November 29. Lotsa confusion. Did we or didn’t we have a guide for the day to hike in the national park? Favio left without telling anyone anything. ‘Couldn’t be reached. Judy called our tourist agent. Supposedly, the office had two women who spoke English. Neither was at the office. Luckily, our next-door neighbor in the pousada, Nelson, was still around. He called them, spoke with the guy at our tourist agency who was noncommittal.

We were just about to give up and go beach-hopping on our own when a representative of Atilaia Tours, showed up and explained to us that he had checked and we had a tour booked for 11:30 with a different company. Apparently, our travel agent had contact Atilaia and, to their credit, they got on it and found the company with whom we had a reservation—no direct communication from them. OK.

So, they pick us up. Neither the driver nor guide spoke much English—a few words, much less than my Portuguese. We went to pick up a second couple that were supposed to be on the cancelled hike the day before and this one, as well. They had given up and were not around their pousada. So much for indifferent communication. We now had a private hike with a guide, Abél, who spoke no English except for things like the imperative, “Let’s go!”

It all turned out fine. He was very nice and my Portuguese had been improving though the week. It was good enough that I could understand most of what he told us and he could understand me. We moved at a pace that was comfortable for Judy and me with many stops for pictures—many, many pictures. We had only one deadline, the tidal pool at Atilaia near the end of the hike, but he didn’t tell us about that until much later in the trek.

We walked along the shore for a long way—not easy! It was all basalt and more porous lava rock ground smooth and round by the surf, very treacherous. First, rocks that were egg-sized and rolled under your feet. Then, rocks that were hand-sized, head-sized, and larger, up to major-sized boulders. There were about 300 meters of these, very difficult. Sometimes, they would wobble or roll under our feet, much boulder-hopping, challenging balance, tiring. It was clear that this hike had to be timed to low tide because these rocks would be under water otherwise.

After that challenge, egg-sized rocks again on a more slanted section of beach, so that we were gliding downhill towards the water with each step.
Every few steps there were another spectacular display of waves crashing against rocks and shooting up into the air. Those victims of the assault were layers of lava rock, but also layers of a conglomerate of stones imbedded in millennia of the bones of fish ground into a kind of coarse sandy looking paste—marine limestone—calcária, as Abél explained—that broke off easily. In some places, the layer-cake of this mix made for beautiful obstacles for the water to slam on and pour over in temporary waterfalls. In other places, the calcária rose in a wall on our right for fifty meters above us—in other places, we walked alongside a wall of slate or basal or coarse lava rock. Also, some more familiar sandstone—much like that in Colorado.

Eventually, we have to cut uphill at near the hottest time of the day, very steep climb that had me dizzy at the top. This was a perfect place to stop to eat our sandwiches and recover. We were atop a ledge, not nearly at the ultimate plateau that we had to reach, but the worst of the challenge was behind us. The view back along the cliff in both directions was spectacular, to be sure.

There was also a viewpoint up there that Abél showed us. Waves crashing into a corner with sound and fury, climbing up the wall to spectacular heights only to fall back again. Waterspouts where the constant pounding had drilled holes in the lowest plateau at the waters edge. All very beautiful.

Thereafter, we climbed through brush to the higher plateau—along the way, a beautiful scene with a horse grazing and a blunt lava chimney in the water as background. Eventually, we got to the fork to Atílaia. At this point, Judy estimated the temperature at 110°F—a good guess—with no ameliorating breeze.

We got down to Atílaia, just as the last tour group of 25 people was finishing up—only 100 people allowed there each day! The controller cleared us to go into the water and then he left with that last group. We, and another group that had hiked in, were the only people left. We cruised with our snorkels to our hearts content. I finally was able to snorkel and enjoy the abundance of sea life.

The fish were gorgeous. The rules of behavior for humans made them unafraid. As I floated, they came right up to me and were content to swim under me. The iridescence of the colors was a joy to behold. One particular fish with purple trim really seemed to have batteries and fluorescent lights under the skin. Yellows, warm whites, tans and purples seemed to predominate. There were also anemones clinging to the undersides of coral formations in the pool.
This was an experience that made the effort of the hike worth it and also refreshed us after all of the hard climbing. From Judy’s earlier experience, we both wore our shirts in the pool and suffered no severe affects of the sun.

A car was to have picked us at the top of a hill by the pool. However, the gate on the road to the pool had been gated, so we had to backtrack uphill for about a kilometer and hike out via a different trail. Much refreshed, this was not a big deal. We had spent about four-and-one-half hours on a hike estimated at five and we were very content although very tired.

In the evening, we went to another restaurant recommended by Manny, Cocimba Bistro (co SIM bah). This was the best meal we had eaten on the island. How nice that we had saved the best for last! The restaurant was located in Vila de Remédios on the down-sloping cobblestone road that leads past Bar do Cachorro and on to Praia do Cachorro. The old Royal Palace lies across the road. The people-watching at an outdoor table was just great!

I had seafood marina piquante and Judy had grilled salmon. We also had an excellent Chilean cabernet sauvignon with the meal. During dinner, George and Gesa Waitz came out; they had been eating at an inside table, but we never looked inside!

We finished up back at the bar Tom Marron, where we had eaten two nights before with our new Brazilian friends from Recife. Moreno was singing—Hey, Jude again for Judy—and I joined him for a few songs. FINALLY, we went back to our room, did a little packing and went to sleep.

Judy and Norm