

I am delighted to say that I have returned from my Brazilian adventure with a thousand stories and have had the most amazing experience.

I have learnt first-hand that the rain forest does exactly what it says, oh boy did it rain. We started out from a pretty village called Campos Neuvos de Cunha and from there rode on the back of a flat-bed 4x4 up into the mountains to around 1400mtrs where we then had a full day trekking to our base for the next couple of days at Rancho Mamalaco. The scenery was stunning but the trail was rather tricky under foot as the rain had turned the path into a stream. I soon found that there was absolutely no point in trying to keep my boots dry so pressed on sloshing through the mud and water, we now have a whole new understanding of the term “fill your boots”! Despite the discomfort it was a wonderful day and ended with a little adventure as the way over the Guaripu River to the pousada was in a little metal cage suspended from a rope, in which you pulled yourself across by hand – very interesting.



Day two brought with it the realisation that with approx. 98% humidity nothing dries and the dry clothes you had put out the night before were dry no longer. It was a special moment putting my cold, wet, muddy boots on and feeling the moisture seep through my clean socks, however, we were wet through within a couple of minutes of leaving. The trek for the day was a circular route taking in the Cachoeira dos Veados waterfall. This route was approx. 11km and I do remember foolishly thinking what would we do for the rest of the day. What I hadn't anticipated was that the route was through the thick of the rainforest and that most of it was a scramble, made even more interesting by the thick mud. At times we had to resort to using ropes to get up and down the slopes as it was too steep and slippery and the tree roots often weren't strong enough to hold your full weight. After the first couple of hours I looked like I had been mud wrestling. It was therefore a bit of relief when we arrived at the waterfall. By the time we returned to the pousada we were drenched and went for an invigorating swim in the rapid flowing river. We were ecstatic to learn that there was hot water to wash with...pure luxury, all by candlelight!

Day 3 was the last day of trekking and the longest day. The rain was very heavy so I put my full waterproofs on thinking that would help – I should have known better. The route was very difficult with



the deepest mud we had encountered, most of the time it came to knee height and every step I took I was relieved when my foot came out with my boot still attached. When there was no mud there were large stones which were covered in green slime with water flowing over the top, needless to say it made the going very tricky. We had to cross the river several times and were occasionally lucky when there was a tree trunk to walk on, other than that we had to wade across



I did take a pretty serious fall and sprained my ankle, the guide ran forward and came back with a mule for me to ride the rest of the route; this turned out to be very exciting and allowed me to look around the beautiful place I was in rather than always looking where to put my feet next. The final part of the river had been turned into a torrent by all of the rain and was much wider than the other parts we had crossed. The group began to get nervous when our guides took themselves off to one side and started conferring and doing much head shaking while looking at the river, never a good confidence booster! In the end they strung a rope across and everyone had to shuffle across

facing up river, chest deep while clinging onto the rope for dear life. I got to ride across on the mule which was quite an experience; it was certainly an experience I will remember for some time. We eventually arrived at the end of the trail and were picked up by mini bus and taken to Paraty to start the kayak section of the trip. We were like giddy children when we emerged bedraggled and muddy from the mini-bus to find we were at a proper hotel with real beds, a shower and even a swimming pool!

The next three days were like a beautiful dream. The paddling was hard work and I am so glad I put in the amount of training I did, it enabled me to fully enjoy the experience.

On day 4 we awoke to a wonderful sunny day and went to collect our 2 man kayaks. We started off in the mangroves and paddled out to the open sea. The sea was very calm and we followed the coast looking for sea turtles and marvelling at the beauty of the coast line. Lunch was a picnic on a deserted golden sandy beach followed by a short walk up to a little waterfall for a power shower in very cold water. That night we camped on the beach near to the home of the local preacher, Orlando and his wife of 40 years, Maria, who gave us a wonderful meal of freshly caught fish, shrimp and squid. We all loved this place so much.

Day 5 was rather overcast and the sea a little more choppy but again we had a lovely day stopping off at another deserted beach...such a tough life. Sadly the easy life ended when it started to rain (heavily) and the next hour or so were pretty hard going but it was very exciting and at the end of the day I had got used to getting wet. We were going to camp on the beach that night but it was raining so heavily and blowing a gale so we ended up pitching our tents under a shelter of a nearby bar.

Day 6 dawned with a clear blue sky and hardly any breeze. We had breakfast at the end of the jetty overlooking the bay, it was simply beautiful. We had a long day paddling but the scenery was stunning and all too soon we were coming to the end of our adventure.

We had 2 days in Rio de Janeiro to gently bring ourselves back to reality and were typical tourists taking in Sugar Loaf Mountain, the Statue of Christ the Redeemer and both the Cococabana and Ipanema beaches.

This has been an interesting challenge in that it challenged me in ways I hadn't anticipated. I was blessed with being part of a small but perfectly balanced group of people who have become good friends. We worked well as a team, particularly during the trickier parts of the trek and everyone seemed to know how to keep each other motivated exactly at the time it was needed. In addition we had a fantastic guide in Christian Fuchs who was lots of fun but kept us all on the straight and narrow.

I would like to say a massive thank you to everyone that has sponsored me. I feel very privileged to have had such a life enriching experience and fully intend to continue fund raising and to take up another challenge in the future. **Thanks once again. Lucinda.**