The Friendship Force of Wellington
and
The Friendship Force of Kapiti Coast

Exchange to
Nor Peru, Peru
Brasilia, Brazil
Belem, Brazil

May 2015
After the morning in Lima we left for the airport and our flight at 4.30pm for Trujillo, where we arrived at 5.30. John already in mother hen mode was making sure we were wearing our black T-shirts and knew who our hosts were. We were greeted at the airport by a very colourful group of the Trujillo Friendship Force holding up a big banner. There was no mistaking the direction we had to go in and were quickly found by our host families.

Drove to a venue where we had a light meal, drinks & beautiful music and dancing (some of which we had to join in). Then off with each of our hosts to their houses for an early night.
Tuesday 5 May              Nor Peru           Judy Canvin

This is our first day of hosting and after a very warm night, we were awaken early by lots of noise – roosters crowing, car horns beeping and people yelling at the top of their voices!! Janet and Jaime, our hosts, are a very lively couple, full of fun and Jaime with his very infectious laugh put us at ease right from the beginning. Breakfast was at 7.45am when they arrived back from work after delivering children to school. Jaime had composed a list of Spanish words and phrases with the corresponding English which made conversation easier considering we didn’t know Spanish and their knowledge of English was limited! Breakfast consisted of lots of fruit – papaya, melon, mandarin, banana, grapes, fruit from the Cacti plant plus yoghurt, corn, Quinoa drink, bread buns and coffee, manzanilla (apple herb tea).

The first planned activity for the day was the greeting and welcome reception by the Mayor of the Victor Larco Herrera District in Trujillo. We had been told it was to be a formal occasion so we were all decked out in our black polo shirts and the Mayor arrived looking very casual in his jeans and checked shirt! The Peruvian Anthem and the District Anthem was then sung followed by the 10 of us singing the NZ Anthem in Maori and English – a good attempt especially as we were unprepared! With the help of an interpreter, the Mayor welcomed us to his District and then John Durnford was presented with a medal from the District. We were all presented with Diplomas of Honour then given a warm welcome by the Nor Peru ED, Esperanza, and Wilson, their President. After the reception we went to the Trujillo Golf and Country Club where we enjoyed a lovely lunch and a tour of the club which accommodated many different sports.

 Later in the afternoon a walking tour of the city was next on the agenda – we were told about the history of Trujillo and its independence from Spain then walked past many of the buildings showing the Spanish influence.

 A Karaoke evening at a member’s home later that evening showed our hosts’ great singing talents as well as some of our members who very bravely joined in occasionally. A light supper was served which included corn chips, tapas with sauce (spring rolls), Empanadas (small) and corn bread.

Jeanette with her Diploma of Honour

Another excellent lunch

Mayor of the Victor Larco Herrera District, Trujillo

“Impressing” the locals at the Karaoke evening
This morning, around midway through another excellent breakfast, we were joined by our host’s daughter (Carmen), her husband (Rafael, a mining engineer) and their two daughters, one of whom spoke good English. Carmen was eager to see photos of our family and we were only too happy to oblige.

After breakfast we drove to Chan Chan Museum where we met others in the group before visiting the City of Chan Chan. While driving to the museum we passed a car in the opposite lane perched on its roof. Although there were no signs of obvious injury, there were plenty of police in attendance. Apart from that accident the drive was scenic and we passed through varied topography including sugar cane plantations and very dry desert lands.

The City of Chan Chan is located 5km northeast of Trujillo, near the Moche valley. The area expands from the sea shore to about 3km in an eastern direction and is about 16 metres above sea level. Chan Chan is the largest adobe city in the world and has been designated as a World Heritage Site. It was built around 850 and lasted until its conquest by the Inca Empire in 1470. At its peak around 30,000 people lived at Chan Chan which covers an area of 20 square kilometres. It was the capital of the historical Chimú culture. As well as a large number of buildings, there are several cemeteries. The sacrificial ceremonies described by our excellent guide were fascinating. Areas of the city are surrounded by remnants of walls, originally up to 400m long and 4m in height. It was amazing to see works built using adobe over 1,000 years ago and understandable that erosion has caused much damage which is now being protected by roofing structures clad with corrugated iron. The city is gradually being restored.

Lunch was at El Sombrero Restaurant at Huanchaco Beach. We were seated near the open windows and enjoyed an excellent meal as well as a great view over the ocean. While waiting for our meal to arrive we watched pelicans in the water and fishermen riding on their traditional boats made of totara reeds. We enjoyed a pisco sour and ceviche before a delicious main meal of fish and rice. Afterwards we walked along Huanchaco Beach, where we learnt the intricacies of making a totara reed fishing skiff and watched the boats being used for fishing. Nellie Santa Maria (Jeanette’s host) volunteered to be taken for a ride on Totara reed boat ride and all went well until the boat had nearly reached the beach when it was swamped by a wave, Nellie got very wet, much to the amusement of many. A great way to spend a couple of hours.

In the evening we took our hosts to dinner at a Chinese restaurant, the Chong Wah. A very nice meal although service for some was very slow.
After our customary light breakfast of fruit and white rolls, we were driven by a rent-a-dent-style taxi to the Museum of Modern Art, which exhibited large paintings and sculptures by Gerardo Chavez, a 75 year old local artist of some reputation in Peru. Some of his works were enormous, covering an entire wall, but the works (I thought) were not particularly “easy on the eye”. While we were there he walked in and welcomed us enthusiastically, and chatted engagingly in very good English.

Mid-morning we were all driven to the “country house” of Santos and Teresa (Marie’s hosts). This place had a very large outdoor recreation area where we played an interesting game of SAPO (“frog”) before sitting down to an absolutely enormous barbecue meal (which defeated everyone except Peter).

Then a surprise: an 11-piece brass band appeared and struck up very professionally to entertain us. 4 hosts took to the floor for an impromptu display of the Marinera, then it was everyone’s chance to dance.

After an afternoon snack of deep-fried “Picaronis” and syrup, we blobbed out over a game of bingo.

A long hot day! Back home just in time for a light snack then an early night to bed.
Today was another busy day on the Nor Peru exchange programme. It started with a 40 min drive to visit the Museo Huacas de Moche (Museum of the Temples of the Moche) and Huaca de la Luna (Temple of the Moon). The small museum had information about ceramics and the ancient civilisation customs of the people who once lived in this area.

Then a short drive to the ruins of Huaca de la Luna, a large adobe brick structure built by the Moche civilisation. This was the site of ceremonies and sacrifices and dates back to AD200-700. The original civilisation had a population of 20,000 living on a fertile green plain, today it is just a hot dry dusty area.

Then the long drive back home for more food. This time our host club had prepared a buffet for us, mainly to sample typical Peruvian foods and fruit.

But this wasn’t the end of this day. We were all advised to go home to have a siesta as we were going out for a Criolla evening at 11.00pm. This turned out to be a Peruvian cabaret with displays of dancing from different regions: this was good. But with the MC speaking Spanish, repartee and jokes throughout the evening were completely lost on us despite all the locals “cracking up” laughing. We finally decided to leave at 3am for some sleep before our next day of activities.
This day really started at midnight, as we arrived at the Criolla festival at around that time. We all thought that this was to be a cultural concert but it turned out to be a Nightclub where fellow traveller Christine proved that she was our champion “booty shaker”! The entertainment was varied starting with a woman who would definitely be considered as “sheep dressed up as lamb”! Her bellows into the mike going into scratchy warbles at times! Fortunately this was balanced by 2 beautiful and polished dancers who gave us a great programme of Dance from various regions. The ‘singer’ closed the evening’s entertainment with greatly increased hip waggles and shimmies!

Home by 3.00am, we were on the road again shortly after 9.00am in 2 host vehicles plus taxi on our way to the archaeological site of El Brujo and the Cao museum. The heat and uneven road surface made the 90 minute drive seem to take much longer than this. Surprisingly, given the standard of driving, it was only on this trip that we saw our first nasty accident. The countryside was incredibly dry and dusty but suddenly, all was green as irrigation was obvious feeding the sugar plantations.

We eventually arrived at El Brujo – a site much more security conscious than previous sites. Despite the magnificence of El Brujo with the inverted pyramidal shape of 5 palaces and a magnificent ceremonial plaza dating back around 1700 years, our interest was captured by the tattooed “Lady Cao” who died during childbirth and whose funerary bundle weighed 120 kg.

Our day was completed by our Farewell Dinner. A really memorable affair with various ethnic dancers, speeches, great food, toasts and, finally, more photos and more gifts. Our Nor Peru friends had entertained and looked after us most royally throughout and we all felt sad as we returned to our host family’s homes for the last time.
Sunday 10 May

Nor Peru

Christine Meredith

My family were always late, unacceptably so for even Peruvian society, where 30 minutes late is considered normal, 45 minutes late acceptable and 60 minutes late is “late”. I was late being taken to the square for our ‘March Past’ of the local dignitaries. John Durnford was one of them. The march takes place every Sunday but the first Sunday of the month is when ALL schoolchildren march. So we were very lucky. Following this we had photos taken, and on to breakfast with both the FF groups. Following this we went our own way.

Today being Mother’s Day, my day was to pick up Mother (aged 97) to visit the cemetery where Pedro’s mother is buried. There were many places to buy flowers for the event. People normally visit the grave of women in the family if possible and clean their graves for the year and re-lay new flowers. All was a hive of industry but Grandma and I were exempt and sat and chatted. Pedro wept openly, weeping on the grass face down for a while. Watch for pickpockets!

And back to the house to pick up the son and daughter to go with them and all of us to a leisure park (complete with 5 swimming pools) for lunch with Pedro’s brothers and all their families. Much fun and laughter along with food and dancing the afternoon away. I’m now part of their family!

No presents for the mothers normally! Hopefully most of them manage to be taken out for a meal.

Back to the house and Grandma helped up the stairs and into bed for siesta. Actually we all had a long siesta before having a rather late time to arrive for the dinner.

A delightful busy couple living with Magda’s mother, both children living at home, and servant who seemed to be in charge of doing all the housework and washing. Between us all, they had about 50 words of English (except for their daughter who spoke very good English) and a Kiwi with about 10 words of Spanish. Thank goodness for electronic translations on mobile phones!
Today we travel from Trujillo to Brasilia via Lima and São Paulo. It will be a long day. I awoke at 5.30am, had breakfast and left for the airport by taxi at 6.30. Had a hassle free check-in; tried to get a window seat for the Lima-São Paulo section so that I could take photos of the Andes, without success. Left Trujillo at 8.30am after a long farewell with much hugging and photo taking and blocking of the passage way to the departure lounge!

Arrived at Lima at 9.18am but had a 2 hours wait so the Ambassadors spent time:
- catching up with the Pando family,
- looking at trinkets in the shops,
- waiting patiently to board the next flight.

Following a hassle free departure from Peru, we flew to São Paulo by Brazil's TAM airways. I was fortunate to be offered the window seat by a couple who preferred to be by the aisle, lucky me! We flew across the Andes range of mountains but I was very disappointed as the snow was not as prolific as the crossing further south, i.e. Santiago to Buenos Aires route! So be it!

We arrived at São Paulo at 6.25 pm after forwarding our watches by 2 hours to the correct Brazilian time. A couple of intelligent Kiwis decided that we should wait at the luggage carousel to see if our luggage would be off-loaded. We were informed at Trujillo check-in that our luggage would go straight to Brasilia. Thank goodness we waited as we would have arrived in Brasilia without our luggage!! I love traveling with Kiwis, especially smart ones!

Left the largest South American city at 10.10pm, arriving at Brasilia at 11.45pm to a warm welcome by the Brazilian FF.
This morning, our first day in Brasilia, we enter the kitchen and notice that little monkeys are peering in at the kitchen window. It appears that Ivo has been giving them a bit of fruit through the window.

Later, Ursula prepared a lovely lunch, with food typical of the Brasilia area which was served at a long table in the garden, under a gazebo. Ivo pours some excellent Brazilian red wine. Daughter Katya joins us. Ivo mentions that at night little bats fly back and to under the gazebo which is quite a long one next to the swimming pool.

Ivo and Ursula are wonderful hosts in a million dollar mansion with a gardener and a maid and a woman who comes in to do the ironing. Only one problem, we are secured behind a big iron fence, metal shutters at our bedroom window which have to be secured when we leave the house. All the other mansions around this area are the same, some with razor wire on the top.

At the welcome party we are treated to a delicious buffet meal and welcome packs are handed out.

Few people we have met in Brazil speak English so we are picking up Portuguese slowly. Many people have French and German as alternative languages.
The stained glass windows in the main building of the Caixa Economica Federal Bank are stunning. I loved to see them at a distance and reflected in the water.

Our next visit was to the Museu de Valores in the Banco Central do Brasil, where after viewing their fascinating displays we were given souvenir coins, cards and bookmarks. We also visited their art gallery.

Lunch was at the club belonging to the House of Deputies, ASCADE. Meals were paid for by weight – what a good idea.

An interesting photographic exhibition at the Centro Cultural Banco do Brasil, featuring Zuleika de Souza was our next stop. The fascinating photographs were taken in satellite towns of Brasilia.

With Ursula, we called at the supermarket on the way home and were impressed that the staff parked the car for us and had it available when we left the supermarket.

On arriving home Katya told us that one of the little monkeys had sneaked into the kitchen and helped himself to the bananas in the fruit bowl.
Thursday 14 May

Left from the South side by bus to visit Dom Bosco Catholic cathedral. One of the many buildings designed by the architect Neimeyer. When we arrived there was a special children’s service going on with a choir beautifully singing. The church had a lot of blue stained glass windows and a spectacular Murano glass chandelier made from 7,400 pieces.

Then on to the residential area of 308 South where thousands lived in purpose-built apartment blocks, the ministries buildings and the cathedral of Brasilia.

Then the National Congress building where we sat in on a session for a few minutes. All very impressive buildings inside!

Lunch at the Ascade restaurant which was a buffet.

We then visited the Foreign Relations Palace set in a beautiful setting surrounded by water. Very modern for its time inside with a curved hanging staircase, sparsely furnished with antique furniture, paintings & tapestries.

Then the circular art gallery to see a modern exhibition, then on to walk around the lake at Pontão do Lago Sul and into the bar to try the Brazilian cocktail Caipirinha Cachaça and watch the sun set at the end of a long day.
Our time in Brasilia is slipping by quickly and we are now into our 4th day with our hosts. We have been so lucky on this trip with the weather and today is another very hot day with temperatures again in the early 30's.

First on the agenda today was a visit to the Juscelino Kubitschek (JK) Memorial, the founder of Brasilia who became President in 1956 when he promised he would build the city if elected. With the help of architect, Oscar Niemeyer and urban planner, Lucio Costa, Brasilia was built in 5 years in what would have normally taken 50 years. The memorial was very impressive resembling an Egyptian pyramid constructed out of white marble containing memorabilia of his life and the construction of his dream capital.

Next, we visited a memorial to the Indigenous people showing the culture of the Amazon tribes. This ethnological building was also designed by Niemeyer in 1987 imitating the traditional round dwellings of the Yanomami Indian tribe. The many crafts of the Indigenous people, the majority made by groups from the surrounding Planalto region, were on display – baskets, jewellery, weapons, hammocks, fishing nets, ceremonial feather headdresses, cooking utensils, etc.

The Headquarters of the Army was another stylish, futuristic building with a memorial in front of the building for the Unknown Soldier commemorated each September. A lone singer was displaying her talents with help of the amazing acoustics at the top of the steps so with encouragement from Jeanette, we took advantage of the situation and burst into singing Pokarekare Ana much to the amusement of the small gathering of tourists!

The small Hermitage, in remembrance of Don Bosco, an Italian priest who brought Catholicism to Brazil was very impressive featuring a futuristic pyramid-shaped chapel and gardens.

Also most amazing was the JK Bridge with its triple arches stretching from one side of the bridge to the other across the lanes. It was another of Niemeyer’s works, winning an award for an outstanding bridge design in 2004. We then saw the first Presidential Palace built for JK in 10 days of the old style up on stilts.

The city earned recognition as a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1987 but I am not sure whether I like this meticulously planned city - the spacious buildings are very impressive together with the vast expanse of the green spaces and wide streets but I feel the atmosphere of the city to be not very inviting!

Our hosts were lovely to us both, very friendly and knowledgeable about Brasilia. Liu Siu came to Brasilia just after it was first founded from the coastal north eastern city of Recife when her husband was invited to take up a position with the Government. They were a very large family of whom most were qualified Lawyers. Juao Carlos (one of the sons) who could speak English, obligingly drove us places and shared his love of Brazil (particularly football!) with us!
Saturday 16 May

Today we spent our first day outside of Brasilia. Along with several of our hosts, we were taken by bus to the Chapada Ecological Reserve Imperial. The drive was approximately 50km over roads that started on the magnificent roads of Brasilia and gradually deteriorated the closer we got to Chapada Reserve. Although the drive took just over an hour, it felt much longer.

The Chapada Ecological Reserve Imperial is a private ecological reserve that has been preserved since 1986. It features rocky terrain, mesophytic forests (interfluve and limestone), forest, grassland, marsh and paths. It has an area of approximately 4800 hectares and is located in the Cafuringa Environmental Protection Area. Animals, including many endangered species such as jaguar, maned wolf, giant anteater and giant armadillo can be found in the reserve. There are three nature trails, marked by the specific degree of difficulty.

Our trek took about 3 hours. It began with a ride on a converted military truck. The track we followed was well marked and ran alongside a stream for part of the distance. The path was well worn and a little slippery in places. Our guides were knowledgeable and fun to be with - one led while another became our "tail-end Charlie". Our guides swam in the pools found at the base of each waterfall although it was a bit icy for us. The water was crystal clear and small fish could be seen swimming. Our one disappointment was that we saw very little wildlife during our walk. There are plenty of activities available at the Chapada complex including a climbing wall, a flying fox and high level cable walkways. The people looking after these activities knew what they were doing and operated all equipment in a safe manner. There were semi tame Macaws at the complex who made great photographic models. The food was plentiful and very welcome after our walk.
Sunday 17 May               Brasilia    John Durnford

Today and every Sunday 6am to 6pm a 12km stretch of of main 6-lane highway running through the
city is closed to traffic, and it becomes a public recreation area. Known as “leisure day”, the people
take ownership briefly, and we saw many people strolling, cycling, jogging, and playing with the kids
on this expanse of tarmac as we drove alongside with our host Gisela. What a great idea!

We all assembled at our first destination – Praça des Três Poderes (Three Powers Plaza), a vast open square surrounded by the
modernistic buildings of the National Congress (Legislative),
Planalto Palace (Executive), and Federal Supreme Tribunal (Judiciary), among other stunning structures designed by Oscar
Niemeyer. Inside the Planalto Palace, which is the official
workplace of the president, we were taken on a guided tour of the
reception halls, meeting rooms, art
gallery, lounges, and president’s office. The Noble Room, a huge unobstructed hall with a capacity of
1000 people, had a freestanding curved ramp leading up to the
mezzanine level. This now has a handrail on the outer edge to help avoid the risk of people (like us) falling 4m on to the stone floor below.

Back to the Praça des Três Poderes for a quick look at the permanent underground exhibition of
urbanist designer Lucio Costa’s city plan and a large model of the layout of Brasilia showing its bird-like
format from above.

Next, a drive along the Eixo Monumental boulevard to the TV
tower where we jumped the queue for the lift to the viewing level
(75m up) for spectacular views of the city. Below we could see the
open-air Market of Crafts, where we went down to for a spot of
shopping among the stalls.

Now we all got driven to
FF Brasilia club president
Izhildinha’s house, where
we met up with about 40
members for a hot lunch of their national dish “feijoada” –
stewed pork sausage & black beans plus rice and the
unfortunately ubiquitous manioc! It was a crowded and noisy
gathering complete with middle-aged bikie troubadour with
guitar who belted out traditional songs.

On the homeward journey, we stopped just before crossing over the distinctive
triple-arch JK Bridge for photos. This must be one of the most beautiful bridges in
the world!

Our evening took an unexpected turn when both of us plus Gisela were invited to a barbecue at Ursula
and Ivo’s house (Allan & Beverley’s hosts). We relaxed on their outdoor patio and were treated to
wonderful food and hospitality till late. What a great way to finish off a great day of magnificent sights
and activities!
Today was a planned free day. We were day-hosted by Liana (a Brazilian club member). Marie joined us for this full day’s adventure. First stop was at the Lago Norte district and to Liana's aunt’s house, unoccupied at the time. This beautiful house overlooked Paranao Lake and there were wire fences at the water’s edge to stop capybaras getting into the garden. The city designer Lucio Costa planned this lake for public use and made a special recreation place for the poorer people of the community to swim.

Next destination was a drive through the poorer outlying district of Paranao. This was an eye-opener for us, the complete opposite to the attractive areas and expensive houses we were being hosted in.

Back in the car, we drove to a venue and grounds for weddings which was owned and operated by Liana’s family. This place wasn't what we expected as we drove up a rough driveway and saw the rather rundown buildings. In the leafy grounds were animals, chickens and an orchard. This wedding venue wasn't like anything we had experienced in NZ.

By this time we were hungry (can you believe this?!) After lunch at a huge “kilo restaurant” we drove to see a cemetery and to visit the curious Temple of Goodwill complex.

After this we dropped Marie off to get her hair done. On our way home Liana drove us along boulevards that were lined with Embassies from around the world, identifiable by signs with country name and flag image. The NZ Embassy was tucked behind a large wall and couldn't be seen from the road.

Arrived home at 6.45pm. This wasn't the end of our day! Back in the car at 7.30pm and off to a party at Marvonne’s house for typical food normally served on Saints Day in June; (actually I don't think we were very impressed with the food.) Left her home 10.30pm to go home to sleep ready for packing and departing the next morning for our flight to the next exchange in Belem.
Tuesday 19 May

Brasília – Belem

Jaye Howey

A comparatively quiet day as we left Brasília and flew up to Belem, a flight of 2 hours 30 minutes, for our 3rd and last “Exchange”. Belem is a thriving port, the largest city and capital of the State of Para in Brazil’s Lower Amazon region.

A group of members, complete with banners, was at the airport to welcome us. We were soon introduced to our hosts and after the usual photos, were taken to our new homes. Christine and I were to be hosted by the same couple in their 19th floor apartment. We enjoyed the lunch of fish and learnt, over the ensuing days, that “Fish” was probably the most reliable choice when we ate out at various places. We also learnt that manioc was the basis of many dishes in this area.

Shortly after lunch, Christine and I suddenly wondered if we were the only people left in the apartment! It turned out that FaFa was working in the kitchen but Jehangir was fast asleep on his bed. This was the norm for the days ahead. After reading and working on our iPads the first day, we soon found we liked the idea of an afternoon siesta and easily fell into this habit on later days.

We left at 6.45pm for the Welcome Dinner. This was in a large hall-like room at John and Ngaire’s “home”. A fairly large crowd arrived bearing various dinner dishes. It was interesting that, apart from those actually hosting us, the other club members seemed to have little interest in meeting us and we were very much left to ourselves to work out protocol regarding drinks (all soft drinks) and food. It made me wonder how we are seen in our club when we host non English speaking guests from overseas?

The formal part of the evening was long, with 7 mainly Portuguese-speaking speakers, National Anthems and the Friendship Force song, but it ended very pleasantly with entertainment (dance) put on by lady members of the Club.
Welcome to the top of the tower. Jaye and I are staying 19 storeys up in central Belem, still need to lock windows etc. in case people try and climb up the outside of the building to try and rob the owners. We breakfast and take a taxi to meet up at the Basilica. Lovely 19C marble imported from Italy. Nice and cool inside but becoming hotter outside.

From there we went on a walking tour of the major parts of the city and included in that was a tour of the markets, firstly the spice and then on to fish, bread, vegetables and even the meat market. The meat market was really interesting with the iron-work being made in Scotland and then transported to the site.

Back for a siesta and then on a boat trip along the river, complete with cabaret dancing showing off the local dances through the ages. Dinner at a riverbank restaurant which showcased local foods, fish and meat from the area with our hosts. We were ‘serenaded’ by a musical group which went along the inside of the old wharf about 20m up in the air. Local ice creams to try for dessert while we looked at some of the little curio shops inside the building.
Thursday 21 May  

Belem  

Jeanette Page

This morning I was awakened by PASSARINHOS birds chirping outside my window.

A brother of the 3 Sisters came for breakfast which had been prepared by Rosa. I had 4 fruits, 2 of which were known to me. The other 2 were SAPODILLA, a small sweet tasting brown fruit and PUPUNHA, a small orange fruit which tasted like dry pumpkin! On my toasted bun, I spread BERINJELA PASSAS jam which was delicious. My black coffee was complemented by a small piece of chocolate cake.

Today our ambassadors visited the Zoo-botanical Park of the Emilio Goeldi Museum where we saw monuments, ponds, animal enclosures and Amazonian vegetation. We saw caged spotted jaguar, baby 3 toed sloth, snakes, fish, alligators, guinea pigs, tapir and other animals. Of particular interest to me was the exhibition of an indigenous tribe who live in MARANHAO State next to PARA State where Belem is situated. Our English speaking guide provided us with a detailed description of the way in which this tribe, KAAPOR, an agricultural people who grew CASSAVA, sweet potato, yam, corn, rice, banana and other fruit, live.

At lunch, I was pleasantly surprised to discover that an English speaking neighbour of the 3 Sisters had been invited. I was able to find out a little more about my hostesses. An amazing number of dishes had been prepared by ROSA. I tried them all! There were dishes that included fish, crab, rice, beans, potato and cooked banana - 6 different ones. For dessert I had ACAI with tapioca.

Following the traditional "after lunch snooze" it was time to attend the Mayor’s reception. He was not available so we were received by his deputy, Karla Martins. She presented us with a book and we drank a toast. Following the formalities, we were shown through the museum with its historical paintings and sprung native timber flooring.

I was returned home by Marie’s hostess. My 3 hostesses were cooling off in their hammocks. Following supper the Sisters and I took a taxi to the beautiful opera house, Theatro da Paz, to listen to the Orquestra Sinfonica playing music composed by Richard Wagner, a German who lived during the 19th century. All 10 ambassadors attended. The day ended with a snack and glass of beer at a restaurant 2 doors away from the apartment, a satisfactory completion to a busy day.
Today we are promised a full day trip to the Island of Mosquerio. We start the day with a breakfast of scrambled egg, a biscuit that looks like toast, banana, mango, brazil nuts, almonds, cashews, black tea with cold milk (just as we like it) and orange juice. All prepared by Sonya the maid.

After traversing a 2 km long bridge, we stopped for shrimps. Next stop was a beach restaurant belonging to Hotel Fazendo Paraiso for comfort stop and to take photos. This is on the Para river which is 100 kms wide at this point. 1st group photo of the day.

Crossed the Ponte de Cajueira where the fishing boats come right up to the bridge. There are fish stalls close to the bridge.

Next photo stop involved a paddle in the Para River (Peter won the stone skimming competition) and small empanados to snack on.

The next photo opportunity and walk around the gardens was at the Hotel Farol which belongs to a member of FF Belem.

Fish lunch at Lambreta restaurant at the side of the river. Terrific downpour had us moving our table quickly. Jay put 3 drops of sweetener in her tiny demitasse of coffee, then mistook the powdered sugar for powdered milk and put 4 teaspoons in. Shock and dismay registered quickly on her face and she said it was like syrup.

Afternoon tea for everyone at the home of Gabriel and Annalucia.

A tasty vegetable soup for tea.
Supermarket first which Gabriel thought would be of interest to us. Everything was very cheap except the price of broccoli, cauliflower and parsley. Lots of fruit I have never seen before. The fish were enormous. Some of the packaged meat was a puzzle.

Next, picked up Marie and on to the Parque Mangal das Garcas.

Later, at my request, we went on to Sao Jose Liberto - an old prison now turned into a jewellery centre - lovely jewellery, I would have liked to spend more time here. Bumped into John and Ngaire, and Judy and Peter.

Gabriel drove us out to La Na Telha (translation – On Tile) which was a restaurant on the waterfront at Icoaraci, Belem. We had lunch there - Judy, Peter and Adozinda (their host), Gabriel, Analucia, Allan and me. Beautiful food - fish cooked in a coconut sauce and presented in a curved roof tile.

The evening was spent at President Antonio’s home. Lovely view of the Theatro da Paz from her window which was open, giving a nice cooling breeze.
This was a free day with our host families and as my host Maura didn’t drive, her nephew David drove us to the Republic craft fair which sold a lot of ethnic goods.

Then on to a tour of the very impressive Opera House where we all had been another evening for a concert by the resident orchestra.

Then we made our way to Osmar steak house for a delicious buffet with all sorts of meats, fish etc. At 6pm it was off with Jeanette and her host for a dinner with Anna Lynch, Ngaire, John, etc.
Monday 25 May

We are nearing the end of the Friendship Force hosting and I have really enjoyed the experience very much. This is our last day and Belem is just as I imagined Brazil, with its colonial Portuguese colourful buildings, the markets and the hot steamy weather especially when we are so near the amazing Amazon! I am so enjoying the fresh vegetables, fruits, herbs and the helpings of fish which are so readily available!

Our host, Adozinda is lovely with a great sense of humour, her English better than our Portuguese, and we communicated some of the time by speaking into her iPad using googly translate which was amusing as sometimes the translation was quite disjointed!

We had a lovely evening last night at the Theatro da Paz listening to ‘Fernanda Takai’, a Brazilian Female pop singer who sang some songs very similar to Glen Campbell. I recognised some tunes, she also sang some songs in English and had great rapport with audience. It is certainly handy at times having attained the label of a senior and being able to get free admission into some places! It even proved its value when we were given first in the queue for boarding the flight at some South American airports!!

This morning we went to Embrapa and visited the Botanical Lab, Herbarium and wild bee beehives all of which proved to be very interesting. The Embrapa Eastern Amazon laboratories in Belem is one of the many units of the Brazilian Agricultural Research Organisation studying most things that are produced in the Amazon. The research being carried out on the stingless bees was very fascinating and Georgio showed us around the hives, talked about the research he is doing and his association with Australia where the bees are also found in Queensland. Research is also carried out on trees, leaves, and the wood found in the Para and Amazon regions, identification by using DNA and giving them Botanical names.

We then had a delicious lunch at Marie’s host’s home. Fortunately her nephew spoke English so we were able to have a good chat and he made the comment that he couldn’t understand his aunt or our host when they spoke Portuguese because they talked too fast!!

It was a fairly subdued crowd at the farewell evening that night at President Antonio’s daughter’s home as this was our last day with our hosts. Farewell and thank you speeches from the ED’s, exchanging of gifts and many more photos being taken thus ending our very first enjoyable and successful overseas trip with the Friendship Force International in Peru and Brazil.
This morning we farewelled our hosts at Belem Airport after a truly memorable visit. The visit to Belem was a great experience for ambassadors and hosts. We enjoyed the difference in each other’s cultures and had great fun trying our hastily acquired ability to speak Portuguese. Our trusty iPads and smartphones with their translating software made life much easier although the results in translation were often hilarious.

At the airport we appreciated the opportunity to walk through the “Special Lane” with a sign that indicated it was reserved for people who were either in wheelchairs, with young children, pregnant, using walking sticks, etc. Although we didn’t feel that we fitted the criteria, our hosts, as they had done in Brasilia, felt that we were elderly and clearly deserved the “special status” – so off we went and avoided a fairly long queue of patiently waiting fellow passengers.

Unfortunately, it was also time for our band of intrepid travellers to split up. Jaye returned to New Zealand, Christine headed to Easter Island, Jeanette, later in the day, flew to Manaus to experience her Amazon adventure while the other seven of us flew to Iguacu Falls and on to Rio de Janiero before splitting and returning to New Zealand, Judy and Peter via Buenos Aries and John and Ngaire via England. A great trip with many new friendships and great memories.