

Which wine goes with roasted armadillo?

It has been another amazing week in South America for me.

Most of it has been spent looking at the tourism potential in the town of Buena Vista, where I have been before.

For the majority of visitors, it is simply a gateway into the jungle of the Ambaró National Park, but I soon found there is plenty more to keep the visitor occupied.

A local hotel has a number of mountain bikes for hire. The bikes are not the best quality but, once you get used to their quirks, you can ride in reasonable safety. 20 minutes down the road, or an hour on foot, is the coffee plantation of El Cafetal.

At the moment it is free, but they are considering making a small charge for entry in the future. I took an hour's walk around the plantation seeing all the coffee bushes. It is shade grown coffee, which apparently pushes the price up significantly in the USA, yet the labels on the products do not reflect this.

I was also able to see all the machinery for processing the coffee beans. Afterwards came

Letter from (South) America

by
RUSS PEARCE



the tasting, and I do believe it was the best coffee I have ever had!

Despite this, nobody in Santa Cruz seems even vaguely aware of it, so I have stocked up the tourist office with lots of information brochures in the hope it will make a difference.

Also within walking distance of Buena Vista, is the River Surutú, which you have to cross to enter into the jungle. At the waterside I observed how the sand is dredged by hand, which looks incredibly hard work.

Alongside the dredgers, the local villagers wash their clothes, and their children, in the slow running water.

A short bus journey away is the River Yapacani, where you can visit restaurants serving all sorts of exotic species. I passed on the roasted armadillo and settled for the Surubi river fish which I know I like!

I am not really sure of the ethics of eating the jungle creatures, but as far as I am aware they are not protected.

Back on the way to Buena Vista was the beautiful town of San Carlos. I went there with the hope of visiting the local brewery. Unfortunately, they are not interested in allowing

visitors to look around, which is yet another missed opportunity.

The beer itself was great once I found a shop selling it, and if it were available at home, could give SA a run for its money!

When I got back to Santa Cruz I, was just in time to visit the International Cheese and Wine Festival. Everything I sampled was excellent, but there was one particular wine from Argentina with a very chocolaty taste. It was so good I bought a bottle!

Also in Santa Cruz, was a local derby when the two major football teams, Blooming and Oriente, came face to face in the stadium they share. The atmosphere was incredible with fireworks, riot police, red cards, and a result satisfactory to secure everyone's safety, a 1-1 draw!

Finally, last night I went to an International Folkloric Dance Festival called 'Tentayape'. It was like a blend of the International Eisteddfodd, the Urdd, and a Disney stage spectacular.

All of the Bolivian acts were interpretations of the relationship between the indigenous population and various animals. Particularly impressive though, were a corps of Japanese drummers and some flamenco-style dancers from Argentina.

As all of those taking part were students, they all had massive support. The section of the crowd we were with were particularly good at tearing newspapers into tiny pieces and throwing them in the air, every time their college was mentioned.

It was like being in the audience at a kids TV show, and I now have some idea what the ticker-tape parades would be like in places like New York at New Year!

WHAT DO YOU THINK OF THAT?

A collection of devotional thought starters
by Rev Dr
JOEL LEWIS



"TALK first with God before you talk with the world. Read first the Word of God before you read what the world has to say in the newspaper." (Anon)

"Now in the morning, having risen a long while before daylight. He went out and departed to a solitary place; and there He prayed." (Mark 1:35)