South Brazil turns out to be the second surprise of our trip so far. 12 years ago we hardly spent time driving around here. We visited Foz de Iguacu, flew to Minas Gerais, spent some weeks there and then flew to Rio and up north. The north is what pictures our mind when thinking of Brazil. Now we see a Brazil with clean, neat, lively and prosperous cities. Like Foz de Iguacu is seemingly doing better than counterpart Puerto Iguazu on Argentinean side. Crossing the border was far more easy then any other before and there where far less “uniforms” controlling the passage into the country then on Argentinean side going out. We found a perfect spot to camp. On personal invitation of the (Argentinean) campground owner of the Hostelling International campground at Foz we’ll stayed at his place. The kids play table tennis, American Pool and enjoy the swimming pool so much they hardly come out of the water. As always during our trip when the kids swim a lot in pools they are again getting “natural” green strings in their hair. Pool owners always stated that, because of protection of the environment they are not using chlorine to clean the water. Whatever they are using it is turning two fair-haired kids into green striped haired kids. To our surprise quite a few people working in tourist business speak reasonably understandable English.

The (pay) roads are good and there is no difference in having a Brazilian number plate or a foreign number plate. Same type vehicles pay same price. Which, in Sao Paulo, is a small fortune anyway, because of the “doble rodades” (dually). The 4 most southern states: Rio Grande do Sul, Santa Catharina, Parana and Sao Paulo are the most prosperous ones. According to some these 4 states and the rest of Brazil are: “Like 2 different countries”. Others even state that: “The 4 most southern provinces make Brazil. You can forget about the rest!” Sometimes they even make a throw a way gesture when talking about “the north”. 

Latest News !!!

Klarin
like a kid at a toy shop wandering around in Brazilian gem heaven

AND

The upgraded spring leaves, the suspension and the high performance bushings of the Fifth Wheel undergoing the 11th repair during our trip!
The power of water

There is a lot of water to admire at Foz d’Iguaçu. Not just the world famous waterfalls, but also the water that is turned into a working tool to benefit mankind. Looking at the free falling water at the parks of Iguacu you hardly can think these are not the biggest ones. The biggest ones disappeared when building the Itaipu dam about 20k away from Foz city.

We remember the simple but interesting tour at the Itaipu dam and decide to visit again. The 12 years gone by changed a lot here. The Itaipu dam now is a top tourist attraction which attracts over 70,000 people each year. Luxurious busses tour them on the chosen free trips. There are 3:

1. A look at the Itaipu Dam.
2. The Dam and a brief visit to an Eco museum and
3. De Dam, the Eco museum and a wildlife park.

We’ll go for option number 2 and are provided with a little green sticker to put on our clothes. This identifies you to the bus driver who can quickly tell people getting on the wrong bus.

Before leaving a film about the dam is shown. It clearly is a promotional one and has a lot “look how great we are doing” -ego, a lot of hollow phrases and a lot of “protecting and saving” the environment (on some cases even doing better than nature itself ever did) but that said, it has some truly amazing (natural) shots and everything is subtitled in English so non-Portuguese speakers are able to understand what is being said as well. Something a lot of tourist attractions in Central and South America lack off, in spite of the often double entrance price foreigners have to pay. 1

This time the tour to the dam only allows a look on the outside. You can still go inside but for that you have to make a reservation on beforehand and it’s not free. The plant is a working one and 70,000 people are simply to many having them wandering around in a place designed to work.

The plant is enormous and has some impressive facts:
- The height is 196mtr, this being enough for a 65 storey building.
- Its length is 7.744mtr. Of the iron used 380 Eifel tower could be build. There is enough concrete in the dam to have another 15 Euro tunnels, or 210 football stadiums like Maracana in Rio de Janeiro. Two of the 18 turbines have a (water) capacity of the total Iguacu falls.
- 90% of the (electricity) power used in Paraguay, and 25% of the (total) capacity needed in Brazil is given by the power of the water of the Itaipu dam. By using this “natural source of power” force Brazil saves on 434,000 drums of oil a day.

The American magazine Popular Mechanics selected the dam, together with 6 others, to be 1 of the 7 wonders of the modern world. (During our trip we already saw 2: The Panama-canal and The Golden Gate Bridge. A third Carla saw long time ago: The Empire State Building. Two more are closer to home: The Euro tunnel and The North Sea Protection Works (Deltawerken) which leaves us 1 to see: -maybe on our next trip? - : The Canadian National Tower)

Despite the enormous amount of water, there isn’t enough for the overflow. The big concrete slides now stand dry and empty. No water is coming down in a spectacular or even visible way to show their power for the visitors today. Since 1985 the plant has paid both Paraguay and Brazil compensation for using the resources (water). About US$ 3 billion each. In Brazil most was paid to Parana state because the Itaipu dam is situated in this state. A small part of the compensation payments however went to Sao Paulo. (as the river also runs through this state). As well as Paraguay as Brazil are paid because the border of these countries runs between turbine 9a and 10. Workforce are Paraguayans as well as Brazilians.

The Eco museum (What’s in a name?) shows a scale model of the dam and one of a turbine. Over 40,000 people helped build the dam. To honor these men and women a wall at the museum has a lot of pass photo pictures of those they could track down. On a television screen pictures taken over the years when building the dam, are shown. In between interviews with and anecdotes told by the people shown on these pictures are to be seen and heard. (Unfortunately here subtitles are missing!) Non the less : This approach gives a big concrete monster a more humanly face.

(Most of) The workers are still anonymous but appreciated (more) for their work through this wall of honor.
Dutch Glory

You'll meet Dutch all over the world. When they are not travelers, (but immigrants) just about following the same route you do, you'll seldom meet them again. About a year and a half ago we met some one on a parking lot in San Francisco. We hardly spoke more than a few minutes, but he already had invited us when we left. Now we are “in the neighborhood”.

Visiting Thomas and his family is not just a visit on emigrated Dutch people. It's like returning back to the Netherlands for a short while. Thomas’ family life in a Dutch colony in Southern Brazil, in the state Parana. Carambei is the oldest Dutch colony founded in 1911 and Thomas’s great grandfather was one of the first to arrive here and settle down. You'll find a lot of Dutch family names here.

Like: Kuipers, De Geus, Verschoor, Vriesman, Los, Harmens and even: Vink (not related, as far as we know) and of course our hosts: Voorsluijs. Thomas’s father is the 3rd generation on the (milking) cows farm.

In the state of Parana there are 3 Dutch colonies: Carambei, the small town we'll call home this week, Castrolanda (where first emigrants arrived in 1951) and Arapoti (founded in 1960).

As odd as it may seem now, being almost all emigrants farmers or related to farm work, the first emigrants didn’t come to Carambei to farm. They came as railroad constructors. The Brazilian Railway Company was trying to colonize the region by connecting (big) cities by railroad.

The small, but very attractive and informative museum shows the early days of the colony. Told in hundreds of pictures, with explanation on what the visitor is looking at in 4 languages. (Portuguese, Spanish, Dutch and English). On the attic you'll have a peep into the pioneers daily life where the church, a classroom, kitchen, living room and small groceries shop is built, filled with original stuff of the pioneers families. In spite of the poor grounds this region developed as a agricultural and farming area. For this reason antique farming machines take a major part of the museum. Fabian and Mighalle are happy to talk with Elizabeth, who, as her mother puts it: “Is from this ground” as daughter of Dutch immigrants still speaks fairly good Dutch.

On special request of the kids we're visiting Jaap's pig's farm. We all want to have a look at the babies. And there are a lot. A lot! And young ones, very, very young ones. Some not more than a couple of minutes. The seize of the mother animals is enormous. They look like giants. Specially compared with their babies whom are so small and tiny like little fairytale dwarfs. Fabian and Mighalle think it's fascinating. Not only the seize of mama but also that she can have up to 11 kids at the time! Whauw, so many brothers and sisters, you can make a soccer team out of it.

The family Voorsluys not only has pigs but also “Dutch” cows. As a matter of fact we are parked right next to the stable and there are young calves too. As do babies these calves too like to suck on fingers pretending to drink a bit. Mighalle refuses to trust one of these creatures with her fingers (“Who is to tell they're not going to bite me?”) but Fabian is in for a new experience. It doesn’t hurt, it just tickles a little, but oh oh, he hurries to wash his hands afterwards as they are all wet.

The time of our visit happens to be the end of April. For the first time in two years we will be able to celebrate April 30, “Koninginnendag” (Queens day), with other Dutchies, again. The 3 Dutch colonies in the state of Parana will be celebrating together and what better place than the windmill at Castrolanda? During our trip we did see several “Dutch windmills” but quite a few of them where odd scale models. Not quite the real thing. Here, in Castrolanda, it is different. The mill is an exact copy of an existing mill in the Netherlands. It is also the second largest one, and it is built with the help of a real (wind)mill builder. The kids play all kind of games during the festivities. Like clinging on to jeans. Fabian is the first: “Kids till 12” to try and therefore ends up First place for a short time. Then its on to milking cows. He chooses Beatrix (the queen) and beats a farmers son. First again! A couple of hours later he is thrown of the throne and end up 4th place. Mighalle turns out to be the best of them, at the “Sjoel” game. Lost again, but it doesn't seem to matter today. They are just having fun.

We watch young costumed wooden shoe dancers and listen to the Jo(h)anna Harms fanfare. For the first time ever Mighalle eats … poffertjes! She loves them. Celebrating Queens Day, far a way from home and eating something really, really Dutch.

A -Dutch- day to remember.
Yours(?) Mine(?) Ours(!) to share!

You have to have guts! Being a foreigner and spending your money in Brazil (or any other Central or South American country for that matter). This has to be punished. Okay, when being another South American resident the crime of doing so is less … but from outer South America … How dare you! For this brutality you'll pay more to see, do and experience the same things. You're considered to be: “A bag full of money”, and you should be happy to be given the chance to “get rid of your money”.

Alright, now we have let go of steam, it’s time to enjoy and appreciate nature’s wonders. Both Argentina and Brazil are making big bucks over the same thing. And yet they look so totally different being in one place or the other. On Argentinean side there are several trails to walk, on Brazilian side there is actually only one. Just one! But one with an astonishing over view on the 275 falls. As soon as you walk up the trail you’re greeted by the sound of falling water. No softly splashing sounds here, no mumbling bubbling little streams. No Sir! Brazil shows a wide, big, high, broad white screen of tumbling down water. Walking along the Brazilian trail it almost never fails to show, at least a little bit, of the Iguaçu falls. It’s a fascinating over view. This trail also is the home of a famous animal. At least it’s famous for Fabian and Mighalle now. Lately we’ve been telling stories to the kids about when we’d visited this place 12 years ago with their grandmother. Their grandmother being notorious for feeding “poor” animals. The animals in question look very huggable, like toy teddy bears. But by far, they are NOT! They have long sharp nails which they use for climbing, and when they smell food they’ll have a go for it. Knowing the stories now the kids take their precautions and admire the animals from a safe distance. They really don’t want their legs to be used as a climbing pole like these sweet looking cuddle bears did with their grandmothers legs back then. The excitement over the Quaties is pushing the water element to second place. After all they did see that an awful lot just a few days ago. There a much less butterflies here too, so they aren’t occupied by these colorful creatures. They look around more and see so many details. Like they see very big spider rags. Poch, luckily no spider in sight. Are that leaves over there(?) but they are moving! How many legs does that orange striped “worm” have? Are those drops on its back blood? Look at all those birds flying above that waterfall. There is so much space why are they all there and that little spot? There are so many rainbows to be seen on this side. How many are there? And why aren’t they all the same? And why are there so much more to be seen from this side than on the other side? The Brazilian catwalk goes straight into the Diablo de Carganta (Devil’s throat)! It’s the perfect place to cool down. Here you’ll get wet all year through. The water comes down at the 80mtr falls in enormous volumes and with great speed. While splashing down it creates a fine moisture that gently drips down almost unnoticed.

Here, specially at the end of the catwalk, human’s “natural” habit of putting themselves “above” nature becomes more humble and truly “over shouted” by nature’s real natural sounds. Big black birds screaming above the thunder of the water falling down. But even the silence of a single butterfly or a small lizard rushing in hiding in bushes gently moving in the wind or rainbows vaporizing softly in the air and even the rocks and stones are more loudly represented than mankind ever could be.

Deforestation as of 1930. The rainforest specially declined quickly from 1965. De Iguaçu falls are situated in the red circle on the 1997 chart.
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Flying high ...

Whauw, that really is a great place to visit. The Parque das Aves Tropicana at Foz de Iguacu, located just before the entrance of the Iguacu falls. Such a pity this private park also is splitting the visitors into the US (being Brazilian) and THEM (non Brazilian) as far as entrance price is concerned.

In 1995 we already loved this place and it approved so much more over the years. Now you can not only have a look at over 800 species of birds but also see some monkeys, alligators, tarantula's and some snakes.

Okay, the birds running around “free” have cut wings and others still live in (smaller) cages but quite a few have plenty of space to fly around. They will do that in big “Walk through” cages, of which the roof is above the treetops on a more than 8mtrs height. It's not a closed roof either. It's a fence. At the 5 ha. Of the park several of these cages are set. The “Walk Throughs” are, simply said, just big jungle areas that are fenced. It is the birds natural habitat. Having them all here makes it a lot easier to observe and admire them. A lot of them stay put on the balustrade or side walk. Some come real close, hopping on to your feet. Others fly like kamikazes straight to your head, but luckily they always seem to change their mind and end up in the trees instead of your head.

The hummingbird is the one bird you rather hear than that you see them, as quickly as they move their wings. The humming bird is also one of the few birds that can choose by itself to stay inside most of the cages or not. Most of these birds are so tiny they'll fit easily through a lot of holes in the fences.

The Tucans are showing themselves as if they want to say: "What you think is my best side? Right or left?" and they look you straight in the eye. Seeing the big bright colored mouth of the bird you'll treat them with respect.

There are a lot of colorful birds we don't know but it's a feast to look at them. Not always, however, is it a pleasure to hear them. They shout and scream high volume till your ears hurt. The most noisy birds are definitely the parrots. And they are all in one Walk Through cage. It is a loudly cacophony. Entering this cage is on your own risk, the signs says. Please do not take food and put away your (shining) jewelries. They even advice you to take of your glasses!!! The screaming is so intense and the movements so sudden that it scares the hell out of Mighalle. Fabian is trying to protect her and he holds her tied. Together they jump up on a bank when the blue parrot is convinced at least one of us has something he can eat! He first tries the video bag, and then goes after Klarin's shoe. We think Klarin's feet have never been luckier than today, 'cause he's not wearing his sandals today but some real sturdy leather boots. The parrot sits on it for a while and then start picking, picking and picking. He just doesn't stop. He goes on and on, even when Klarin starts walking to the exit. When the parrot finally leaves he triumphs over the shoe as he has managed to tear of a little piece of the leather.

Whow, now it is really time for us to leave the parrot cage!