

Sheryl Howe

From: "Sheryl Howe" <sahowe@wbt.org>
To: <sahowe@wbt.org>
Sent: Tuesday, November 09, 2004 4:11 PM
Subject: My "three hour tour"...

Hi! I had the coolest weekend.

This unexpected opportunity to fly out to a village came up. I, not being so very fond of flights in small airplanes nor of spending any significant amount of time in the heat with no airconditioning, didn't exactly jump on this opportunity. But I was persuaded that this is a once in a lifetime chance I shouldn't pass up. So I took some Dramamine and headed out to the hangar at a time of day when normal people should still be sleeping on Saturday morning.

I'd been told it would be unbearable hot there. We step off the plane and it's drizzling rain and miserable cold. This is one of these "friagem" deals I've been told of --- where cold blows in from the south (being on the other side of the equator, it gets warmer the further north you go) and lasts a day or two and then back to hot. However, these friagem deals don't normally happen this time of year.

So we troop, in the drizzle and cold, from the airstrip to the edge of the river (not a short trek) to await a boat to take us across carrying various supplies we're bringing to the translators who live there. There's no dock or anything, it's a slippery steep mud bank to get down to the boat. I slid a ways (although was in no danger of falling into the river --- inhabited by various stingrays and piranha and alligators too). The very gracious translators loaned us warm clothes and flip flops (to wear instead of my mud-covered sandals), also because visiting the houses in the village required trooping through water.

I ate various things I've never tried before --- and don't remember the names of --- one thing that came off a type of palm tree; it's about the size of a gumball --- you peel off the outer shell and chew on it like gum. If you're persistent enough to chew on it until all the fruit's gone, it's got a little baby coconut in the center.

We visited all the houses in the village. I learned a ton of stuff in just a couple hours AND I managed to catch two or three words here or there in Portuguese.

Then we went fishing. I've never been fishing before and certainly never fishing for piranha. I so didn't expect fishing to be that much fun. I have now seen the light. It was great. I got some fish, some I don't remember the names of and a couple piranha --- and then it was time to go, headed back across the river, back to the airplane (where I managed to step in a mongo mud hole), took Dramamine again... and then learned the weather had moved in to Cuiaba also and there was no chance of making it out today. We were to try again in the morning. So suddenly our day trip is an overnight excursion.

I got to eat some of the fish we caught for dinner (piranha is yummy as was all the fish --- another benefit of this fishing business, the fresh fish). The very gracious translator people managed to fit three extra people in under mosquito nets for the night. When we got up the next morning, it looked just as cloudy as the day before, although not so cold. The pilot had arranged to check with Cuiaba at 9am and at 9am the weather in Cuiaba was worse than the day before so he arranged to try back at 11am. At 11am, after more fishing, not as productive as the previous day but I got another piranha, the weather was better but not good enough to leave. At this point, I was so very sad I'd passed on a bucket shower the night before. At night, wearing two sweatshirts, I was so cold, I couldn't imagine being wet too.

But by noon the next day, I kind of had a layer of grime. The amazingly gracious translator people offered to heat up water so I could get a shower --- it's a nifty set up they have, their shower system. Very Gilligan's island. It was great. Another meal of fish. Much discussion about the likelihood of us leaving that day at all --- and then we set off across the river all of us, just in case we could make it out, they thought we should all go across and see. I waited to take my Dramamine (my last one) this time until we learned we were actually going and then we headed back, this time with no clouds, I could see stuff from the plane.

I took pictures when I could, but the pictures just don't capture how amazing it was... thus, the big long narrative... (and this is edited --- imagine if you were here in person and had to listen to the whole unabridged version :-) ... which would definitely include how they don't have clothespins so, naturally, string barbed wire for clotheslines... rough on clothes, but it works).

Trust all is well!

Sheryl