

PATAGONIA EXPLORER 'The Best of Chile'

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With extension to Easter Island (Rapa Nui)

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Our winter get away from the Michigan cold was to visit Chile and a region called Patagonia, a sparsely populated region at the southern end of South America, shared by Argentina and Chile. Our extension was to have a few days on Easter Island, a Chilean territory, is a remote volcanic island in Polynesia. Its native name is Rapa Nui. Getting there is always tedious and seems like it takes so long but well worth it once the tour gets started. We choose Odysseys Unlimited for our small group travel experience. We finally arrived in Santiago, Chile and after immigration, picking up luggage and going through customs we had to re-check our luggage for our flight from Santiago to Puerto Montt where we were met by our excellent guide Ivan Bustamante. We met our fellow travelers and were transferred to Puerto Varas to the Radisson Hotel Varas, which boasts panoramic views of Lake Llanique and the Andes Mountains. After a short briefing our group was taken to Cambalache Restaurant for our welcome dinner.

After a 'sleep-like-the-dead' rest, we depart for a full day tour of Osorno Volcano and Vicente Perez Rosales National Park. As soon as we saw the Osorno Volcano our bus stopped for us to take photos of the volcano. Osorno Volcano is a (8,701 ft) tall conical stratovolcano lying between Osorno Province and Llanquihue Province, in Los Lagos Region of Chile. It stands on the southeastern shore of Llanquihue Lake, and also towers over Todos los Santos Lake. Osorno is known worldwide as a symbol of the local landscape, and is noted for its similar appearance to Mount Fuji. Osorno is one of the most active volcanoes of the southern Chilean Andes, with 11 historical eruptions recorded between 1575 and 1869. Across the street was a farm with lots of cute llamas in a corral for us to look at. We continued on and then had a short stop at a park with beautiful tall trees and ponds. We did a little nature walk and saw some birds and wild fuchsia bushes. It was a sunny day and we had good views as our coach traveled up the drive to the volcano for a spectacular view of the peak, Lake Lago Llanquihue, the surrounding mountains and countryside. When we got there you had the choice of hiking on the volcanic roads or riding the ski chair lift to various points in the park. Some of our group took the ski chair lift and Mike and I and others started hiking. Walking the trail gave you panoramic views of Llanquihue Lake and the neighboring volcanoes as you climbed higher and higher. The terrain was like walking on the moon. On our return trip to the coach we ran into some serious mountain bikers dressed in all their gear ready to challenge the trails. The hiking sure made us ready for lunch. We stopped at a place called Bombon Oriental for some Chilean cuisine. Mike had his first taste of a spice called merquen, which we purchased at a supermarket in Puerto Varas later that day. Merquen is a smoked chili pepper that is sometimes ground with toasted coriander seed and salt. We started with some tomato soup and the main dish was hake or salmon both served with boiled potatoes, julienne vegetables and peppers. For dessert you had a choice of a slice of raspberry kuchen or a bowl of ugniberries. The ugni molinae common known as Chilean guava, strawberry myrtle, or New Zealand cranberry is used

in cuisine mostly limited to southern Chile where it grows. It was a favorite fruit of Queen Victoria having been introduced to the UK in 1844. The dessert is called Murta con membrillo and is made by boiling the quince and Chilean guava berries together with sugar. After lunch we continue on to visit Vicente Perez Rosales National Park, a protected area in southern Chile's Lake District. It's known for Petrohué Falls, which flow down volcanic rock chutes etched by lava. Nearby are the green waters of Lake Todos los Santos and the snow-capped Osorno Volcano to the west. Tronador Volcano is visible in the far east on the Argentinean border. The park is crossed by trails and is home to pumas and tiny pudú deer. We walked a nice paved trail to see the waterfalls and volcanos. It was a beautiful sunny day with clear views at every lookout. Our last stop of the day was to visit Fundo Los Alerces for a Chilean rodeo demonstration and dinner. Rodeo is a traditional sport in Chile. It was declared the national sport in 1962. It has since thrived, especially in the more rural areas of the country. Chilean rodeo is different from the rodeo found in North America. In Chilean rodeo, a team (called a *collera*) consisting of two riders (called Huasos) and two horses ride laps around an arena trying to stop a calf, pinning it against large cushions. Points are earned for every time the steer is properly driven around the corral, with deductions for faults. Rodeos are conducted in a crescent-shaped corral called a medialuna. The sport, in its modern form, is strictly regulated. Chilean Horses are used exclusively and riders are required to wear traditional huaso garb.

Today we are heading to Calbuco Island for a unique lunch experience. The island was separated from the mainland by Calbuco Channel, but a causeway was built in 1965 to connect the island to the continent. Market stalls were set up on the main street with vendors selling their wares. The colorful market was alive with people selling vegetables, fruits, fish, seafood, pork, eggs, fresh herbs and homemade goods. Strings of dried mussels (choros), crates full of seafood in their shells such as oysters, clams, mussels, crab and the odd crates full of live barnacles related to crabs and lobsters. The rock barnacle, or picoroco, lives in a shell that looks like a miniature volcano. I thought I was imagining that the barnacle was alive till I looked close and saw this strange and unappealing creature popping out....scary! Tables full of trays of shelled mussels, clams and sea squirts (ascidain) took my attention along with piles of cured pork. I liked watching the men fillet the fresh fish to sell.

Two ladies were had their food truck set up and were selling empanadas and milcaos. You could order your empanada with various fillings. Camaron queso (cheese and shrimp), centolla queso (crab and cheese), pollo queso (chicken and cheese), queso (just cheese), marisco (seafood), carne picada (beef). Milcaos are a traditional Chilean dish. They're a type of pancake made with raw, grated potatoes, and cooked mashed potatoes, which are then mixed with other ingredients. There are other variations with caramelized onions, fried pork bits, or spicy pork sausage. They can be served with pico de gallo or sour cream. Some of the stalls were selling milcaos along with homemade breads, donuts, cookies and kuchen. Bricks of cheese, homemade jams, pickled vegetables and honey in jars and plastic containers. I even saw some miel de ulmo (ulmo honey) in a plastic coke bottle. The honey of ulmo is that produced by the bees when they collect the nectar of the flowers of ulmo, an evergreen tree reaching up to 35m in height, in the

native forests of southern Chile, in the regions of Los Lagos and Los Ríos. The honey is perfumed, with a creamy texture and whitish color, which differentiates it from other types of honey common in Chile. Bundles of dried kelp (which belong to the brown algae family) lined some tables. Dried kelp is salty with a heavy fish flavor. It must be soaked for hours before it can be used in traditional Chilean dishes like stew, though some people enjoy it with just a spritz of lemon.

After a short visit in Museo Calbuco (civilization museum) with everything from stuffed birds, old marine articles, boat models, religious icons, statues and old radios. Sort of like visiting a flea market. On our way to the coach we had a brief look inside San Miguel church which houses an image of San Miguel Arcángel patron saint of Calbuco that would have been brought by the Spanish founder in 1603. We left downtown Calbuco to go to our lunch designation. On the way we passed many mussel farms, docked boats and local houses. Our unique lunch was at Turismo Rural Estero Caicaen where the food is cooked for hours in a traditional Chilean dirt pit. A revered custom throughout Chile, (curanto) is a traditional food preparation method that has been practiced for centuries. It is marked by the cooking of a variety of seafood, meat and potato dumplings in a stone and nalca leaf covered fire pit in the ground that glows red from the insulated heat. We watch as the ladies and men uncover the pit and took out the layers of potato dumplings, seafood, sausages and pork. We all gathered in the dining room and took our places at the picnic style tables. Here come the waiters with bowls of the food from the pit. "Who would like some sea-squirts (ascidain)?", we were asked. I didn't but Mike and others said OK. FYI adult sea-squirts are simultaneous hermaphrodites possessing both male and female functional reproductive organs. Sea squirts are primarily sessile (permanently fixed to a surface), potato-shaped organisms found in all seas, from the intertidal zone to the greatest depths. They commonly reside on pier pilings, ships' hulls, rocks, large seashells, and the backs of large crabs. Some believe eating it causes a reaction called "poor man's Viagra" that tastes like the ultimate representation of the ocean, others say it tastes bitter and soapy and smells like sweaty underarms, yum! Sea squirts live in a protective cover that looks like a rock (pena). Our waiter brings over a plate and removes the sea squirt from its cover. It looks like a bag of blood with deep red flesh. When you cut it open its filling looked like cooked ground beef. I think Mike took a taste but I didn't hear about his opinion not then or later that night...lol.

When we got back to Puerto Varas we had time on our own to explore the town. We did some window shopping and entered a few shops. I peered in the jewelry store windows and saw jewelry made with semi-precious stones such as lapis lazuli, malachite, turquoise, jasper, quartz and obsidian. One interesting stone was piedra cruz (the stone of the cross) mined in the south of Chile that has very unusual marking in the shape of a cross. This stone symbolized the souls of the Mapuche warriors, who were killed by the Spanish Conquistadores during the fights nearly 500 years ago. Lapis lazuli, with its intense and exclusive blue color has always been a symbol for purity, health, elegance, luck and nobility. This semi-precious stone has been used by man for more than 6000 years. Some people believe wearing it stimulates the desire for knowledge, truth and understanding, and aids in the process of learning. It is excellent for enhancing memory;

guess I should wear my lapis lazuli beaded necklace more often. We walked around town and waited for Costumbrista to open for dinner. What a gem of a restaurant it was. Mike ordered a bottle of Chilean wine (which during this trip we were served gallons of different Chilean wines). After a nice appetizer of cooked shrimp in garlic sauce we had our main dishes of hake (meluza) in butter sauce and slow cooked beef ribs, both served with boiled potatoes.

Today after morning at leisure Mike and I took another walk around Puerto Varas and had lunch at Cassis Café that served big sandwiches, fresh squeezed fruit drinks and huge slices of mile high cakes and pastries. Mike ordered a green smoothie with spirulina (pond scum), I had a large glass of hand squeezed orange juice. I ordered one of their large chicken sandwiches and Mike ordered a mixed green salad that had big chunks of blue cheese on it and candied almonds. We ventured across the street to have our last view of the seaside and looked at vendors with their wares on blankets. I purchased a nice handmade silver wire pendant with a chrysocolla cabochon with colors of green and blue. This natural stone is said to calm the mind and nerves through times of stress, guess I should wear it everyday. We left today for our flight to Punta Arenas and settled into Hotel Cabo de Hornes.

Our agenda in Punta Arenas this morning was to make an early departure to board our day cruise through the Strait of Magellan today to Magdalena Island to visit the Magellanic penguins. This is one of the highlights of our trip to get up close to the Magellanic penguins. Magdalena Island is a small island in the Strait of Magellan, Chile. It is occupied year round by a small force of Park Rangers. At the top of the island is the Magdalena Lighthouse and from here you can have stunning views of the Magellan Strait. The island is the breeding location for several species of seabirds, most notably the Magellanic penguins which grow to be 30 inches tall and weigh 6 to 14 lbs., males are larger than females, and the weight of both drop while the parents are nurturing their young. Adults have black backs and white abdomens. There are two black bands between the head and the breast, with the lower band shaped in an inverted horseshoe. Young birds usually have a blotched pattern on their feet, which fades as they grow up into adulthood. By the time these birds reach about ten years of age, their feet usually become all black. With an estimated 120,000 nesting Magellanic penguins on the island it is an important breeding ground for this penguin colony and also it is one of the best rookeries in Patagonia for getting a close view of this species thanks to a small path that winds between their burrows. Many other seabirds, such as cormorants and gulls are resident here. After a wonderful hike around the path observing the young and mature Magellanic penguins digging in their burrows, waddling around the grounds, and feeding their young. They use many vocal and visual displays to communicate nesting territories, mating information, nest relief rituals, partner and chick recognition, and defense against intruders. On land penguins are very noisy; the structures in their throats emit vocalization sounds that sound like squawking or high pitch braying. On our return cruise the boat got close to an island where groups of sea lions were swimming and lounging on the beach. On our return we went to Lomitos Café for lunch. The café was busy with customers, décor with tiffany style lamps, old antique advertisement boards on the walls, and a menu of different sandwiches.

For our free afternoon Mike and I walked through the park to check out Punta Arenas Cemetery. The cemetery dates back to the 1840's with many local aristocratic families and European immigrants particularly English and Croatians buried here. It was designated a National Monument of Chile in 2012. The cemetery of Punta Arenas is well known because of its attractive legends that transform the place into a magical environment of mystery. When Sara Braun gave everything for building the entrance of the cemetery, she asked for something. After her death, the central door of the cemetery had to be closed forever. Nowadays, that door is still closed and has not been opened since Sara Braun's death. Another legend of the cemetery concerns the "Indio Desconocido" (unknown Indian). Everything started in 1930 when an Indian died on the island called Diego de Almagro. The Indian was buried in the cemetery there due to a donation from the administration of the same place. After twenty years, someone discovered several candles and coins around the grave. The years passed by and in 1968 by the grave were plenty of papers demonstrating gratitude for being helped by the Indian. Moreover, a woman named Magdalena Vrsalovic decided to donate the coins, in order to help the Cruz Roja (Red Cross) of Punta Arenas, a Chilean Institution that helps the community in case of difficulties. In the 1960s, Magdalena and other people agreed to move the grave to Punta Arenas and build a monument with a statue of the Indian made by Edmundo Casanova. As Mike and I wandered around the grounds of the cemetery we stumbled upon the figure of the Indian that must have been made of bronze and had aged to black except the thumb on its right hand and the whole left hand that had been rubbed till the bright brass shown through. Some of its toes had also been rubbed and the bright bronze was seen. I swear that as I touched the left hand it felt like touching a warm hand of a living human being, it could have been the warmth from the sun but it also gave a pleasant sensation of communication. The cemetery was beautifully landscaped with its exquisitely-manicured European cypresses under the peaceful gaze of angels standing atop the many chapels and mausoleums. We happened to witness a funeral procession taking place in the cemetery. We saw a group of people following a cart full of funeral flower arrangements and behind it some men that lifted a casket and placed it in a niche in a wall. The niche was opened and flowers were stuffed inside then the casket. Metal ladders that slid on rails provided access to the upper levels of the wall. We observed several of these niche lined walls in the cemetery. The glass panels offered views of items placed in the niches by family members. One grave had a metal plaque with a clock stating the fatal time of the death of the family member.

We stopped at Plaza Armas where there is a monument of Ferdinand Magellan standing at the top. The statue looks towards the Strait of Magellan. Statues of Patagonia Indians adorn lower levels of the monument. The foot of one of the Indians has been rubbed and touched by so many people its bronze shines while the rest of the statue is dark. They believe rubbing the foot will bring them luck and one day they will return to Punta Arenas.

After this full day of adventures we headed back to our hotel to rest and get ready for dinner with the group at Hotel Jose Nogueira in the Pergola room. The restaurant is located in the Sara Braun Palace, for many the most characteristic building in Punta

Arenas, highlighted by its beautiful setting in front of the Plaza Muñoz Gamero, and surrounded by other national monument buildings. In 1982 it was declared national monument, since then the main characteristics of the building can't be modified. Sara Braun came from her native Russia into the southern lands by the year 1874. She married in 1887 with the successful Portuguese entrepreneur José Nogueira, who had built his fortune thanks to the shipping activities, sea lion hunting, and sheep farming. When Nogueira died of tuberculosis in 1893, Sara inherits and managed a large fortune, using part of it in the construction of her home. When Sara Braun died in 1955, the mansion was given to her nephews, which sold most of the furniture. The following year it was purchase by the "Club de la Union" (Union Club). We were served the most interesting salad consisting of a large radish and young carrot with leaves still attached, mixed greens and a light dressing. Main dish was hake with a sauce. I enjoyed the hot crisp rolls the best, but the atmosphere in the Pergola room was delightful.

Today we headed towards Puerto Natales, gateway to Torres del Paine National Park on the shores of Ultima Esperanza Sound. Our first stop was to catch the ferry crossing in Rio Verde to visit the 'Estancia Fitz Roy Ranch' on the island of Riesco for a tour and lunch. We traveled along the ranch lands of the Patagonia Steppe land. The terrain was dotted with Estancias (ranches) stretched out as far as you could see with wild rheas running in the fields, sheep grazing and wind blown trees. The wind was so strong that the trees and bushes leaned heavily with the direction of the wind. We passed some ponds with black-necked swans, the largest waterfowl native to South America. As we waited for the ferry to go to Fitz Roy Ranch we saw several Andean condors. Found in the Andes mountains and adjacent Pacific coasts of western South America, the Andean condor is the largest flying bird in the world by combined measurement of weight and wingspan. The condor soars with its wings held horizontally and its primary feathers bent upwards at the tips. We also saw way up on the hills wild llamas.

Estancia Fitz Roy is located on the island of Riesco, it is one of the largest islands in Chile. The island is bordered by two large piedmont embayments: Otway Sound and Skyring Sound. The narrow Fitzroy Channel connects both bodies of water and separates the island from mainland Patagonia. Riesco Island hosts Chile's largest known coal reserves, with mining activities dating back to 1880. Numerous glaciers can be found on other parts of the island. When we arrived at the ranch started by Don Secundino Fernandez we were greeted by Fernandez family members including Geraldine who now manages the family business. On the grounds was a collection of old farm equipment, motors, engines, tractors, trucks, cars, motorcycles and parts from other farm equipment, a nice open air museum. There even was a tall wooden pole with arrows pointing in lots of directions to show distances to counties and places all over the world. The one that caught my eye was the arrow that said Michigan 11135 km (6918.97 miles). Our group went in one shed and inside was a collection of old adding machines, typewriters, radios, computer monitors, computer keyboards and strung on a wire a collection of old luggage suit cases. We were then taken to a wooden structure with a corral with some sheep and a gate that once opened led to a concrete trough filled with a solution and a ramp leading to a corral on the other side. This structure was made for sheep dipping. Our group was asked for some volunteers to dip some sheep. They got on one side of the concrete

trough and were given long poles with a neck shaped wooden end. Sheep dipping is an immersion of animals in water containing insecticides and fungicide. As the sheep travel through the trough a person gently pushes the sheep down with the plunging pole into the solution and the sheep go into the next corral to dry. Next we visited the shearing shed that nowadays is a family museum in a large barn. Outside the barn I saw an old box that said 'Little's Powder (poison) Sheep Dip'. Inside the barn was the biggest collection of stuff, so much you couldn't see it all in a day. Everything from old pots and pans, sinks, motors, stuffed birds (even a stuffed penguin), movie posters (one of Marilyn Monroe), old lanterns, small kitchen appliances, clocks, engines, utensils, old tires, the collection of Don Secundino Fernandez and his mania to collect everything that others wanted to discard. In a corner of this cramped barn we were gathered to observe one of the oldest practices, which consist of stripping a sheep of its fleece at the point of large scissors and expert hands. We went back out to see a corral with some llamas, cows and horses. One cow was interesting as it had an extra small leg extending from one side, a condition called polymelia. We went for a short walk to San Nicolas Chapel, built by the own hands of Don Secundino Fernandez and two other assistants during three months of winter 2003. Using the native wood (lenga) and recycling elements such as cart wheels this chapel was created to fulfill the dream of one of his daughters to get married on Riesco Island. After a pleasant lunch of BBQ lamb, assorted salads and desserts we boarded our coach to continue on our journey to settle in Hotel Costa Australis in Puerto Natales.

On our way our local guide Francisco "Pancho" briefly stopped the bus to show us a shrine consisting of an enormous number of empty plastic bottles gathered around small cement structure painted lime green with one small glass door embedded in a raised embankment. This is in memory of a woman (Deolinda Correa) who died on a road crossing the pampas. Despite the fact that she perished from dehydration, her child survived by feeding on milk from her breast. It was considered to be a miracle. It is believed that if you leave an open bottle of water here (to calm her eternal thirst) at the shrine someone who is sick will be healed.

According to popular legend, the husband of Deolinda Correa was forcibly recruited around the year 1840, during the Argentine civil wars. When he became sick, he was abandoned by the *Montoneras* [partisans]. In an attempt to reach her sick husband, Deolinda took her baby and followed the tracks of the *Montoneras* through the desert of San Juan Province. When her supplies ran out, she died. Her body was found days later by gauchos who were driving cattle through. They were astonished when they saw the dead woman's baby was still alive, feeding from her "miraculously" ever-full breast. The men buried her body in present-day Vallecito in the Caucete Department of San Juan, and took her baby with them.

Puerto Natales is a town at the narrowest part of Chile, only three miles from the Argentinean border. It is spread along the shore of Last Hope Sound where flocks of cormorants, tufted ducks and black-necked swans gather in large numbers. Our group gathered for a short walk to Cormoran restaurant for dinner. After dinner Mike and I took a walk through the neighborhood passing painted murals on fences and buildings of

local birds and animals found in the area with the backdrop of mountain scenery. We stopped by the waters edge at a popular skate park in front of the harbor. A boardwalk circled the area by the waters edge and benches were placed so you could watch the stunts of kids on bikes and skateboards. Some children and dogs had a good time just sliding down the embankment of the smooth concrete bowl. It was a warm night and people were just enjoying themselves sitting on the big rocks by the waters edge talking as the sun set.

This morning we set off for a full day tour of Balmaceda and Serrano glaciers with lunch at Perales Ranch. We had reservations on the boat (21 de Mayo) departing from Puerto Boies to the Balmaceda and Serrano glaciers through the Ultima Esperanza Fjord, viewing mountains and waterfalls and a cormorant colony. Ultima Esperanza Fjord, or 'Final Hope Fjord,' is an inlet bridging Eberhard Fjord and Balmaceda Mountain. The fjord was named by Spanish explorer Juan Ladrillero, who hoped that crossing the sound would take him to the Strait of Magellan. Instead he arrived to find sheer walls of ice blocking his path. As we cruise ahead of us we have the majestic Monte Balmaceda and the glacier leading off its eastern slopes.

We disembarked at the entrance of Bernardo O'Higgins National Park for a hike to the foot of the Serrano glacier. It was a beautiful sunny day, the sky was blue and some of the bushes were in bloom with wild flowers and bright berries. The lagoon was calm and the reflection of the Serrano glacier gave a mirror image in the water. The glacier with its snow and 'blue ice' always captures your attention. Blue ice occurs when snow falls on a glacier, is compressed, and becomes part of the glacier. Air bubbles are squeezed out and ice crystals enlarge, making the ice appear blue. It was a perfect walk perfect to the glacier. On the return hike I stopped to admire the trees and the lagoon with flowing ice chunks floating in the water and listening for the sounds of nature. On our return cruise we were offered an aperitif of whiskey with millenary ice from the glacier and lunch at Perales Tourist Ranch. At lunch we were served roasted Magellanic lamb, potatoes, salad and dessert. Our guide Ivan spotted a ringed kingfisher by the water so we grabbed our cameras and were lucky to get a photo of it with a fish still hanging from its beak. We then made our return to Puerto Natales with time on our own for shopping and dinner.

We walked to some of the shops in town to look for postcards and souvenirs. We purchased a couple of small statues representing the native Selk'nam people. The Selk'nam, also known as the Onawo or Ona people, are an indigenous people in the Patagonian region of southern Argentina and Chile, including the Tierra del Fuego islands. They were one of the last native groups in South America to be encountered by migrant ethnic Europeans or Westerners in the late 19th century. Traditionally, the Selk'nam were nomadic people who relied on hunting for survival. They dressed sparingly despite the cold climate of Patagonia. They shared Tierra del Fuego with the Haush (or Manek'enk), another nomadic culture who lived in the south-eastern part of the island. The Selk'nam had little contact with ethnic Europeans until settlers arrived. These newcomers developed a great part of the land of Tierra del Fuego as large estancias (sheep ranches), depriving the natives of their ancestral hunting areas.

Selk'nam, who considered the sheep herds to be game rather than private property (which they did not have as a concept) hunted the sheep. The ranch owners considered this to be poaching, and paid armed groups or militia to hunt down and kill the Selk'nam, in what is now called the Selk'nam Genocide. To receive their bounty, such groups had to bring back the ears of victims. The tribe's most sacred ritual was the '*hain*' also known as the 'coming of age'. The adult male members would be painted in red, black and white, wear fur, bark costumes which were supposed to resemble feared spirits. One of the last *hain* ceremonies performed was in 1920, documented by Martine Gusinde, a missionary from Germany. He was sent to Chile to teach at the German school in Santiago. He eventually carried out expeditions in Tierra del Fuego and found the Stone Age tribe. Gusinde's photographs of the Selk'nam managed to save the legacy of this now lost and extinct tribe. By 1924, they ceased to exist.

We went for dinner to Santolla on Magallanes St. in Puerto Natales. The restaurant is housed in converted shipping containers. We had a slow start getting a table but finally did and ordered some of the local shelled king crab and some dauphinoise layered potatoes served with roasted vegetables. The food was incredible but the service needs guidance.

Early checkout today for the highlight of the trip to Torres del Paine National Park and stay at Hotel Rio Serrano. On the way we stopped for a coffee break and shopping. I purchased a laminated fold out guide of the birds, flora and fauna of Torres del Paine National Park which came in handy during our tour of the park. Torres del Paine National Park, in Chile's Patagonia region, is known for its soaring mountains, bright blue icebergs that cleave from glaciers and golden pampas (grasslands) that shelter rare wildlife such as llama-like guanacos and the puma. Some of its most iconic sites are the 3 granite towers from which the park takes its name and the horn-shaped peaks called Cuernos del Paine. ("Torres del Paine" means "Towers of Blue".)

Our first day in Torres del Paine National Park and we were pleasantly surprised as we stopped at the Grey rangers station to be admitted to the park when we heard our guide Ivan yell "puma!" We all started scanning the area for the puma. There it was, not far from our coach walking in the grass. Before we could get our cameras ready for a shot a van came down the road also seeing the puma. The puma ran into the ditch nearby the road. We watched and a little while later the puma jumped out of the ditch and ran across the road to a nearby wooded area. Mike managed to get some action shots of the puma as it ran to the wooden area. That was exciting!! We all had to register at the ranger's station and then were allowed in the park. Our first hike was to see the Grey Glacier. We hiked the Mirador Lago Grey Trail which required crossing a wooden suspension bridge over the raging Rio Pingo and then walk through a lenga and coigue forest until we arrived at the dark sand beach. On the sand bar winds almost knocked us over as we got a view of massive Grey Glacier in the distance. We walked on the beach until we reached the lookout point trail. Our guide Francisco advised that because the winds were so strong today that we could not hike the lookout trail for safety reasons. We enjoyed walking on the windy beach digging our heels in the sand to keep from being knocked over and getting close to the shore to feel the water and pick up a large piece of ice that

came from the glacier. The ice was crystal clear and light as a feather. On the way back on the trail I saw a senecio succulent bush with yellow flowers. Senecio is a genus of the daisy family the scientific Latin genus name meaning “old man.”

Our group was taken to Hosteria Lago Grey for lunch in the heart of Torres del Paine National Park on the shores of Lake Grey. On the way to the restaurant we saw a group of noisy austral parakeets and some dark-faced ground-tyrants. On the way back to the coach we saw a few thorn-tailed rayadito birds. The most distinctive feature of this bird (frequently compared to a tit) is the long “thorn”-tail with twelve spiny retrices, which gradually develops in juveniles as they mature. This thorn-tail is believed to be used, not to aid in climbing trees but to attract the opposite sex during courtship. Such a pretty little bird. Located at the north bank of Toro Lake in Villa Monzino, there is a bird lookout and a visitor’s centre. At the center we saw a family of Magellan Goose. Males have a white head and breast, whereas the females are brown with black-striped wings and yellow feet, and could be mistaken for ruddy-headed geese. A greenish-bronze speculum is located on the inner secondary flight feathers of the adult male. Males attract females through a courtship display in which they whistle loudly, to which the female responds with softer cackles. They are monogamous, and if a male encroaches on another's territory, a violent fight may break out. Males have been found injured or dead after these fights (what a gallant goose). Back at the hotel we had time to go to the spa and swimming pool. We found some lounge chairs that faced the widows in the inside pool looking out at the mountains. The pool did not have many people in it and later no one but Mike and I. There was an interesting metal lounge chair in the pool covered with water. The chair had holes in it. I didn’t know what the chair was all about till someone laid in it and pushed a button on the side of the pool. The chair started shooting out water jets all over and gave you the most relaxing water massage ever. We hung out at the pool for awhile and then got back to our room to get ready for dinner with the group. Mike had for an appetizer a plate of thinly sliced guanaco which was nearly raw. I can’t remember what I had but I remember they had an open buffet for salads, vegetables and desserts.

More fun touring Torres del Paine National Park today. When we got inside the park the coach made a short photo op for us to take picture of a group of guanaco. The guanaco is a camelid native to South America, closely related to the llama. Guanacos live in herds composed of females, their young, and a dominant male. Bachelor males form separate herds. While reproductive groups tend to remain small, often containing no more than 10 adults, bachelor herds may contain as many as 50 males. When they feel threatened, guanacos alert the herd to flee with a high-pitched, bleating call. The male usually runs behind the herd to defend them. They can run at 35 miles per hour, often over steep and rocky terrain. Its color varies very little ranging from a light brown to dark cinnamon and shading to white underneath. Guanacos have grey faces and small, straight ears. What I like the most about the guanaco are those large beautifully soulful, long-lashed eyes. Guanaco fiber is particularly prized for its soft, warm feel and is found in luxury fabric.

In the heart of the Torres del Paine National Park we hiked the Sendero Mirador Cuernos trail. Today was sunny and warm and the winds were not strong. It takes around two and

a quarter hours more or less to hike the nearly 4 mile roundtrip trail. Starting off you pass by the Salto Grande, a picturesque waterfall then you keep following the mostly flat trail. Along the way you will see many dead slivery trees as this area of the park was affected by a man that started a fire a while back. In a patch of tall grass and slivery trees was a group of guanacos lying on the ground. Some of us walked slowly up to the group and got some nice photos. The landscape is so majestic with the lakes and mountains in the background. At the end of the trail you are rewarded to see the aqua blue waters of Lago Nordenskjold and the majestic Mirador Cuernos del Paine.

Later our group was taken to Cascada Rio Paine. This spectacular waterfall is located on the Paine River in the Laguna Amarga sector next to the road. The Paine River watershed begins in the cold southern ice fields from which the Dickson, Zapata, Tyndall, Pingo and Grey glaciers are born. The Southern Patagonian Ice Field is the world's second largest contiguous extrapolar ice field. As we traveled on I spotted a lake with a large flock of Chilean flamingos, closely related to the American flamingo and the greater flamingo. The Chilean flamingo is listed as near threatened by the IUCN. These flamingos are mainly restricted to salt lagoons and soda lakes but these areas are vulnerable to habitat loss and water pollution. Our last stop in the park was to get a glimpse of the distinctive three granite peaks of the Paine mountain range of Paine Massif. From left to right they are known as Torres d'Agostini, Torres Central and Torres Monzino. It was a bit cloudy but you could make out the three granite peaks. On the way back we also saw a large pond with several species of ducks and the beautiful Coscoroba Swan. The swans hey have white plumage except for black tips to the outer six primary feathers, although this black is often barely visible on the closed wing. In flight, the black wing tips are conspicuous. The bird has a red beak, legs and feet, they look somewhat more like geese than swans.

Arriving back at our hotel tonight we had a private Chilean lamb barbecue set up outside. Trays of pisco sours were passed around and a platter of warm sopapilla were on the table. Pisco sours are an alcoholic cocktail of Peruvian origin that is typical of the cuisines from Chile and Peru. The drink's name comes from pisco, which is its base liquor, and the cocktail term sour, in reference to sour citrus juice and sweetener components. As we ate the sopapillas and sipped on our pisco sours the chef had us line up to taste a slice of the lamb that he cut from the lamb carcass that was stretched out on an iron cross and roasted over a wood fire. That was just a taste as we got more of the lamb served to us at our table in the dining room with a buffet of assorted salads, vegetables, potatoes and desserts to choose from. We were also served glasses of Chilean wine.

Early check out of our hotel today to depart Torres del Paine and go to Punta Arenas airport for our flight to Santiago with a bag lunch to take on the bus. We sure didn't go hungry on this trip and the wine and pisco sours just kept flowing like an alcoholic waterfall. One last stop to have more food (I need to go on a diet now). We had a bowl of Chilean Stew (Cazuela) consisting of chicken, a hunk of corn on the cob, potatoes, pumpkin, onion in a chicken broth with rice. This is definitely going to hold our hunger through the flight and journey to Santiago and our transfer to Hotel Atton. We had to say

goodbye to our local guide Francisco “Pancho”, he was a delight to have on our trip, funny, and full of family stories and the history of Patagonia. We also had experienced, wonderful coach drivers on all of our travels in Chile.

Today is our last day with our full group with half of us going to Easter Island (Rapa Nui) on the extension part of our trip. Today after breakfast we had a short tour of Santiago with a local guide named Terry. Terry was a really nice guy with a good sense of humor. He really wanted to show off his home city of Santiago. We had another sunny warm day. Our group stopped in the Plaza de la Constitucion and was looking at the monument in honor of Salvador Allend Gossens, socialist president who died on September 11, 1973 during the coup in Santiago de Chile. We asked Terry why so many people were in the plaza looking like they were waiting for something to happen. Terry said “Oh it must be time for the changing of the guards at La Moneda Palace”. A changing of the guard ceremony occurs every 48 hours at 10:00 a.m. during it, two Carabineros mounted units and the Central Band of the Carabineros escort the incoming guard detachment to La Moneda, and the outgoing detachment from it. The current drill for the changing of the guard was instituted in 1936. Both the old and new guard detachments have an infantry company and a cavalry platoon. Each Monday since its inception the Guard has provided two, ten-man squads, a drummer and a bugler to form a cordon of honor for the entrance of the President of Chile into La Moneda at the start of the work week. If the President is outside the capital, the drill is performed instead for the Vice President. Female carabineros joined the Palace Guard for the first time in December 2001.

Terry said we could watch it for awhile that sometime it last for hours and we had other places to visit. Not soon after we saw a group of soldiers in white jackets with green pants and black high top boots being led out of the palace with a drummer and bugle player leading the way into the plaza. We watched them march then line up and display their rifles for awhile. Then we heard another larger band with soldiers in their dress uniforms arriving from the street behind us. As they turned the band was being lead by soldiers on horses. Troops of soldiers were behind the band in dress uniforms some with rifles some with sabers and more soldiers on horseback with flags on long poles. The soldiers on the horses then divided their line up in two rows facing each other, the horses in full control. As the army stood at attention the drill and ceremony was at full force. I thought the ceremony was captivating. Terry wanted our group to leave and continue our tour of Santiago.

We walked down colorful pedestrian streets with bright red lines running down the street with red spherical chairs to sit in. Bandera Street was turned into a colorful pedestrian promenade. The street itself is a colorful urban art project titled (Paseo Bandera) that opened on December 21, 2017 and designed by Chilean visual artist Dasic Fernandez, the entire 35,500-square-foot floor mural sprawls across almost four blocks and three sections. Featuring a 400-yard-long stretch of rainbow-colored swirls and three-dimensional illusions, each section of mural art represents Chilean history, their diverse culture, and colorful future.

It was fun to watch the street performance artists (buskers). With low wages and a high cost of living, everyone looks for ways to make some extra *luca*. Some people set up tables to sell handmade crafts, others show skills like juggling, singing, mimes, balloon twisting and other ways of entertaining. Street performance is practiced all over the world and dates back to antiquity. Santiago is the capital city of Chile. The city of seven million people is full of culture and art; although this wasn't always the case. In 1973 the Chilean government was overthrown by the military in what is known as the Chilean coup d'etat. From 1973 until 1990 Chile was under military dictatorship. During the dictatorship the government burned art and books causing artists to question their safety and the safety of their families. Many artists were persecuted and sent to detention centers for speaking out against the government. The government's restriction on art was removed after the dictatorship, causing a surge of performance and visual art in the streets of Santiago.

We walked to Plaza de Armas, the main square of Santiago where the Central Post Office, Palacio de la Real Audiencia de Santiago (where the Chilean National History Museum is) and where the Santiago Metropolitan Cathedral is located. We went inside the cathedral for a visit. The Metropolitan Cathedral of Santiago is the seat of the Archbishop of Santiago de Chile, currently Ricardo Ezzati Andrello, and the center of the archdiocese of Santiago de Chile. Construction of the neoclassical cathedral began in 1748 and ended in 1800; further alterations ordered at the end of the 19th century give it its present appearance. Previous cathedrals in the archdiocese had been destroyed by earthquakes. A lovely place for a sit down, meditate or take a quiet walk, taking in the cathedral's baroque details. The modern day Santiago Metropolitan Cathedral encompasses a crypt and three naves, in addition to several alters and a chapel with ornate frescos on the ceiling and gilded columns. On the floor I noticed the beautiful black and white patterns created by thousands of tiny tiles. Terry took us to Parque Arauco mall for lunch and shopping. We had a good lunch with a few Aperol Spritzes (second one free!) can't pass that up. I did find two jewelry stores that I liked and purchased two lapis lazuli beaded necklaces and a silver necklace and bracelet with lapis lazuli and malachite stones set in the silver (nice finds). Time to board the coach for our visit to Santa Rita Winery.

Santa Rita Winery is located 45 minutes outside of Santiago located in the foothills of Alto Jahuel, Buin. The winery is sited in a natural setting, a meeting point for winemaking traditions, Chilean history, culture, and cuisine. Santa Rita was founded in 1880 by Don Domingo Fernández Concha, a leading businessman and public figure of the time. Don Domingo brought the finest French grape varieties to the rich soils of the Maipo Valley, together with specialized equipment and a team of top winemakers from France. This brought techniques that were hitherto unknown in Chile, changing the way in which wines were made in the country and bringing spectacular results. Our group walked outside to see the vineyards and then inside the winery's bottling plant. We had a look inside one the wine cellars and then to a tasting room to learn about their traditional winemaking techniques and to taste some of their wines at the wine bar. Busy day so after a short nap (for Mike) we got ready for our farewell dinner at Santa Brasa Restaurant. I thought the food was great here. We started with a salad, grilled sausages,

potatoes and a great steak. Terrific food and company with our group and guide Ivan. This was our last night as a full group, eleven of us were continuing to fly to Easter Island (Rapa Nui) the next day and others were flying home.

EASTER ISLAND (RAPA NIU)

Extension to Easter Island (Rapa Nui): *Wikipedia* Easter Island (Rapa Nui) is a Chilean island in the southeastern Pacific Ocean, at the southeasternmost point of the Polynesian Triangle in Oceania. Easter Island is most famous for its nearly 1,000 extant monumental statues, called *moai*, created by the early Rapa Nui people. In 1995, UNESCO named Easter Island a World Heritage Site, with much of the island protected within Rapa Nui National Park.

It is believed that Easter Island's Polynesian inhabitants arrived on Easter Island sometime near 1200 AD. They created a thriving and industrious culture, as evidenced by the island's numerous enormous stone *moai* and other artifacts. However, land clearing for cultivation and the introduction of the Polynesian rat led to gradual deforestation. By the time of European arrival in 1722, the island's population was estimated to be 2,000–3,000. European diseases, Peruvian slave raiding expeditions in the 1860s, and emigration to other islands, e.g. Tahiti, further depleted the population, reducing it to a low of 111 native inhabitants in 1877.

Chile annexed Easter Island in 1888. In 1966, the Rapa Nui were granted Chilean citizenship. In 2007 the island gained the constitutional status of "special territory." Administratively, it belongs to the Valparaíso Region, comprising a single commune of the Province Isla de Pascua. The 2017 Chilean census registered 7,750 people on the island, of whom 3,512 (45%) considered themselves Rapa Nui. Easter Island is one of the most remote inhabited islands in the world, with the nearest inhabited land being Pitcairn Island 1,289 miles away.

Moai are monolithic human figures carved by the Rapa Nui people on Easter Island in eastern Polynesia between the years 1250 and 1500. Nearly half are still at Rano Raraku, the main moai quarry, but hundreds were transported from there and set on stone platforms called ahu around the island's perimeter. Almost all moai have overly large heads three-eighths the size of the whole statue. The moai are chiefly the living faces (*aringa ora*) of deified ancestors (*aringa ora ata tepuna*). The statues still gazed inland across their clan lands when Europeans first visited the island in 1722, but all of them had fallen by the latter part of the 19th century.

The production and transportation of the more than 900 statues are considered remarkable creative and physical feats. The tallest moai erected, called *Paro*, was almost 33 ft high and weighed 82 tonnes (90.4 short tons). The heaviest moai erected was a shorter but squatter moai at Ahu Tongariki, weighing 86 tonnes. One unfinished sculpture, if completed, would have been approximately 69 ft tall, with a weight of about 145-165 tons (160-182 metric tons). The moai were toppled in the late 18th and early 19th centuries, possibly as a result of European contact or internecine tribal wars.

We were met at the airport by a driver for Hotel Hanga Roa. Our beginning was a bit confusing as a guide for our time on Easter Island did not show up and we were not informed on what the itinerary was for our stay. We were assigned bungalows in the shape of the round stone house in the ceremonial village of Orongo on the island. Mike notified Odyssey that we did not have a guide, later we were told that a guide would be assigned to us. Mike and I decided to get on our bathing suits and go to lounge by the pool with a drink. We were told later that a guide named Hugo from the hotel was going to take our group for a ride to Ahu Tahai (*ahu* is the local word for the great bases upon which the moais stand) where there will be a beautiful sunset surrounded by the vast Pacific ocean and some moai statues, one with restored eyes and a “top hat” known as (*pukao*) which could be cylindrical top knot of hair, or grass hat or turban. We had a nice sunset and took some nice photos. Hugo surprised us when we got back to the van with a champagne toast with appetizers of cheese and sausages.

Today we met our guide Bruna and told us that she was going to take our group to several places. We were heading first to the main beach on Easter Island, Anakena. It’s white and fine coral sand, crystalline turquoise sea, calm waves and coconut palms (brought from Tahiti several decades ago) make it an ideal place for rest and leisure. It was here that the first king of the island, the Ariki Hotu Matu’a, landed with his men and established the first populated center that gave birth to the Rapa Nui culture. On the right side of the large square overlooking the sea, at the foot of Mount Maunga Hau Epa, is the *Ahu Ature Huki*, a single moai statue that was the first to be raised on the island in modern times. The idea came from the famous Norwegian explorer Thor Heyerdahl, who related his stay on the island in 1956 in his book “*Aku-Aku*”, encouraged several islanders to raise the statue to test their theories. The most imposing platform and dominating the center of the landscape is the Ahu Nau Nau with seven moai statues. It is one of the island’s best-preserved platforms because they remained hidden under the sand when they were felled, which protected them from weather conditions. Four of the moai statues have top hats and details still visible such hands and long slender fingers resting along the crests of the hips, meeting at the hami (loincloth) with the thumbs sometimes pointing towards the navel.

Bruna then took us to Te Pito Kura (The *ahu* of the last moai). The only statue at this site, called *Paro*, is the biggest moai ever moved and successfully erected on an *ahu*. It is almost 10 meters tall and weight around 80 tons. The *pukao* weighs approximately 12 tons, being one of the largest ever carved and moved from the Puna Pau Quarry. Tradition tells us that the erection of this moai was ordered by a widow in the memory of her late husband. The moai *Paro* was one of the last statues knocked down from its *ahu* some time after 1838.

In a protected round stone wall are three ovoid shaped stones. One large ovoid shaped stone is 80 centimeters in diameter. The expression Te Pito Kura means “navel of light” and some people relate the name of the place with the special qualities of this rock and with one of the names with which it is known to Easter Island, *Te Pito O Te Henua* which means “navel of the world”. This singular stone was formerly known as *Tita’a hanga ‘o te henua*, and according to legend, was brought by Hotu Matu’a, the founding king of the

Rapanui people, in his boat from Hiva, his native land. It is said that this rock, almost spherical and smooth, concentrates a magnetic and supernatural energy called *mana*. Because of its high iron content, this stone warms up more than others and causes the compass to behave strangely. Many visitors put their hands on it to capture their energy or also, according to the belief of some, increase female fertility. It seems that some tourists, too believing in their power, performed some obscene acts on the stone and since then they decided to close the circle of stones that surrounds it.

Our next stop was to Ahu Tongariki. Ahu Tongariki is the largest *ahu* on Easter Island. Its moai were toppled during the island's civil wars and in the twentieth century the *ahu* was swept inland by a tsunami. It has since been restored and has fifteen moai including an 86 tonne moai that was the heaviest ever erected on the island. Ahu Tongariki is one kilometer from Rano Raraku and Poike in the Hotu-iti area of Rapa Nui National Park. All the moai here face sunset during Summer Solstice. This *ahu* is on the south coast of Rapa Nui, close to two previous volcanoes, Rano Raraku and Poike. Of the fifteen moais, one wears a top hat. The 86 tonne moai at the entrance by the ticket booth is called "Traveling Moai". In the distance you can see the Poike volcano, the oldest on the island, whose eruptions gave rise to the peninsula of the same name and where, according to tradition, the battle between "the long ears" and "the short ears" took place. Back to the hotel for lunch and a short rest before heading out again.

We are now going to take a short hike on the Rano Raraku Trail. Rano Raraku, the quarry of the Moai. The Rano Raraku volcano is one of the most incredible and extraordinary archaeological sites on the planet. In this magical place full of mystery, the moai were made, the giant statues that have made Easter Island famous worldwide. Rano Raraku supplied the raw materials, was used as a workshop, and was the distribution center for the statues. Here at Rano Raraku the slopes are dotted with dozens if moai of various sizes, in different positions, and of many styles – creating an unforgettable picture that has caught the imagination of travelers, scientists, and artist for generations, and that today each visitor may experience it his or her own way. In addition to its great archaeological relevance, Rano Raraku is one of the most interesting volcanic centers of Easter Island from a geological point of view. This volcanic cone, now extinct, was formed more than 300 thousand years ago as a result of the eruptive activity of the Maunga Terevaka and Pua Katiki volcanoes. Unlike most island volcanic cones, Rano Raraku is composed of a unique type of rock on the island known as the Lapilli tuff. The tuff is a porous rock formed by the accumulation of volcanic ash ejected during an eruption, which when cooled, in contact with the atmosphere, is compacted and hardened. The main characteristic of this volcanic tuff is its low hardness under the surface, compared to basalt, which encouraged the ancient sculptors to use it as raw material to carve the huge statues.

Rano Raraku became the quarry where almost all of the 1,000 statues that have been found on Easter Island were sculpted. Here the moai were carved and then they were taken to the *ahu* or ceremonial platforms, distributed along the entire coast, to honor the memory of the ancestors. It does not appear that any established work order or system has been followed. The statues are everywhere and in almost inaccessible places, as if the

intention had been to take advantage of any space available in a valuable and limited material. It is estimated that the work of carving the statues in Rano Raraku spanned more than 500 years, beginning around 1000 AD. and ending in the mid-eighteenth century.

With the help of basalt tools, called *toki*, they began to cut the tuff to shape the moai. All the images were carved on their backs, regardless of whether they were in a horizontal or vertical position. Sculpting the face was the first step, paying special attention to the nose as it served as a guide to maintain the symmetry and proportions of the sculpture. Then work on the neck, the torso, the arms and the hands were followed. After that the sculptors continued with the sides and released the material under the statue until they left a narrow strip of stone that ran along the column, as if it were the keel of a ship. While the statue was held with heaps of stones, like a wedge, holes were drilled in the keel until it was completely trimmed and released from its niche. Some statues broke at that time. After the work of carving, the statues were transported to ceremonial platforms using a method still unknown. Several hypotheses suggest the use of trunks, ropes and the strength of dozens of men, but so far has not been discovered the system used to move such colossi through a fairly irregular terrain. It seems that the abandonment of work in Rano Raraku was not due to a single sudden and dramatic event. Rather it was the consequence of a gradual decay in the values and beliefs that affected the scarce resources available and provoked successive tribal wars that finally collapsed the system.

At the southern end of the Rano Raraku quarry, where the main path forms a curve to continue the visit, it is possible to enjoy a spectacular view of the Poike volcano with the 15 figures of the Ahu Tongariki silhouetted against the ocean. Right in this place is the Tukumuri moai, one of the most controversial and enigmatic images of Easter Island. Its name, which is usually translated as kneeling moai, actually means “squatting moai”, being Tukumuri the correct term for the word “kneeling”. This statue was discovered, once again, by the expedition of Thor Heyerdahl in 1956 and from the beginning it caused a great astonishment, especially among the own people of Easter Island, since they had never seen anything similar. The statue is unlike any other on the island, since its appearance is much more natural and realistic. The head is rounded, with carved eyes that stare and his chin has a goatee like the carved kava kava moai sold in craft stores. But what sets it apart from the rest, whose carving is interrupted at the waist, is that Tukumuri has the whole body. It is shown in a kneeling position with his legs bent back and his buttocks resting on his heels. The hands appear placed on the thighs instead of meeting on the belly, in a posture very used in Polynesia to show reverence and that can still be seen in the ancient songs of *riu* that are preserved on the island.

Orongo is a stone village and ceremonial center at the southwestern tip of Easter Island (Rapa Nui). It consists of a collection of low, sod-covered, windowless, round-walled buildings with even lower doors positioned on the high south-westerly tip of the large volcanic caldera called Rano Kau. Below Orongo on one side a 300-meter barren cliff face drops down to the ocean; on the other, a more-gentle but still very steep grassy slope leads down to a freshwater marsh inside the high caldera. The first half of the ceremonial village's 53 stone masonry houses was investigated and restored in 1974, with the

remainder completed in 1976 and subsequently investigated in 1985 and again in 1995. Orongo now has World Heritage status as part of the Rapa Nui National Park.

Between the 18th and mid-19th centuries Orongo was the centre of a birdman cult whose defining ritual was an annual race to bring the first *manutara* (sooty tern) egg back undamaged from the nearby islet of Motu Nui to Orongo. The race was very dangerous, and hunters often fell to their deaths from the cliff face, killed by sharks or drowned, though replacements were apparently easily available. The site has numerous petroglyphs, mainly of *tangata manu* (birdmen) which may have been carved to commemorate some of the winners of this race. In the 1860s, most of the Rapa Nui islanders died of disease or were enslaved, and when the survivors were converted to Christianity, Orongo fell into disuse. In 1868, the crew of HMS *Topaze* removed the huge basalt moai known as Hoa Hakananai'a from Orongo. It is now housed in the British Museum.

The rocks around the village are covered with more than 1,700 petroglyphs, making Orongo the place with the highest concentration of rock art on the island. As our group walked around the path at Orongo we saw a few petroglyphs. One was of a human body in a fetal position, a human face and a human form with a bird's head. It is believed that each petroglyph depicted this way represented a differed birdman that would have been a winner in the race. In the Rapa Nui mythology, the deity Make-make was the chief god of the birdman cult, and the other three deities associated with it were Hawa-tuu-take-take (the Chief of the eggs, a male god), his wife Vie Hoa, and another female deity named Vie Kanatea. Each of these four also had a servant god who was associated with him/her. The names of all eight would be chanted by contestants during the various rituals preceding the egg hunt.

The purpose of the birdman contest was to obtain the first egg of the season from the offshore islet Motu Nui. Contestants would swim to Motu Nui carrying provisions in a bundle of reeds called a *pora* under one arm and await the arrival of the terns, hoping to return with the first egg. Once the first egg was collected, the finder would go to the highest point on Motu Nui and call out to the shore of the main island, announcing his benefactor and telling him, "Go shave your head, you have got the egg!" The unsuccessful *hopu* would then collectively swim back to the main island while the egg-finder would remain on Motu Nui and would fast alone until he swam back, which he would do with the egg secured inside a reed basket tied to his forehead. On his reaching land, he would then climb the steep, rocky cliff face and, if he did not fall, present the egg to his patron, who would have already shaved his head and painted it either white or red. This successful contestant would then be declared *tangata-manu*. He was entitled to gifts of food and other tributes (including his clan having sole rights to collect that season's harvest of wild bird eggs and fledglings from Motu Nui), and went into seclusion for a year in a special ceremonial house. Once in residence there he was considered *tapu* (sacred) for the next five months of his year-long status, and allowed his nails to grow and wore a headdress of human hair. He would spend his time eating and sleeping, and would be expected to engage in no other activity. "Quite the Easter egg hunt"!

We then went to see the Rano Kau Volcano, an extinct volcano that forms the southwestern headland of Easter Island. Rano Kau has a crater lake which is one of the island's only three natural bodies of fresh water. The principal archaeological site on Rano Kau is the ruined ceremonial village of Orongo which is located at the point where the sea cliff and inner crater wall converge. The inner slope was the site of the last toromiro tree in the wild until the specimen was chopped down for firewood in 1960. At this site is a rock with petroglyph of the birdman.

Next stop was to the ceremonial center of Vinapu which includes one of the larger *ahu* on Rapa Nui. The *ahu* exhibits extraordinary stonemasonry consisting of large, carefully fitted slabs of basalt. The American archaeologist, William Mulloy investigated the site in 1958. The stone wall faces towards sunrise at Winter Solstice. Here, as in other ceremonial centers, all the moai were torn down around the 18th and 19th centuries, during the wars that took place between the different clans of the island. Here there are six fallen statues face down. There is another buried moai from which only the head protrudes. There is a theory that states that Vinapu was built by the Inca Tupac Yupanqui during his expedition to the Pacific.

But the main attraction of this place is the singular red column that rises in front of the *ahu*. Discovered and erected again by the archaeologist William Mulloy during the expedition of Thor Heyerdahl in 1956, it is made of red scoria, the same material of the pukao, and carved in the quarry of the Puna Pau volcano. It seems that this eroded "column" actually represents a singular feminine moai, as the details of its surface show. According to some witnesses it could have originally two heads, and it could have been used to hold a wooden frame where in ancient times corpses were put to dry before being buried. The statues which have been found that represent the female gender are very scarce. The most important female moai was found in Anakena beach by Heyerdahl's expedition, and it can now be seen at the Sebastian Englert Museum.

After lunch we headed to Puna a Pau a quarry in a small crater or cinder cone on the outskirts of Hanga Roa in the south west of Easter Island. Puna Pau was the sole source of the red scoria that the Rapa Nui people used to carve the pukao (topknots) that they put on the heads of some of their iconic moai statues. The stone from Puna Pau was also used for a few non-standard moai including Tukuturi and also for some petroglyphs. Currently, the Puna Pau crater is just a depression in the land covered with vegetation. Only a few outcrops of scoria are visible on the southern slope, where a rock wall shows several stripes of reddish material.

We are now going to visit Ahu a Kivi, a particularly sacred place. The site has seven moai, all of equal shape and size, and is also known as a celestial observatory that was set up around the 16th century. The site is located inland, rather than along the coast. Moai statues were considered by the early people of Rapa Nui as their ancestors or Tupuna that were believed to be the reincarnation of important kings or leaders of their clans. The Moais were erected to protect and bring prosperity to their clan and village. A particular feature of the seven identical moai statues is that they exactly face sunset during the

Spring Equinox and have their backs to the sunrise during the Autumn Equinox. Such an astronomically precise feature is seen only at this location on the island.

The legendary first paramount chief of Easter Island is said to have been Hotu Matu'a, who supposedly arrived around 800 to 900 AD. Legend insists that this man was the chief of a tribe that lived on Marae Renga. Some books suggest that the Hiva region was an area in the Marquesas Islands, but today it is believed that the ancestral land of the Easter Islanders would have been located in the Pitcairn Mangareva intercultural zone. Some versions of the story claim that internal conflicts drove Hotu Matu'a to sail with his tribe for new land, while others say a natural disaster, possibly a tidal wave, caused the tribe to flee. According to an oral tradition, Hotu Matu's priest had a dream in which the King's soul flew across the ocean when the Rapa Nui Island was seen by him. He then sent scouts navigating across the sea to locate the island and to find people to settle there. Seven of these scouts stayed back on the island waiting for the king to arrive. These seven are represented by the seven stone statues erected in their honour.

Our wonderful, funny guide Bruna kept her promise to take out group for a brief stop at a local craft market where we could buy some postcards and souvenirs. The front door of the complex was a wooden door with a panel of an image of a two headed birdman. Some of the booths were closed, yards of island designed cloth hanging over the booth. The first tables I saw had the usual souvenirs you see at these places, key chains, mugs, shell and seed necklaces and small figures, most representing the moai or the birdman theme along with wooden carved eggs. Wood carvings of the moai (mostly the same). A few interesting bras covered with feathers (probably like the ones the women wear in the shows around town). Some of the male figures had very large erect phalluses (guess to show power and sound leadership). I almost gave up buying anything except post cards when I spotted a well carved wood kneeling moai 'Tukuturi' like I saw at the Rano Raraku quarry. It was signed by the artist Tole 2018, carved out of makore wood (African Cherry). I immediately knew I wanted it. As I was paying for my moai I saw a baby in a crib and asked the saleslady if it was hers. She smiled and said 'Yes'. I had been carrying around a Steiff teddy bear to give to a child. I said "I have a bear for your baby, can I take its' photo?" She got so excited and reached in the crib and took the baby out and I took a photo of her, the baby and the teddy bear. I then gave her friend that was helping her Christmas bag I had also been carrying around with me. Both ladies finished ringing up my purchase and put in my hand a gift of a keychain and a refrigerator magnetic of a moia. I had earlier on my trip given a beanie baby pig named "snort" and a stuffed bunny out as gifts. I gave the baby pig to a housemaid at the hotel as she acted like I had just handed her a bunch of money. She took it and hugged it close to her face and showed so much thanks for it. Luv it when I give something to someone and they like it.

Time to leave Easter Island and finish our trip to Chile and Patagonia. We had a long 31 hr. trip back home but have now time to reflect on the trip and our good times with fellow travelers and the people of Chile and Easter Island.

The End: Audrey & Mike 2019