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Tripping over the Cobblestone Roads of Paraty

No one knew where we were going. Were there a lot of Parrots, or maybe a lot of parties in Paraty? When we arrived in Paraty by a bus that was not able to drive into the town, we felt relief from being away from the busy city of Rio de Janeiro (where we were previously). No one knew what to expect, even the professors had not been. Our helpful tour guide, named Christian helped us find horse and buggies to help us carry our luggage through the bumpy streets. The streets were difficult to walk on and I was surprised to see any cars survive on those roads. We had just been exposed to a huge city in Rio, with huge monuments, buildings and mountains. Everything went from big and astonishing to small and quaint. There wasn't a building over two stories tall and the streets were like a labyrinth. The town was so old and historical. We arrived in our hotel of two stories, which was minimal compared to 26 stories in Rio. Our rooms were tiny and all wooden. My roommate was too long for the beds that we had. The bathrooms had swinging doors that were hard to lock, and the shower floor was concrete. It was refreshing.

Pic1

Paraty grew during the gold rush in the early 18th century. The town was a stopover between Rio and the Minas Gerais goldfields. The popularity of the town diminished when a new Rio-Minas road via the Serra dos Orgaos was opened in the 1720s (St. Louis 185). Paraty was inhabited by the Guianas Indians when Portuguese from Sao Vicente settled there in the 16th century. During the gold rush, "Paraty became a busy port as miners and supplies headed for the gold mines disembarked, and gold was shipped to Europe. The small town prospered and, as always, the wealthy built churches to prove it (St. Louis 185). A coffee boom revived Paraty's local economy in the 19th century. Paraty was accessible only by sea until 1954. The population of the city has grown now to 17,000. It was once said by Amerigo Despucci "Oh! Deus, se na terra houvesse um paraíso, não seria muito longe daqui! (Oh! God, if there were a paradise on earth, it wouldn't be far from here!" (St. Louis 185).

On the afternoon that we arrived, we were given a walking tour of the city, which might be more appropriately called a large town. We stumbled along the streets and saw the beautiful colonial town. That night we went out and to our surprise the streets were absolutely packed at night. For having a small town feel, the nightlife surprisingly rivaled Rio. Perhaps it is just the party attitude of Brazilians who don't seem to have much stress in their daily lives. The streets rang with live music for the three nights that we were there. One evening, for dinner we sat at tables that were actually on the streets and we ate while we watched tourists and habitants walk by. The next morning, we traveled to an

amazing forest that was close to the city named Serra de Bocanna. While hiking, we stopped by several natural pools and went for a dip. The second place we stopped, during the hike, was actually a huge natural rock slide. The locals, being their no-fear-Brazilian selves actually were skiing down this rock, standing up, while we, more fear filled Americans took the slide in a safer sitting position. Then we visited a Cachaca plantation located near the forest. Cachaca is the sugar cane liquor used in the national drink, named caiperenhas. From the Cachaca plantation we had one more stop to a rope swing at another natural pool. Here, we witnessed more of the no fear Brazilian attitude as the locals were swinging off of the rope swing and doing flips and launching themselves at absurd levels above the water before they dove in. Two of them climbed up the side of a large rock wall right next to the pool and must have dove 40-50 feet into the water. No one from our group attempted to join them that high. We traveled back into Paraty after the rope swing and encountered a night similar to the first. The following day we took a schooner tour around the islands off of the coast of Paraty. The boat took us to several stops where we were able to swim in the bright blue water, which had a very salty taste. The tour gave us lunch and drinks. The schooner tour was a good time for all.

Pic2

Our trip in Paraty was coming to an end and our next destination was another big city; Sao Paulo. We were to miss the peacefulness of Paraty. Paraty, although a fairly busy place still gave off a peaceful quiet feeling. Perhaps it was the absence of cars or the way the streets were a labyrinth with high walls and you didn't know what was going on around the next corner. From Paraty we witnessed a different part of Brazilian culture. We saw a lot of the same characteristics, like the no fear attitude and partying, but we also saw a historical side to the country. Just as the water floods the streets of Paraty daily, the city flooded our minds with images we will never forget.