



Dual sport drama

The magic of Brazil from two wheels

By Scott Jamieson

I needed to get away, to do something different, to clear my head. That's how it started, as a sentiment expressed to a now former co-worker as we discussed my resignation from my job. It turned out she had a friend who runs a motorcycle touring company in Brazil. I knew squat about Brazil but it sure sounded like an interesting idea.

I got on the phone with Davis Bales of Brazil Moto to talk details. He had no tours planned for my time frame but he did have an idea. There was a tour he added to his offerings but only tried it once and wanted to make some alterations. If I was up for it, he could set up a scouting tour where we would use the good parts of the previous ride but also check out some new ones. We would split our time between paved and dirt roads for more of an adventure-style tour than the others Brazil Moto offers. I was in. By the time the tour rolled around another Canadian, Tim Last was added to the group.

Ricardo picked me up at the Rio de Janeiro airport in the Land Rover – not one of those cute neutered Land Rovers either but a real adventure-capable one. This combination would act as our chase and support vehicle for the trip with the addition of a spare GS 650 Dakar.

At the hotel in Ipanema, a block from the beach, I met Davis and my GS1150 before checking in. After meeting Tim we began our

orientation. The main part of the orientation was getting to know some of the street signs. I learned quickly that Brazil has taken the time to use a considerable number of road signs. However, it seemed quantity was more of a focus than say, standards. There seemed to be about 90 versions of each road sign. They might all mean the same thing but they certainly didn't say the same thing, using several different phrasings to keep us on our toes. The visual signs were mostly the same as in Canada. All the yellow ones with 90-degree angles or s-bend or the snaky line meant pin-it, just like home.

DAY 1 - RIO TO CORDEIRO/BOM JARDIM – 260KM

Traffic riding in Rio is an experience in itself. Although at first glance there seems to be a complete disregard for anything remotely connected to traffic laws, there is actually an ebb and flow to the traffic. Once you release yourself to it, while still establishing your position in it, the riding gets easier. There are tons of motorcycles on the roads so other drivers are very aware of your presence. Despite that, you need to be very willing to claim your piece of road.



The big BMW's attracted plenty of attention among the locals along the way

PHOTOS COURTESY SCOTT JAMIESON

The road to Petropolis is a fun climb all the way, with tight corners running up the side of the cliffs. It was a light riding day mileage wise, so we stopped part way up the first main climb to take in the view. It looked as spectacular from above as it was to ride. Years ago this route was all dirt and part of the road that inland miners would take to get to the port towns like Rio.

The next short leg took us into Petropolis, the one-time summer capital of Brazil during the Brazilian Empire years.

Heading forward Davis showed us a section of our maps where it appeared there was no connecting road. This non-existent road turned out to be one of the riding highlights of the trip with perfect new asphalt laid on, over and around mountain terrain.

As this was both an adventure and scouting mission we decided a dirt road of about 11km would make a good alternate to our planned route as well as provide a warm-up for a longer dirt route tomorrow. After a short burst, Davis and I had gapped Tim so I stopped. After I'd been waiting for too long for Tim a truck stopped to let me know Tim's status. Amazingly, with only hand gestures to bridge the language gap the truck driver was able to tell me that Tim had grabbed too much front brake in the loose dirt, tucked the front end and tossed the 650 off the side of the road. Motorcycling is such a universal language.

I found Tim back on board the bike, not really any the worse for the incident but shaken up a bit. It also turned out he had basically destroyed the left crash guard aka "saddle bag," which was safely tucked away in a car behind him. The car held three guys who had helped Tim get back going.

We spent the night at a rustic ranch property. The owners breed championship Brazilian Walking Horses and we got to meet a few in the morning.

Our planning session for the next day was re-evaluated so we could detour to find a bike shop to replace the damaged left turn signal on the Dakar, along with some other minor tweaks to help get us through.



The run to Caravales included some freshly paved sections through excellent twisty bits

DAY 2 – PEDRA AZUL (ESPIRITO SANTO) – 400KM

According to the WorldLingo translation service, "fita adesiva do duto" means duct tape in Brazilian Portuguese. As it turned out, this was a very limited resource in the areas we were traveling. The bungee cords holding the crashed saddlebag together on the Dakar kept melting on the exhaust and we had to sparingly use our one roll of duct tape to try and keep it together.

The roads this day were mainly in very good condition as we headed out of the Rio region toward Domingos Martins and the Espirito Santo State. However, I had been warned about large pot-holed sections of some of the roads. The big GS came in handy dealing with the ones we were not able to avoid.

I continued to be amazed by the spectacular and lush views of the frequent "coffee valleys." Large ranches and plantations sprawled through the valleys, creating astonishing views.

I also began to notice the amount of attention the GS's drew as they cruised through town. Given the number of small motorcycles everywhere here, it seemed the sheer size of these things was what people noticed.

The hotel for the evening was the polar opposite of the previous night. The large, opulent accommodations were a

welcome sight after the day's ride. Even more welcome was the large and extravagant dinner buffet. Afterward we relaxed on the upper deck listening to live piano music.

DAY 3/4 – CARAVALES (BAHIA) – 630KM

We had a big ride planned in order to reach Caravales, where we would be doing the only two-night stay of the trip. Almost all of the route, including two dirt road sections, was scouting and had not been traveled by Davis.

Our first section of road turned out to be more fresh pavement through some excellent twisty sections. Following this we stopped to grab some water and prepare for the upcoming 40km of dirt road. The dirt route was amazing. We rode through small farming communities in coffee valleys connected by cliffside roads. The road was in great shape with some sections inches from the edge of the quick way into the valley. I

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had my first 'moment' of the trip coming around a cliff side corner. The bike hit a rain rut and stood itself straight up, pointing at the outside edge of the road. I managed to gather it back up but did get into 'maybe I should just get off' range.

We jumped back on the pavement and started routing back through small towns. As we approached the last leg of the day's ride a decision was made to split up and scope separate routes. Davis and I took a route that would lead us to a 75km dirt logging road and then into Caravales while Tim and Ricardo took the more conventional paved route.

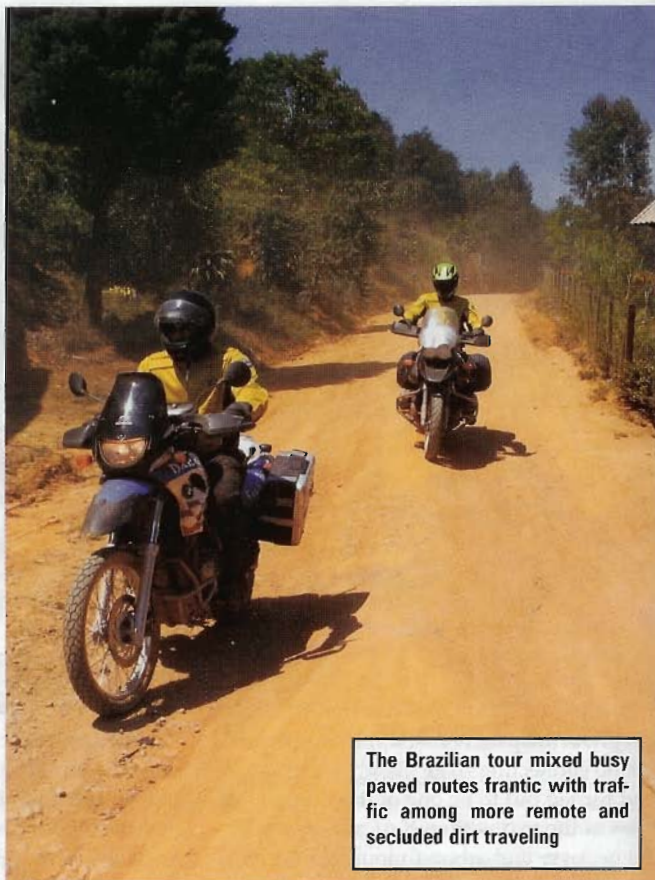
Davis and I encountered long straight sections of road that provided extended views but not great riding along the paved section of our route. As we hit the dirt road the sun was threatening to drop on us. Since there was little traffic we aligned the bikes side by side, high beams on, and charged into the darkness. The road was in mainly very good shape but did throw the

occasional GS-eating pothole at us. Davis caught the rear wheel of his 1150 in one of the worst ones. The bike bottomed out so badly that he cracked a saddle bag mount, dislodged the bag and forcibly removed the rear mudguard. To add insult to injury, this happened about 20 feet from the start of the paved roadway.

Not all of Brazil's wonders can be seen from the bikes and early on day four we headed to the local marina and boarded our chartered boat. After scanning the ocean for movement we were rewarded with the sight of a humpback whale lounging in the water. As we marveled over the size of our discovery, it was suddenly dwarfed by a second whale surfacing beside it. Then a third, much larger humpback showed itself.

Walking on the beach after dinner, under the light of the full moon, was a fitting end to a more relaxed but no less adventurous day.

Continued next month...



The Brazilian tour mixed busy paved routes frantic with traffic among more remote and secluded dirt traveling

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The unmistakable panorama of Rio de Janeiro from over 2,000 feet above the city



History lesson

Stepping back to Brazilian culture

Story and photos by Scott Jamieson

Part 1 of this feature appeared in the January issue.

DAY 5 - ARRAIAL D'AJUDA – 270KM

The Bahia region is not known for the quality of its road work. It's to the point where the road maps show areas of extreme disrepair identified by symbols not even in the legend of our other maps. The last time Davis did this trip to Arraial d'Ajuda the roads were as poor as the map indicated so we were pleasantly surprised to find them repaired or repaved for our visit.

We got our first hint that we were heading to a tourist area as we passed a good number of makeshift shacks on the roadside selling local trinkets and kitsch. Porto Seguro was the most blatantly tourist area we had been to so far.

In addition to the poor roads in Bahia, questionable service is also a tradition. Davis educated us on the intricacies of ordering meals in this area. The most reliable, but not foolproof method appeared to

be asking what from the menu they had available to serve. This was not as simple as it sounds, reinforced by the fact that the phrase "we have it, but we're out" has worked its way into Bahia culture. For example, if you point to the menu and ask if they have the shrimp, the server will say yes. When you then order it, you will be informed that they have run out of it. Tricky, but you get the hang of it.

Walking the town before dinner we discovered a nice, clean tourist area. We sat on the patio of a steak restaurant favoured by Davis and enjoyed an amazing dinner of Argentinean beef. Davis and I then visited the Chapel of Our Lady of Ajuda. The Jesuits started building the chapel in 1549. During the build they discovered a fountain of miraculous waters which attracted pilgrims. People still come to visit this believing in the miracles the fountain can provide. I'll save that for next time.

DAY 6 – ILHEUS – 340KM

We made some alterations to our original plan for the next couple of days so we

could scout some new roads and visit an eco-reserve where several endangered species of monkey are protected.

We decided to take a bit of highway in order to get to the better parts of the ride along the coast more quickly. It turned out that the highway was in terrible shape during the initial sections. Given our luck with road quality so far, this was overdue.

I had begun to discover that Davis has a real thing for "shortcuts" when it comes to the scouting tours. The regular tours are more defined but the exploratory nature of this trip allowed for some real spontaneity. He spotted a dirt road section, which we then found on the map and determined it worthy of investigation. Setting up the new standard split, Davis and I headed to the entrance of the dirt shortcut.

It turned out we were not the only ones using this short cut. We were on a traffic route for cows being herded along, then horses being moved from farm to farm. The guy herding the horses told us to go around the pack but this move caused them to suddenly start running. Without saddles or riders onboard they quickly outpaced

their keeper. After exchanging some Portuguese words I didn't understand Davis told me that we were to try and get in front of the horses and slow them down. This worked out surprisingly well as we got in front just as they needed to turn in to their destination farm.

DAY 7 – IGATU – 590

There were more rough and potholed roads heading out of Ilheus but nothing we were not expecting. Our fuel stop in Itororo turned out to be fun as we met a group of local riders drawn to the GS. While Davis held court I mentioned to him that the dirt bike parked beside me looked to be made up of, as near as I could tell, three other bikes. There were still rad brackets on the frame where the liquid cooled engine was removed and replaced with the air cooled unit currently stuffed into the space. This, once translated, got a pretty solid laugh from the group.

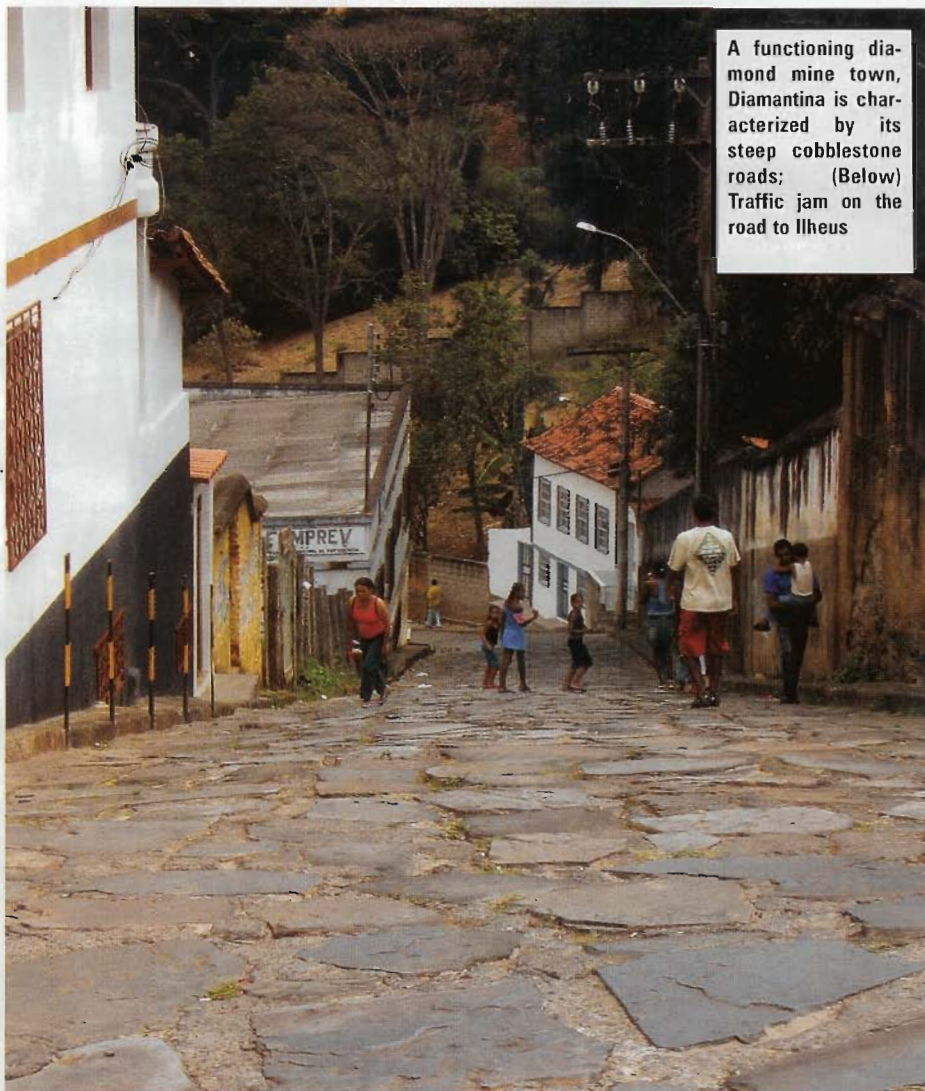
Just in front of Vitoria do Conquista we stopped for lunch at a Churrasco, or bar-beque place. This served what I knew of as "Brazilian food" from back home. One waiter after another brought huge skewers full of meat, chicken, poultry, etc. to the table and carved off pieces for us.

The road conditions were much better in the afternoon. The areas we were traveling through were much different from before. Long gone were the lush green coffee valleys as we now traveled through much drier areas. Small houses with cactus gardens out front and bored-looking cattle out back were scattered along the route.

Just when I was lamenting the scenery we changed our route for the last stretch towards Igatu. We were rewarded with green landscapes and great new roads around the town of Ituacu. It seems this area was discovered by the coffee-growing folks so the valleys were being worked. Since this coffee needs to be shipped out of the area there are brand new paved roads where the map showed dirt and debris.

Although Igatu, originally known as Xique-Xique, was once a thriving mining settlement of over 9000 people, today the 400-person town is quite different. Igatu now stands out for its ruins of houses made from stones and incorporating naturally occurring rock formations as one of the walls or ceiling.

As I walked though town in the evening, then again through the outlying area in the morning, I felt like I had been left in a museum alone after it was locked up. Igatu



A functioning diamond mine town, Diamantina is characterized by its steep cobblestone roads; (Below) Traffic jam on the road to Ilheus





does not thrust its history at you but rather leaves it in its place for you to feel almost as if you discovered it as you experience it.

DAY 8 – LENCOIS – 220KM

We took the main road out of Igatu in the morning, which is a 7km road made of ancient stone. It was a relaxed pace with great views of the river running through the area. We had planned a short day's ride to Lençóis.

The roads were in good condition and we took advantage of that with some brisk riding. The city of Lençóis is a main destination in Chapada Diamantina, and as such it has great infrastructure for tourists, both Brazilians and foreigners.

Our first task after checking in was to head to Pai Inácio Hill. From the top we had a 360-degree view of the striking landscape. The skyline of the green and blue hills, the golden clouds and the cold wind completed the feeling of being on the top of the world.

DAY 9 – RIO DE CONTAS – 300KM

After getting out of town on a rough stretch of road, we headed into more farm areas. The roads were good and the views were consistently spectacular but the last 80km on dirt was

the most fun of the day. With river crossings, elevation changes and valley side roads there was plenty to look at. We emerged into Rio de Contas with all saddlebags intact.

The city of Rio de Contas is located 1200m above sea level and is considered one of the most important examples of

colonial architecture in Bahia. As such, several buildings are protected by the Bureau of Historic and Artistic Heritage.

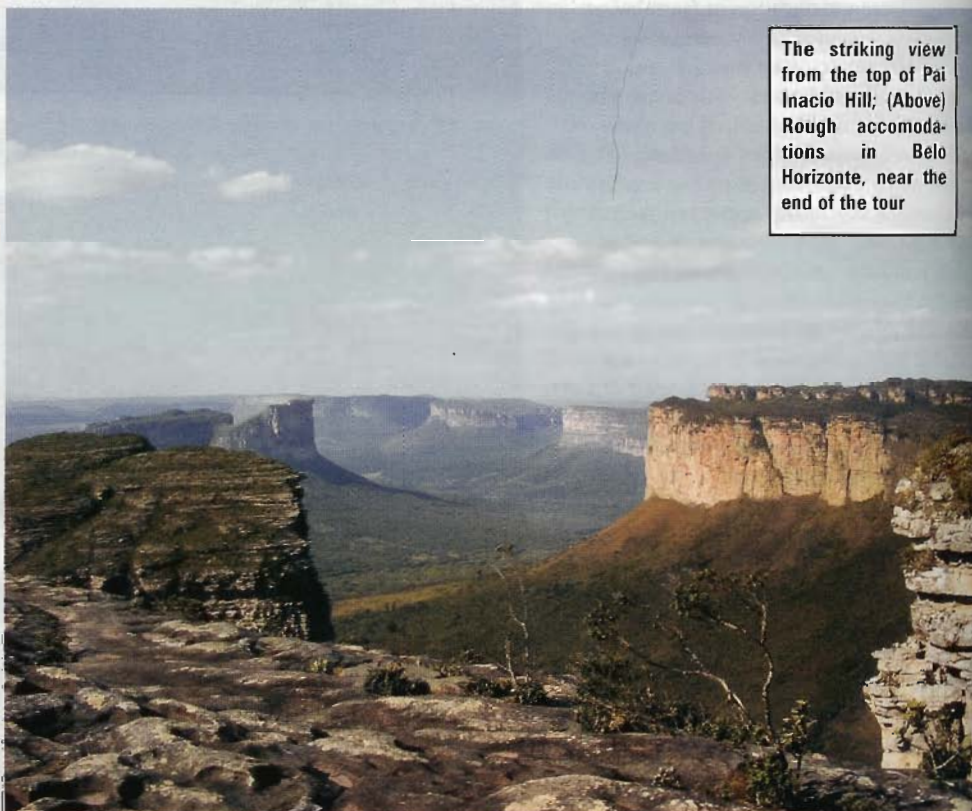
DAY 10 – MONTES CLAROS – 620KM

Montes Claros was not on the original route plan but again, it was a scouting trip. Mainly, however, it was the best stop on the way to Diamantina.

The roads had pothole repair scars everywhere but were in good shape and we kept a solid pace in an otherwise casual riding day. The scenery probably would have been impressive a week or so ago but by now we were accustomed to the spectacle.

Once in town and cleaned up we headed to dinner on "Sanitary Street." I kept asking, but that's what they call it. From our sidewalk table we watched about a million scooters and sub-250cc motorcycles, plus one Ducati 916, ride by. This area consists of restaurants, bars and clubs so we walked the route a few times to burn our pizza calories off.

A combination of industrial and college town, the Montes Claros stop ended up being entertaining as we got a real taste of what Davis describes as "middle-Brazil," more modern than most of the places we have been without the big city feel of Rio de Janeiro.



The striking view from the top of Pai Inácio Hill; (Above) Rough accommodations in Belo Horizonte, near the end of the tour

DAY 11 – DIAMANTINA – 250KM

It was a short ride to Diamantina in the morning but the quality was fantastic. We traversed perfect pavement that had been laid pretty much across the top of a small mountain range. The occasional drops down into the valleys, and the subsequent climbs back to the hill tops, made for an entertaining ride.

Located in the Minas Gerais state, Diamantina is the hometown of Juscelino Kubitschek, the president responsible for the creation of Brasília, and one of the more popular presidents in Brazilian history. Diamantina has a very different atmosphere to any of the other colonial towns and is still a functioning diamond-mining town.

Walking around town is made challenging by the steep inclines on many of the cobblestone roads.

Like Igatu, although on a larger scale, Diamantina allows you to explore and discover its history rather than beating you over the head with it. Instead of simple tour brochures blindly leading you from stop to stop, you are encouraged to interact with the locals to understand the area.

DAY 12 – SETE LAGOAS – 290KM - SERRO

Following some overnight rain we decided to tackle the mostly dirt route to Sete Lagoas, in order to follow the historic route the early miners would take when traveling south through Ouro Preto to port towns like Rio. The sections in this area are preserved as dirt roads, albeit in better shape than they probably were in the early days, in order maintain some of the experience.

It was a hugely fun ride over great terrain and through countless small and well preserved towns, most of which are over 300 years old.

We made a quick but pleasant stop into Serro along the way, leaving the locals drooling over the GS' while we snacked on cheese turnovers and walked the central town square.

Staying just outside Sete Lagoas on a spectacular ranch property we were treated to first class accommodations. Although it looked very historic it was actually a recently built property. The owners went to great lengths to build it in a manner that was loyal to the historical architecture, even blending antique items into the place.

DAY 13 – TIRADENTES – 330KM - BELO HORIZONTE

Heading to Tiradentes we were hit with a few showers here and there. It was the first day of less than perfect weather.

Tiradentes is named after Joaquim José da Silva Xavier, who was the leader of the first organized movement against Portuguese rule in Brazil in 1789. His role in the rebellion ended poorly for Tiradentes as he was publicly hanged in Rio on Apr. 21, 1792. To further make an example of him and frighten the

population into complete submission Portuguese authorities ordered his body to be cut into pieces so that it could be displayed publicly along posts in city boulevards. Eventually, Tiradentes' martyrdom made him a national hero. When Brazil eventually became independent from Portugal Apr. 21 was designated a national holiday.

DAY 14 – RIO – 280KM

On the route back into Rio it was difficult to find a spot that was actually straight. The entire route was twisty and spectacular, making for excellent riding. We retraced some sections from the ride, stopping at the same café for a coffee and juice as we did on the way out.

We arrived back into Rio early so that we could visit Corcovada. The narrow and twisting road through Santa Teresa provided some adventure of its own. At 2330 feet above Rio, the 125 foot statue of Cristo Redentor (Christ the Redeemer) is one of the more recognizable images of Rio and Brazil in general. Although packed with tourists, it is a fun experience to make the visit. All of Rio and its 12 million people seem spread out below.

While Davis runs this tour company as his livelihood, he clearly has his enthusiasm for both motorcycling and Brazil as the real motivation. It was a great balance between riding and sightseeing with the emphasis on the riding.

Being at the hotel to take care of our arrangements was just the beginning with Ricardo. It was his other contributions that never ceased to amaze us, from his driving skills in the Land Rover through the hundreds of pictures all the way to a never-ending stream of upbeat and offbeat antics. It would not have been the same without him.

I also think that the organized tour was the way to go rather than trying to pursue this on my own. Davis' knowledge of the areas and Portuguese language skills were a huge positive impact. More than this, his love of the country came through in everything he said while touring us through the various towns. **IM**



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