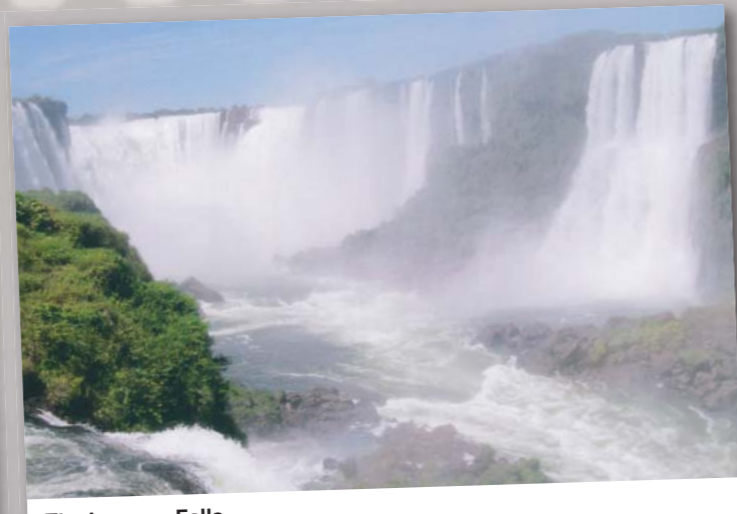


Two Cities

Magical Mystery Tour in South America



George Palmer pictured with Major Ricardo Gambarani



The Iguassu Falls



Standing room only, but at least there is a blue safety strap!

Like many recent retirees George Palmer was seeking a suitable retirement adventure, that proverbial 'holiday of a lifetime' everyone dreams of. After much thought and no decision the answer came from a former workmate.

George takes up the story:

Braz De-Lima, a Metropolitan Police officer (and former Brazilian police officer from Sao Paulo) asked me if I wanted to meet him on March 16th. 'Where?' I asked. 'Sao Paulo airport, I'm visiting relatives out there for a week but I'll hang around if you want to come over.' How could I refuse? So with no itinerary at all, I booked a return flight and gave myself two weeks in Brazil. Braz assured me an IPA element would be included in the trip, which he explained intriguingly would not involve any input from me. We didn't stay in Soa Paulo but took a connecting flight to Foz do Iguacu in the

south western part of the country. This frontier town sits right on the border of Argentina and Paraguay.

The town has grown and modernised in recent years thanks to the huge Itaipu hydro electric project that Brazil shares with Paraguay, but it also has another gem that it shares with Argentina. The largest set of waterfalls in the world. After a visit to the Itaipu dam during which my jaw dropped at the sheer scale of the thing and the inland sea it has created we visited the falls. In one day Braz and I saw how man can create mega structures but cannot and will never compete with the beauty and power of nature. The falls were awesome, dozens of them turning a gently meandering river instantly into a deafening maelstrom of water and creating an up draught that literally rained upwards drenching us. The wildlife was no less exciting ranging from exotic birds, raccoons and millions upon millions of beautifully coloured butterflies. We visited the waterfalls in the Argentinean National Park and if anything this was even more impressive in terms of scale. In rainforest covering hundreds of square miles, pristinely unspoilt, it was quite the most beautiful place I've been to.

The town of Ciudad del Este in Paraguay was the opposite. Horrendously built up and overcrowded it is probably the biggest bazaar

in the world. We walked around some of the stores and every type of electrical goods and gadgets were for sale at mind bogglingly cheap prices. Some gadgets I'd never even seen before, but I wasn't going to part company with my credit card in this place. It was a relief to get back over the border and head back to the hotel and a swim in the pool. Braz was giving nothing away and we were in the airport departure lounge before I discovered the next stop on this mystery tour was to be Manaus, the capitol of Amazonia.

This city sits on the Negro River which runs into the Amazon at a place called the meeting of the waters. Here the inky black waters of the Negro meet with the lighter Amazon waters and gives the impression that a huge pipette of ink has been dripped into the river and is swirling around the confluence. We took a traditional open two tiered river boat to this point and beyond into the Amazon. After a meal at a floating restaurant run by local Indians we jumped into a motorised canoe and were guided through the rain forest. The local caimans eyed us greedily from among giant water lilies and we spotted a number of huge fire ant nests. We kept a respectful distance.

When we returned to Manaus, Braz negotiated a flight in a sea plane and off we went with

anywhere in the world. Hell would have to freeze over before I take to the roads in that city, so Braz drove me like a local to his sister's flat near Interlagos.

More surprises were in store. Arriving shortly after us was Braz's ex boss retired police Colonel Juscelino Ibsen Ferreira. Now Braz knows I am a keen fan of Formula 1 racing and a visit to the Interlagos circuit was always on the cards from day one. Indeed I thought that would be the first place we'd visit on my arrival in Brazil. Unbeknown to me Colonel Ferreira had grander ideas for this visit. He drove us to Interlagos police station and introduced us to the station commander who assigned a police car and two officers to us. We were driven to the circuit manager's office and introduced to his deputy, Celso Xaueia. The next hour and a half was

probably the most glamorous hour and a half either of us have experienced. Celso took us first to the race directors' suite which afforded us a panoramic view of the whole circuit with Soa Paulo city as a backdrop. Next was the timekeeping office and then the VIP area above the pit straight where during race day rich punters part with £3,000 just to get in. Food and drinks are extra. Our police escort stuck to us like glue. Next we climbed the spiral staircase that the winners ascend to the podium and posed in victorious fashion, sadly without trophies or Champagne.

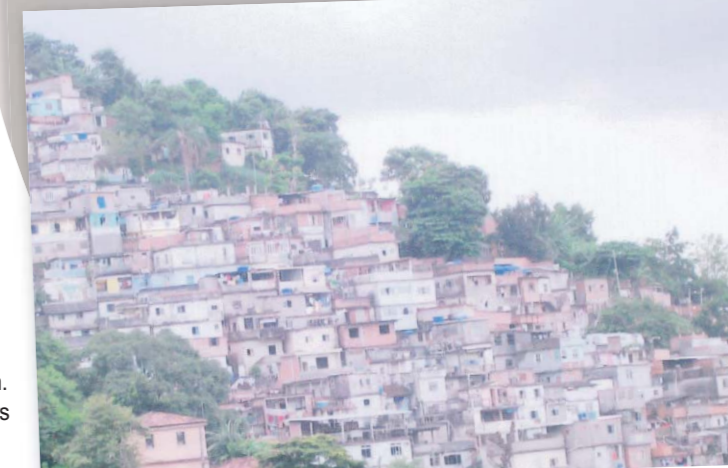
But Hey, no complaining! Our guide who seemed in no rush whatsoever then took us for a walk along the pit straight. There were preparations going on for the first day of free practice in the Indy Car Championship and we were allowed to nose around the Red Bull team and examine the cars and the team. After watching a number of cars lap and visiting the famous Senna S bend it was with a huge amount of gratitude that we said goodbye to Celso and

returned to the police station. After presenting Colonel Ferreira and our police escort with small IPA tokens another surprise lay in store. A visit to the Sao Paulo Air Support Unit, the Policia Militaire or 'The Eagles' as they prefer to be known as.

The Eagles are based as far across town as you can get from Interlagos and it was rush hour when we set out. Needless to say I once again showed my cautious nature by declining to drive and it was an exhausted Braz that finally arrived at the airbase an hour and a half later. We were met by their Commanding Officer, Major Ricardo Gambaroni who couldn't have been a nicer fellow. He showed us around the hangers and some of the fleet, which included small training helicopters and single and twin engine aircraft. His enthusiasm marked himself out as a man who loves his job.

After the tour of the hanger Major Gambaroni escorted us to the operations room and introduced us to the two crews on standby. At Major Gambaroni's insistence we stayed and shared pizza that the crew's had ordered. Major Gambaroni is no stranger to our own Metropolitan Police ASU as he had visited the UK a few years ago and been attached to them as a pilot. After a two hour visit I presented Major Gambaroni with an IPA plaque for the crews mess room and we bade farewell. And it wasn't just farewell to the Eagles, it was farewell to Brazil. Two weeks had just shot by and the next day I flew back to the recession. It definitely was an action packed mystery tour.

George Palmer, Two Cities Branch.



Favela, Rio De Janeiro, 'City of God'