
ProjectsAbroad

B R A Z I L NEWSLETTER



AUGUST 2010

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Linda from Austria with her dance students Project: Espaço Múltiplo Orla

A Note from the Editor...

Ola! Hello all! This is Paula, the new Assistant Manager for Brazil!! I am so excited to be part of the team and to welcome you to the very first edition of the Brazil Newsletter!

August in Brazil is winter time. For us here in Niterói, Rio de Janeiro, that means temperatures are at their lowest this month, usually between a wonderful 22 and 30 degrees!

Over the last few weeks, volunteers have been working on various extra activities to keep the energetic kids and teens from the orphanages and care centres entertained during their winter holidays. Trips to the beach, camping, football championships against the volunteers, dance workshops, kite making workshops and English through Drama classes are just some of the extra special activities that ran this month!

New placements came into swing with a new community centre opening for English teaching volunteers which is fantastic, a gardening and urban agriculture project has begun, and a medical volunteer was shadowing one of Rio's top surgeons!

We also all got together to paint the AMAS boys orphanage, to redecorate the interior of the building and got covered in paint! It was good fun and the orphanage looks so much better now.

There is a lot of work to be done! And we are excited to share our stories and experiences with you! Please let me take this opportunity to invite you to find us on facebook, through the Projects Abroad Brazil Official Group where you can find me under Paula Brazil, or read our blogs at www.mytripblog.org. If you would like to share your stories, poems, art, memories, ideas, or pictures with us through our newsletter, please get in touch with me with your very welcome ideas! You can e-mail me at: paulaandreewithc@projects-abroad.org.

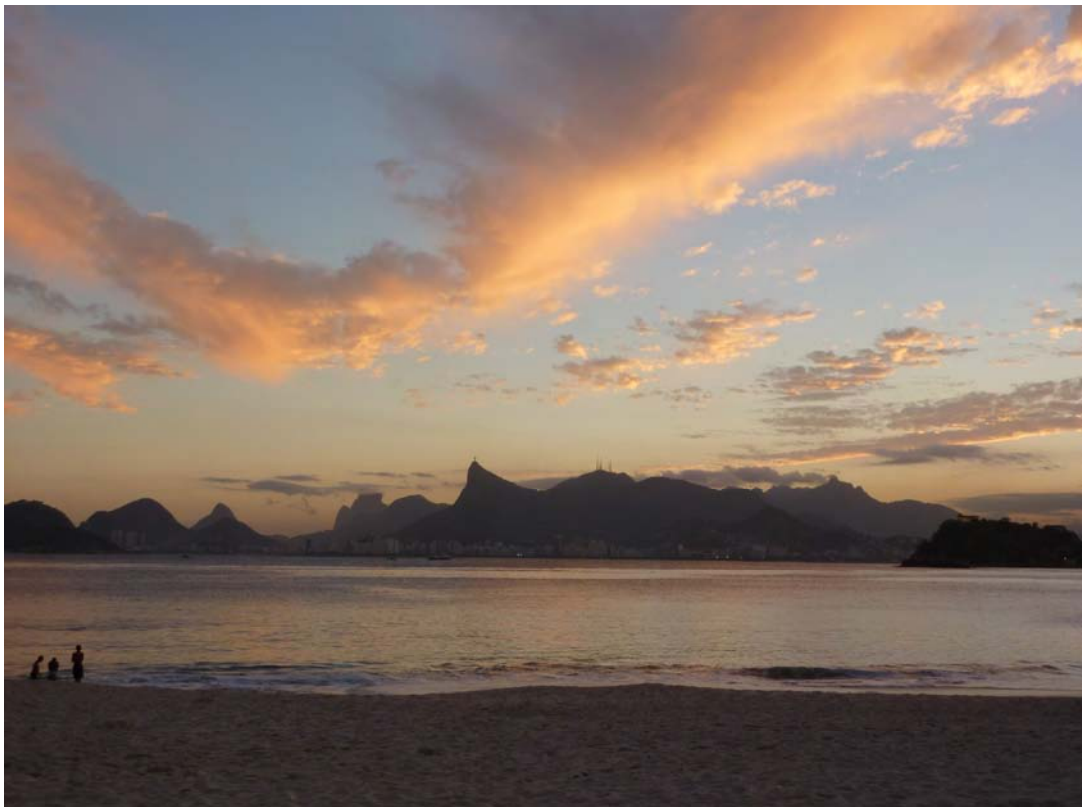
Please note that for legal reasons and to protect the children and young people of our projects, many placements have asked us not to publish photographs on the internet, so our newsletter boast less photographs of children to respect those wishes.

Happy reading! Enjoy!

BRAZIL INSIDE OUT:

Culture Corner

Brazil boasts one of the most diverse cultural mixes in the world. As a place of great natural bounty and mineral wealth, Brazil is an attractive destination for those seeking opportunity and wealth. However, like many histories that involve the quest for material wealth and colonial expansion, Brazil's people have been subject to complex histories of displacement and Brazil's history is chequered with stories of exploitation; indeed, European colonisers involved Brazil heavily in the African slave trade, with thousands of African men, women and children being taken from their homeland to work the new and unyielding Brazilian coffee and sugar plantations. Along with the creation of these hugely profitable industries came the continuing displacement of indigenous Brazilian people, whose local knowledge, language and intimate connection with Brazil's landscape were lost as industry took over. Sadly, this displacement continues today with the hugely profitable and corrupt logging industry that is a constant threat to one of Brazil's most treasured and revered asset, namely, the Amazon rainforest.



View of Rio from Icarai beach, Niteroi

A silver-lining to Brazil's colonial past comes in the form of the influences that so many cultural groups brought to Brazil. Each cultural group brought, and continues to bring, limitless resources of cultural knowledge, which mix together to form a unique explosive energy and joy which is essentially Brazilian. The things about Brazil that attract so much attention- samba, capoeira and carnival, to name but a few- have come about through the mixing of cultural influences and do not have one single cultural origin. Rather, Brazil has been the place where things, fed with natural exuberance of the landscape and an essential optimism, come together with explosive consequences. It is essentially this energy that Brazil is famous for overseas; we are fed with pictures of the famous Rio de Janeiro carnival and the immense Botafogo football stadium which portray Brazil as a place of unbounded energy. To those abroad, it must seem that Brazilians have found the secret to a carefree existence. All this is true; Brazil does indeed have a joyous energy that is hard to match, but to see Brazil in this single-faceted, simple way is surely to brush under the carpet some important issues that Brazil tackles daily.

The discrepancy between the rich and poor in Brazil is one of World's largest. Poverty and extreme wealth live side by side, separated only by fences and security guards. It is due to this uneven distribution of wealth that Brazil is often portrayed as a dangerous and unstable place. Many of us will be familiar with the term 'favela', meaning an unsolicited shanty town or slum that springs up within a city. Indeed, Brazil has its share of shanty towns - brightly coloured, higgledy-piggledy sprawls that appear on every tourist's postcard of Rio de Janeiro. These unofficial towns do suffer their (often very public) lion's share of strife, with the level of drug crime and drug-related murders at an alarmingly high rate. Lack of sanitation and access to basics such as education and health care are pitifully lacking. It would be fair to question the existence of such towns, as Brazil is one of the world's fastest growing economies along with China and India. Indeed, it has come to the World's attention that something must be done to improve living conditions in the 'favelas' of Brazil.

Projects Abroad believe unequivocally that it is in these intense, loving and hospitable communities, known by some as the 'favelas', that the true hope and future of Brazil resides. The warmth and strength of these communities is a constant inspiration to us. We know that we can learn as much from observing these communities as those who partake in our projects learn from us. Our aim is not to dwell on the negatives of the communities that we work with, but to focus on the positives, of which there are many. The spirit of communal learning and sharing of skills which gave birth to the music and dancing that the whole world loves is very much in evidence. If talent and communal spirit are given a constructive framework in which to flourish, then the possibilities of Brazil are endless.

FEATURE: An Italian Inspiration

AMAS for boys is an orphanage for boys from 14-18 years old, located in the outskirts of Niteroi, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. Over the last year, Projects Abroad have built a relationship with this home as a care placement, where our international volunteers spend time with the boys on various projects and activities. A lot of the experience of this care placement is spending quality time with the 11 boys, making friendships, allowing a cultural exchange to take place, playing football and teaching languages; and volunteers have used their creativity to invent all sorts of activities from pizza making to gardening, from English through drama to homework assistance and maths groups.



The day we Painted Amas Boys orphanage

One very special project has been taking place over the last few months. Our Italian Volunteer, Armando, is a poet, a writer, and an inspiration for these boys. He has been working with the group to write a book, which has been made up of different chapters: Each week the group would look at a theme such as Love, Violence, Trust, Friendship and all of the boys would write their ideas and thoughts. Armando has now beautifully woven together their words to make a book which is currently being printed! This has been a special and appreciated project that has given the boys an incentive to write, to think, to share, to dream and to express themselves in a free and wonderful way.

Congratulations Armando, you have made your mark and will be missed!!

Armando has shared some ideas of his experience with us...it is written carefully by hand on a small piece of paper, and is says the following:

"It would be easier only to describe my experience here in Brazil: There is a House in Sao Goncalo (Rio), with 11 guys, a supervisor etc...It would be easier and better. But there is more: much more. There is the daily miracle of a humiliated life that is reborn and finds a new dignity for itself. There is the miracle of a life that never dies.

There are 11 guys: Aldeir, Mauricio, Ruan, Oliveira, Josmar, Moreira, Rodrigues, Everton, David, Daniel and Edoardo, who are now a family for each other. 11 guys that play and joke like friends and brothers. 11 guys that can teach us a lot of things about life: the real life, more than a thousand books or a thousand teachers. 11 guys that have never lost their souls and humanity, when all the world seemed to want their innocent spirit. 11 lives that are winning against the deepest abyss. Maybe there is not the answer to all of life. Maybe, there is not the answer you are looking for.

But there is a light that you can find here, in this house of Sao Goncalo. There is a spirit of new humanity that runs on wings so strong that no sky can scare it!!! There is a way that conducts to a point of the soul that we dream but do not know. It's a mystery of pain and beauty, that they are ready to teach us, only if we are ready to be their friends. There is a warmth that can touch each dejected humanity.

If this is not enough to persuade you to try this kind of experience, then I don't have other words, and your fear has already won. But remember: fear stops life. The bravery to live it will improve you as a human being. If you have a doubt, I tell you: be stronger! You only need to make your first step. What you can find here will be yours for the rest of your life.
Armando Ballotta.

Feature: AMAS for Girls

By Virginia Merz

I have been here for three weeks now and I clearly remember the feeling I had the first time I stepped into AMAS. Even though everyone was really welcoming and warm I felt out of place, a stranger. But I guess that's how everyone feels when they dive into a world that is not theirs, into a strong, bonded family. Day by day, the transparent wall fell and what at the beginning seemed impossible, now is. I don't know exactly when it happened but one day I entered the room and 12 little pairs of arms hugged me with such honest happiness that I realized it clicked.

What before was just a respectful fear, distantly analyzing me, became interest and curiosity. It started with a simple dance class which helped them to have fun with something they liked, but actually spending time and patience on it (no class was shorter than half an hour, an incredible amount of concentration for them). They're full of energy, all that was needed was to channel it into something constructive. My first concrete project was a treasure hunt. It's as simple as that to make them happy and teach them concentration and English at the same time. The adrenaline of the competition and the desire to win the treasure was enough for them to focus on words they had never seen before and trying to memorize them.



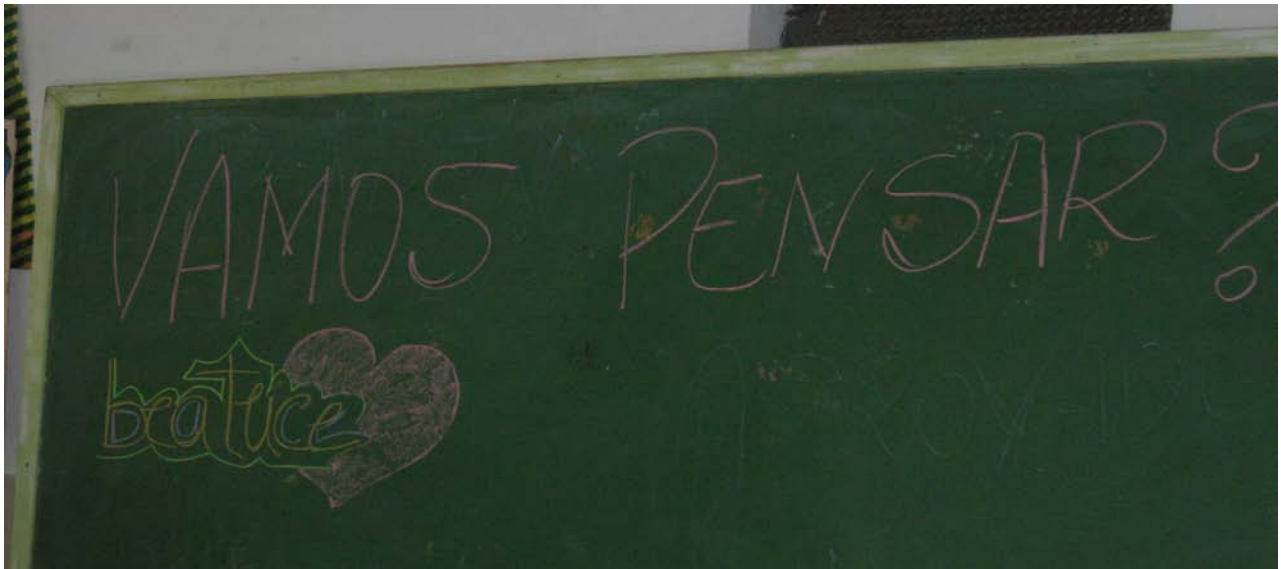
Virginia with her supervisor, Nilton, at AMAS girls orphanage

To me, it was a little miracle; watching them reading and focusing, speaking and running; smiling. Not all of them smile, not all the time at least. So today was the biggest lesson was for me. I learned that even the easiest game, the easiest plan, is a step towards their maturity. Our influence can only be productive if we actually fill them with new; new ideas, new games, new words, new ways of dreaming. The girls are all different ages, some are adolescents, some are still little children. With some of them it's easy, with others it's harder, a longer process. Some

of them hardened from all they've been through, some of them are overwhelmingly sweet, but they have each other, in every laugh, in every move and word, you can see all of them reflected.

All that I could hope and wish for when I started this experience was that somehow, when I left, a little piece of me was reflected in those smiles, too. That my simple presence would be a warm memory to keep them growing. Growing towards what they already are, wonderfully good and strong, fragile and complex. Just like every child, all that we can do, is show them ways, not only one, but all the ways possible. And silently wish that their broken souls, despite of everything, won't lose that sparkle, the sparkle that makes you want to wake up in the morning and hope that today, one of those smiles will be for you, and that their wounded hearts won't stop searching for healing. That is all I've been a part of today, when, once the hunt finished, one of them, the hardest one, the roughest one, hugged me, smiling.

In relationships, there is no such thing as victory or success, there is just a gentle, warm feeling of happiness bonding two hearts with trust and affection. I thank them for allowing me to gain theirs.



Words written on the black board by a young girl at the girls orphanage: Let's Think?

NEW STAFF MEMBER!

OI! Tudo Bem??



HELLO! I am Paula, the new team member in Brazil, and am feeling full of energy in this sunny, smiling and vibrant place. This month has been all about getting to know Niterói and Rio, and the various places and faces of the projects that are running around the city.

I received a very warm welcome, which felt somehow like a homecoming (!) and have been enjoying watching volunteers come up with interesting new ideas for projects and really using their creativity to make a mark in the lives of so many people of all ages. It makes me so happy to be living and working in an environment where tangible, positive change is happening every day. Work feels like life and life merges into work and it feels like a gift!

Spending time in the various projects is giving me insights into the gems that exist in Brazil. Behind the carnival, the samba, the music and the beaches lies a reality that is even more beautiful, and that is the energy and the time that specific individuals have taken and put into developing projects in their communities. The dedication that I have seen in the community is remarkable. There are passionate people that believe in the work that we do in the orphanages, schools and community centres that we work in, where the power of their dreams made dreams reality and these project are being fuelled by having extra helpers, our volunteers, and the support of Projects Abroad. There are new projects on the horizon as well and the atmosphere here feels like its buzzing with new ideas and the buzz of overcoming new challenges every day. This buzz inspires me!

I also have personal goals while I am here in this rich culture of movement, theatre, dance, language and music and have been training capoeira (a Brazilian martial art) in a beautiful space up on a hill, under banana trees full of monkeys, and with a full panoramic view over Rio and its glistening ocean. I love drama, and have set up a new community theatre project which I am very excited about, and we have also been given permission to work on a piece of land in the community which we can use to build an edible garden to start teaching members of the community how to grow their own food, which will be used as an urban agriculture centre for education and a step towards sustainable urban living.

The fact that Rio de Janeiro is delicious and beautiful and fills every bus ride with post card moments is really just the icing on the cake!

I look forward to hearing your ideas and dreams... let's make them happen!!!!

Enjoy!

Paula

From the Brazilian Kitchen.....

Brazilian Recipes!

Grace Bond

After spending just over a week in Niterói, Rio I've already completely fallen in love with the food here! I'm eating so much because our host mum is the most amazing cook and makes such delicious food :) These are a couple of the recipes that I've discovered since being here and which I'll definitely be making once I get home...enjoy!

Frango Assado (Roasted Chicken)

Ingredients:

1 chicken cut into pieces
1-2 cloves of crushed garlic
1 bay leaf
Finely chopped parsley
A few drops of lemon juice
Salt and black pepper to taste

Method:

1. Rinse the chicken and dry it with a paper towel.
2. Put the chicken in a bowl and season it with the garlic, bay leaf, parsley, lemon juice, salt and pepper.
3. Cover the bowl with cling film and put in the fridge for at least an hour.
4. Grease a baking tray with oil and place the chicken on it.
5. Cover the tray with aluminum foil and roast the chicken in a heated oven (350F) for 30 minutes.
6. Remove the aluminum foil from the baking dish and roast the chicken for 15-20 minutes or until golden brown.
7. Serve hot with rice and salad.



Socializing in August...

It's always important to balance work with fun, so here is the section about socializing! This August the volunteers have been meeting every Thursday to share stories, meet new faces, and get to know new places.

This month we have gone from hanging out in the local favorite, FRIENDS, on Icarai beach, to exploring new areas such as the beautiful coastal fishing village of JURUJUBA, where we enjoyed a traditional Brazilian fish speciality, Moqueca, with views over the bay to Niteroi and sparkling Rio de Janeiro.

Our monthly social this month is a trip to Paqueta, a little island between Rio and Niteroi, where families go and have picnics, cycle around and enjoy the amazing views of Rio with all its dips and curves and hills and waters.

Towards the end of the month all the volunteers are getting together to get their hands dirty to start a refurbishment project at AMAS Boys Orphanage where we will be repainting the interior of the whole building.

Be sure to keep updated on social events by checking the Official Brazil Facebook group and if you have any ideas for a social event your ideas are very welcome!!!

Volunteers having a relaxing get together at the local favourite, FRIENDS





New piece of land to start the urban agriculture project at Recomendarc, Ititioca