Brazil 2 – Chapada Diamantina and Rio de Janeiro

Chapada Diamantina – Happy Trekking

The plateau (chapada) of diamonds (diamantina) is a wonderful national park in Bahia, some six hours drive east of Salvador. The main town in that area is Lençóis and this is where tourists stay during their visit to the huge park. If you go there, you should sleep in Posada do Alcino (Alcino's guesthouse) which is more of a home than a guesthouse. And what a home it is! (Check the photo gallery and some of my own pictures). And what breakfasts! My home cannot match that...

It was there that we met the ultimate guide for our trip – Tiago. For four days we travelled the beautiful park with him and a bunch of Brazilian tourists that made our trip so much more enjoyable. Improvising on the famous saying of Will Rogers I hereby declare that I never met a Brazilian that I didn't like.

Each trekking day began with a breakfast that would put a smile on the gloomiest face. Then we would drive to our destiny of the day and start our trek. The highlight in each day was a waterfall or a cascade and the highlights of the entire trip were the bathing under and sometimes even going behind those falls. The exhilaration is hard to put in words. Regretfully, I do not have pictures from under or behind those falls so you will have to believe me that this is something that should be added to anyone's wish-list. All in all, a trekking experience that starts every day with an indulging breakfast, ends in a little paradise in the form of a guesthouse, and in between offers a terrific natural shower with no water pressure problems – is a happy trekking experience.

Enough said. Here are the pictures from each of the four days in the park. Put it on a slideshow, sit back, and enjoy the music (music is not included).

Day 1 - Along the San Antonio and Roncandor Rivers

Day 2 - Pool, Valley, Cave, Mountain - in this order

Day 3 - The Very Very Wet Mosquito Fall and the Paridas Rock

Day 4 - The Ribierao River, the Sossego Fall, and Ribierao do Meio

Rio de Janeiro – Happy End

We landed in Rio's airport one day before the Passover Seder. A taxi driver was waiting for us with a sign with my name in his pocket (where else did you expect him to hold it) in order to take us to Noam and Liliane's house. Noam is a dear Israeli friend whom I know from my South America trip 18 years ago. Liliane is his Brazilian spouse and in the last four years they live in Rio with their kids Yonatan and Amir. In the very last minute before they return to Israel, I finally managed to visit them.
Noam sent to us a special taxi driver because the typical taxi driver in Rio would not know how to get to their huge wooden house that is located in the middle of the Tijuca jungle in the heart of Rio. Even that driver was on the verge of getting lost. The place is too surreal. Imagine living inside a large metropolitan where a creek runs just underneath your house, a huge steep mountain is located just in front of your front porch, and toucans, giant butterflies and monkeys can be spotted from the dinner table.

Rio boasts stunning beauty. The beauty is in the natural setting of that city between the sea and steep mountains and huge rocks, not in its boulevards or edifices. I hope that the pictures below capture some of that beauty.

Apart from the lovely Seder that Noam led gracefully in both Portuguese and Hebrew, and a terrific night in Rio Scenarium night club, the special experience of those days in Rio was our visit to the Rocinha favela. Favela is a slam and Rio has something like 600-800 favelas. Rocinha is considered to be the largest one in all of Latin America. Estimates of its size range between 60,000 to 400,000 (our guide estimated its size to be around 250,000). We took a private tour there with an English-speaking inhabitant. Leandro, a soft-spoken and well-educated 28-year old, lead us safely through the various districts of the huge favela, and tried to shed some light on "the system" of the city-within-a-city, the daily life of its inhabitants, and the delicate balance between the official Rio down at sea level and the shadowed Rio on the mountain. Even though Rocinha is an upscale favela that offers conditions that are beyond the reach of those who live in nastier favelas, it still offered an eye-opening visit to the side of Rio that is frequently overlooked by visitors and almost totally overlooked, not to say suppressed, by the local Cariocas – The people of Rio.

Rio de Janeiro Pictures