

November 2011

Emily



From Burlington North to Brazil

An estrangeira in Rancharia

The afternoon of July 18, 2011 was bright and sunny, around 26 degrees. That afternoon was when my adventure truly began as I walked off the plane in Guarulhos airport to find my first host family waiting for me (since my arrival I have found almost every afternoon here is hot and sunny, even if it is the middle of 'winter'). Walking off the plane I was beyond excited as the reality of exchange began to hit me. With my bright red blazer and blonde hair I made my way to the line for 'estrangeiros' and began to understand how I really did stick out in this foreign country. However despite this, and after these past 4 months I've come to feel at home here in this crazy new country.

My home for the year is in a small town of about 20,000 people. Many people tease that my town is home to more cows than people as it is a large farming community. Rancharia, my town is located in the interior of São Paulo State in the South Eastern part of Brazil. São Paulo State has a great diversity from beautiful beaches on the coast to the large Metropolitan city of São Paulo (seventh largest city in the world) to the rural interior. It has a larger population than all of Canada combined in less than 1/40th of the area.

November 2011

Being such a small town everyone knows each other, creating that great small-town feel. I love the feeling of walking down the street (really everything here is walking distance) and hearing 'Oi Emily, tudo bem?' from someone I know. Also in the centre of the town is a beautiful, giant yellow church and each hour the bells ring throughout the city. When most people think about an exchange to Brazil they picture the amazing beaches of the coast. I have come to think of Brazil in the image of my own beautiful small town.

Brazilian people are renowned for their kindness and openness. I have found this to be true especially for the four families that will host me over my year here. My first host family, The Rodrigues were an incredible, typical Brazilian family. They loved to have family parties and churrascos (giant BBQs with mass amounts of beer and meat) which really helped me get to know everyone. I had 3 host siblings which was always a lot of fun. My oldest host sister left for her exchange in Germany 2 weeks after my arrival and we had the best 2 weeks together as she got ready for exchange and I got started on mine. My other 2 host siblings, Duda (11) and Jose Renato (9) were absolutely great and we were always laughing. Halfway through October I moved to my second family the Da Silvas. They are lovely people and their house even has a pool which has definitely helped as the summer months of December and January approach! I will be moving again in January and then finally once more in April. I've met my next host families and can't wait to live with them as well.

I began school two weeks after my arrival. Starting school was a bit intimidating. I knew that my class had about 18 students that had been in the same class together since kindergarten and I also had been warned school here was very different than school in Canada. I really had no reason to be anxious as the 18 students in my class were so welcoming when I handed out my Canada pencils and introduced myself. They were right however about the difference between school here and in Canada. For starters of course is the noise level. Not to mention you call your teachers by their first names, you never switch classrooms, and you have no course selection. You take about 10 classes all year round, and the school year starts in February. I was in the final year of school called Terceiring Objective at Colegio Creativo de Rancharia. School went each day from 7 until 12 so that students went home for the largest meal of the day, which is lunch.

November 2011

When school starts up again after the Summer holidays I will be doing the final year of school over again however this time at a different school.

Travelling is definitely one of my favourite things to do here and I am so lucky to have had so many opportunities. At the end of August I went to my district's RYE orientation at a resort called Terra Parque. We spent 3 days swimming, zip lining, playing soccer (it is Brazil after all) and so much more with 55 exchange students from over 10 different countries (including 4 Canadians!). In October I went with Rotex to Brotas a city known for its river rafting. White water rafting, tubing, churrascos, and swimming sum up the weekend. I've also travelled to the city of Maringá in the state south of mine, Paraná. I stayed with my host aunt and uncle and got to see much of the large and beautiful city. I visited a Buddhist temple, went to a park with wild monkeys and a giant cathedral. I really enjoyed seeing the contrast between my small town of 20,000 to the large city of almost 400,000.

The best trip of all however was called `Grande Viagem`. I went with 30 exchange students for 2 weeks to tour the Amazon, the northeastern coast and a quick stop in the nations capital, Brasilia. This trip was absolutely amazing and I made so many memories to keep for a lifetime. In the Amazon we stayed on a boat on the Rio Negro for 4 nights. We visited a native tribe and a local village, swam with pink dolphins, fished for piranhas, caught cayman alligators, and so much more! In the capital of Amazonas, Manaus we visited a theatre, went to a giant fish market, and hiked to ancient caves and waterfalls. Our next stop was Fortaleza on the coast known for its breathtaking beaches. There we spent our time enjoying the sun and the ocean. For a day we also went to a water park called Beach Park. Beach Park a slide called the 'Insano', which is both the fastest and tallest water slide in the world. After a few days in Fortaleza we travelled out of the city to meet up with a set of dune-buggies. They were our transportation for an hour to arrive in the paradise of Jericoacoara. Jericoacoara is a picturesque town on the coast surrounded by kilometres of nothing but massive sand dunes. The town is created for professional kite and windsurfers. In the middle of a nature reserve the town's streets are paved of sand and street lights are prohibited. Each night everyone in the town goes to the top of the highest sand dune to watch the sunset over the ocean, it truly was a paradise. As our trip was almost over we had one final stop in Brasilia. There we toured the city and saw many of the famous buildings created by Oscar Niemeyer. Finally after a 21 hour bus ride we made it back home!

November 2011

In my opinion one of the most beautiful parts of Brazil is the language. Portuguese is an absolutely gorgeous language. As one of the Romance languages (sisters to Italian, Spanish and French) it seems to just elegantly float off the lips of the native speakers. At times my admiration for this language diminishes as everyone around me begins to speak miles a minute, of course all at the same time. My reading and writing skills have also greatly improved I just lack in the many, many rules of grammar. Speaking is my area of most difficulty however I have reached a point where if I don't know a word I can explain it with the rest of my vocabulary. Believe me when I say there is no better feeling than when someone asks you how many years you've been studying Portuguese only to reply 4 months.

Life here has come pretty easily. I am awed by Brazil each day as it brings something new, whether it be a new adventure or a new food! Exchange of course has its ups and downs. I had been expecting the worse before my arrival here but was pleasantly surprised at not have any major issues with the new culture and hardly any troubles with homesickness. I've learned that most of my Mum's little sayings have turned out to be true, and that you really do have to take the good with the bad. I know my time here is limited so I try to make the most of each moment. I've already come to realize how much I will miss hearing the birds when I wake up or sitting around a churrasco late at night with friends. When I remember this time last year I honestly could not picture myself living in Brazil especially after receiving 3 different countries as an outbound. Living here now though I could not see myself anywhere else. Whichever outbound gets Brazil this year is in for a treat!

These past 4 months have flown by. I've seen so much, done so much and learned so much. There are so many people that have made this possible however and I can't thank you all enough. Rotary Districts 7080 & 4510 as well as the clubs of Burlington North and Rancharia I am forever grateful for all you have given me. Of course all the people I've met here that have helped me grow and adapt to this new world as well as my amazing friends and family back home, thank you so much! Muito obrigada!

Love from Afar,

Emily

