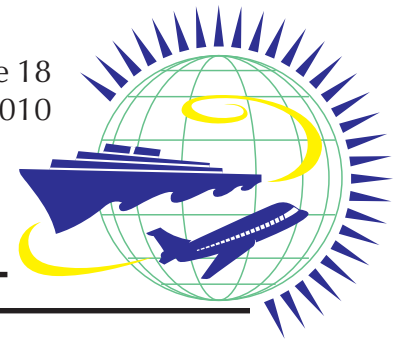


Routon's **ROUSING** Reports

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A Routon's Romantic Reservations Publication – not for resale

Hey, look at this, an issue of RRR before October! Could this mean maybe I'll get back to two issues a year? Don't bet on that...but who knows??? And unlike the last issue, this one does have international travel *and* a cruise. Yes, the "iffy" cruise whispered about last time, just *from* South America, did happen thanks to a stock market that improved shortly before final payment was due. Alas, the market headed south again the day the cruise ended so who knows what is in the future.

Actually, we were on two cruises "back to back" for a total of 45 days. The first was from Rio de Janeiro to Buenos Aires and return to Rio, and the second from Rio to New York City. The second one was to get our ship, Holland American's MS Veendam, from South America where she had "wintered" back up north for the summer cruise season. These repositioning cruises can be a great deal for those of us who prefer the longer cruise. The only problem with this one was too many ports – 28 in 45 days – which impacted the daytime speaker programs we enjoy so much. Also, three ports in three days

A great place to wind down on Ilhabela.



requires more stamina than I have anymore. Of course, we knew the number of ports and adjusted by just staying on board, especially in the many Brazilian coastal ports.

Let's check your geographic skills: if you lived in New Hampshire and wanted to go to Rio de Janeiro, what is the best way? With research on the internet, for us it was Boston to Toronto to Sao Paulo, to Rio on Air Canada. Why? For reasons I cannot fathom, it was \$900 less expensive and did not take that much longer to make the trip. Internet research does pay, it seems. However, if you are ever going via the Sao Paulo airport, be sure to hire a guide to get you and your luggage to the connecting flight.

While we were not at all happy with the Inter-Continental hotel in Rio where we "crashed" after our long flight, we were delighted with the MS Veendam. Our first impression was great and it just got better. The Veendam had had a recent and extensive refurbishment where the ship was "rebuilt" within the old hull, everything from some additional cabins to a thorough redecoration of everything the pas-

senger sees – an older and somewhat smaller ship made new again. Our inside cabin was spacious, the shower worked (unlike the Inter-Continental Hotel shower), and the storage space was so expansive, we did not have enough stuff to fill it – and that's a first! The service was fine, the nightly entertainment outstanding, and the food was even better, the best I have had at sea and as good as any five star restaurant on land. They even made a world class crème brulee, and for a thousand people! Special requests were graciously honored – like mine for crème brulee for our table only, an apple pie, or a special entrée for one. Very special indeed.

Speaking of dining, again we were blessed with six super table mates. Peter and Gill are Aussies who live in the mountains outside of Brisbane in a "town" where the population during the week is 22 – that's not the age but the number of inhabitants. The cruise was part of a three month trip for them and they gained immediate fame when Gill told us they had only one suitcase for the two of them – WOW!!! The other two couples, Huguette and Andre and Mimi and John, are French Canadians from Quebec. With the latter couple living on the US border, they are almost next door neighbors. While French is their first language, only Huguette's English was limited. And she loves to tell jokes. She would work hard in the afternoon to translate the joke into English and then tell it at dinner. You could not always understand her clearly from across the table but she was such fun, you had to laugh anyway. Delightful new friends all, and we do hope to make it up to Quebec to see them or for them to come south.

In regard to ports, as expected, the high point was Buenos Aires, the loveliest city in South America and as lovely as we remembered. We did go to the tango show at the Carlos Gardel as we did last time, but this was our trip splurge!! We went VIP class. A private car and driver came for us, we were met at the door – actually outside of the door – by an

assistant maitre 'de, escorted to our table at the rail overlooking the theater and the stage, and the champagne was poured... and poured... and (for me) poured some more. Helen did her share but I think I drank a whole bottle of very good champagne plus a half bottle of the excellent white wine with my dinner. And, yes, we did see the show, but we certainly were thoroughly "relaxed". It was a wonderful high point.

Our second day in Buenos Aires started with re-visits to a couple of our favorite spots including the classic, 19th century Café Tortoni for coffee and cakes. With the coffee and cakes for stamina, we then met Peter and Gill at an upstairs, small tango dance hall for an afternoon of dancing. Yes, we did dance the tango Argentine style and in public. (And no, the effects of the champagne had worn off by then.) We had had one lesson on board the ship and were "masters" (note: past tense). Anyway, it was strictly a local place with no tourists in sight and fun. If you go, they are open from 3:30 to 6PM and the address is Confeiteria La Ideal at Suipacha 380. Oh yes, you can get lessons there, but, of course, we didn't need them. (ha ha)

Just before Buenos Aires we had another of our favorite cities in South America, Montevideo in Uruguay. Here we had a challenge. The sole on one of my good black (and only 15 year old) shoes had come loose and they were

Jerry gets a steel drum lesson.



unwearable. How do you say you need a shoe repair?? The best I could do was, *Donde esta zapateria?* Fortunately, the tourist office girl, though puzzled, searched her data base and sent us off by taxi – well, at least in the right direction. Our first local inquiry was not going well, but then a young girl in the group trying to help us rattled off in Spanish and another person took our map and marked it. After disrupting the entire store and with a lot of arm swinging and pointing, we went on our way. After just one more inquiry, we were there. The gentleman glued the loose sole of my shoe while we waited. The exorbitant price was 30 pesos... about \$1.30. Having spent so much on shoe repair, we slowly walked back to the ship. Well, we did stop three times for refreshments and just enjoyed the city on a lovely day. We talked at some length with a very knowledgeable "hippie" from a commune outside of the city while in one outdoor restaurant and visited with several others during our stroll. At the end, I had a cooling beer in a restaurant near the port that served the biggest mixed grill I have ever seen. Unfortunately, we sailed before dinner time, but if you are in Montevideo at dinner time go to the La Posada Don Tiburon in the Mercado del Puerto (market of the port) and order the mixed grill. It has a generous portion of rib eye steak, rump steak, pork, a rack of lamb and is served over oven glazed onions in what appears to be a double boiler to keep it all warm while you eat. It says it is served for two but I'd suggest three or four.

In the first of the two cruises from Rio to Rio, we had 10 ports in the 14 days, six of them Brazilian coastal ports. With temperatures in the 90's (32-35c), we chose to stay aboard in the A/C comfort until we got to Ilhabela. We were set to do the same again but Ilhabela looked good from the ship so we caught the tender – there was no dock big enough for us – and went ashore. Ilhabela proved to be a very nice and small seaside holiday spot on an island off shore from San Sabastiao. Unlike many of the Brazilian coastal ports, it is clean, safe feeling, friendly and fair priced. Nothing major but notable for being so nice. One young lady even led us to the internet café, an example of the friendliness that was typical. It was still very hot so we spent most of our non-internet time viewing the water and people from a



Helen meets some green natives.

delightful, open air restaurant while sipping the local beer. While sipping (maybe because of sipping?) I came up with a story to tell our table mates about OUR day ashore. First of all, I said that when we stopped at the tourist information booth to ask for an internet café we were greeted by several official looking men. It seems we were the 5,000 tourist to visit Ilhabela this year. They took us to the governor's villa where we used his internet connection and then he and his wife served us lunch on their patio overlooking the city and gave us souvenir gifts including a key to the city. Unfortunately, I went too far when I said they had personally returned us to the ship using their private yacht, and that blew my credibility for the day and the rest of the trip. Ah well.

Back in Rio, over a thousand of our fellow passengers left for home and a comparable number boarded. It turned out that only 143 of us were doing both cruises and this paid off as we sailed north. We of the "143 group" were treated to dinner at the extra fee restaurant, had a special Indonesian luncheon, and a private cocktail party with the captain – well, 143 is a bit much to call it private but the captain was buying.

While horde number one was getting off and out and horde number two was boarding and finding their way about the ship, Helen and I decided to join Peter and Gill on a trip to the Museum of Contemporary Art. Since the temperature was 86F (30C) at 10AM, we took a taxi to the ferry to get across the harbor, the ferry, and then bus number 33B to get to the museum. The trip was worth the trip just for the trip.

(You can puzzle that one out.) And the architecture of the museum was very dramatic, just as their guide book said. It looks like a giant, white mushroom (or space station depending on your viewpoint) set in the middle of a reflecting pool. You walk up a winding “road” to enter on about the third floor to get your ticket and then more “roadway” up to the fourth floor level. The museum architecture is worth seeing and the views from there are absolutely outstanding – everything, the Christ Statue on Corcovado, Sugarloaf, the beaches, and city itself. The art inside sets a new standard – unfortunately a new low. Their premier exhibit consists of strips of paper that have been stuck to newspapers, pictures, or whatever and then ripped off and put into a pile – and I am not kidding you!!! Gill said, “I wonder what it’s supposed to mean?” My reply was that it meant the trash cans were full. We finished off the day by taking a bus through lovely and then not so lovely residential areas and found an excellent restaurant with outdoor seating and very cold beer to prepare us for the arduous return journey – bus, walk, ferry, walk, and taxi “home” Not exciting but one of the most pleasant days I’ve had in Rio.

As we sailed north from Rio, the heat crept even higher and with five “look alike” ports in seven days plus the cold I had developed, we decided we’d stay on board and save ourselves for the Amazon. It also didn’t help that the very nice Brazilian gentleman on board representing H.Stern, a major South American and international jeweler, kept alerting people to the danger of wandering around on your own ashore. The last two of these stops were Recife and Fortaleza. These have a special story. In both cases we were scheduled well ahead to dock about 7AM for a port clearance procedure that normally takes minutes. In Recife, the pilot was “late” and the clearance process took until 1:25PM. In Fortaleza the ship arrived at the pilot station on time at 6AM and were then told that the dock had not yet been cleared by a freighter, the pilot showed up after 7AM and we finally got to the dock at 8:30 only to be told that the clearance and health officials would not arrive until 10AM. The health inspectors finally arrived at noon. Land tours in both cases had to be cancelled and those with private arrangements were just out of luck. Why all this? Very simple; the captain did not and would not cross their greasy

palms with bribes. In this environment is it any wonder that when Gill and Peter, our new Aussie friends, did their usual city bus sight-seeing in Fortaleza that even the bus driver and local passengers kept warning them as best they could not to get off because it was dangerous? Brazil will be one of the major powers of the world well before the end of this century, but they do have a long way to go.

I mistakenly thought we had finally reached the Amazon River when we arrived in Belem on Easter Sunday. Actually, Belem is a ways up the Baia de Guajara and is south of the mouth of the Amazon by several hundred miles. Unfortunately, the shallowness of this water made us late and the town had only one small dock for the tenders to use to get us to the buses for the hour drive to Belem. With most things closed on Easter Sunday it seems like staying on board in the A/C would have been a good idea, right? However, we had just skipped five ports and Belem, a major city, “looked good” with a cathedral and big fish market to see. First problem was the 11:15AM buses were 2½ hours late. Second, when we got to town the fish market had closed and the hotel concierge told us it was unsafe to walk to either the market or the cathedral. Then when we got back to the dock to board the tenders to the ship, all of the locals who had gone to a nearby island for picnics and swimming were coming home – by boat, to the same dock. They unloaded and unloaded and unloaded – for an hour and a half we stood on the dock and waited. How many were there? I can’t say as I lost count at 4,422,847 people, approximately. The good news, our crowd was remarkably good natured while we waited and we did get back aboard for dinner, but I had to choose between a drink and a shower. Helen had a shower.

The following morning we did enter the mighty Amazon – and it is mighty. At 4,080 miles long it stretches all the way across the broadest part of Brazil to its head waters high in the Andes of Peru. The main

body of the river ranges from 3 miles to 6 miles wide normally and up to 15 miles wide in flood stage. It is 100 miles wide at the mouth. The river is navigable by ocean going vessels for 2,000 miles and the major port where we docked is a full thousand miles from the Atlantic. Viewed another way, the water, which is collected from a full 40% of the total landmass of



The “Meeting of the Waters” where the Rio Tapajós meets the muddy Amazon

South America, is greater in volume than the Mississippi, the Nile, and the Yangtze all put together – 20% of all the fresh water on earth in one river! A couple examples that have been calculated bring this home: first, one day’s flow would satisfy all of the water needs for New York City for 12 years, or the flow for just one second is enough to fill 2,000 backyard swimming pools, one second! Yes, it is mighty and mighty impressive.

Reportedly the river was first discovered by a European when a ship’s captain 200 miles off shore discovered he was sailing in fresh water. The first full exploration, however, was by Francisco de Orellana in 1541-42. Interestingly, he explored from west to east starting at the headwaters in Peru, down the precipitous drop from the Andes, and out to the Atlantic. In the course of his travels, his group was attacked by a ferocious band of Indian female warriors called Icamiabas meaning women without husbands. (The question to this day is were they ferocious because they didn’t have men or because the husbands had gone fishing and left them to fight the Spaniards. Even Google has no answer on this.) The Spaniards named them Amazons after the



top: School bus Boca da Valeria style
middle: Tenders to and from downtown
Boca da Valeria
bottom: Main Street in Boca da Valeria



female warriors in Greek mythology and this is where the name for the river and the entire basin originated. Obviously, they made quite an impression on the Spaniards.

The Amazon basin is an ecological wonder. Seemingly, every species of animals is present except polar bears and penguins. OK, not quite, but when you look at a list it does seem like it and the rivers contain over 3,000 varieties of fish. The cat fish is not the largest of these, but they will grow to 200 pounds – that's a lot of cat fish to put with your hush puppies (for you folks in the southern US). Birds from the colorful parrots and macaws to the black vultures are common in the jungle, and the tropical vegetation is a wonder in itself, like water lilies with leaves several feet in diameter. And just to keep it complete, to balance all of this out, you have the bugs and insects – which raises the question, did Noah really have to collect a pair of each of these???? It's easy to see why the Amazon basin, particularly from Manaus to Peru, is a rich, rich area for eco-tourism.

After picking up our river pilot at Macapa – over 100 miles from the river entrance – our first port was the little city of Santerem, a city of 130,000 halfway between Belem and Manaus. For a change, it “felt safe” and was a nice little, country city. It appears that its main purpose is a regional center for

shopping, probably some government offices, and a transportation center for the area. Let me explain. There are few roads in the Amazon basin so travel is primarily on the river. There are “bus” type boats for short trips and “cruise liners” (maybe 100 to 150 feet long) for overnight trips. The latter are most interesting. They have three decks for passengers. There's the main deck that has very small and basic cabins, the “mezzanine” deck which is open on the sides and has hammocks hung cross wise on the ship and fairly close together, and the top deck which is the roof deck above the mezzanine where passengers can stretch out on the bare deck to sleep in the total outdoors. The bugs and insects probably can be found in all classes. The main reason to go into town was to see where the dark and clean waters of the Rio Tapajos meet the muddy Amazon in a very good example of a “meeting of the waters”. The two rivers flow side by side until they finally mix. You can see it clearly in the picture.

Boca da Valeria was a total and welcome change of pace, a village of 100 at the mouth of the Valeria River. There are a number of other villages nearby on the Valeria, but where we landed by tender, the village was 100 strong. Chickens everywhere and, of course, fish aplenty in the rivers, interesting houses on stilts, lots of canoes for transport (no roads and no cars) and the jungle right out back. But they do have electricity in at least some of the houses – or else the satellite dish was for decoration. The one “house that got away” from my camera was one with a large satellite dish at the end of the house directly next to a beautiful, brand new outhouse!

There were canoe rides up the Valeria on offer - \$5 per person for 30 minutes... but others had gotten a full hour for the same price so it was negotiation time, a problem considering my severe lack of language knowledge. Helen finally negotiated a full hour for \$6 each – and we got back in 45-50 minutes. However, in the heat, it was enough. We saw a number of little villages and the “school bus” (see picture) bringing the children home, but I think I only saw one toucan and a lot of black headed vultures so it was a disappointment from the earlier reports. However, the problem may have been the earlier reports

of birds galore were for trips in the earlier part of the day and we were there in the early afternoon, in the heat of the day when “intelligent life” was taking a siesta.

The people were very nice. True, they expected a dollar tip if you wanted a picture of yourself with the parrots or whatever, but they did not ask and I have no problem with the tips for their efforts to be there with something interesting. They even welcomed you into their homes. Helen went into one that did not look like much from the outside but inside it was spotless and had three bedrooms with low, floor level beds for each person. Perhaps no 52 inch TV but a comfortable place to live — except for the climate! It was very open and no A/C anywhere. The ship's crew had arranged for 50 of the local school children to come aboard the ship for a tour and lunch. All of the children looked very healthy (the on board 50 and on shore) and a couple of the older ones we saw even spoke a little English from school. The ship made a donation to the school – they did not want money; they asked for school supplies. A nice place to visit, but believe me, NO one missed the last tender to the ship.

Manaus with close to two million people

is by far the largest metropolitan area in the Amazon basin and is twelfth largest in all of Brazil, despite being a thousand miles from the Atlantic and in the middle of a broad jungle area. It actually is not on the Amazon River but on the Rio Negro or black river just above where the black waters merge with the muddy waters of the Amazon, another meeting of the waters location. Manaus was founded in 1669 and basically has seen four periods: the slow development from a fort, the rubber years, and the period of poverty from 1920 until modern Manaus emerged as a result of government action to create a duty free area.

The best known and storied period is the years of the Rubber Barons from about 1880 or so until 1920. The rubber trees scattered through the jungle forest created great wealth for the European barons as they had a monopoly of the market in North America and Europe. Their excesses are legend as they tried to make Manaus the Paris of the Tropics and created a city which ranked as one of the gaudiest cities of the world. Everything was imported, from the English steel for the market to opera singers including Jenny Lind. The floating docks that automatically adjust for the varying levels of the river were built in and imported from England. The materials for their villas ranged from the marble and glass of Italy to the furnishings from Paris. They had electricity for lights and an electric street car line before many European cities. They had clean wa-

ter and sewage systems, but the grandest of all was probably the Teatro Amazonas, the famous opera house.

The opera house was built essentially between 1885 and 1896 with the first performance on January 7, 1897. Roofing tiles came from Alsace, bricks from European kilns, furniture and furnishings from Paris, Carrarra marble for the stairs and columns from Italy together with 32 of the 198 chandeliers being of Murano glass. The curtain which must be raised directly, not rolled, was painted in Paris, and the ceiling panels were painted by the Italian artist Domenico de Angelis. The dome is covered with 36,000 decorated ceramic tiles. Mats were put down on the tiled roadway outside so that the horses' hoofs would not make disturbing noises. For the elite, there was a secret tunnel entrance directly into a private room for drinks before the performance. The theater seats about 700 in a room with perfect acoustics even today. Singers, corps de ballet, and entire opera companies were brought in from Europe, grand in every way. Extravagance is hardly a strong enough word.

The sudden ending of this wealth was the result of three things. First, the rubber trees of the Amazon would not grow in groves for easy harvesting; even Henry Ford tried. Second, British adventurer Henry Wickham stole 70,000 seeds which were taken to the British Asian colonies, where they do grow and prosper in groves, dramatically reducing costs. The Rubber Barons of Manaus lost their monopoly as the supply grew in Asia. By 1920, the



*left: The Fort Young Hotel - ramshackle outside, posh inside
bottom-left: The place for a drink at the Fort Young Hotel
bottom-right: The “spa” deck at the Fort Young Hotel*

emergence of synthetic rubber products ended the glory days. Manaus fell sadly into what I have called the period of poverty. There was no money to run the generators and thus no lights or street cars. Without the rubber industry, there were few jobs and the period of extravagance ended.

This period of poverty continued until the 1950's when the central government established some duty free privileges areas, which evolved into the Manaus Free Trade Zone in February of 1967, with special incentives for a period of 30 years to create an industrial, agricultural, and commercial center. This has now been extended until 2013. With the freedom to import duty free, many international companies have established electronic and other factories; many Brazilian firms have set up operations in Manaus, including petroleum and chemical plants; the port has become a hub; eco-tourism from around the world is strong; and even Brazilian tourism has boomed with "tours" to take advantage of duty free shopping. Manaus is no longer a gaudy city of outlandish extravagance, but its prosperity is obvious.

And what of the opera house? It has been restored four times, most recently in 1988-90, and after 90 years of no opera, opera is again flourishing with regular performances and the annual Festival Amazonas de Opera, which is held in April. They also have their own corps de ballet, and philharmonic orchestra. Helen heard them rehearsing and said they were great. Interestingly, more than half of the musicians have been imported from Bulgaria, Belarus, and Russia.

Back in the Atlantic and then into the Caribbean, we again had a surplus of port calls – five in seven days heading into Ft. Lauderdale!: Devil's Island, Barbados, Dominica, Tortola in the British Virgins, and then a day at Holland American's private island. However, we were definitely winding down. On Barbados all of us from the table joined to have a day at the beach using a rented van. With no highway number signs, this became a bit of an adventure. And yes, we did ask for directions with little success until one lady finally said, "follow me." But it was fun. On Devil's Island fairly steady rain fell all day making the trails muddy and slick, and by the time we were ready to give it a try the seas had become rough going for the tenders. So Helen and I skipped it again – for the third



The Teatro Amazonas, the famous opera house in Manaus

time, I think. Reports said not much to see that day except the souvenir T-shirts at 50 Euros each. Perhaps the main species on the island are the local "gougers".

The stop we did enjoy more than expected was Dominica and we did not get more than half a mile from the ship. Huguette from our table had told us about the Fort Young Hotel just a hundred yards or so from where we came ashore from the ship. It was a delight. We had drinks on the second floor balcony, then went to the front for the main entrance graced by two shiny brass canon, enjoyed just looking at the pool, and telling ourselves that this would be a wonderful and surprisingly inexpensive place to stay. But that's another trip for another day.

It was a really good trip despite too many ports. The ship was outstanding, the entertainment and service great, and despite the world class food, I did not gain weight – a first on a long cruise. Buenos Aires was the high spot, but the Amazon was a very pleasant surprise and I recommend it to you. And, as usual, we have new friends.

Back at home, Helen left 36 hours after we arrived for – where else – Ft Lauderdale, where she could have gotten off 4 days prior. Since then we have made the usual May trip to Akron, and I've been trying catch up in addition to having a root canal and physical therapy sessions for my leg. Just to have something else to do, we have

joined a new gym and are now "pumping iron" – well, a small amount of iron anyway. We will be off soon for a family visit and a first time trip to Branson, Missouri. We've never been there and it is only a couple hours drive from where we will be at David and Paula's in Arkansas. I'll try to give you a report later this year.

And the Chez Routon had its first international guest of the year from England. It was great fun. Frankly business at the Chez Routon has been slow during the recession. We are open for both international and domestic guests. How about you? Our rates have never been lower. Do give us a call and come along. We also look forward to your emails and letters and are always interested in what is happening in your life, so do let us hear from you and how your plans might bring you to the Chez Routon. 'Til next time, *may a kind and loving God walk with us and with each of you.*

Amen.