

Return to Brazil

I started by going back to Brazil, where Ben arranged for me to train with Lucio 'Largarto' Rodriguez, upon returning from Brazil I would then move to Doncaster for a time in an effort to find a different path for my life.

I shared the beach front apartment in Rio with Jose, a Mexican purple belt who was teaching English to fund his training and living in Rio. He was a former resident of Mexico City and Jiu Jitsu had given him a way out.

My friend Chris whom I worked Security with, had gone over a couple weeks earlier than me, befriended Jose then invited him to stay in the apartment rent free as it had plenty of space.

We later nicknamed him the 'Mad Mexican' reasons for which I may tell at a later date.

Jose was on a budget, he would eat like a snake, once every 2-3 days.

His favourite day of the week was when the local Pizzeria did "All you can eat" night.

You would pay a relatively small amount, then take a seat. The service staff would walk round carrying pizzas cut into slices, you call them over and take a slice.

This would continue until you had your fill.

Now I love pizza, and I thought I could eat, however the Mad Mexican showed me otherwise on my first visit to the Pizzeria.

Over a couple of hours I sat and watched him eat. It was obviously a well practiced routine, he would take his time with each slice, knowing he was there for the duration, the sugar filled sweet pizzas didn't really appeal to him as he was there for as much nutrition as possible, as this feast would nourish him for a couple of days.

Jose was a fierce sparring partner, there was no light rolls with him but away from the mat he was a friendly likeable guy. He was a keen competitor and talked me into entering the next competition which was to be held at the Tijuca Tennis Club.

The week of the competition, we checked our weight daily in the local chemist.

Jose was used to cutting weight, I wasn't. I was struggling to keep up with the fluid and nutrition demands of the heat and training schedule, so I entered at my walking around weight, about 73-75kg at the time.

The Tennis club was located behind the hills in central Rio.

Jose offered two routes to travel there.

The safer more tourist bus ride would follow the coast past the Pedra De Gavea, Sugar Loaf mountain & Christ the Redeemer to arrive at the tennis club.

The other more native route was the bus ride through the hills and the favelas.

I chose the latter option.

The favelas fascinated me, many years later on my third trip to Brazil I would stay in a friend's home in a favela.

Tourists are usually told to avoid these areas as they are dangerous.

Fortunately for me, I was dark haired and after a couple weeks in the Rio sun I had dark skin, I often was mistaken for a Portuguese speaking native.

I laced my G-shock watch into my board short string and tucked it away. Making sure I showed nothing of value, including trainers we boarded the bus.

Riding through the shanty towns was an experience I'll never forget. Similar to the poverty stricken areas I had seen during my travels in Thailand, the dwellings were often tiny, garage sized buildings. Some made of concrete, others bricks, most with a corrugated tin roof.

At a couple of bus stops there would be a bar of sorts, to cater to those waiting for the buses. Many times people would be dancing, laughing and joking as we rode passed, their relative lack of possessions failing to stop them being happy.

Looking back its possible both this trip and sights I saw in Thailand set me up to realise that the western culture of more is better was false. Travel has a way of lifting the veil of culture.

I can remember being super nervous at the competition, the usual inaudible belching from the PA system was made worse by the fact I couldn't speak the language being distorted through the speaker.

Finally my name was called and I stepped onto the mat. I somehow won the first match on points, then was promptly strangled in the next match.

It was my first meeting of a clock chock, applied from side control top, it went on that fast and tight I thought my neck would break.

I sat and cried in the changing room for what felt like an eternity.

In situations like that words are pretty useless, whatever the intention of the speaker, the wounds are still too raw.

I think Jose understood this and simply said "If defeat doesn't bother you, you're in the wrong game"

It's stayed with me ever since.

I sat in the stands to watch Jose compete, he was fierce and unrelenting, submission after submission. I think he came away with gold, he certainly medalled.

Continued in Part 3..