



My Solidarity Holiday in Brazil

Elaine Burgher, an Administrative Assistant at ArcelorMittal Coke & Chemicals in Pretoria has recently returned from her Solidarity Holiday in Brazil. From 12 to 18 May she spent part of her annual leave to work with other Solidarity Holiday volunteers in conjunction with Child Fund Brazil to renovate the ABAFE Community Centre in Belo Horizonte, Brazil.

Elaine Burgher

Arrival in Brazil

I arrived at Belo Horizonte Airport at approximately 18:30 and was very happy to see someone standing at the arrivals with my name on a board. I had visions of myself being stranded at the airport!

I discovered that my taxi driver, while extremely friendly, did not speak a word of English! I asked him if I should sit at the front or back of the taxi (via hand signals) and he seemed to be happy for me to sit up front. What a bad decision! Not only was I sitting on the 'wrong side' of the car, but he drove on the 'wrong side' of the road! This became the most exhilarating and scary ride of my life! He drove like a maniac which was fine on freeway, but once we hit the city and heavy traffic with bumper to bumper buses and darting motor bikes I had to hang on to the dashboard – I never knew I could hold my breath for so long. Nevertheless, 1 hour and 20 minutes after collecting me at the airport, he deposited me safely at the hotel door, wide awake and high on the adrenalin rush.

Meeting the team

Most of the team members were present at our first meeting at breakfast on Sunday morning. We were welcomed by Natalie

Rehaen from the ArcelorMittal Foundation in Mexico, and a presentation was given by Child Fund Brazil. We met and chatted with our team mates (the language barriers made for exciting and funny forms of communication).

We were all from different countries, spoke different languages, were different ages, however, we all had one thing in common – a passion to make a difference in these peoples lives.

The team

Oscar and Mireya from Mexico, Nicole from Canada, Rajesh from Germany and India, Sorina from Romania, Danijela from Bosnia, Pedro from Spain, Juana from the USA Ernest and Elaine from South Africa. Ernest is from Vanderbijlpark.

Day 1

After breakfast on Sunday, we were taken on a bus tour around Belo Horizonte, visiting various places of interest. We attended a play at a theatre that is sponsored by ArcelorMittal. This theatre gives opportunities to aspiring actors, as well as giving the people from the local community the opportunity to bring their families to watch the theatre productions.

The afternoon was spent wondering around a local market, with an array of cheeses, meats, crafts, jewellery, and so much more.

Our first dinner together at a

local restaurant was fun, with all of us trying different dishes and comparing the different foods to that in our own countries.

ABAFE Community Centre

Our project was the renovation of ABAFE Community Centre. This Centre takes care of children from the surrounding area while their parents are at work. The first group of about 50 children arrived in the morning, and spent the morning attending lessons, playing games and participating in educational or sporting activities. These children go to school in the afternoon.

The children who were at school in the morning then arrived to spend the afternoon attending lessons, playing games, and participating in educational or sporting activities. They are looked after until they are collected by their parents in the evenings.

Our task was to paint and repair the exterior and interior walls of the Centre, and on the final day, to "decorate" one of the outside walls with the help of the community children.

Day 2 - Local TV Interview

On Tuesday, the local TV sent a crew to interview the 'strangers' who had come to help in the community.

Day 3 - Visit to ArcelorMittal Monlevade

Wednesday saw us leaving bright and early for a visit to

ArcelorMittal Monlevade Long Carbon Steel - a two hour road trip.

The town of Monlevade has grown around the plant. The first house was built in the 1880's. The team was welcomed and given lunch in this beautiful old house.

Iron ore is brought from the mine to the plant via an 11km cableway.

ArcelorMittal Monlevade Community projects

ArcelorMittal Monlevade aids two community projects – a children's home, and a substance rehabilitation centre. We visited both during the afternoon. What a humbling and heart-warming experience.

Day 4 - Visit to the community

On Thursday, we took a break and walked around the community where ABAFE is situated, where we were welcomed into a local resident's home. It was sad to note that although there were trees, not one house had a garden.

Day 5 - Meeting with CEO Long Carbon Americas

Early on Friday morning, we visited the ArcelorMittal Offices in Belo Horizonte. Where we met, shook hands and chatted with Augusto Espescht de Almeida (VP, CEO-Long Carbon Central & South America). We were made very welcome and thanked for our contribution to the community of Belo Horizonte.

Our last day at ABAFE

On the last day at the ABAFE Community Centre the children sang and did a play for us. The highlight of the play was the prince waking up Sleeping Beauty!

They gave each one of us a hand made thank-you gift.

The team collected some money which was used to buy much needed educational toys, and we handed these over together with gifts that some of us had brought from our home countries.

Final project

Our final projects were for each of us to paint our respective country's flag on an outside wall with the help of some of the children. We also planted some trees to celebrate the ending of this Volunteer Week.

Conclusion

I have made new friends, experienced life in another country, and most of all, together with the team, helped to uplift a community in need. It was an incredible experience, and I would encourage each and every one of my colleagues to apply for Volunteering with Solidarity Holidays and the ArcelorMittal Foundation.

In September, 2010, the ArcelorMittal Foundation launched the Solidarity Holidays programme as part of the company's commitment to supporting the communities which surround our operations. The aim of the project is to give ArcelorMittal employees the opportunity to volunteer in a country other than their own. This project offers employees the unique and rewarding opportunity to engage with people from different cultures, interact closely with colleagues from other locations and make a direct contribution to the company's social development initiative.

