

The Cedar Rapids-Iowa City (CR-IC) Friendship Force Club was invited by the Ribeirao Preto and Salvador-Bahia Clubs to participate in a cultural exchange. It was the "winter" season in Brazil, with average daily temperatures below 80 degrees (F). It felt much like summer in Iowa. Ambassadors included Judy Miner, Geri Frascht, Barb Steggall and Jim Steggall from the Cedar Rapids-Iowa City Club along with 12 Ambassadors from other clubs throughout the US and Canada.

Ribeirao Preto Club Journey

The group arrived in Ribeirao Preto on June 26 for the official start of the Journey. Ribeirão Preto (Portuguese for "Black Stream") is one of the most important cities in São Paulo state, with about 600,000 inhabitants, health center, several universities, hospitals, and clinics. We were warmly greeted by our Hosts, many of whom were working couples with school age children. This enabled us to experience the culture of the city in a very meaningful way. The club is led by longtime FF leaders Helcio and Simone Lanzoni who assembled a great group of hosts and an interesting program. During our five-day homestay we visited the historic city, coffee plantation, art museum and the beautiful region of Sao Simao. The club visited a local institution for children called Sociedade Espirita, and made a donation to this very worthwhile charity. We were very impressed by the enthusiastic hospitality of club members, many of whom are newer to FF and well below the average age of US clubs.

After Ribeirao Preto we travelled to Iguazu Falls which is in southern Brazil. We had a three-night hotel stay near the Iguassu National Park where we visited the beautiful Parque das Aves, the largest bird park in Latin America. The bird park is home to more than 1,320 birds from about 150 different species. There are 16.5 hectares (40 acres) of lush Atlantic rain forest maintained to provide the best habitat for these animals. In the evening we enjoyed a folklore dinner show that covered, not only traditional dances from Brazil, but several other Latin American countries. From north to south, it's songs and dances, such as chorinho, capoeira, samba and others, all of which are showcased to bring joy to all present.

We experienced the Falls from both the Brazil and Argentina sides. The colossal power of these thundering falls is a mesmerizing sight: 275 separate falls in a U-shaped formation pound the water below in raging cascades with a deafening intensity.

Salvador Bahia Club Journey

On July 4 we boarded a flight to Salvador to continue our Journey with the Salvador Bahia Club. Salvador is located along the balmy tropical Atlantic waters on the Bay of All Saints and is one of Brazil's oldest colonial cities. The city of 2.7 million people is known as the "melting pot" of Brazil where the Portuguese, African and indigenous people came together to form the "Bahian" culture. We learned about the history of the Portuguese settlers, the African slave trade (which was banned in 1835) and the blending of these two groups with the existing indigenous people. Sugar was king in the colonial times and we heard about its importance in the region. The club planned-activities included exploring the UNESCO neighborhood of Pelourinho with its rich Baroque churches and colorful colonial architecture, visiting the tranquil beach village of Praia do Forte and a sea turtle rescue center and a trip to the memorial of Sister Dulce, a new saint

according to the Catholic Church. The Salvador Club was very welcoming and had much to share about their experiences with FF. We were able to meet family members and experienced their warm hospitality.

On July 9 we returned to the US and will have many fond memories of the Journey to Brazil. What makes travelling with FF so special is that these memories will be mostly of the great people we met and how they shared their culture with us.

This was my first experience as a Journey Coordinator and I am so glad I did it. My only regret is that more of our club members did not experience this wonderful Journey. I encourage CR-IC members to participate in future opportunities.

In Friendship,

Jim Steggall
Journey Coordinator