



TOURING SOUTH AMERICA

(Part 4)

A SHORTENED TRIP THROUGH BRAZIL
WHILE RACING AGAINST THE VIRUS

by Amir and Tamra Hyster



A closeup of Devil's Throat, the most monumental of the waterfalls in the Iguazu system, located on the Brazilian side of the Falls.

WE HAD VISITED THE ICE-fields of Patagonia in Chile, landed at Ushuaia in Argentina – the most southern commercial airport in the world, officially known as the “End of the Earth,” encountered Spanish-speaking-only ATCs, took in the beautiful lakes of Bariloche and the modern city of Buenos Aires. About that time, COVID-19 had started making news and we knew it was time to keep heading north through Brazil to get back to the

U.S., speeding up the final stretch of our South American tour.

Buenos Aires, Argentina – Iguazu, Brazil

Argentina was planning to announce that all flights in and out the country would be suspended, and all land borders and airspace would be closed due to the COVID-19 pandemic that was closing borders around the world. There were less than 50 cases in the



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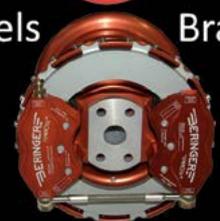
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country at the time and the president issued public announcements of the measures they were imposing for the next two weeks.

We decided to take our last opportunity to leave Argentina and proceed with our journey as planned, hoping for the best. The permit to fly into Brazil was granted and we received a smooth exit from Argentinian customs and immigration officials. There is no departure procedure (SID) from San Fernando International Airport (SADF) and we were given the clearance in a complex list of vectors. Ground Control took a long time

relaying the vectors but spoke very fast in an accent that we couldn't understand; when we read back, they couldn't understand our accent! We needed to repeat instructions and the whole process was exhausting and frustrating. To add to our irritation, once we departed, ATC requested we follow just one simple heading then a direct path to Iguazu Falls. On a positive note, the landscape was beautiful, over all the green agricultural fields, with many rivers flowing through the rich fertile land.

We were transferred by the Argentinian ATC to Brazil Control and we requested a flyover of Iguazu Falls, which was immediately granted with the surprising response, "Absolutely! Take as long as you want and report when finished." Both the Argentinian airway and that side of the falls were closed so the

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▲ Iguazu Falls is the largest waterfall in the world, its vastness is showcased in this photo taken at sunset.

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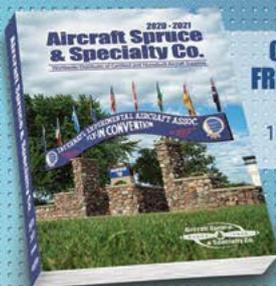
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radio was silent as we were the only aircraft in the vicinity as we took our time to enjoy flying around the largest and, in our opinion, the most impressive of all the waterfalls in the world. This now topped our flyovers of the trifecta of the largest and most amazing waterfalls – Victoria Falls in Africa, Niagara Falls in Canada/U.S. and now the Iguazu Falls of Brazil/Argentina. With a width of 2,700 meters (1.7 miles) and average water flow of 62,000 cubic feet, Iguazu Falls is the largest waterfall in the world; most of it being located on the Argentinian side, but the Brazilian side has the spectacular Devil’s Throat which is the most monumental waterfall in the Iguazu cascades system.

We were vectored for an RNP approach and landed on the Brazilian side of the falls clearing customs and immigration. We called the Belmond Hotel das Cataratas and they were shocked that we wanted to make a

reservation instead of a cancellation; we were the only booking they had in over a week. A great rate was negotiated and we settled into one of the very few rooms that overlooked the falls. This luxury iconic hotel is located 8 miles

inside the national park that attracts 4 million tourists a year, however in the last few days access had been tightly restricted due to COVID-19, leaving the park and the falls solely to the very few hotel guests!

It was very tempting to stay in paradise and ride out the current crisis, however as the days passed by, we saw other hotel guests panic and scramble to return to their homeland as their

governments called all their citizens to return, and airline flights were being canceled. The hotel also announced they would close down, even though Brazil had not yet announced the closing of its borders. The feel of the world news and the pressure for governments to tighten down was evident, and our intentions to spend some time in Brazil were changing. We wanted to avoid getting stuck in a country where we didn’t speak the language and in possession of a large taxable asset with no access to Consulate and medical services, with all borders closed around us. We needed to get back to the U.S.!

Iguazu – Cuiaba (capital of Mato Grosso, Brazil)

We made an early start as huge thunderstorms were closing in over the Iguazu Falls area, and we needed to move north through Brazil with an overnight stop in the southern part of the Amazon to wait for the weather to clear at our next destination of Manaus, located north of the Amazonas. After paying vastly overpriced landing and parking fees, we departed for an uneventful two-hour flight with a straight in ILS approach into Cuiaba’s runway 35.

We parked at Abelha Air Taxi, a fantastic FBO at the extremely expensive airport. The FBO charges were fair but aviation in Brazil is a complete rip-off for foreign general aviation. The locals pay only about 10% of what foreigners are charged for landing and parking fees. It pays to shop around, and although you may find an FBO that is reasonably priced, the airport will gouge you with the most fees it can or vice versa. We were greatly assisted by Bruno, our friend in Brazil, to arrange handlers at every stop.

(continued on page 36)

“WITH ... AVERAGE WATER FLOW OF 62,000 CUBIC FEET, IGUAZU FALLS IS THE LARGEST WATERFALL IN THE WORLD ...”

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Cuiaba – Manaus- Amazonas, Brazil

Wheels up by 7 a.m., the flight took us over some of the 2.2 million square miles of the Amazon. The huge thunderstorms that we waited overnight to clear were all around us but had mostly dissipated. When we checked the weather before the flight, we were expecting CAVOK at Manaus, however at the point of no return, the Garmin Connex weather showed a 100-mile radius thunderstorm had formed northeast and branching toward Manaus. The very limited possible alternates had much worse conditions, so we reduced speed to 40% power (200 knots) and were told to expect RNAV runway 11, despite the wind favoring runway 29. As we came closer, we could see that the lightning had moved giving clearance to RNAV runway 29 via GELAG, but there were still cloud tops at 29,000 feet. On descent, we were weaving through the clouds and trying to stay out of them for as long as we could, but at 18,000 feet we encountered heavy rain, ice and moderate turbulence! Intercepting GELAG and continuing to land, we broke through the clouds at only 900 feet AGL – the worst of it being that the LNAV approach was not engaging. At 4,000 feet, we received two GP (glide path) needles on the G3000 that went up and down and didn't engage, the airplane just kept going down ignoring the approach to hold at 4,000 feet. This created an enormous workload of disengaging autopilot, manually ascending back to 4,000 feet, re-entering approach, re-engaging autopilot and it still didn't want to play nice, all in full IMC turbulent, heavy rain conditions, engaging the procedural approach just before we broke the cloud base.



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Manaus is the capital of the State of Amazonas and is the gateway to the Amazon Rainforest; the largest tropical rainforest in the world and has the largest biodiversity with many waterways and rivers. It's a good spot for visitors to take tours to see the pink dolphins, fish and hike. Under better circumstances we would have stayed a few days, however everything was canceled or closed. We visited the very busy river port of Porto de Manaus to see where the Rio Negro River intersects with the Amazon River. Large and small trucks were all loading up supplies of food, drink, appliances and construction materials to the ferry boats and barges that would travel to all the ports along the 4,000-mile long Amazonian waterways. With airspace around the world closing down rapidly,

we decided it was time to move on and continue our journey to the U.S.

Once again Amir pulled out all his ingenuity and started to call every island/FBO and governing body possible to see if he could get us through the Caribbean Islands and as close to the U.S. Florida coast as possible. After a few hours of getting negative responses for landing, he received an "affirmative" from Trinidad for a technical fuel stop only, and St. Kitts would allow an overnight stay.

"UNDER BETTER CIRCUMSTANCES WE WOULD HAVE STAYED A FEW DAYS ..."

Manaus, Brazil – Puerto Spain, Trinidad

We flew directly north over the entire Amazon Rainforest mostly at a flight level of 31,000 feet; the visibility was



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▶ Manaus Port where ships were being loaded with goods to travel through the 4,000-mile long Amazonian waterways.

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The AeroKART is an all electric battery powered aircraft tug for moving light aircraft. The AeroKART is designed for a particular height of attachment points, either high (Cessna, Bonanza, or Piper), low (Cirrus, Corvalls/Columbia, or Tail Wheel), or customized options to fit your aircraft. The two arms can easily be replaced by pulling the two quick-release pins and installing a different pair (length or height) of arms. Adaptors for different aircraft are installed in the end of long arms to mate with your particular aircraft. The adaptors are held in place with either a quick-release pin or a bolt tightened against a flat on the adaptor.

SPECIFICATIONS

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over 600 miles either way and we could only see dense rainforests, rivers, lakes and reservoirs. When flying toward Boa Vista in northern Brazil we received clearance to fly direct to waypoint GEMOL, the crossing point from Brazil into Guyana, leaving the Amazonian ATC and transferring to Georgetown ATC staying clear of Venezuela. The landscape over Guyana is much the same as the Amazon – a thick and dark green rainforest. On route to Georgetown, we were cleared direct ALBEP on the coast, then a sharp left turn to Trinidad which sits just off the coast of Venezuela. ATC was astonished that we had a permit to stop in Trinidad.

On the ILS runway 10 approach in moderate turbulence, we received a front wheel landing gear failure

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▲ *On what would have been peak-season, the beach at the resort in Nassau is deserted.*

warning – the third time this had happened after the deployment of the wheels – first we see the three green lights and then on and off red messages. We asked the tower to check that all gear was down and they confirmed it was, so we probably just had a faulty sensor. We landed without any issues if you don't count the maddening repetitive woman's voice of the avionics shouting, "WARNING GEAR LANDING FAILURE!" The red alert stopped during taxi to park; it was just a sensor. The handlers and flight services were waiting on the tarmac, and with us sitting in the plane they completed the Passport Control and General Declaration documents; they lodged the flight plan and arranged the fuel. We were not permitted to leave the aircraft, not even for a bathroom break! We were back in the air in less

than an hour – the fastest turn around we have ever had.

Port Spain, Trinidad – St. Kitts/Nevis

Just 400 nm from Trinidad at St. Kitts we were permitted a night stopover. A note to anyone flying to St. Kitts, perhaps fly to the next island!

St. Kitts – Nassau, Bahamas

The four-hour flight to Nassau was actually our longest of the South American trip; the weather was fair and the airways were busy again, with many American Airlines aircraft making special evacuation flights, all reporting choppy conditions. We were climbing to 30,000 feet with a headwind of 65 knots and a crosswind component

(continued on page 42)

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(continued from page 40)

“ONCE PAST THE CARIBBEAN SEA, WE FLEW OVER THE BEAUTIFUL ISLANDS SCATTERED THROUGHOUT THE ATLANTIC OCEAN ...”

of 25 knots. This changed our flight conditions considerably, giving us an unacceptable estimation of fuel at our destination of only 42 gallons. We throttled back to slow down through the strong headwinds, the Connex Weather indicated that winds should decrease after an hour-and-a-half of flight to a headwind of 12 knots, changing our fuel at our destination to 82 gallons, which made us more comfortable.

Once past the Caribbean Sea, we flew over the beautiful islands scattered throughout the Atlantic Ocean;

the shallow azure blue water surrounding them looked like paradise on earth. We landed a visual approach with over 90 gallons of fuel at Nassau, Bahamas and taxied to Jet Nassau, where we instantly felt like we were back to civilization. Flying through the South American countries, whilst very rewarding, had been very difficult, with constant work to negotiate handlers, parking and permits to enter countries and clearing bureaucracy at airports.

We stayed at the Grand Hyatt Baha Mar, a resort that has around 2,300 rooms. Normally this was their peak season and they would have been full, but there were only 45 rooms occupied, leaving it partially shut down. It was an odd sight to see such a huge resort empty – several pools had just a few people and the beach was barren. It

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“OUR APPOINTMENT TO APPLY FOR A B2 VISA ... WITH THE U.S. CONSULATE WAS CANCELED ... DUE TO THE CORONAVIRUS.”

was great for us and the few guests that we became acquainted with. Again, we were tempted to stay in paradise being just an hour flight away from the U.S.

coastline, but with the continued crisis unfolding we again decided it would be better to be in the States.

Our next problem arose – we had no visa to enter the U.S. with our own aircraft. Australia and the U.S. have a visa waiver program called ESTA (Electronic System for Travel Authorization), which is a 90-day tourist stay when arriving on a commercial flight. This didn't apply to private airplanes and there is no provision for a private owner/pilot – certainly an unusual situation.

Our appointment to apply for a B2 visa (a temporary visa that permits you to enter the United States for a short period for tourism) with the U.S. Consulate was canceled the week before due to the coronavirus. Amir called the U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) and explained our situation. After many calls and slowly being sent up the chain to the most senior officer, we were advised to initiate the eAPIS to enter Fort Lauderdale Executive Airport (FXE). We left immediately and were in the air within an hour; the flight of 162 nm took only 50 minutes. Fort Lauderdale CBP was waiting for us and commenced the paperwork for a B2 visa on the spot. The complex process took a little under four hours, completed by the professional and helpful CBP officers. We were extremely grateful for their






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kindness showing us how the U.S. handles a crisis – pulling together to become the most amazing country with the most generous people.

Sadly, since our trip was cut short, we weren't able to explore more of Brazil's populated cities, but we hope to go back soon. This trip was such a wonderful experience, meeting people and seeing their beautiful countries.

The Vision Jet opened up a new world of opportunities for us. Having flown the SR22 to many locations all over the world it was challenging to obtain avgas outside of U.S., Europe and Australia, as well as gaining permits and clearances into other countries and contacting handlers. When we embarked on a South American trip without knowing any Spanish or

Portuguese, we reached out to fellow pilots and their contacts for support. Initially we were helped by Cirrus Managing Director of International Sales Adam Hahn, who has hundreds of hours in the Jet, and Latin America Regional Director Gabrielle Maestracci who linked us to Ulises Mones and provided us with a list of handlers and FBOs around South America. One contact led to another and after hundreds of phone calls, text messages and emails, our plan was developed. We no longer had the avgas problem, using World Fuel Services (WFS) for the Jet A-1 by the WFS app or email order. The world opened up a new circle of friends, who were initially strangers and now feel like family; our humble thanks to you all for making our South American travel dream possible. ☺

AMIR AND TAMRA HYSTER are active aviation travelers, flying themselves throughout the world and writing about their experiences. The Vision Jet is their fourth Cirrus aircraft, a progressive move from their previous SR22N, SR22TN and SR22T that they previously flew on their world adventures.

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