

South America Travel Journal – Volume 1

Saturday, March 7, 2026 – Buenos Aires, Argentina

Just as we were finally getting over the jetlag from our last trip to the South Pacific, we decided the obvious solution was another trip. After doing laundry and repacking, we boarded an overnight flight and landed in Buenos Aires, Argentina this morning.

Our flight from Miami was delayed a couple of times after we were already onboard. First there was a “VIP,” presumably President Trump, arriving at the airport. This forced a ramp closure, which meant our luggage could not be loaded until he was cleared. Apparently, Air Force One gets priority over our socks and underwear.

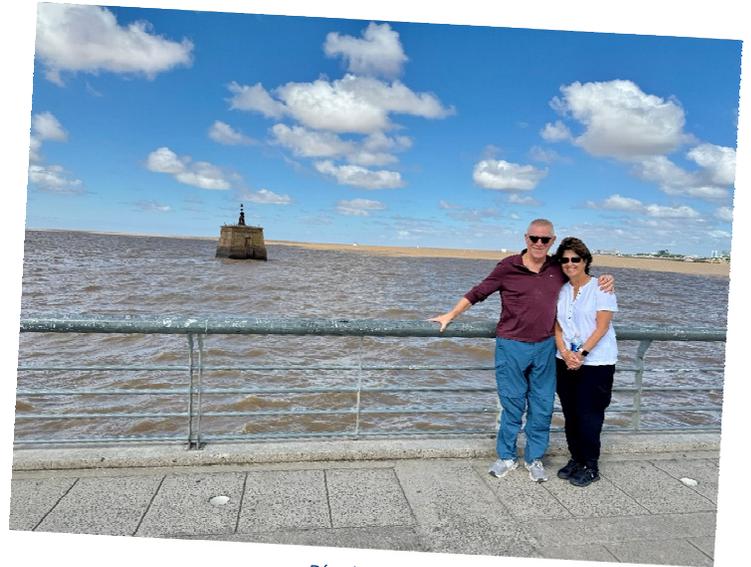
Then, just as we were taxiing to the runway, there was a leak in the galley, forcing us to return to the gate for repairs. At that point we were slightly concerned the flight might be cancelled and we would miss boarding our cruise (more on that shortly). Our 9:00pm flight finally departed after midnight. We landed at 10:30am this morning and briefly convinced ourselves we weren't exhausted. That illusion did not last long.

The name Argentina comes from the Latin word *argentum*, meaning silver. Early Spanish explorers believed the region held great silver riches and named the wide estuary the Río de la Plata, or the “River of Silver.” While most of the actual silver was mined far away in the Andes, the Río de la Plata region became an important transshipment route where silver from the interior was moved downriver and shipped across the Atlantic to Spain. The silver wasn't here, but the name stuck anyway.

Argentina has one of the largest Jewish communities in the world because it became a major destination for Jewish immigrants in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. As Jews fled persecution and pogroms in Eastern Europe, Argentina actively encouraged immigration and offered land and opportunity. Over time, many Jews moved to cities like Buenos Aires, where a vibrant Jewish cultural, religious, and intellectual life developed that remains significant today.



Montevideo Holocaust Memorial



Río de la Plata

After touring around Buenos Aires for a few hours and visiting several Jewish heritage sites, we boarded the Oceania Marina for a ten-day cruise that will take us up the coasts of Uruguay and Brazil, ending in Rio de Janeiro.

Sunday, March 8, 2026 – Montevideo, Uruguay

This morning, we docked in Montevideo, the capital and largest city of Uruguay. Uruguay stands out in South America for being small, stable, and unusually progressive. It has long been known for strong democratic institutions, low corruption, and a high standard of living. It also does not observe daylight savings time, so we didn't lose the hour last

night that we would have lost had we been home. No wonder we woke up feeling so well rested. Or maybe it was because we went to bed at 8:30pm due to complete exhaustion.

Montevideo is the country's main economic, political, and cultural center. The city features a mix of historic colonial architecture, modern buildings, and a long waterfront promenade along the Río de la Plata.

Our Jewish History Walking Tour showed us Montevideo's rich Jewish heritage, tracing the footsteps of immigrants through historic synagogues and cultural centers. It was a reminder that wherever Jews settled, they immediately built a synagogue and argued about something.

We visited the Memorial del Holocausto del Pueblo Judío (Holocaust Memorial for all you English speakers), the first national Holocaust memorial in Latin America. Its design features a series of stone pillars and fractured walls meant to evoke the destruction of European Jewish communities. Lunch was in the Old Town, where most of the shops were closed on Sunday.



La Mano

Monday, March 9, 2026 – Punta Del Este, Uruguay

Today's port is Punta del Este, the "St. Tropez of South America." It seems every beach town compares itself to somewhere in France. It's a seaside resort city on a peninsula in southeastern Uruguay, known for its beaches and modern high-rises, yachts, upscale lifestyle, and vibrant nightlife, which attracts wealthy tourists from across Latin America and beyond. If I was that wealthy, I would just go to St. Tropez.

We did a tour which first took us through the upscale neighborhoods of San Rafael, Cantagril, and Beverly Hills. Apparently, they couldn't come up with their own original names for neighborhoods. Next, we visited La Barra del Maldonado, a former fishing village known for its unique bridge that mimics ocean waves. At Playa Brava we saw the iconic "La Mano," a giant hand sculpture emerging from the sand. We concluded at



Casapueblo

Casapueblo, the whimsical cliffside villa designed by artist Carlos Páez Vilaró.

It's part Mediterranean fantasy, part Dr. Seuss acid trip.

Tomorrow is an "at sea" day. Translation: forced relaxation. If there weren't days like this, Lori probably wouldn't travel with me. So I hesitantly embrace them. Briefly. I'll pick up when we get to Brazil.

Love, Lori and Stephen



La Barra del Maldonado

South America Travel Journal – Volume 2

Wednesday, March 11, 2026 – Itajaí, Brazil

After a day of forced relaxation at sea yesterday, today we added a new country to our count: Brazil. It's the largest country in South America and the fifth largest in the world, covering nearly half of the South American continent. We're going to be hard-pressed to see all of it on this trip, but we'll give it our best shot. Brazil borders almost every country in South America, sharing borders with ten countries, missing only Chile and Ecuador. It's so big that the northern point of Brazil is closer to Canada than it is to the southern point of the country, and the eastern point is closer to Africa than it is to the western point. Is that big enough for you?

Colonized by Portugal beginning in the 1500's, Brazil remains the only Portuguese-speaking country in the Americas. This means we've now transitioned from Spanish misunderstanding to Portuguese complete confusion.

Our first port in Brazil was Itajaí, a major port city in the southern state of Santa Catarina. We drove to Balneário Camboriú, a seaside city whose name we still can't pronounce even after hearing it a hundred times. There we rode a cable car into the Atlantic Forest, a highly biodiverse South American biome stretching along Brazil's coast into Paraguay and Argentina. In scientific terms, this means there are a lot of plants and animals there that we can't identify.



After walking to a couple of scenic lookout points and taking the mandatory photos, we descended by cable car to Laranjeiras Station and Orange Beach, a beautiful beach tucked along a calm bay. After taking a short walk on the beach, we boarded a slightly hokey pirate ship that ferried us back to our bus.



We then returned to Itajaí, where we had lunch at the Mercado Público de Itajaí (Public Market), an historic fish market building which has managed to retain odors from the previous century in some parts. That's where we had our first caipirinha, Brazil's national cocktail. It's a delicious mix of cachaça (sugarcane spirit), sugar, and lime, served over ice. We'll be conducting further research on this beverage over the next several days.

Thursday, March 12, 2026 – Santos/São Paulo, Brazil

Today we docked at Santos, a major coffee exporting port and the cruise gateway to São Paulo, Brazil's largest and most populous city. São Paulo is one of the largest metropolitan areas in the world, with over twenty million people in its metro region. This translates into a lot of traffic.

We made the two-hour drive inland to São Paulo in that traffic and did a Jewish heritage tour. São Paulo has a rich cultural heritage shaped by numerous immigrant groups, including large Japanese, Italian, Korean, and Portuguese communities. It's also home to half of the Jewish community living in Brazil, so it has synagogues, kosher restaurants, Jewish-oriented hotels, cultural centers, and strong

opinions about how things should be done. We explored the neighborhoods of “Higienópolis” and “Bom Retiro” where Jewish groups mostly settled in the late 19th-century and first half of the 20th-century.

We stopped at a Chabad house where we met Rosie from New York, plus the dozen other people she had to introduce us to before we could get out of there. We also visited the oldest synagogue of São Paulo that now houses a museum of Jewish immigration; the Holocaust Memorial; the Center for Jewish Culture, and The Jewish Museum. We heard about the Jews who fled from Portugal to Holland to Brazil to North America during religious persecution in the 17th century, helping found “New Amsterdam,” now known as New York City. Too bad Jews didn’t get frequent-flyer miles for all the times we had to flee somewhere.

We finished in São Paulo at a 103-year-old restaurant that serves Bauru, a classic São Paulo sandwich with roast beef and three kinds of melted cheese. Considering the restaurant had been serving these sandwiches since it opened, I figured it had to be worth a try. Lori didn’t; she had a hamburger. It was good, but not worth mentioning in my travel journal. Our waiter has been working there for 35 years, and he’s the new guy! We returned to the ship just before departure, which is apparently important.

Friday, March 13, 2026 – Parati, Brazil

Today we were in Parati, a well-preserved Portuguese colonial town on Brazil's Costa Verde (Green Coast). It’s a UNESCO World Heritage site known for its historic center with cobblestone streets, colonial architecture, and surrounding natural beauty. We were signed up for a jeep tour of the area, but a 45-minute tender ride to shore



and lack of taxis once we got there caused us to miss the tour. Instead, we wandered around the historic area of town, and, in furtherance of our research of cachaça, sampled more caipirinhas and other Brazilian alcoholic beverages; day-drinking in pursuit of research. After we twisted our ankles on the cobblestone streets to the point that we practically needed medical attention, we took a horse-drawn carriage ride around the historic area’s car-free streets lined with art galleries, shops, and old churches. We had lunch in a traditional Brazilian restaurant before returning to the ship.



More of Brazil to follow. Also, don’t forget you can find journals and itineraries from all our past trips at www.margolistravel.com.

Love, Lori and Stephen

South America Travel Journal – Volume 3

Saturday, March 14, 2026 – Ilha Grande, Brazil

Ilha Grande ("Big Island") is a forested, car-free island off the coast of Rio de Janeiro known for its beautiful beaches, the Atlantic rainforest, and hiking trails. The island was once used as a pirate hideout, leper colony, and prison. For centuries, nobody came here voluntarily. Real estate values have improved considerably since then. Now it's a nature reserve packed with tourists. We visited the ruins of the old prison (incarceration becomes more attractive once it's over), hiked jungle trails, saw the original stone aqueduct, and admired Black Beach's dark quartz sand. What was once exile is now a bucket list destination.



After our walking tour we strolled through Vila do Abraão, the main village, past beachside cafés and little shops to a restaurant right on the beach. There we tested its caipirinhas (they passed) and had a delicious lunch of fish and shrimp with bananas with a couple we met from Miami. Brazil



continues to perform very well in our cocktail research program.

Sunday, March 15, 2026 – Búzios, Brazil

Búzios was a quiet fishing village until Brigitte Bardot visited in 1964. After that, it became a chic seaside resort town. Amazing what one French actress can do for property values. Local real estate agents remain grateful.



We cruised around the beaches and islands of the Búzios peninsula on a Bahian-style schooner, pausing at Ilha Feia and Praia da Tartaruga for swimming and snorkeling. The weather, water and scenery were spectacular. The snorkeling ability of the passengers was less consistent.

After returning to shore we walked along Rua das Pedras, the main street along the beach, now packed with boutiques, galleries, and restaurants. We stopped for lunch, naturally, at Madame Bardot restaurant with a couple we met from Maryland. If Bardot could turn the town into a resort, the least we could do was eat lunch in her honor.

We're also finding that the caipirinhas keep getting better the longer we're in *Brasil* — the local spelling, not the gringo version. At this rate, by the end of the trip they should be exceptional. Rehab may be required.

Love, Lori and Stephen





Monday, March 16, 2026 – Rio de Janeiro, Brazil

We arrived in Rio de Janeiro this morning, the grand finale of the cruise. Rio is a major Brazilian city famous for its stunning natural setting, iconic sights, famous beaches, and vibrant culture, including Carnival and samba. It appears to have everything, often all at once.

Despite its fame, Rio's name actually comes from a mistake. When Portuguese explorers arrived in January 1502, they thought the entrance to Guanabara Bay was the mouth of a river.

They named the place "Rio

de Janeiro," meaning "River of January." There is no river. The name, however, stuck.

For nearly two centuries Rio served as Brazil's capital, and for a brief period in the early 1800s it was even the capital of Portugal when the Portuguese royal family fled Napoleon and moved the entire court across the Atlantic. It's probably the only time in history that a European empire was run from a tropical beach. In 1960, the government moved inland to Brasília, a planned modernist city, presumably with fewer distractions.

We had a full-day private tour today. The traffic in Rio is horrible; occasionally it moves forward, occasionally it moves sideways, and often it doesn't move at all. Fortunately, our tour guide and driver, Rodrigo, wasn't deterred by closed streets, barricades or questionably legal shortcuts, so we made surprisingly good time.



Our first stop was Sugarloaf Mountain (Pão de Açúcar), a massive granite peak rising 1,299 feet above the harbor. The cable cars to the top opened in 1912, making them one of the earliest cable car systems in the world. Not a reassuring tidbit of information. We tried to go early to avoid the crowds, but so did everyone else. It was packed, but the view was spectacular.

Our next stop was at the Christ the Redeemer statue. We took the train up Corcovado Mountain through Tijuca Forest to the base of the statue

overlooking the city. With its arms stretched wide over Rio, it feels as if the statue is either blessing the city or directing traffic, or both. It was more crowded than Sugarloaf Mountain,



with everyone jockeying to get a photo without hundreds of other tourists in the picture trying to do the same thing.



We stopped for lunch in the artsy hillside neighborhood Santa Teresa, with its cobbled streets, colorful colonial houses, artist studios, and quirky shops. We finished at the Selarón Steps (Escadaria Selarón), a staircase of 215 steps covered in brightly colored mosaic tiles created by Chilean artist Jorge Selarón. By this point we had climbed, walked, and photographed enough for one day.

That was all on our first day in Rio. Obviously, pacing is not our strength.

Tuesday, March 17, 2026 – Rio de Janeiro, Brazil

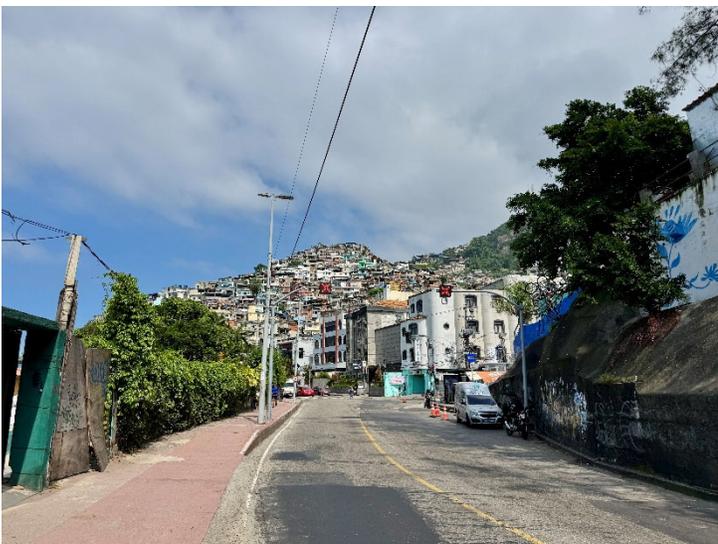
We disembarked the ship this morning and transferred to a hotel on Ipanema Beach. We immediately started looking for the girl from here. We're not exactly sure what she looks like, but she's tall and tan and young and lovely, and when she walks, she's like a samba. Fortunately, there are a lot of girls here who match that description.

The beaches of Rio are known not just for their beauty, but also for reminding visitors that they probably should have spent more time at the gym. We started at Ipanema Beach and continued to Copacabana Beach, where we had lunch, furthered our research into caipirinhas, and strolled along the famous mosaic sidewalk. We blended in perfectly with the locals, except for the cameras, hats, backpacks, sneakers and sunscreen. And the fact that we weren't wearing thongs.

In the late afternoon, we did a food tour sampling various Brazilian dishes containing ingredients we recognized and several we chose not to ask about. We ended up at a square in Pedra do Sal. One of the couples on the tour was from Ireland, so we were able to celebrate St. Patrick's Day with the real McCoy.

Wednesday, March 18, 2026 – Rio de Janeiro, Brazil

A lot of people warned us about how dangerous Rio is and told us to be very careful and avoid the bad areas. The slums in Rio, called favelas, are built on the sides of mountains and are notorious, densely populated communities marked by poverty and long-standing issues with crime. So, naturally, we took a walking tour through the Vidigal favela, one of several tours offered in Rio's slums. The things we do for our readers!



Vidigal is part of Rio de Janeiro's favela pacification program, launched in 2008 and aimed at dismantling drug gangs through Pacifying Police Units—establishing permanent, community-based policing to improve security in areas long controlled by traffickers. While the program initially reduced crime rates, it has faced ongoing challenges, including renewed violence, allegations of police abuse, and limited infrastructure investment.

We took motorcycle rides to the top of the favela. This seemed like a perfectly reasonable decision at the time. Then we walked down narrow pathways between the buildings. The favelas are controlled by mafia-like gangs, and at one point we passed through an area patrolled by

men carrying AK-47s. Our guide, Robinson, told us to remove our sunglasses, as they don't want anyone wearing Meta glasses taking photos of them.

Along the way we saw schools, shops, bars, restaurants, and a single hospital that serves as the primary source of healthcare for roughly 50,000 residents. Needless to say, we stood out slightly. It was also a sobering reminder of how

much poverty exists there.

That brings

us to the end of our South America trip. We fly home tonight. We've added a new country, seen some remarkable places, and continued our ongoing research into local cocktails with generally positive results. As always, we're grateful for the opportunity to travel and to share these experiences with all of you. Until the next trip (which is sooner than you think).

Love, Lori and Stephen

