

An American in Brazil

One of the 2009 additions to the eClub is Bob Hand, who not only switched to an online club, but changed hemispheres during the year! What follows is a little about the community where he has settled and his new home. So sit back and enjoy a trip to South America!

Nova Petrópolis is situated about 90 km north of Porto Alegre, the capital and largest city (about 1.2 million people) of the state of Rio Grande do Sul. The region is quite mountainous with lush green valleys and is known as the Serra Gaúcha, or Mountains of the Cowboy. Nova Petrópolis has a population of about 18,000 people, but about 1/3 of them live in the rural parts of the municipality (equivalent to a US county).

The region was settled by German immigrants in the mid-19th century. The German heritage is very much evident in the local culture. Many streets carry German names (such as rua Schwarzwald, rua Amstadt). Several restaurants serve German recipes (such as eisbein and bockwurst with sauerkraut). Although Portuguese is the official language, it is not uncommon to hear people conversing in German on the street. The other day, when I was paying for my purchases in the supermarket, the

cashier thanked me with, "Danke schoen." The local FM radio station plays a mix of Brazilian, German, and Italian music.

Italian immigrants also settled in the Serra Gaúcha, but about 50 km west of here. The city of Bento Gonçalves is the center of the wine growing region of Brazil and the culture there is strongly Italian. I'll write more about that another time.



This is a scene on the main street of Nova Petrópolis. It is divided for most of the length of the street by a center island with trees and flowers. You can note the "Bavarian" influence in the architecture.



As I take this picture, it's the Christmas season in Brazil and the towns of Nova Petrópolis and Gramado are becoming well decorated. This street is at the side on the Plaza of the Flowers. The

pavilion in the distance is where weekly Christmas shows are being held.

The Plaza of the Flowers is replanted periodically according to the season. This "Christmas tree" is made of rings and strings of lights.

There is a nativity scene and statues of the three wise men. By the way, it's quite funny seeing Santa

Claus (Papai Noel) all dressed in North Pole red and white with the local temperature at 80 F.





The plaza also has a live Labyrinth, also well decorated for Christmas.

As you can see in the picture below, at night, the Christmas lighting is quite lovely.

At one of the shows a children's choir performed Christmas music in English, Portuguese, and German. Two weeks earlier, at the first of the weekly shows, a fine orchestra, two large choirs, and a dance group performed. The quality of the shows has been excellent, all with local talent.



Last Sunday we went to the Festa da Leitão (Leitão is a young pig). Lunch was served in a huge gymnasium.



I don't know how many pigs were barbecued, but they served about 1,000 people. There were 30 people at each

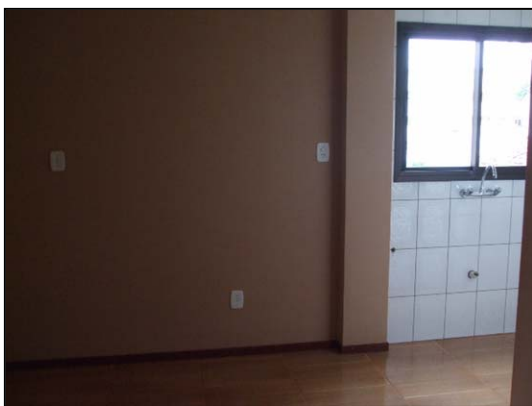
table, with people coming and going all the time.

A long buffet line ran the length of the room in four sections. Gaúchos carved the pigs and served the meat. The buffet had vegetables for salads, and hot spaghetti, beans, sauerkraut, potatoes, etc. The whole process was very orderly and everyone was fed quickly. Other waiters served the beer and coca-cola.



We arrived in Nova Petrópolis on the 3rd of November and moved into a rental apartment on the 16th. The apartment is located in the building in

the picture below. The veranda on the second floor at left is ours. The building is well-kept, has a security entrance, and is located about five blocks from that Plaza of the Flowers. We don't have a car...yet. The town is so small, though, we really don't need one. A supermarket is just a block and a half away. Furniture stores, clothing stores, etc, are located close to the center.



This is the kitchen of our apartment the day we moved in. Right! No stove, no refrigerator....and no kitchen sink. We had to buy all those things, which is common in Brazil. The previous tenants took their sink with them.



So now we have a kitchen sink. And a stove and a refrigerator. And table and chairs.



Our bedroom is quite large, with a private bath. But guess what...no closet. This is also quite common

in Brazil. Instead of a closet, people buy an "armário", or armoire. So now we have a bed and a huge armário. The latter had to be



assembled in place, since it will not fit through any door. But it's really very nice.

So we're nicely settled in our apartment, now with an internet connection, and I'm making up

some meetings I missed while I was internet-less!

Yesterday, we went to Gramado, a city about 35 km east of here. Gramado is a nationally famous city for hosting tourist events. There are two main events every year, a National Film Festival in July, and a Christmas Festival in November and December. People come from all over the country for those two events. Nova Petrópolis sort of tags along. Gramado is about twice the size of Nova Petrópolis and is loaded with hotels, restaurants, and shops.

Again in Gramado you can see the strong Bavarian influence in the architecture of the buildings and in the use of flowers almost everywhere. Any doubt that it's Christmas time in Gramado?



Gramado is called Avenida das Hortências.

The region where we live is known as the Region of the Hortências. That plant is wildly proficient here in the Serra Gaúcha. It's known as the hydrangea in the USA...at least in New Jersey where I grew up. The main street of



The main intersection in Gramado has this huge "Christmas Tree." It's odd that the snow doesn't ever melt even though the temperature is 80 F.

The Catholic church in Gramado is constructed entirely of grey stone blocks.



Across from the Catholic church is the Rua Coberta, or Covered Street. It's a block long and is lined with restaurants, bars, and shops.

One of the shops in town specializes in Christmas "stuff" of all kinds. This store was chock full of every item imaginable to decorate your house for Christmas.....



.....some quite elegant such as these figurines of the Holy Family and the royal visitors.



At the end of our day in Gramado, Cidinha and I had a lovely Fondue lunch, with a bottle of Sauvignon Blanc from a vintner in Bento Gonçalves. It was a great finish to a fun day.

Brazilians love their fireworks, and I discovered some interesting things about New Year's Eve here.



Bob and Cidinha at their home.

The fireworks, all strays, began about 9 AM. Every few minutes someone would send off a bottle rocket. At midnight, it seemed like the whole city exploded. The official fireworks show went off in a rapid fire sequence. Other lesser shows in various neighborhoods competed for attention. The cacophony lasted at least a half hour, with stray rockets going off on into the night.

We also participated in a Brazilian tradition of eating "Lentilha" for good luck in 2010. Lentilha (pronounced "len-TEEL-ya") is a soup made of lentils with chunks of smoked pork and pork sausage. It was reminiscent of the black eyed peas and ham hocks the folks in the American South eat on New Year's Day, also for good luck. The lentilha was very good with beer and we ate it at home in the peace and...well, not quiet.

We wish you and all the club members a very creative and prosperous 2010.

Bob Hand

Rushton's comments:

Bob's wonderful story about his journey is something special for our eClub, particularly in the ability we have to tell about what we see and do each day to our colleagues across the planet. In 2009, we were taken to the Australian Outback, given a tour of One Rotary Center in Chicago, and told of many wonderful organizations working to make the world a better place.

As you look ahead on 2010, please consider sharing what you do with our members and guests, as well. It can be a beautiful way to build goodwill and better friendships!

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