

JULY 2026 MONTHLY BLOG/ 185

A YEAR OF POEMS

RETURNING FROM TRAVELS OVERSEAS



**‘Home is the sailor, home from sea,
And the hunter home from the hill.’
Robert Louis Stevenson (c.1884)
[Image: istock 2026]**

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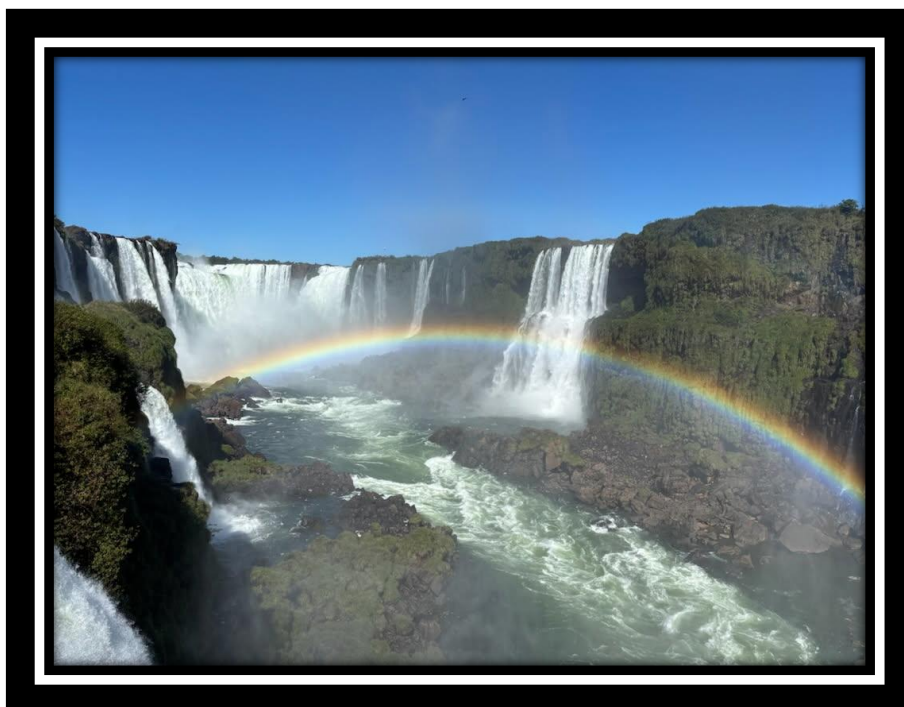
It’s fun returning to BLOG again after a pause for travel overseas. So the logical theme for this month’s commentary is the fun of travel overseas - and the equally great fun of returning home. Our cats, after an initial aloof moment (*‘Where have you been?’*) gave us a great welcome; and we purred warmly in reply.

Visiting Brazil in May/June 2026 was a total experience. And the first thing to record is how friendly, welcoming and lively were all our encounters with Brazilians (excluding only one bad experience, noted briefly below). We started the visit in Rio, which is an amazing city on an amazing site.¹ On our final evening in Rio, we took the lift to the very top of the famous Sugarloaf Mountain - and enjoyed not only a magical sunset but

also a superb view of the great bay in which Rio is sited and the surrounding mountains.

Brazil is a fast-developing country, with signs of growth and change everywhere. Some of the sharp contrasts between wealth and poverty certainly gave us pause for thought. The poor '*favelas*' [shanty-town slums] indicate the continuing extent of urban deprivation and make the case for structural reforms. So do the collapsing pavements and sidewalks in the Brazilian cities. A systematic programme of repaving is well overdue.

At the same time, there are great wonders to be seen and unequivocally enjoyed. We marvelled at the fantastic Iguazu Falls, which are among the grandest waterfalls to be seen anywhere in the world.² Happily, we were there on a sunny day and the ubiquitous spray from all the falling water meant that everywhere we looked there were rainbows, both large and small! We were so happy that we did not bother to hunt for the proverbial pots of gold at the rainbow's end ... [See photo Iguazu Falls © Tony Belton 2026]



Another great experience was provided by our short trip to Ilya Grande - an island south of Rio that has banned all motor traffic from its streets. It's a magical experience to stroll round an entire urban area with no traffic to dodge, other than people on bicycles and a few on horseback. Life without the motor-car was so utterly tranquil that we quite lost track of the days and hours. Dreamy!

We did have one Conference on Eighteenth-Century History to attend, which was a great success. The commitment and knowledge of our Brazilian colleagues was impressive; and we had lots of stimulating exchanges. The Congress met at Belo Horizonte, which is in the heart of the Brazilian mining region. Aptly enough, therefore the organisers took us all on an excursion to view an intact eighteenth-century mining town. Ouro Preto is now listed as a UNESCO World Heritage site - and rightly so!³ Its steep hillsides are covered in cobblestone streets, and lined with magnificent Baroque buildings, including churches, palaces, and museums, with present-day restaurants and bars as well. The only response is: WOW!

Leaving Brazil was a moment of sadness. Another bonus to record was the great food and wine. And the only downside: a bad encounter with a desperate man, when we inadvertently walked from a tourist area in Belo Horizonte into a poorer part of town. The desperate man prowled around us - literally. And he then jumped forward and snatched our sunglasses from our heads. Well, he did not get anything of value. And he did not hurt us. Two local men came to our aid and called the police, who promptly gave us a free ride back to our hotel. So the encounter ended as a demonstration of Brazilian goodwill - and we thank our helpers wholeheartedly!

After that, we got home, greeted the cats, slept deeply - and then left for another Conference in Paris. It was a distinctly abrupt turn-around. Happily, the Conference in Paris - also on eighteenth-century history - was another great success. We met many friends, old and new. And we had time

to explore Paris again - a great world-city that we both love. Then it was home again - ready to be greeted by the cats - and to catch up with mountains of postponed business. Travelling is great and so is returning after travels. To paraphrase Stevenson: *'Home are the travellers, home to climb their personal email mountains'*.

ENDNOTES:

¹ See for stimulating accounts: O. Morton, *Rio: The Story of the Marvellous City* (2015); and B. McCann, *Ten Moments that Shaped Rio de Janeiro* (2025).

² For details, see https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Iguazu_Falls.

³ Expert guidance is offered in the following website:
<https://artsandculture.google.com/story/pgUhKzLZOMHvKg>.