Inca times and holds a record for fineness. This is earth's second driest city, after Cairo, and no rain certainly helps with preservation.

Tomorrow early we go to the Amazon, and there will be no email for the next five days. But we might make up for it.

- John (and Barbara)



WORLD RECORD THREADS

CHINCHA

IMPERIAL EPOCH (1300 AD - 1532 AD)

- Fragment of a textile decorated with camelids and geometric designs.
- Technique: lacework tapestry weave technique.
- Material: Cotton fiber was used for the warp, while the weft employed camelid wool.
- This is a world record in terms of the fineness of the thread. There are 398 threads per linear inch.



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November 8

Hello from the Amazon

Hello all,

The Amazon is probably a great place to be if you don't mind being drenched in sweat beginning 5 minutes after you get out of the shower and until you take the next. At least it's only in the mid-90s -- in the summer it surpasses 110. So it's a place to visit quickly.

We're in an eco-tourist lodge, which means it's natural and has a small environmental footprint. Thatched roof, walls of native bamboo and mud plaster, and employees are from the local native village. The intent is to replace destructive practices with self-sustaining tourism; if a villager finds an eagle nest in an ironwood tree he was about to cut for charcoal, he can preserve it and earn money for each tourist who visits it. I guess it works -- at least it doesn't seem to exploit the locals which almost every other plan does.

The lodge itself is open to the elements (if only there was a breeze!), upscale, and a pleasure to be in. Our room has a private bath with shower, and one wall is entirely open to the forest -- quite unusual: the jungle is right there. The staff lowers a mosquito canopy over the bed in the evening but we've seen very few bugs (a major surprise). There is no electricity in the rooms, just gas lamps they turn on at dark and off at 11 and our headlamps, so we're not in our room after dark except to sweat as we sleep. The food is great and largely local.

John has been under the weather and skipped most activities except two hikes, but Barbara and our personal guide Mariano have been here and there to try to see animals, or at least birds, and they're somewhat far between. We see monkeys in the trees but they move so fast we can hardly focus on them. A howler monkey awoke us at 4:30 one morning with his bellowing which is unimaginably loud -- very difficult to believe that so loud a sound can come from one animal. We do see some birds and butterflies and frogs. And lots of impenetrable vegetation. They also visited a farm which is real subsistence farming -- a few banana trees here, a few papaya trees there -- but I can imagine the heat and humidity don't encourage a lot of physical labor.

Actually, the novelty of high heat and high humidity has totally worn off for us too.

Flight to Cusco cancelled. Overnight in Puerto Maldonado. Much hubbub involved in a steam bath airport.

- John (& Barbara)

Photos will hopefully follow in three separate emails.

Our room with its one side open to the world, close to nature.



Some of the trails are very damp. It's not a place to hike without a guide.



The Amazon rainforest, seen from an observation tower at canopy level.



November 9

Exhausted in Cusco

Hi all,

It's almost 8:00 and we'll be in bed in minutes. Will save for another day the miserable odyssey in getting here, but we're here. Just two photos; a walk a block from our hotel and tonight's dinner -- the local specialty, guinea pig. Actually very tasty.

More another day,

- John





November 10

Cusco Purchase

Hi again,

We're about to leave Cusco for a tour of the Urubamba Valley (many ruins) but have time to write before our guide shows up.

The one souvenir we intended to buy is a colorful cloth to cover a space in our bedroom back home, and we negotiated with this lady to join three of her pieces to make one wider one, and left her a deposit. We'll be back in Cusco in three days.

The trip to get to Cusco was miserable. After waiting 4 hours in an airport at 93 deg w/o AC

they announced our flight was cancelled; more wait for arrangements to be made for the night. The airline put us up in an OK hotel (it had AC!!!) and we fell in with a group from our jungle lodge in the same predicament and went to dinner with them. The next morning another 2.5 hrs at the airport, but it was cooler -- only 91. We were ready to faint. Anyway, we got to Cusco and walked around several hours. So far no effect from altitude.

The next few days are the highlight of the trip.

- John (& Barbara)



November 11

Barbara went Shopping!

Hi from Urubamba,

Barbara went shopping! And actually bought things! In the native market in Pisac, in the Urubamba Valley. Today we were picked up at our hotel in Cusco and taken on a long tour by our personal guide of several ruins, with a stop at this famous market. Now we're in a 5-star hotel (except for useless internet, in the lobby only) that is entirely out of place in a little village of mud brick homes, so we'll stay inside and rest.

We lost our free day in Cusco but are back on schedule.

In the morning we're up early to take the train to Machu Pichu for a long tour (we'll again have our personal guide), and back to Cusco at about dark. So it should be a great day and the highlight of the trip.

But now to rest.

- John (& Barbara)



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November 12

Machu Picchu

Hello Again,

The non-functional internet in Urubamba screwed up our system and I believe the last email went out multiple times. Sorry! This is a 3rd world country (possibly 2-1/2) and not everything works. Water is often off, for example, and when people say they will do something by a certain time that's not an obligation. And the front desk here at the hotel in Cusco has yet to take a message from our travel agent.

Anyway, we had a great day. Took the train down the Urubamba River with ruins on both sides and glimpses of the high Andes (we're told the snow is down to the 16,000 foot level; the photo was taken from around 8,000 ft). We had plenty of time in Machu Picchu on a warm/hot sunny day with a private guide for 2+ hours and another hour+ to wander on our own. It's easy to see why MP is the #1 tourist attraction in South America. Then a long train ride back to Cusco.

So yesterday was probably the highlight of our trip.

Meanwhile our travel agent screwed up our private Cusco city tour today, but that eventually got fixed and is on for this afternoon. Maybe more photos tonight.

Both of us feeling fine except for shortness of breath here at 11,000+ feet -- to be expected.

- John (& Barbara)







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November 13

Crossing the Andes

Hi all,

A long day today -- a 10-hour bus ride across the Andes and then the altiplano from Cusco to Puno on the shore of Lake Titicaca. We had several stops to see an obscenely ornate Catholic church from the 1600s, various ruins, a museum, and lunch stop, but the scenery became repetitious.

You know how at overlooks in the US southwest Navajos gather to sell jewelry and trinkets? At this view point on the pass that crosses the Andes at 14,000+ feet the locals gather with piles of colorful merchandise. Just like back home.

On the altiplano the farms are small and *not* upscale. Very poor. We wonder if they have dirt floors and where the outhouse is; certainly no electricity or running water. We see men standing in a field tending a flock of a dozen sheep or alpaca and people with short handled hoes weeding their one-acre plots of potatoes. Literally dirt poor. The second photo is pretty typical, and in many cases we weren't sure if they were abandoned or not.

Now we're in a fine hotel, just had a wonderful dinner with a Peru Libre (me). Tomorrow the weather should be OK for our boat ride onto Lake Titicaca. The hotel has wifi in the lobby only, so a few more pics tomorrow. Then on to Bolivia on the far side of the lake ... and deeper into the unknown.

- John (& Barbara)





November 14

Lake Titicaca

Hi all,

We spent the day on Lake Titicaca. First up was the Uros Floating Islands (Google it) made of reeds -- most interesting, concluding with a ride on a reed boat. One of the highlights of the trip.

Then a long boat ride to Taquile Island for a hike and lunch with an even longer boat ride back (snooze time).

Weather continues good, for which we're grateful.

Bolivia tomorrow and more Titicaca.

- John (& Barbara

Typical street scene on a floating island.



November 15

Lake Titicaca – Day 2

Hi All,

Our morning started with a 4-hour bus trip (including passing thru customs and immigration) to the SW shore of Lake Titicaca on the Bolivian side where we have a very nice hotel with a great view of the lake; hotel grounds are in the foreground. Resting now, then lunch, then another tour of an island (2-hr boat ride) and its ruins. These multi-hour bus and boat rides are wearing us down and we're looking forward to just sitting and perhaps reading a book for a change (can't read on the bus). Actually we have tomorrow morning off before a 4-hour bus ride to La Paz and we may just hang in our room rather than attempt to see the town.

From our balcony you can't see the other side of the lake, so it reminds us of the Great Lakes. Deep blue water at 8 deg. C.

I won't bother you with more photos later, even though for the first time since Lima we have wi-fi in our room -- don't have to go to the lobby! Viva Bolivia.

We haven't been in Bolivia long enough to comment on it other than yes, the women do wear bowler hats. BTW, the President of Bolivia is quite anti-USA, and I think for good reasons. We've not been the best partner to our Latin American neighbors.

- John (& Barbara)



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November 16

Lago de Titicaca – Last Day

Hi all,

This morning was our last day on the lake, and we took a walking tour of the town. What a treat -- and a highlight of the trip! We spent two hours walking the huge outdoor market with fills the streets of several city blocks, and there was so much to look at and see. The colorful women was a highlight. We kept stopping to remark that this is a really foreign land.

I could send a dozen pics but will limit it to two. First, the blessing of the cars. We don't have the details, but on one street they decorate their cars with fresh flowers, trinkets, hats, and somehow the Virgin Mary blesses them so they will have no (fewer?) accidents. There was a whole line of them in the blessing process. We're surprised that the Virgin has time to bless cars, but what do we know. Further down she was blessing little models of homes, cars, and wads of cash to help people acquire what they wanted. From this and others we got the idea that they are super-super-superstitious. One photo I didn't take was of a basket of llama fetuses that are burned in offering when laying the foundation of a building; we were told that unless this was done no workers would work on construction and no one would rent or buy it.

The second snap was typical. Women sat with fresh fish at their feet and others bought them. The fish are fresh and probably pretty good, but it sure is a small-scale business model. Note, of course, the derby hats (among others). BTW, Barbara bought a hat -- but not a derby.

Then a 4-hour bus ride across the altiplano to La Paz at the lower elevation of 11,975 ft where we'll be for two days. Our hotel is a converted colonial mansion exactly downtown. We have two half-days of tours lined up.

So the adventure continues ...

- John (& Barbara)





November 17

La Paz Day 1

Hello all,

Today was our first full day of two in La Paz -- but first, last night. After a dinner of filets of llama and stuffed avocado I sat in the lounge and had three cups of complimentary coca tea -- and stayed up until 10:30! We've been going to bed between 8 and 9, rather tired, so I can endorse coca tea. You can buy it in the shops (along with the leaves to make your own, or just chew) and I'd bring some back except it would get me 5 to 10 as a first offense. So I'll drink it here and be happy in the evening with lots of energy.

Back to today: we had a city tour that included the cathedral, government buildings (we think Pres. Morales car was parked in front of the parliament building), several different neighborhoods, and shopping areas -- a rather complete driving tour. The second snap is a typical street scene shot out the front window from the back seat. There are fewer bowler hats here but still plenty. The third snap is the city of 2.5 million from an overlook with a snow-capped peak in the distance. It's an interesting place -- a city of such size at such altitude with a largely native population.

After the tour we walked on our own and again saw llama fetuses along with dried babies for sacrifices, and this time took a photo; it's not something you see every day. It's amazing what you can find in these markets. Rain -- the first since the Amazon -- cut our walk short so we took a rest in the lobby (more coca tea!) and then a nap.

Tomorrow: pre-Inca ruins outside town.

- John (& Barbara)









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November 18

La Paz Day 2 - Tiwanaku

Hi All,

On our second and final day in La Paz we were taken by our guide an hour outside town to the pre-Columbian and pre-Incan ruins of Tiwanaku. This civilization flourished from Roman Empire to late Viking times, ending in a cataclysm around 1200 AD. It was long abandoned when the Incas took over the area.

Highlights were a shakedown ("mordida") by the Bolivian Highway Patrol (our guide was familiar with the process and paid the bribe; no problem), the huge Pacha Mama ("Mother Earth") monolith (photo 1) in the museum, and the pyramids and ruins themselves, all in a bad

state and partially reconstructed. The second photo looks across a recessed temple where the monolith was found to the Sun Gate entrance to the Temple of the Sun beyond.

On the drive we learned that a starting salary for full-time work -- basically minimum wage -- is \$200/month. I've quizzed all our guides on President Evo Morales who was just re-elected, and they all like him. I'll have to read about him this evening, but I tend to agree. He's one of the very few world leaders willing to stand up to the United States and -- in contrast to all previous Bolivian presidents who were in it for what they could get, Morales seems to be working for the good of the people. Another example of how travel is interesting -- you get new perspectives as well as views of unusual scenery.

Tomorrow an early flight south to the Atacama Desert and an afternoon tour of salt flats. We'll be in the Atacama for several days.

- John





November 20

In Southern Bolivia

Hi All,

We've spent two days exploring southern Bolivia with a guide and driver in a car, with one more to go. To be honest, we're kind of tired of long all-day drives in the back seat and are ready to change the program. Driving across the altiplano of southern Bolivia is very much like driving across Nevada on a 2-lane dirt road that hasn't been graded recently so that the smoothest part (this is relative) is in the middle, so everyone drives there and moves over to pass; note that our car has zero shock absorbers. Oh -- and there are herds of llamas near and far and snow-capped volcanoes in the distance. Three days will be enough.

But we have seen the world's largest salt flat (we drove across it twice), REALLY remote and primitive villages (mud brick walls and thatched roofs, or sheet metal if they could afford it, no paved roads or sidewalks, many buildings uncompleted and many others falling down, and trash everywhere). Yesterday's hotel's walls were made of blocks of rock salt cemented together; at 12,000 ft there was no heater but plenty of blankets (we were warm). Tonight's hotel is quite upscale and even has wifi, although not fast enough for pictures. We've seen flamingoes, quinoa fields (amazing that anything useful grows where it does) ancient rock art, interesting rock formations and the even more interesting plant that grow on them, and a lot of what looks like Nevada out the window.

I had a chance to observe from a dark courtyard last night and see the southern stars with binoculars. I've not seen the southern sky in 20 years so this was a highlight for me.

Tomorrow: the Atacama Desert and two nights in the famous town San Pedro de Atacama.

- John (& Barbara)

This is an entire village of 9 families on the altiplano adjacent to the salt flats. We took the photo from the second story of our hotel. It's fairly detailed so you should zoom in. The primary industry is quinoa growing, and if you look at the soil you can't imagine that anything useful would grow in it.



Barbara and our guide examining a quinoa field on the altiplano. Can you imagine a rockier place to farm? Generations of campesinos have build miles of rock walls, but they left a few. Fortunately they need only scrape a hollow in the ground to plant it. Quinoa's price has increased dramatically in recent years so that the locals can no longer afford to eat it except in small quantities -- they export it as a valuable cash crop and it's boosted the standard of living. People are actually moving back onto the farm! This field is about 1,000 feet or so above the village where the farmers live.



November 21

Hi from the Atacama Desert, Chile

Hi All,

We're in the little but famous tourist town, San Pedro de Atacama, in an upscale hotel that even has slow wi-fi on the northern part of the Atacama Desert. A lot changed today, so to start at the beginning.

We hadn't realized until this morning that last night's hotel on the Bolivian altiplano was at 13,205 ft altitude! That's according to the GPS in Barbara's iPhone. We've almost never been at that altitude, let alone eaten and slept there. But we both felt well. I have almost no energy but Barbara is the Energizer Bunny. Anyway, from that town we climbed a long way on dirt roads that were 1 or 2 lanes, rocky and sometimes rutted, and not a lot of fun for passengers in the back seat of a Land Cruiser w/o shocks. But the scenery was spectacular. We thought we had done it all when we went over a pass at 15,200 feet (with volcanoes even higher on both sides), but our highest pass was 16,064 ft. We stopped and got out to see if we could breathe, and yes -- but the ferocious wind took our breath away, and it was cold. That's by far the highest either of us has ever been or ever will be again. Then down to a lake at "only 15,000 ft

that was filled with thousands of flamingoes. I wish I could send pictures (wifi probably to slow but I may try later). Then to fumaroles and mud pots. And on to the border with Chile and a mud-brick custom house. Our Chilean transfer picked us up and we descended roughly 6,000 ft to our town in the Atacama Desert where it is 30 degrees warmer and very peasant short-sleeve weather for a change.

We missed our afternoon tour of rock formations because we didn't know about the time zone change, but we were tired of rock formations and are just as happy. They offered to reschedule for tomorrow but we declined. We have one afternoon tour and that's plenty. Plus an evening astronomy event for John.

- John

I'll be surprised if these go ... but here's trying.

The first is a lagoon inhabited by thousands of flamingoes somewhere between 14,000 and 15,000 feet. They don't seem to mind the harsh scenery.

And speaking of harsh, our guide took the second photo at a pass at 16,064 feet -- as high as we have ever been. It was chilly and very windy. Note the zero plant life beside the main highway.

In both the surrounding mountains are volcanoes and the rocks all lava.

Now we're at 8,000 feet in the desert and it seems so much more hospitable -- although we're comparing the altiplano to the Atacama!

- John (& Barbara)





November 22

Atacama Desert

Hello All,

A slow day in the Atacama -- "el desierto mas seco del mundo." Our only tour was not until 5, so we walked the length and width of town (4 blocks square) and into the countryside, and cannot claim to have seen Chile. This is a 100% tourist town and we'll have to return and go elsewhere to be able to say we actually saw Chile. But it was nice to have a day off and we enjoyed our stroll and huge lunch at \$10 each (we could finish 2/3 of it).

We noted that at noon we don't cast much of a shadow. Note the unplastered and unpainted stone and mud brick walls (they do that only in the very center of town), but also Barbara's weak attempt at casting a shadow. The weather has been great -- here at 8000 feet the high

was 76 with 11% humidity and zero chance of rain for the next six months. They get 1 inch of rain a year, all in the winter, in this part of the desert, and it passes 125 in the summer.

Then our tour, which was pretty much a loss: a long drive on a formerly paved road, fortunately in a car that does have shocks, to a salt lake with flamingoes, and return. I shot the second picture out the window. Definitely desert. Barbara showed our guide a photo of our home in Utah and he said "That's not desert!" and by Chile standards he's quite correct.

Tonight I have an astronomy tour from 10 - 12:30; my expectations are low.

Tomorrow is a free day. We've already walked all the streets several times so we may spend a sunny summer day in the hotel garden, reading and kicking back, venturing out only to eat.

- John (& Barbara)





November 23

Hi from San Pedro de Atacama

Hi All,

We have the day free in San Pedro de Atacama (Google it) until a 5:00 tour we think is timed for the sunset, so have been walking around town. We got cash from an ATM -- an eternal chore -- and bought an electrical adapter so we can charge our devices, looked in a few tourist shops, went for a long walk, and rested at a cafe on the plaza with a banana milkshake (milk and banana blended but no ice cream). Now a rest before heading out again for lunch and more walking.

The town is for tourists! Tourists and tourist services everywhere. It's artificial -- not much to do with the real Chile. We're impressed that the mud brick buildings are both plastered and painted (most of them) -- what a concept. I don't think it'll catch on in Bolivia -- too extravagant.

So a slow day so far, which is fine -- it beats sitting in the back seat of a shockless Land Cruiser on dirt "roads".

- John (& Barbara)

pics: me writing in the lobby of our 5-star hotel (Chilean standards, but it is very nice) with a Pisco Sour to inspire, and a typical street scene. This is a pueblo, not a city.





November 24

Leaving the Atacama Desert

Hi All,

My astronomy evening was fantastic, completely contrary to expectations. It was at the largest public observatory in South America, and they had a dozen telescopes the size of my big one pointed to different objects, and we could look as long as we wanted (waiting lines were very short with so many telescopes and so few people) so I got great long views of some Southern Hemisphere sky objects I'd always heard of but had never seen before (or just in binoculars). Another highlight of the trip.

Yesterday we had no activity lined up, so we took the day off. It was beautiful -- 78° with no humidity; the same today -- so very pleasant. We read in our patio garden, caught up on

internet things, walked around town yet again, toured the local archaeology museum, and had two nice meals out (breakfasts are always included). So not much to write home about.

Today we're lounging again in the morning and then will spend the afternoon and evenings in airports and airplanes -- flights to Santiago and then on to Buenos Aires, arriving late.

Tomorrow I'll write from Buenos Aires.

So we're leaving the Atacama, but we barely saw it -- just that one tour to a salt flat. But we have the idea.

- John (& Barbara)

Photos:

Hotels are walled compounds with gardens etc. inside, and this garden was just outside the sliding door to our room. This is what you can do when you're retired -- fly to Chile and read a book.

I should have sent a pic of this long ago. In Peru, Bolivia, and Chile at the hotel breakfast they offer your choice of coffee, tea, or coca leaves. One of the teas in packets is coca tea, and I've enjoyed plenty of that (think caffeine), but there are also glass jars of coca leaves for you to take and chew. Zoom in to read the label. Out of view is a huge thermos of strong coffee and another of hot water for tea. The grocery stores also sell packets of coca leaves.





November 25

Buenos Aires

Hello all,

We arrived at our hotel in downtown Buenos Aires at midnight last night and hit the sack. We very, very narrowly avoided missing our connecting flight and spending the night who-knows-where in Santiago, Chile, except Barbara asked for help from staff and got us passed through the hour-long emigration line after waiting in it only 40 minutes; another 20 and we'd have been stranded. Kudos to Barbara!

So here we are in Buenos Aires. The contrast between here and the altiplano / Atacama is extreme -- like being whisked from two weeks in Appalachia or the wilds of Montana straight to downtown Chicago. Crowd-averse Barbara was slightly traumatized as we walked through

dense crowds and worse traffic today to make a 5-hour walking loop around downtown, but we survived, and we now have an idea of what downtown Buenos Aires is like: crowded, trash everywhere, busy, and unbelievably upscale compared to Bolivia. I pointed out a 6-story hotel to Barbara and remarked how clever the Argentinians were to be able to make such tall buildings out of mud bricks; that's about all we've seen for weeks. And no bowler hats on Indians (no Indians).

A few hours in Buenos Aires was interesting, but we could have skipped it and gone directly to Iguazu Falls, which is where we're headed shortly. We'll arrive after dark tonight and stay two days. Back to the jungle!

This is the one photo we took in Buenos Aires. It's a typical street scene (all the narrow streets are one-way and the average speed of cars is a brisk walk) but more importantly it shows the headquarters of the Association Madres de Plaza de Mayo -- the organization of mothers of the "disappeared" who went missing during the dictatorship of the '70s and '80s. The mothers boldly confronted the authorities. It's a sad story and it's impossible to imagine what it would be like to live under a dictatorship where speaking out could get you "disappeared" without explanation or recourse.

So now we're waiting for our transfer to the airport.

- John (& Barbara)



November 26

Iguazu Falls - Argentina

Hi All,

We arrived at a 5-star resort in Iguazu too late last night to see anything, but today went on a tour of the Argentina side of Iguazu Falls. I was here 28 years ago and remember it as being spectacular (I think it's the #2 tourist destination in all of South America), and it definitely is spectacular, and I have wanted to bring Barbara. So today we walked for perhaps 90 minutes on the boardwalks with views from several directions.

We saw plenty of waterfalls in Iceland and Norway earlier this year, and some were tourist destinations and highlights of the scenery, and we were impressed -- but we've never seen any

that remotely approach this. The photo shows maybe a third of the falls which are, if I understood correctly, more than 2 miles long and almost half again as high as Niagara. In some places, like here, the falls are in two steps; elsewhere it's one drop. Taking a great photo is a matter of pointing the camera and pressing the shutter; we took more than a few but will limit this email to one that is representative. Do a Google image search for more than you want to look at.

What more is there to say? We've never seen anything like this and won't again elsewhere. You should hear the sound on the video! We understand why the catwalks were so crowded that it was hard to move -- it's one popular place.

We've been back at our great hotel for a few hours, some of the time swimming and then resting by the pool. Very tropical. We got a glimpse of a monkey earlier but couldn't get a snapshot. Ditto an 18-inch long lizard by the pool. We did get some good shots of coatis -- the local equivalent of raccoons.

Tomorrow we tour the Brazilian side and take a quick helicopter flight.

- John (& Barbara)

PS: on second thought I've attached a snap of a coati. They were very aggressive around the food area.





November 27

Iguazu Falls - Brazil

Hello All,

I'll risk boring everyone with THREE photos taken on the Brazilian side of Iguazu Falls -- "one of the seven natural wonders of the world." (We've been trying to figure out which the other six are, but there's no official list or consensus, so we've been making our own list. Iguazu Falls is on it.) Today's activity was walking a mile or so on catwalks following the river and mostly looking at the falls on the Argentina side across the river, but as you see in the first photo there was one place to get up close and personal (note Barbara at left). The noise was deafening --

this is a huge tropical river that looks about the size of the Colorado cascading over the cliff. We also ventured on the catwalks that gave a 360-degree perspective; they were selling raincoats to those who went to the end. And the third was taken from our short, pricy, and memorable 10-minute helicopter ride and it shows about a quarter of the falls; here the drop is in two steps but elsewhere it is one long fall. I shot video from the 'copter and will edit that when I have a laptop instead of iPad.

It's 90 degrees and 90 percent humidity and our rain luck continues to hold -- no rain on us since our first day in the Amazon, now an age ago.

So a scenic, dramatic memorable day at what I believe is the #2 tourist destination in South America.

We'll miss Thanksgiving as they don't celebrate it here, although we do see Christmas decorations here and there. Happy Thanksgiving to all of you!

Tomorrow is another travel day; we leave for the airport right after breakfast and arrive in Rio de Janeiro in the late afternoon.

- John (& Barbara)







November 28

Rio de Janeiro – Day 1

Hi All,

Today was another travel day (there have been several days lost to mass transit) -- we were picked up at our hotel in Iguazu at 8:20 and dropped off at our hotel in Rio at 4:20. So it goes.

Our hotel is 1/2 block from Copacabana Beach, so after organizing in our tiny room w/o a view we hit the sidewalk with its famous wave tile pattern and walked a ways, stopping for a beer & coke and to watch kids play soccer in the sand. Sugarloaf in the distance is 1/4 of the way in from the right. Then a walk along a main street (looks pretty much like busy streets anywhere;

saw one sign for a Black Friday sale!) and had a wonderful all-you-can-eat buffet with fresh fish etc. for \$8 pp. Then it started to drizzle -- our first rain since our first day in the Amazon almost a month ago!-- so back to the hotel to see how much TV we can understand in Portuguese (Barbara just tuned in The Simpsons). John might take his iPad to the bar and sip & read.

This is our second hotel with high-speed internet, so we'll catch up on old news, TED talks, etc.

Tomorrow a half-day morning guided city tour. We'll be dropped off on Ipanema Beach and will walk home in the afternoon. It'll be 80 degrees or so with no rain predicted. Then we have the following two full free days in Rio!

- John





November 29

Rio, day 2 of 4

Hi all,

The drizzle ended overnight so we had a beautiful balmy (77°) day to see Rio with some clouds that almost ruined the view from the famous Christ statue that overlooks the entire city. This is the best shot I could get. Our hotel is 1/3 of the way in from the right on Copacabana Beach.

Then mostly a long walk through town and then along Ipanema and Copacabana beaches,

where we stopped for a fresh coconut drink (photo; lop off the top and insert straws) and ice cream. Now we're taking a break at the hotel to rest our feet.

Tomorrow another tour in the morning -- and I'll tell you about it then.

- John (& Barbara)





November 30

Rio Day 3 of 4

Hello all,

This morning we took a guided tour of a favela -- a slum or shanty town -- that overlooks Rio. Who would have thought that's a popular tour!

History: in 1888 when the slaves were freed, they asked "what are we to do and where are we to go" and they were told "it's up to you -- good luck," So they set up shanty towns outside the city on the uninhabited hillsides, and 130+ years later they have grown into communities of hundreds of thousands of people with hand-built homes, electricity, and completely inadequate

trash collection. The police patrol in groups of 4 with weapons drawn, but we felt safe walking around with our guide. We paid a fee to be there so we're good for local business.

Trash is everywhere, in some places in deep piles, and it smells it. Note the multitude of wires tapping into the mains, all illegal but ignored by authorities. Officially the favela doesn't exist, so no one pays taxes -- and the city barely provides services. The favelas were basically ignored thru most of Rio's history, but recently efforts have been made to provide basic services, but that's a work in progress. We're told that most people who live there prefer it and feel comfortable in their close neighborhoods.

Actually it didn't look worse than downtown La Paz, although the trash is deeper here.

Then a long walk along Copacabana Beach with a few pauses to watch the action. We especially enjoy watching volleyball where you can't use your hands -- just chest, feet, and heads, as in soccer -- amazing to watch.

Now we're relaxing in the hotel, and a simple dinner -- probably slices of pizza or something simple -- will follow in awhile. Barbara's watching TV and I'm using the hotel's super-fast internet to upgrade apps etc.

- John (& Barbara)





December 2

South of Rio, day 1

Hello all,

On our final day in Rio we once again walked along Copacabana Beach and the nearby streets which are filled with shops, and the novelty has definitely worn off. Too much of a good thing, and we're ready to move on.

I'll take advantage of the hotel's super-fast wifi to send three pics.

Earlier we sent a snap of the beach from the wide sidewalk that runs along it; here's one from

the beach itself. What a wide, beautiful, warm, sandy beach! No wonder it's famous. I wanted to get a shot of a mini-bikini -- three triangles each about 2 or 3 inches on a side with string -- but no good opportunity presented itself. Ditto people playing hands-less volleyball. The temp was 88 with higher humidity than we would prefer -- tropical.

Our main activity was an afternoon ride up Sugarloaf via the cable cars. The second snap is from the top, about 1300 feet above the sea, looking back down to the station where you change cable cars and, below and to the left, the short beach they start from. Copacabana Beach is the long J-shaped (actually a crescent) beach at left, and our hotel is at the far end. (Ipanema Beach is the next one beyond, but you can't see it.) You can barely see the Christ statue at right on the tallest peak.

Third is a critter that ran around the snack bar at top; we've not yet identified him, but he (or she) has a cute face about the size of a quarter dollar.

Tomorrow after breakfast we leave Rio and head south a short ways to end our trip in a quieter setting.

- John (& Barbara)







December 2

South of Rio, day 1

Hello all,

Another half travel day -- a 4-1/2 hour bus ride took us to the resort / tourist town of Paraty. The "downtown" tourist area is one street 4 blocks long, and there's a "historical" district of a few square blocks down by the water (the ocean). This was a port in the 1600s for shipping things to and from Portugal, and the old town has a bit of charm (and no cars) but the narrow streets are paved with watermelon-size cobbles and that's hard going for me -- reminds me of hiking over lava fields back home. So we walked around a bit in the 91-degree humid weather under a clear sky and sought out shade where we could. The souvenir shops have no appeal. We spent the second half of the afternoon in the shade by the pool in the hotel's garden --

quite nice.

We're here for two full-day excursions, one tomorrow and one Thursday.

Wifi here is SLOW and intermittent, so I may try to send a photo but I doubt if it will go; don't expect one. Which reminds me -- in our travels we often have slow wifi, so if you respond to one of our emails PLEASE don't send the attachments back with your reply -- delete it / them -- and save us what might be a long download to see what we already saw. Obrigado.

It sure is a lot quieter here than in Rio and we're OK with that. Neither one of us cares much for cities any more -- even those on a 5-star beach. Nice to visit -- briefly.

- John (& Barbara)

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December 3

colonial town Parity, Brazil; day 2 of 3-1/2

Hi all,

Today was our first full day in the colonial / tourist town of Parity roughly 100 miles south of Rio, and it was a totally disappointing day. To make a long story short our "jungle jeep adventure" turned out to be a short drive to a swimming hole at a waterfall -- very scenic, but no one told us to bring suits so we watched the others splash about for an hour. Then 1-1/2 hours at an expensive restaurant, mostly waiting for food to arrive -- not how we wanted to spend 1/4 of our "day in the jungle." (1) Then another hour at another swimming hole 5 minutes further down the road; we were so pissed we just sat in the "jeep" and fumed. We barely saw a jungle and thought the entire day was a waste.

I'm going to join Trip Advisor just so I can give this tour a 1-star review.

It was 93 today -- temperature and humidity -- and the novelty of that has worn off. Hurray for the desert next week!

Now we're wary about tomorrow's "adventure."

So now we're about to head out for dinner. Then reading in bed with the AC up full!

- John

PS-- as an experiment I tried to send a photo -- and it went! Surprise, surprise! Half the time

we have no internet at all and the rest of the time it's almost too slow to browse web pages. But it did take 15 minutes. I'll try another photo.

(1): we have never seen an exception to the rule in Brazil that when you order at a restaurant, absolutely nothing arrives for at least a half hour and more likely 45 minutes; not even soup or salad or appetizer. We don't get it. Apparently we're supposed to smoke a half-dozen cigarettes and talk while working up an appetite.

No Photo Correction

Sorry for the correction -- but it appears that the photo did NOT go thru. It seemed to have but now I don't see it in the sent box, so evidentially I got a false signal. Things in mail were screwed up for about 20 minutes while it choked. I MAY try again -- but assume that we won't be sending any more photos during what remains of our South American Adventure.

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December 4

Last Full Day in Brazil

Hi all,

Today was our last full day in Brazil, and we lucked out. The forecast was 100% chance of rain by noon, and at 4:30 (now) it still hasn't rained, although it will shortly. So the last rain we had of any significance was on our first day in the Amazon more than a month ago! What luck!

In contrast to yesterday's disappointing tour (our travel agent has applied for a refund), today was just what we wanted -- a 6-hour cruise on a motorized schooner among the islands of the huge bay off Paraty. It was 88 by the weather app, but we were on the water with a breeze and it felt great for a change. Barbara swam a bit (the water was cold and salty!) while I was content to be onboard. We spent much of the day watching the coast drift by -- very tropical with palm trees, vacation homes, and lots of other boats.

Now to read by the pool and then back to the dinner spot we discovered last night -- a pay-by-the-kilo grill. They line up food like a buffet and you fill your plate and then they weigh it -- 39 reales per kilo. Go thru the line as many times as you like and they weigh it each time. Dinner last night came to \$16 for the two of us with drinks. And good grilled food too!

No photos: I tried several times last night and it just choked my email. But you can Google "Paraty Schooner" and see pics. I just did and copied this which presumably is small enough to email -- you get the idea.

Tomorrow is a LONG travel day (more than 24 hours) and we'll send a final email in the morning.

- John (& Barbara)



December 4

Leaving South America / Signing Off

Hi all -- for the last time,

Mucho travel ahead. We're waiting for the bus to take us to Rio (4.5 hrs), then a long wait at the airport, then a 10-hr flight to Atlanta, 3 hrs in Atlanta, flight to Las Vegas, another wait, and 2+ hour shuttle to St. George, arriving home by taxi in time for dinner -- if there was food in the fridge. We have some frozen cheeseburgers from CostCo so we'll be OK, but our next 30 hours or so will mostly be sitting and/or waiting. So it goes.

TGIF, BTW.

I thought I'd end with random thoughts on food. It's not entirely the same in South America as back home:

The coffee is strong -- much stronger than I'm used to -- but not bitter. Almost everyone adds hot milk which is kept in a pitcher beside the coffee pot, often 50-50, and sugar. I need milk too, to be able to drink it, but it's very tasty and I've gotten to like it a lot.

Tea is popular with a variety offered. On the altiplano I invariably took the coca tea; tasted herbal but had a little 'punch'. Haven't seen coca tea in Argentina or Brazil. We resisted the urge to bring a few tea bags home -- the airport sniffer dogs would have ratted on us and we'd be in jail until Halley's Comet returns.

Scrambled eggs are served at all the breakfast buffets, but never with any seasoning and always runny. Occasionally you can find salt nearby but never pepper.

Sausage is served at the breakfast buffet too (all hotels include breakfast buffet), but only twice in a month was it what I would call sausage -- all other times it was hot dogs. Got tired of that.

Lunch meats & cheese are part of the buffet too -- great if you want to sneak a sandwich for lunch.

Also lots of fruit -- often tons of fruit, some of which I don't recognize, and almost always very good. The bananas are half the size of the ones back home and were picked a few days ago instead of while green a few months ago, but they taste the same!

Coco Puffs cereal is offered at almost all breakfast buffets, especially on the altiplano. What's with that! Couldn't figure out the fascination with Coco Puffs.

The fruit juice is often made on the spot from fruit, not concentrate, and it is often between very high pulp and super high pulp. Great! And you can chose from mango, papaya, pineapple, orange, watermelon, etc.

Bread everywhere is a variation of highly processed Wonder Bread in different shapes, but with no taste or interest. There's no overlap between what they call bread here and what they call bread in Norway -- it's the difference between Tang and super-high pulp orange juice.

Soups are great -- thick (often more of a stew) and tasty. I couldn't get enough soup. Invariably over-salted, though, sometimes by a factor of 5 or more.

Grills where you pay by the kg are popular and a great value. Load up your plate (or not) at the buffet line, they weigh it, and you pay for what you take. Lots of grilled meats to chose from along with potatoes, rice, salads, beans, fruit, cakes, etc. etc.

Pizza is popular and we tried it once; it's 1/3 the thickness of what you'll see back home and not really worth the trouble.

Beer & wine is the same here except no CA wines; good and cheap. Each country has its national beer but they all taste pretty much the same and I drank what was featured. At one hotel I ordered a bottle of Chilean wine and drank half the first night and they kept the second half for the second night; it was \$11.

Coke owns the South American soft-drink industry and Coke is everywhere; Pepsi vanishingly rare. Not too many native varieties not owned by Coke. A shame. Guarana soda was great -- made from fruit from the Amazon.

When you order in a restaurant, expect to not be served anything, including the appetizer or salad, for at least a half hour and likely longer. It's the custom, and it drove us nuts. Don't eat out (except the per/kg cafes or a pizza place) unless you have 90 minutes.

I'm sure we could think of more -- and will after I send this off.

So it was a great trip, albeit with much travel time in airports and busses. Now there'll be many things to think about in years to come as we recall where we went and what we saw. We hope you enjoyed the commentary.

Signing off,

- John (& Barbara)