



Chile, Argentina and Uruguay: agua, montañas y empanadas

By Léa Plourde-Archer

**Buenos Aires - Montevideo - Bariloche -
Salta and Tilcara - Mendoza - Santiago -
Valparaíso - Pichilemu**

Buenos Aires

(September 23rd to 26th- Just me
October 10th to 16th- Michel and I)

Music to my ears

Carlos Gardel: Viejo jardin/ Metá Metá: Oya/Banda Conmoción: Pregonero
Foxtrott: Colors/ Julieta Venegas: Sin Documentos/
Fever Ray: Keep the streets empty for me

Reflections on Buenos Aires

When I first arrived in Buenos Aires on a rainy Wednesday morning, the city was surprisingly quiet. Where was all the noise and intense energy that usually permeate the soundtrack of a big city? Turns out that Buenos Aires was just barely waking up, eyes still a bit foggy from a busy night out.

The true nature of the Argentinean capital would only reveal itself a few hours later. This bustling metropolis lives on a whole other schedule. Things truly get going around 10AM when the streets become crowded with workers, students and tourists all heading in opposite directions. A few hours later, restaurants fill up for lunch and traffic kicks up on busy *avenida 9 de Julio*.

In the evening, dinner service only starts at 8PM, except in the more tourist-oriented joints. Even then, most places remain empty until 9PM. If you're thinking about going out to a club, don't even bother to show up before midnight. It takes a while for most visitors to adopt this new schedule but the extra effort is made worthwhile when you get to enjoy Buenos Aires as it comes alive, showing itself to be one of the most exciting places on earth.

Like in other South American cities, there's a major art scene using the city as a giant canvas for their colourful and ever-changing compositions. In the districts of Palermo, Recoleta and San Telmo, countless galleries display the works of hot new artists but oftentimes the most interesting art is displayed right on the street.

Much like the art that covers the city's walls, *Porteños* themselves are quite the vibrant and colourful bunch. Opinionated, warm and passionate; the people we met during our time spent there left a great impression on us.

Highlights

Walking through Palermo/Recoleta/San Telmo. There are so many things to see in these neighborhoods, from galleries to shops to street art to historical sights

The reserva ecologica Costanera sur in Puerto Madero

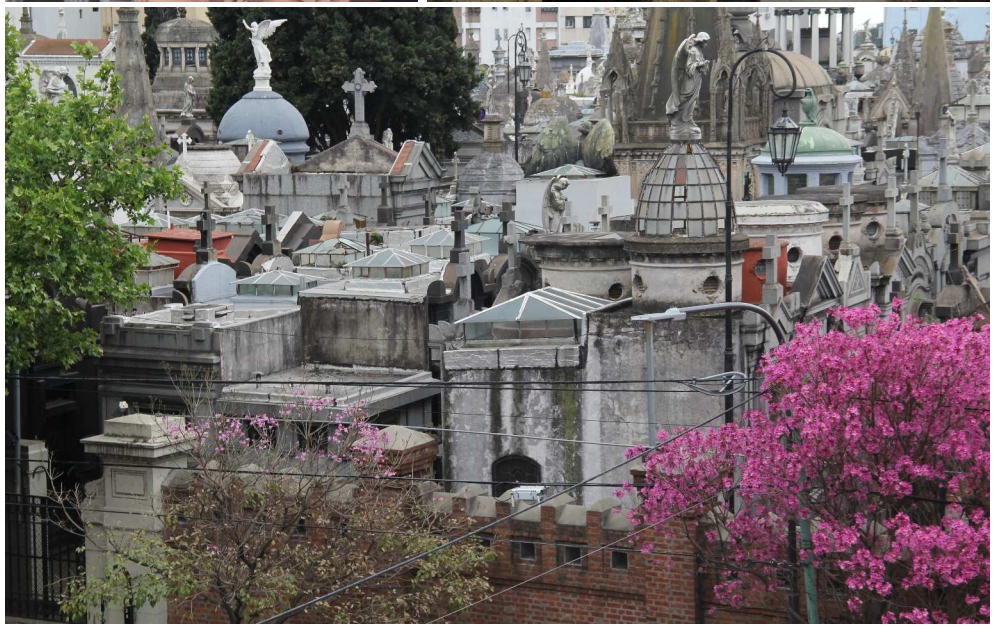
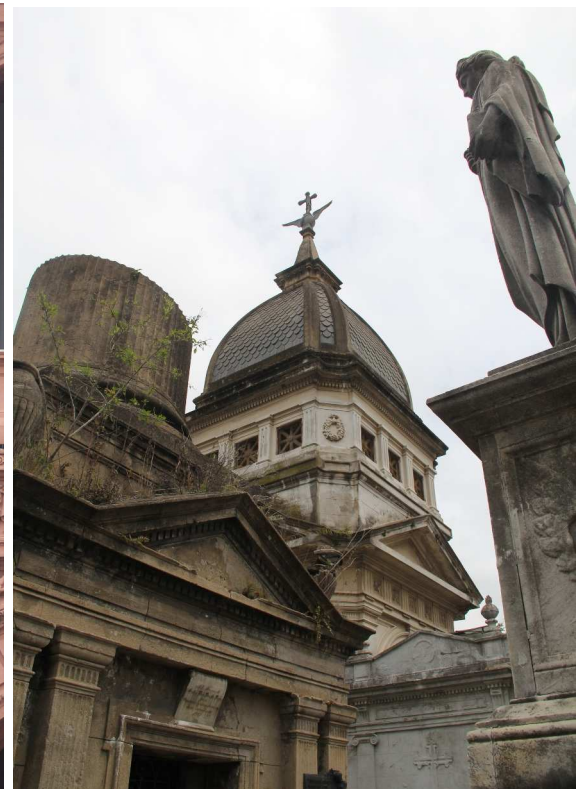
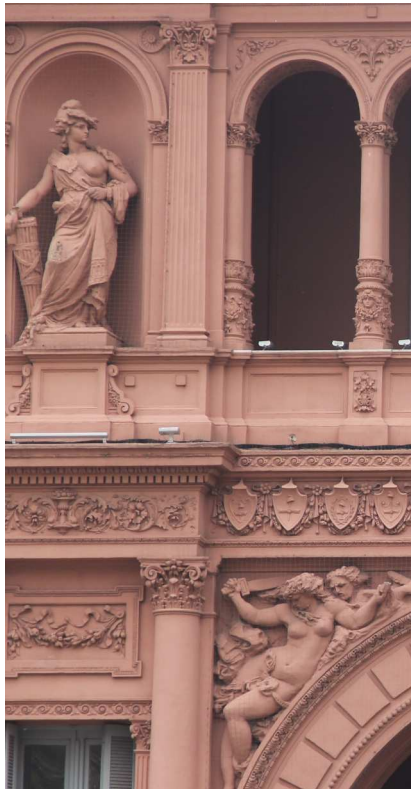
The Parrilla Food tour with Maria. Fun times with a feisty, mildly crazy *porteña* who speaks French, English, Spanish and Portuguese.

The fascinating museums (MALBA, Museo del Bicentenario, Museo de Bellas Artes)

Mafalda everywhere (in San Telmo her statue attracts endless crowds looking to pose with the famous character)

In the footsteps of dictators tour with Elisa Diodato

The liveliness of the city (endless protests, outdoor concerts, parades...)







Madres y abuelas de la Plaza de Mayo

They still meet every Thursday at 3h30PM sharp. 40 years after they first started walking around *Plaza de Mayo*. 40 years after their children disappeared at the hands of the dictatorship.

At first, they were looking for their sons and daughters, many of whom had vanished without a trace. With few answers coming from the government, a group of brave women with fabric diapers worn as scarves on their heads formed an association and were among the first to vocalize their resistance towards the authoritarian regime.

Each of these women has paid a heavy price for their activism. Some met the same fate as their children did: Azucena Villaflor was one of the passengers on the infamous death flights where people were thrown from a plane into the Rio de la Plata. Regardless of the danger they faced the *madres* kept fighting. It hasn't been an easy ride. To this day, they are both venerated and vilified by parts of the Argentinian population.

As the years passed, the *madres* turned into *abuelas* (grandmothers). It should be noted that many of the disappeared women had been pregnant when they were taken away. Their abductors were kind enough to let them live until they gave birth. Once the baby was born, the mother was killed and the child was given up for adoption. In many cases, the adoptive parents were military officers who were fully aware that the biological parents had been detained and killed. Others kids were kidnapped along with their parents and given away. This terrible secret was kept from the children and the truth only started coming out decades later. Out of 500 children thought to have disappeared, some 120 have been reunited with their *abuelas* in the last few years. A small bit of solace after years of suffering and many questions left unanswered. Approximately 30 000 people disappeared between 1976 and 1983. *Nunca más* (never again)









Montevideo

(October 16th to 19th- Michel and I)

Music to my ears

Campo: 1987/Jorge Drexler: Luna negra/Boogat : Los presidentes
Russo Passapusso: Paraquedas/ Alain Bashung: Résidents de la république
Bud Shank: Choro in A/The War on drugs: Under the pressure

Reflections on Montevideo

I have a feeling we didn't get to enjoy the full potential of what Montevideo has to offer. It's my fault. For once, I decided to wing it. We had two full days to discover the city and we wanted to be spontaneous. The only thing I knew was that some of my favourite bands hail from here and that Uruguay seems like an interesting country in terms of politics and culture.

On a piece of paper, I had written down a few events and places that caught my interest, thinking that these activities would fill up our time. Unfortunately, things don't always pan out the way you think they will.

See, Montevideo is a really quiet place on weekends during the day. It really only comes alive after 11PM. When we arrived, we hadn't yet adapted to that schedule . Having dinner at 8PM already felt late to us. Montevideo is also really laid back. Activities don't necessarily start at the specific hour that was stated on the website.

For the reasons I mentioned above, we kind of messed up and didn't get to see some of the cool things that I know we would've enjoyed, like the Candombe street parades on Sunday nights or the tango show at Baar Fun Fun which started at midnight on Saturday. We only have ourselves to blame and I'm not saying we didn't have fun in this colourful, surprisingly tranquil big city. I just want others to be able to experience what we didn't get to. I'd like to have the chance to go back, this time equipped with a little bit more wisdom and knowledge (and planned nap times during the day perhaps?).

Nevertheless, we thoroughly enjoyed relaxing on the beaches and in the parks that dot the shores of the Rio de la Plata.

Highlights

People dancing tango on the street at all hours of the day. From pros to neophytes, everyone's at it!

The museo de los Andes and its owner, Jorg, who is willing to spend hours answering questions about the famous plane crash that happened in 1972

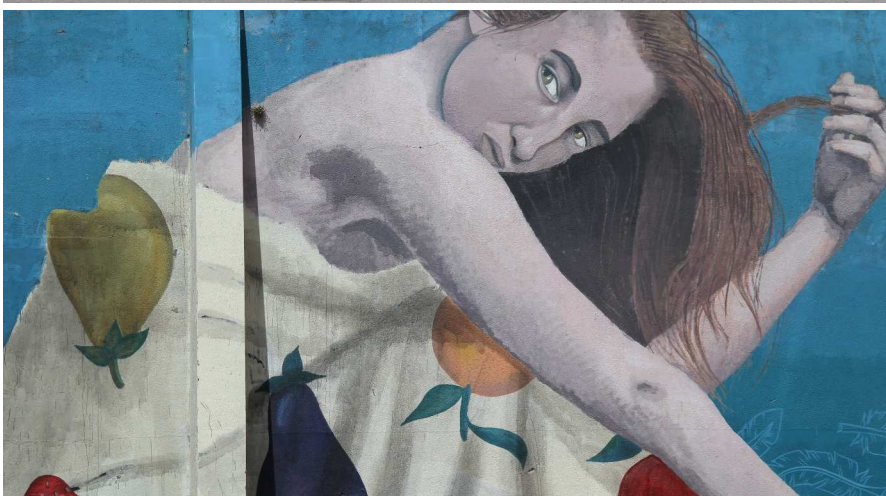
Strolling along the Rambla on a Sunday, when everyone in Montevideo comes outside to have a picnic, run with their dogs and most of all DRINK MATE

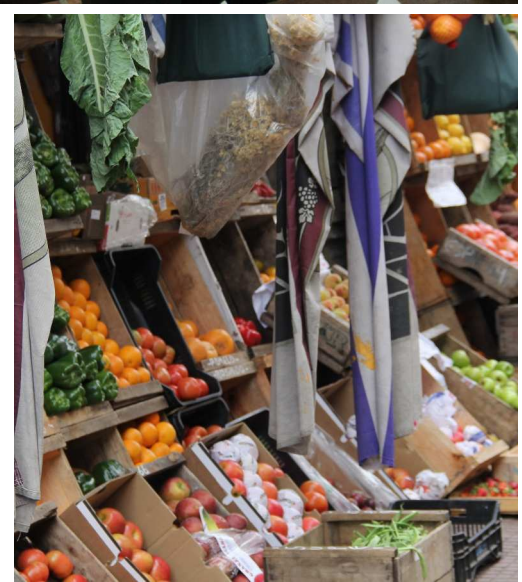
Meat, meat and more meat at the Mercado del Puerto

Hours spent reading old French magazines atop a hill as the sun hits the Rio de la Plata

Checking out the street art







Bariloche

(September 27th to October 10th, Just me)

Music to my ears

Astor Piazzolla: Adios Nonino/ El Cuarteto de Nos: Asi soy yo
Calle 13: Latinoamérica/ Selda Bagcan: Kizil dere/Alvaro Soler: El mismo sol
Richard Bona: O sen sen sen/ Gustavo Cerati: Cabeza de medusas

Reflections on Bariloche

Cold weather/warm people

That's what comes to mind when I think of the two weeks I spent in the patagonian city of San Carlos de Bariloche. This contrast perfectly encapsulates the experience I had and already brings up great memories, despite the fact that I was only there for a fortnight.

When I arrived the equinox had just passed a few days earlier. The mountains surrounding the pristine waters of Lago Nahuel Huapi were still capped in snow. Downtown on Calle Mitre, groups of students from around the country walked around in huddled packs, clad in rented ski attire.

Very quickly, my new friends shed their warm and affable demeanors to complain about the exceptionally cold weather. We even got treated to a few flurries which I found delightful even though I could completely relate to the fact that my teachers and family couldn't bear see another snowflake.

My argentinean "mother" Mariela kept telling me about how beautiful the region is when the flowers start to bloom. I had trouble imagining how it could possibly get any more gorgeous than it already was. The city itself isn't spectacular but the natural environment marked by mountains, lakes and thick forests is breathtaking. To be honest, I wish I'd spent an extra week there, taking in the beauty of the area and getting to know the friendly people I met there.

Highlights

Reading outdoors with a view on Lago Nahuel Huapi while a group of friends start jamming reggae songs on their acoustic guitars nearby

Studying at Escuela La Montana: intense and challenging but always fun and it was a worthwhile experience

The sound of the wind at the top of Cerro Campanario

The chocolate, oh, the chocolate

My host family and their lovely house on calle Villegas

Running up the hill to get back to class after having spent break time admiring the views near the lake

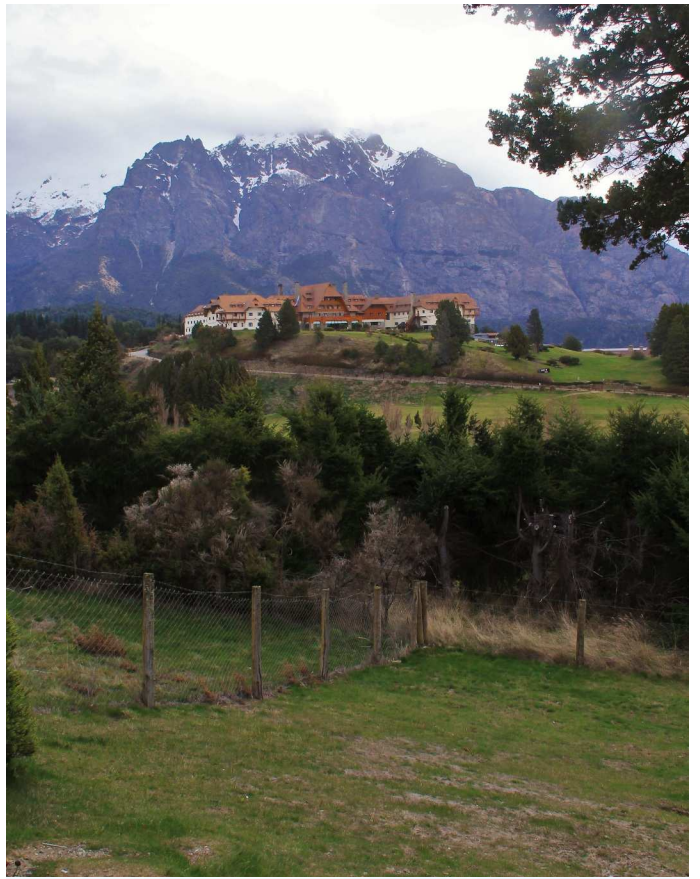
Eating ice cream (helado) at Jauja

The peacefulness of Lago Gutierrez

Walking to the cascada de los Duendes with Agustina, Jose Luis and Mariela











Salta and Tilcara

(October 20th to 26th- Michel and I)

Music to my ears:

Noir Désir: Des visages, des figures/ Georges Brassens: Putain de toi
Lemon Bucket Orkestra: Prescachanka/Mercedes Sosa: La maza
Ana Tijoux: Antipatriarca/ Bocaflaja: Fuego/Karkwa: Le pyromane
David Bowie: Changes

Reflections on Salta and Tilcara

Every day at 3PM, the wind rises and starts shaking up each particle that sits on the surface of the *pachamama*. The air is thin here in Northern Argentina and every colour seems brighter. Sky of a saturated blue grazes the multicoloured mountains, sometimes producing a single cloud that sits atop a rocky mound. When the breeze slowly turns into a steady current of air, the dry desert ground lifts up, turning the craggy panorama into a sepia-toned moonscape. So much emptiness, so little vegetation. A once grand river now resembles a tiny brook. Yet life is everywhere here if you look closely enough, peaking out between cracks, creeping its way down a narrow path and settling down where the water used to be.

Tilcara is a pretty town set 3 hours north of Salta. Though it has been taken over by tourists, there's still lots to see and do especially during the low travel season. We ate some of the best meals of our trip in our time there.

When visiting this part of Argentina it's all about hitting the roads to enjoy the incredible landscapes and explore the large uninhabited areas. Sometimes, just driving off without a fixed goal will lead to amazing discoveries. In other cases, time spent driving towards the final destination will turn out to be the main attraction. Thinking back, we realized that one of our favourite moments during the trip was the car journey to (and back from) Salinas Grandes. We enjoyed it even more than actually seeing the famous salt flats.

Highlights

The animated streets of Salta at nighttime

By contrast, the peacefulness of *Casa Estrella azul*

Driving in all directions without one particular destination in mind

Tasting the delicious cuisine (different from other parts of the country)

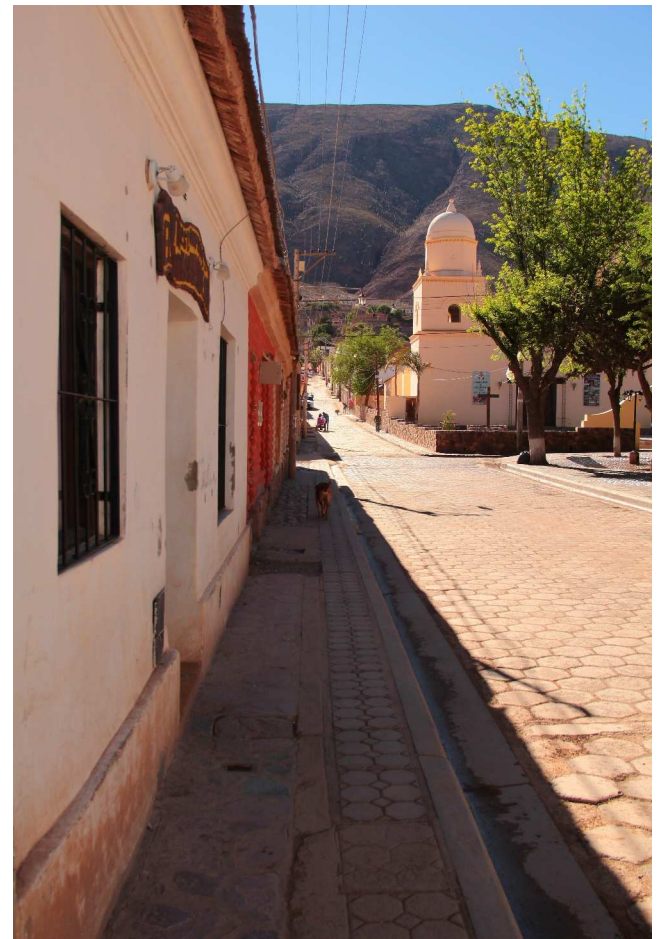
Sunsets in the backyard of our *casa*

Exploring the *Pucara de Tilcara* historical sight and cactus garden

Learning about local history and culture at the *Museo Arqueologico*

The blindingly white salt flats known as Salinas Grandes

Cerro de siete colores (seven coloured hill) in Purmamarca



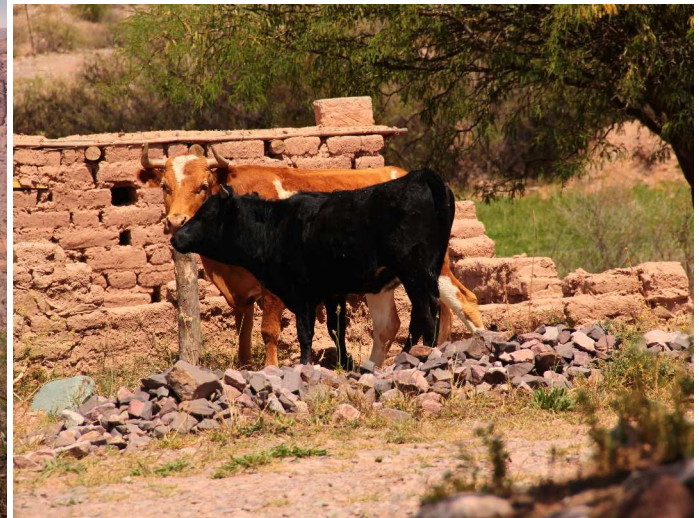
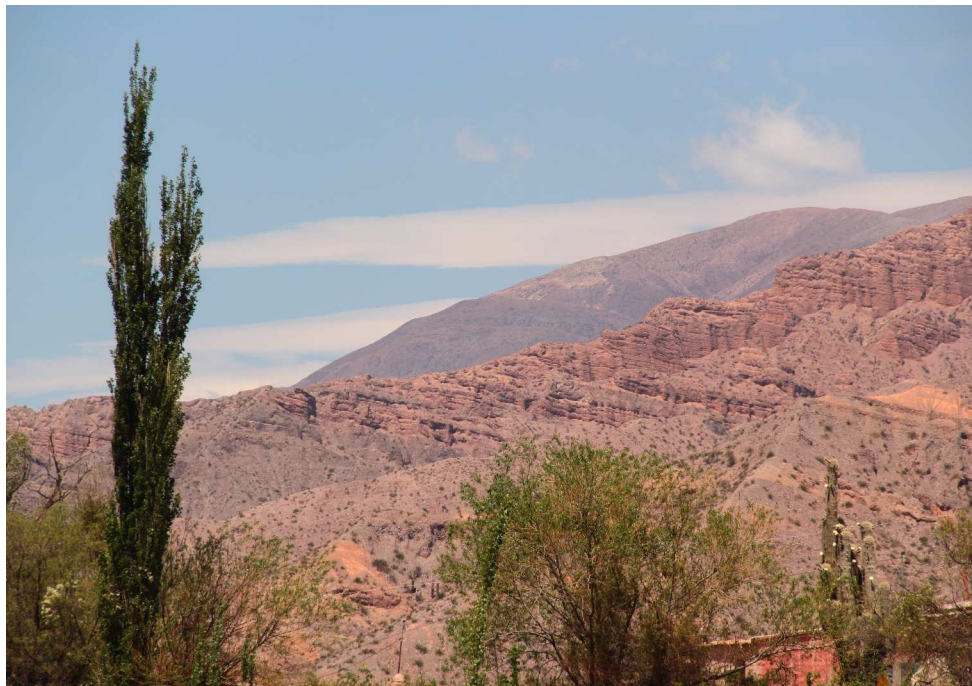






Casa Estrella Azul

This humble little house located just a few minutes away from the village of Tilcara was a destination in and of itself. The pink adobe walls and roof seemed to barely protect us from the insects and natural elements. Yet we felt comfortable and happy spending time in this authentic, beautifully decorated *casa*. Outside, a little terrace surrounded by blooming flowers proved to be the ideal setting for a few hours of musical meditation and one very windy dinner.



Mendoza

(October 27th- November 1st- Michel and I)

Music to my ears

Mussorgsky: Night on bald mountain/Mozart: Symphony No. 40 in G minor, K. 550

Bach: Air on G string/Ait Menguellet: Ddin amcum

Tony Allen: Secret agent/Silverchair: Israel's son

Reflections on Mendoza

Wine is a fundamental part of the national identity in Argentina. The most typical meal you could ask for is a medium rare *bife de chorizo* with a glass of malbec. Not just any wine, it has to be malbec.

This dark grape variety was brought to Argentina some 150 years ago by a French agricultural engineer. To reach full potential, it needs plenty of sun and heat. The Mendoza region, located at the foothills of the Andes, provides an ideal environment for the Malbec grape to grow. Vines cover more than 350 000 hectares of semi-arid land and have become a major tourist attraction with many wineries catering to visitors by offering tours, meals and even accommodations.

To visit the vineyards, you can hire a guide, travel by bike or rent a car. Knowing that we aren't big drinkers, we chose the last option which felt more flexible. Unfortunately, we only got to visit one place, Familia Di Tommaso, due to unforeseen circumstances (let's leave it at that). Nevertheless, the time we spent driving through seemingly endless rows of vines set in front of tallest mountains in South America was an unforgettable experience.

Highlights

Visiting the vineyards and olive farms in Maipú

The beautiful backyard at Teodora's house

Crafts festival in the downtown plazas

Road tripping all the way to Uspallata and back, only stopping for a quick lunch (unforgettable landscapes)

The fun atmosphere on calle Villanueva Aristides

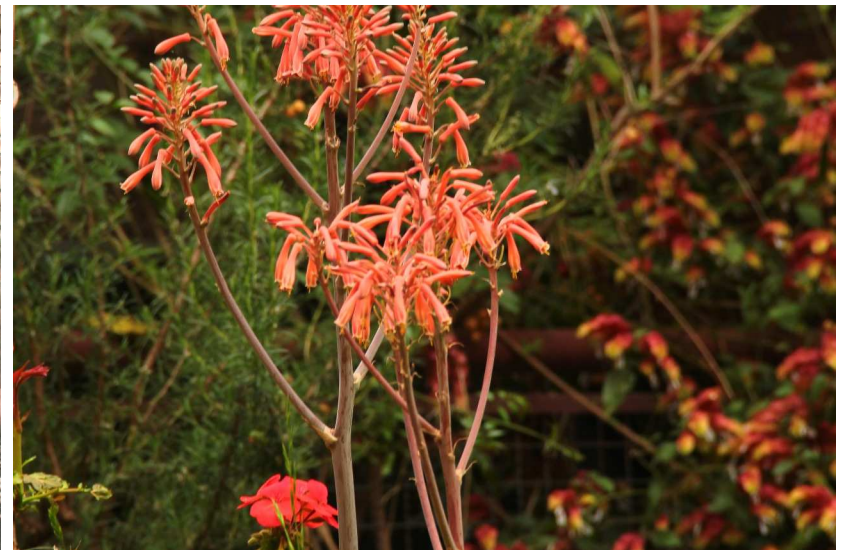
The Mercado Central: a pleasure for the senses

Napping and playing pencil and paper games in Parque General San Martin

Walking from downtown Mendoza to our lovely temporary home

Taking the bus from Mendoza to Santiago















Santiago

(November 1st to 4th- Michel
November 1st to 5th- Me
November 19th- 22nd- Just me)

Music to my ears

Juanito Ayala- De tanto viajar/Little Joy- Next time around
Dave Brubeck- Take Five/Bill Withers- Grandma's hands
Talib Kweli- Too late/ Makiza- La rosa de los vientos
Heavy Soundz: Alza la mano

Reflections on Santiago

Coming in with very few expectations, we were pleasantly surprised by the Chilean capital. The fun, if a bit bourgeois neighborhoods of Bellas Artes, Lastarria and Barrio Italia provided nice spots for people-watching, one of our favourite activities. Like in Buenos Aires, the public art was on point, especially near Cerro San Cristobal.

Prior to our arrival, we had heard mixed comments about the food in Chile. Fortunately, we found that to be untrue and sampled a good share of fine meals in Santiago and other parts of the country. We found excellent cheesy empanadas and overdose-inducing portions of Peruvian ceviche. The only bad meal we had was a frozen lasagna we bought at the grocery store when we arrived (and that could happen pretty much anywhere in the world).

Our accommodation was located in the center of town, towering over the busy *avenidas*. It was an apartment but almost felt like a hotel so it turned out to be one of the few times during our trip where we chose this type of place in lieu of something more authentic. When I came back to Santiago towards the end of my journey, I also chose to stay at a hotel. Unfortunately, it was a regrettable choice that ended up costing me way too much money for a plain room and disrespectful staff. Still, Santiago is an interesting place to visit for a few days. There are many beautiful parks and great (free!) museums.

Highlights

The liveliness and smells of *mercado La Vega*

Visiting the city with a Tours 4 tips guide who showed us places we would've never seen otherwise and shared interesting information

Checking out the temporary and permanent exhibits at the *Museo de la memoria y de los Derechos humanos*

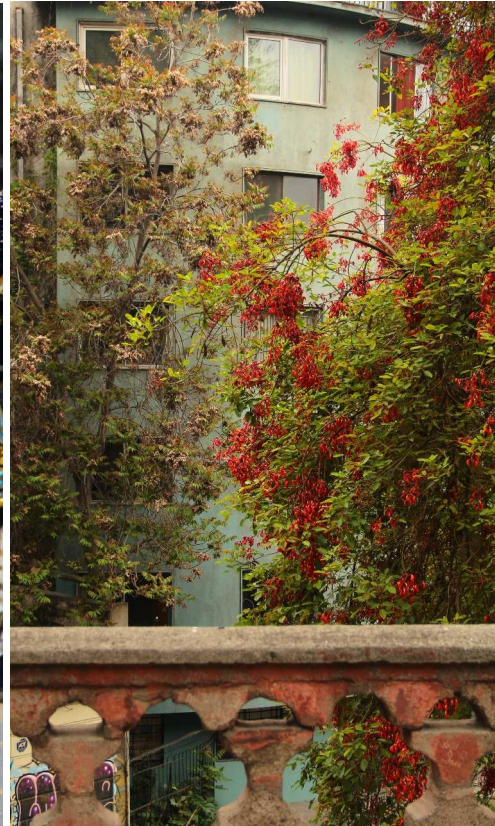
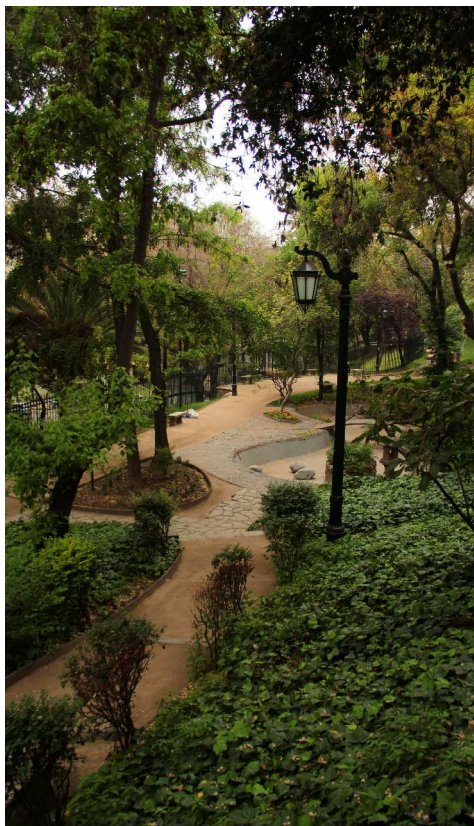
People watching on the pedestrian streets (especially the businessmen sipping coffee and reading newspapers all day long)

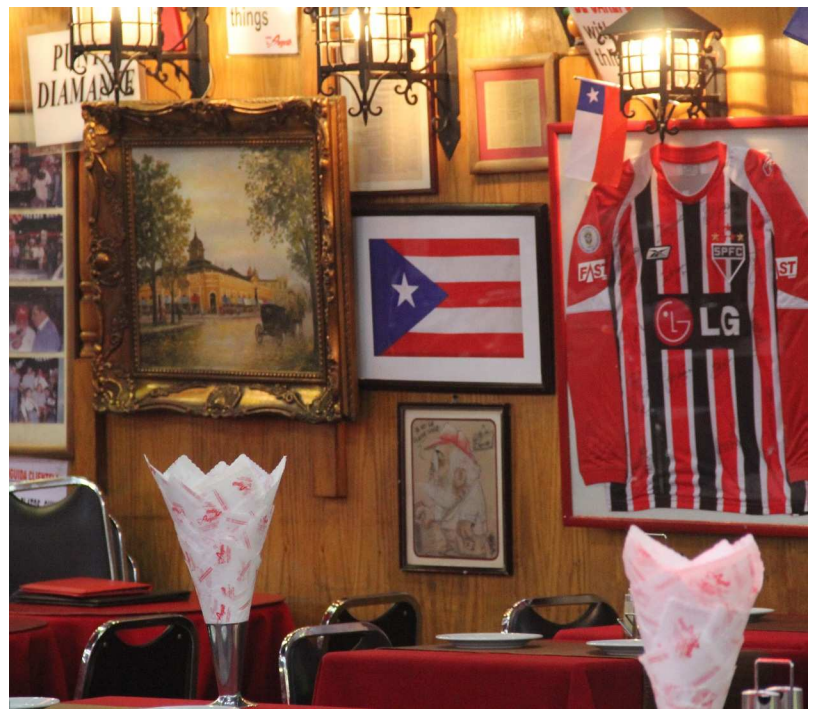
Window shopping in Barrio Italia

Shopping for books and souvenirs at the tienda Nacional (music label headquarters)

Beautiful parks providing nice green spots in the middle of the city

Gorgeous views of the nearby mountains





Valparaíso

(November 5th to 15th- Just me)

Music to my ears

Evelyn Cornejo: America si/Chico Trujillo: Ahora quien
José Gonzalez: Teardrop/ Pierre Barouh: Ce n'est que de l'eau
Bebo Valdes: Con poco coco/ Oscar Peterson: Wave

Reflections on Valparaíso

Pablo Neruda's former home *La Sebastiana* sits on top of a hill reached through winding staircases and alleyways lined with overflowing flowerpots. From the terrace, the view offers a stunning display of the city's 42 hills and busy port on the shores of the Pacific ocean. Lots has changed since Chile's most famous poet last spent an afternoon typing away in his office.

For a time, Valparaíso earned bad press as a dirty and dangerous city. However, in 2003 two of the city's hills, Cerro Concepción and Cerro Alegre, were awarded UNESCO World Heritage status. In came the backpackers who, undeterred by the city's bad reputation, ended up falling in love with the bright colours of the innumerable murals and with the creative atmosphere that flourishes in many parts of "Valpo".

Ten years later, Valparaíso has developed one of the most important cultural scenes in all of Chile. Street art has become a thing of pride for locals. After dealing with years of constant vandalism, a group of citizens decided to make way for more attractive art by turning their part of town into an open-air museum. Nowadays it seems as though the whole city is one big canvas where artists, both Chilean and foreign, have come to leave their mark. Musicians have also taken to the streets, preferring sidewalks over closed studios. In doing so, they create a perfect soundtrack for a unique city.

Highlights

Walking from one *cerro* to another through narrow staircases and alleys

Stumbling onto amazing murals at every corner

Breathtaking views of the Pacific ocean

Observing the sea lions who spend hours on end sunbathing on Muelle Baron

The Museo de Bellas Artes

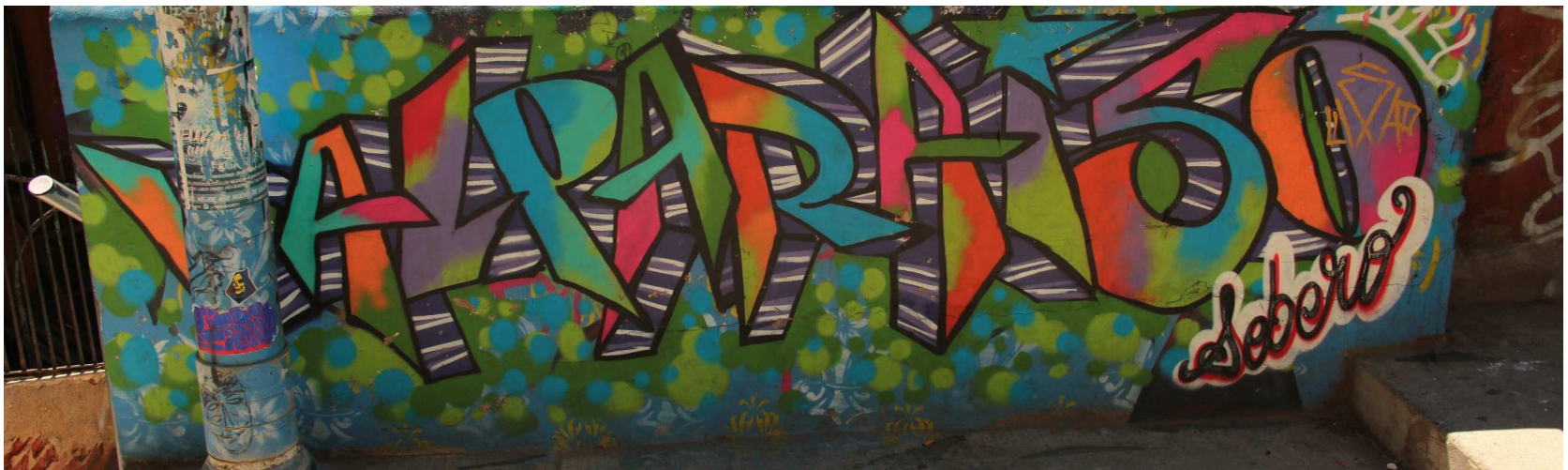
Music everywhere (from impromptu jam sessions to big rock concerts on the central plazas)

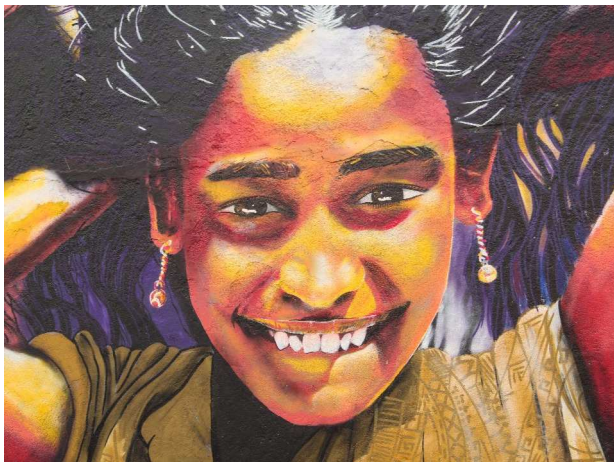
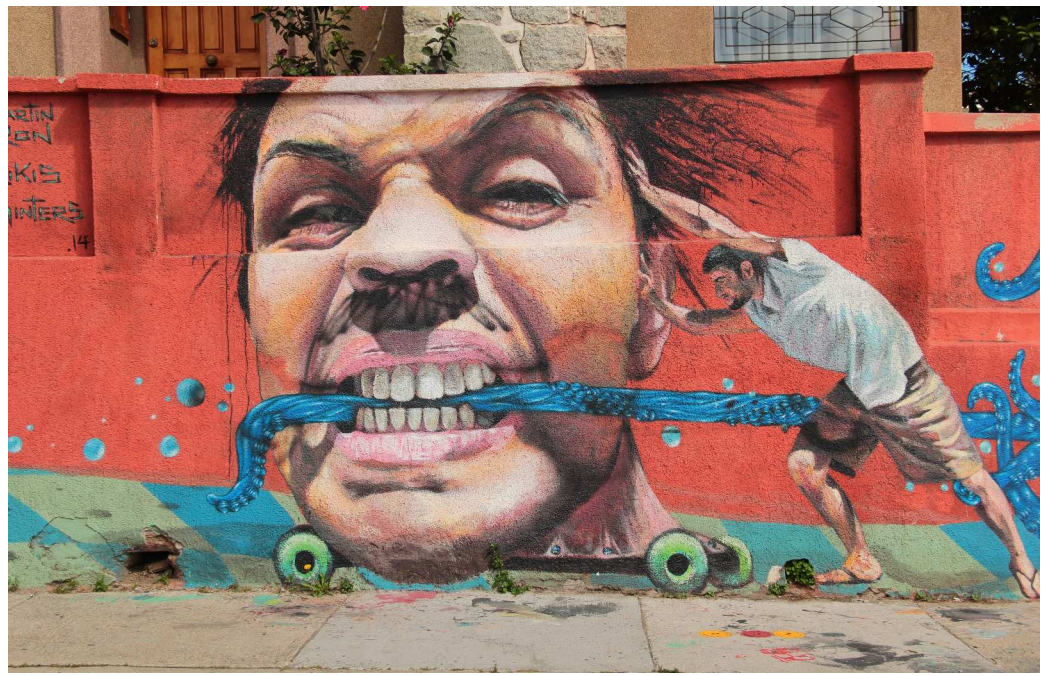
Catching a conference (by Jason Shogren) and a movie (Chico y Rita) at the Puerto de Ideas festival

The friendly hosts and delicious breakfast at Hostal Portobello

Studying Spanish in a lovely private home on Cerro Alegre

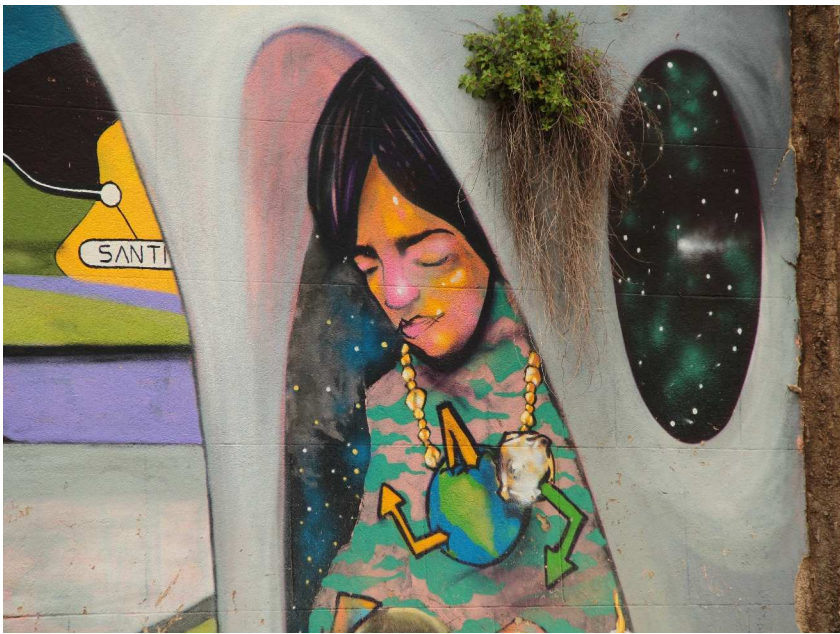
Rummaging through used bookstores, trying to find a copy of *Las veinas abiertas de Latinoamérica*



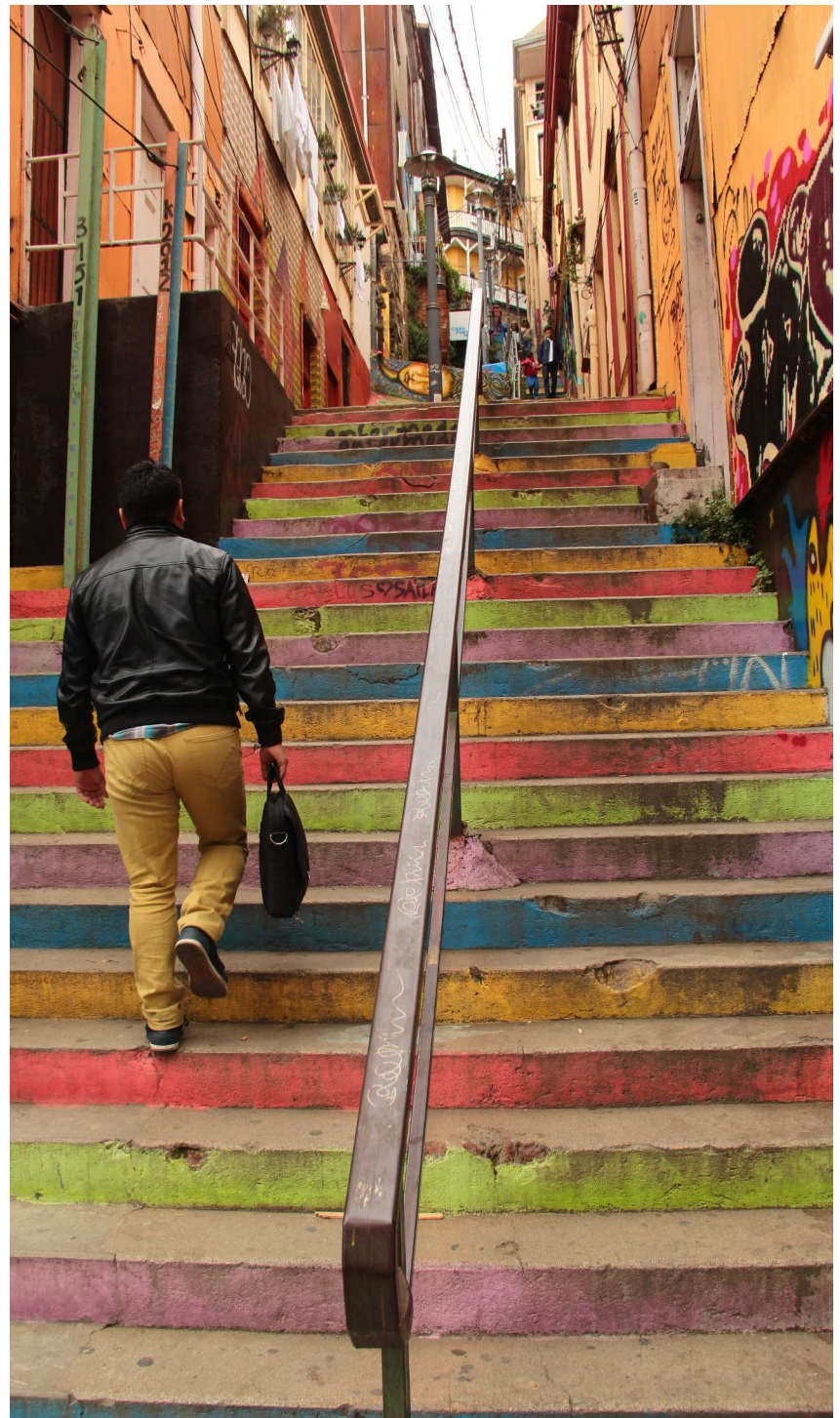
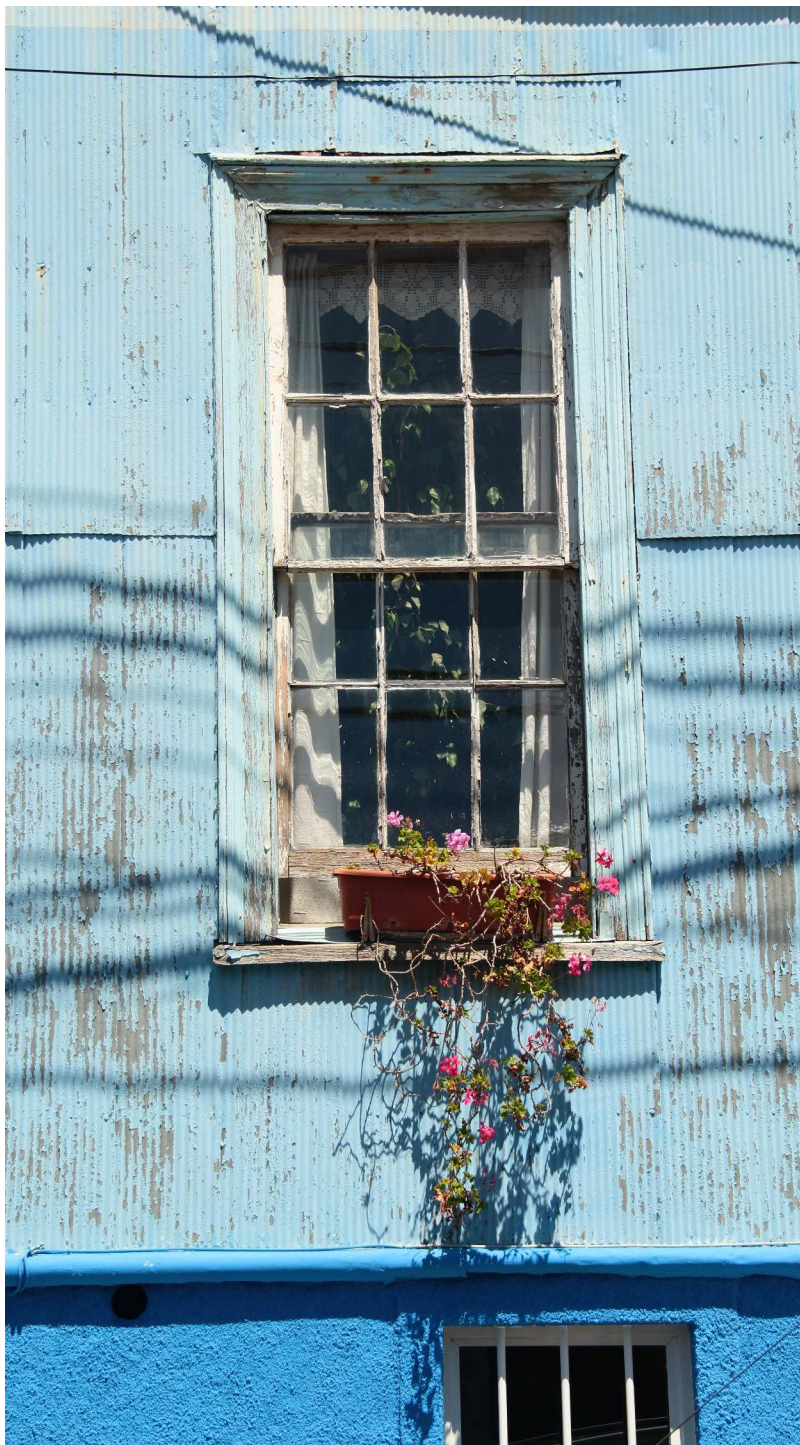












Pichilemu

(November 15th to 19th- Just me)

Music to my ears

Erik Satie: Gymnopédie No. 2/Glenn Gould: Goldberg variations BWV 988: Aria
The Roots: Atonement/Billie Holiday: I'll be seeing you
Mos def: New world water

Reflections on Pichilemu

Pichilemu is for surfers.

I chose this quiet resort town as a vacation within my vacation, a weekend getaway at the beach if you will. When in Pichilemu, one must surf. My first and last attempt at learning to ride the waves happened nearly a decade ago during a summer trip to France. It wasn't a very successful endeavour. Also, people who know me know that I have several random fears that keep me from doing certain things like using a bicycle in the city or venturing more than 2 meters from the shore when I go for a swim. That makes surfing a challenge for me. However, when I'm traveling it feels like my phobias don't have as much power over me. With enough willpower, I am able to get over them.

This time around, I decided that only a fool would leave Pichilemu without having tried to surf. Threatening my own ego was the only way I could throw myself outside of my comfort zone. Surfing was both a goal and an obstacle I had to overcome. And I did it! I rode the waves of panic and as the board glided across the waves, my anxiety slowly turned into a smooth feeling of heightened consciousness.

After a few hours spent riding the waves, all I wanted was to sit on the beach, playing in the sand while lending one ear to Erik Satie's *gymnopédies* and another to the sound of the waves crashing on the cliffs. And that's what I did. It was great.

Highlights

Playing with the gray sand

Brightly coloured flowers everywhere, cascading down the cliffs or popping out of the sand

Scrumptious cheesy empanadas from the cart near my hostel

Fresh herbal tea for breakfast, specially made by the hostel owner's mother just for me

Friendly locals

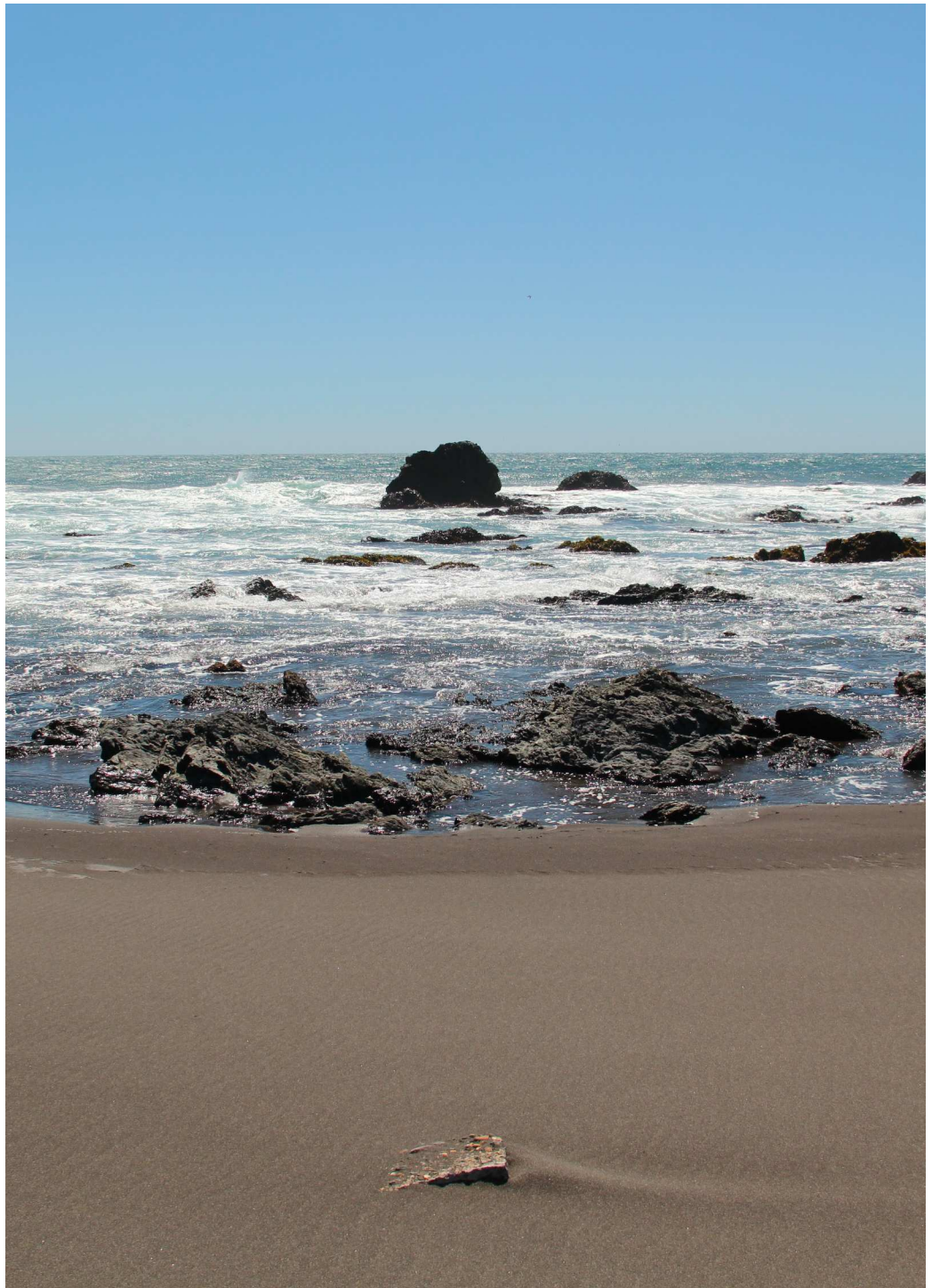
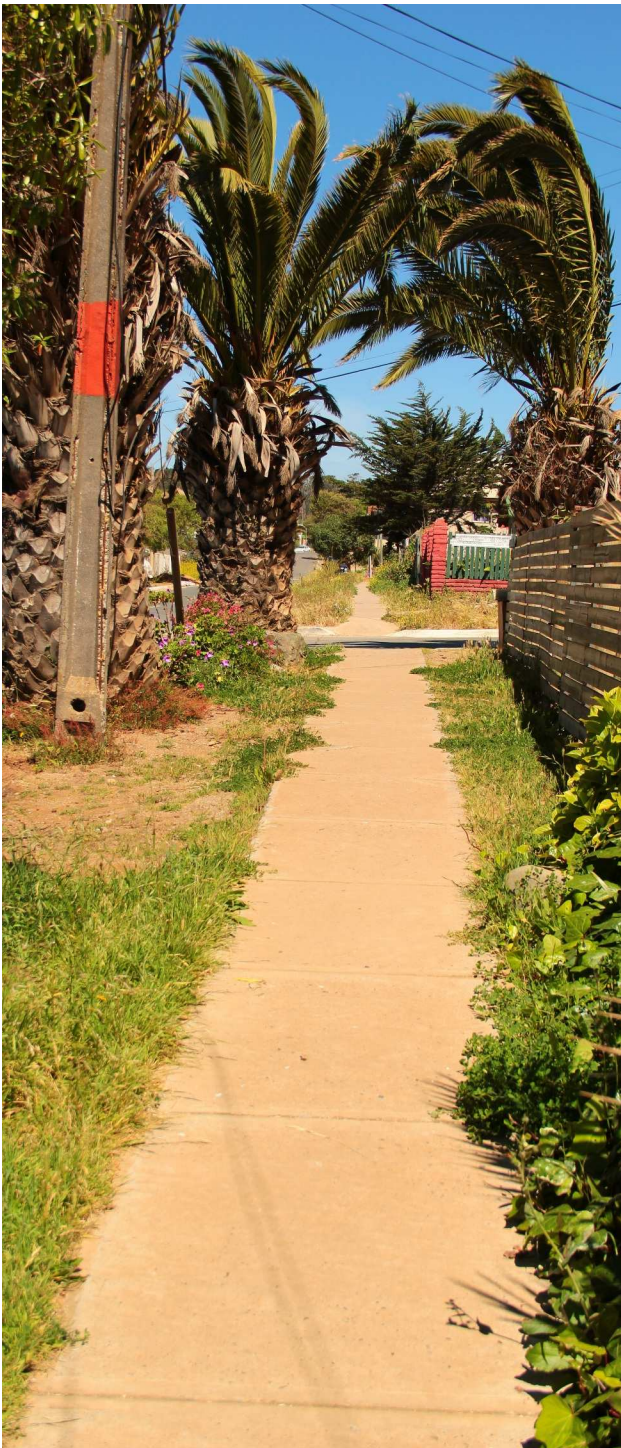
Off-season= few tourists

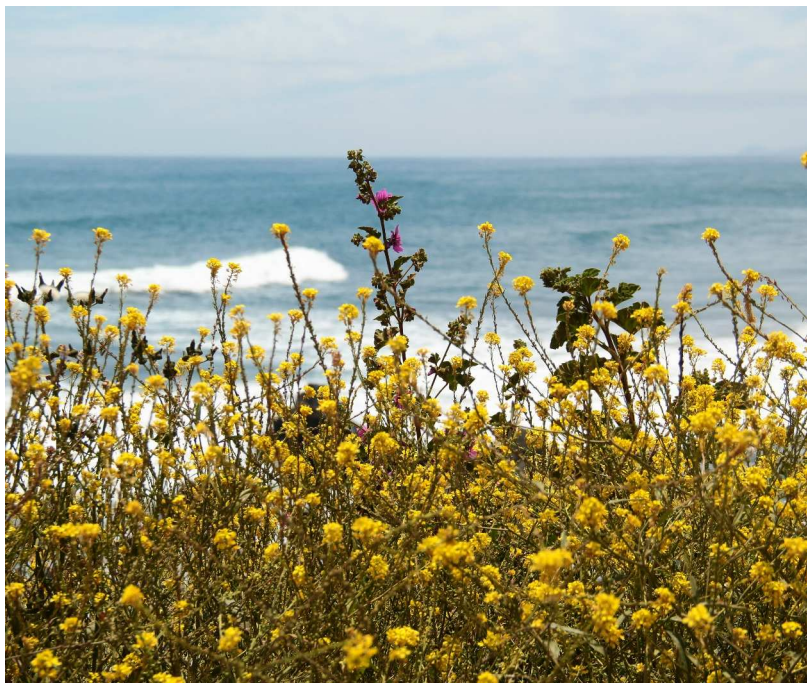
Being able to ride 3 waves successfully on a surf board

Waiting for 1/2 an hour to finally get the perfect shot of a surfer riding a wave before sunset

Tsunami warning signs, a constant reminder that this type of situation has happened before and will probably happen again here

Quiet streets lined with bright flowers











Food

What we ate (that was good)

Bife de chorizo + Empanadas (dozens of shapes and types of fillings) + Choripan (grilled chorizo hot dog) + Ceviche (there are lots of great Peruvian restaurants in Chile and Argentina) + Llama meat + Budín (really practical for breakfast and snacking on the bus. We liked it the first 20 times we ate it) + Completo (decadent hot dog with a TON of mayo) + Dulce de leche on everything + Chocolate + Helado (Lemon and basil was a favorite) + Provoleta (grilled provolone cheese)+ Morcilla (for the first time in our lives we liked blood pudding) + Chipas (cheese-flavored rolls) + Sopaipilla (fried salty pastry served a spicy tomato-onion-herb sauce) + Medialunas (croissants) + Something à la milanesa (everything is prepared *a la milanesa*, from meat to vegetables. Oftentimes it is served drowning in cheese. I liked it the first 10 times, especially eggplant *a la milanesa*) + Tasty sauces (salsa criolla and chimichurri)



Land of meat

It's sort of cliché to say that Argentina is all about meat but honestly, they deserve that reputation! Along with fútbol, meat worship is almost comparable to a religion in this country. Even in the most basic restaurants, the quality of the meat tends to be excellent (equivalent to the best restaurants in Canada). Don't expect a side of vegetables. Just enjoy the slab of beef, a few fries and maybe some provoleta (grilled provolone cheese) with a good glass of wine. Uruguay and Chile also rever meat. NEVER compare their parilla skills to those of their neighbors, this would prove to be very offensive to your new friends.

Sweet

After a nice meal of meat accompanied by more meat, it's nice to eat something light and healthy... Well, not in Argentina! (or Chile for that matter). Desserts are decadent and extremely sweet. Everything is covered in dulce de leche (manjar in Chile). You can feel the Italian influence as two of the most popular desserts are tiramisu and helado (gelato). For a perfect afternoon snack, Argentinians and Chileans alike grab an alfajor (two round cookies with a sweet filling between them). At breakfast, we ate a lot of budín (sweet cake-like bread). We ate so much of it that I couldn't eat another piece if you paid me. Chocolate, oh how I love thee. In Bariloche, I got my money's worth. In fact, that's pretty much all I ate when I was over there for two weeks. My favorite treat was the Franui, a raspberry with ice cream, covered in chocolate. Delicious.





Tierra Negra Cooking class in Buenos Aires

Ever since I took a food tour in Istanbul, food-related activities have become a priority as I plan my future trips. I believe that when you learn about the food, you get more insight about the culture and the people who make up the country. In this case, Veronica and Manuel hosted us inside their home and taught us how to prepare empanadas, choripan, gaucho sandwich, salsa criolla, papas al ajillo, chimichurri and a cocktail made with Fernet. It was unbelievably fun!

What we ate (that wasn't good)

Disclaimer; This could happen anywhere so I won't blame the whole country for the few places who serve bad food but I still think it's worth mentioning because we laugh about it now

Intestines- Mayonnaise with bread (instead of butter)- Something a la milanesa (after having had it 10 times)- Budín (after having had it 20 times)- Powdered onion soup with noodles (our own fault, we had nothing else to eat in our house in Tilcara)- Bus food (most of the time cardboard would've tasted better.

Wine, spirits and a lot of juice

Both Argentina and Chile have some of the best wineries in the world. Unfortunately, we were not the best clients for this type of product. Both of us enjoy the taste of wine but we don't drink a lot of it (I physically can't and Michel isn't prone to drinking much). However, when you're visiting these countries, especially the Mendoza region, it would be a shame to leave without having tried some of the great products on offer. Plus, a good steak begs for a nice glass of Malbec. We visited one winery in Mendoza (Familia DI Tommassini) and tried other great wines like El Enemigo and Familia Cecchin,

That's not to say that wine is the only thing to drink here. In Chile you'll find great cocktails such as the terremoto (cheap sweet wine with pineapple ice cream) , the chicha (sweet fermented wine) or the pisco sour (never say that the peruvian version is better). Also, fresh fruit juices are incredibly tasty, though do remember to specify that you don't want extra sugar in it, otherwise they will pour that stuff in until it covers the taste of the fruit. Chileans like things sweet. Don't say I didn't warn you!

Cortazar style

Instructions on how to eat an empanada

(inspired by Julio Cortázar's *Manual de instrucciones*)

An empanada is a meal suitable for any given moment of the day. It can satisfy an afternoon craving or fill up a dinner plate with a portion more appropriate for an ogre. Most empanadas are stuffed with some sort of meat or cheese filling, though one is free to use any ingredient of their liking. Results not guaranteed. Many believe that the key to a good empanada lies in the quality of the dough. Some prefer to bite into a flaky pastry while others favour a softer texture. It must also be noted that depending on which country one is visiting, size may vary. The following instructions explain the best empanada consumption protocol according to Argentinean standard sizes, which tend to be smaller.

Using a brown paper napkin, one must grab the empanada, leaving half of it uncovered and ready to be consumed. Applying the proper amount of pressure on the empanada is key during this particular step. The covered part should be firmly secured into one's hand, but not so much so that the the pastry breaks apart.

Before the empanada meets the lips, one should take a moment to enjoy the rich, buttery smell of the dough. This stage, a crucial one in the process, ensures sufficient saliva production inside the oral cavity. Doing so creates an ideal environment to welcome the tasty treats into one's mouth.

The next move one must make is to open their mouth at an angle of 37 degrees and a diameter of 4cm . Once the proper opening has been created, one is ready to start eating the empanada. With the first bite, an influx of flavours will hit the tongue: the flakiness of the crust, the spices mixed into the filling, the creaminess of the cheese... Oh, what a lovely moment!

An empanada can be eaten very quickly or very slowly. No matter which way one decides to savour their empanada, one should take a moment to enjoy it in all its glory.



Misunderstandings

and other funny situations

It all started out on kind of a sour note. I had gotten an email confirming the address and names of my host family in Bariloche. I was going to stay at their house for two weeks while I studied at La Montaña. As planned, I took the bus from Buenos Aires to Bariloche on September 26th. I would arrive in the city at 10AM and take a taxi to get to their house. Everything was under control.

After a 20 hour journey, we finally got to our final destination. As planned, I jumped into a taxi which dropped me in front of Villegas 769. I knew this was the right house as I had seen photos attached along with the email. Not finding a doorbell, I waited for a while in front of the gate. They would see me from their house, I thought. About ten minutes later, I figured out that I could unlock the gate and reach the front door. They had to be inside! I rang the doorbell and knocked to no avail. Confused, I started imagining that they may have been waiting for me at the bus station. I decided to try to call them. No answer. Inside, I could hear the stereo playing loudly (to confuse potential thieves, and me, as it turned out).

Eventually, I started communicating with Michel who was still in Montreal at that point. I wanted to know if they had tried to contact me in some way or form (I had no Internet access). Nothing. I was cold, tired and starting to feel the call of nature. At about 4PM, I couldn't take it anymore. The little map of Bariloche inside the Lonely Planet guide proved useful as it indicated where the tourist information office was located. I left my luggage inside the vestibule and practically ran downhill. I must've looked pretty desperate because the lady working at the information desk obviously felt sorry for me. She told me to go back and if they hadn't returned home at 7h30PM, to come back so we could find a hotel room. I walked back to the house, barely taking the time to enjoy the breathtaking scenery. The family hadn't come back. I cried a little bit. It's not the first time I experience this type of situation but it always feels a bit weird to be in a place where you don't know anyone and don't know where to go. At least I speak enough spanish to get by! Finally I gave up and got a room in a hostel. For the first time in 48 hours, I had warm feet and a comfy bed.

The next day, I went to school with all my luggage. Visibly concerned by the situation, the principal told me that my hostess was extremely embarrassed by what had happened and that she would make up for it. She had thought that I was arriving on the 28th. That's why the whole family had spent the day in Chile and only came back late in the evening.

Boy did she make up for it! Mariela was an awesome mom! She was friendly, warm and generous. Agustina and Melina, daughters, were both delightful and I quickly felt like I was a part of their little family. Together, we watched Disney movies, ate late dinners and attended Zumba classes. Along with Jose Luis, whom I didn't get to see much because of his work schedule, we went on a nice drive where they showed me some of the most beautiful spots in the region.

And now thinking back on this situation makes me laugh. Ah, the absurd situations that come with traveling.



117ARS for a box of Leclerc cookies (\$12CAD). Why on earth would they import those cookies from Quebec? Who on earth would buy them at this price?

Dog walkers in Buenos Aires holding 15 leashes at a time without getting them mixed up. Quite a feat to be observed!

Loud music and bad movies on 18 hour bus rides. From Miley Cyrus to christian propaganda movies.

My lack of luck with keys: locking myself out of the house in Mendoza and breaking my key inside the lock in Valparaiso.

People mixing good wine with Coca Cola in Montevideo. In other countries they would get killed for even mentioning the idea.

Earthquakes in Valparaiso (or for the locals, just another minor tremor)

Trying to get information about the Canadian elections during a 20 hour bus ride where we didn't have access to WiFi. Frantically texting my brother.

French tourists scrambling to finish their *saucisson* before we cross the Chilean border

When the waiter at Don Julio asked me if I had already gotten my main dish, I misunderstood and said yes, thinking that he had asked me if I was still waiting for it. 45 minutes later I realized that there had been a confusion, told the waiter (who smiled politely but I could tell he thought I was a bit dumb). Since Michel had already finished his meal, when I finally got my food it was his turn to stare at me while I ate.

A guy walking his pet pig through the park in Santiago (he was being filmed)

Getting stuck on the other side of the fence leading to our house because the cows didn't want to move.

When the bus attendant tried and tried to get me to come have coffee with him at the back of the bus.

Speaking with a mix of Argentinean, Spanish, Chilean and Colombian vocabulary all once. Nearly insulting locals by using the wrong words (dulce de leche instead of manjar, vos instead of tu)

Music, cinema and literature

Heard

Like many things in Argentina, music is a reflection of the various cultural identities that have mixed here due to large waves of immigration.

Tango, the genre most tied to Argentina, first originated in the seedy port of Buenos Aires, making its way to Montevideo along the Rio de la Plata.

With hindsight, it becomes apparent that the genre and its form of dance are the result of a fusion which mixed Andalusian, Cuban, Italian and Slavic styles. Vocalist Carlos Gardel and musician Astor Piazzolla are two of the most important names in Tango.

Other traditional genres blend indigenous influences, with folk sounds especially in the northern parts of the country. One of the most famous singers in Argentina is folk superstar Mercedes Sosa who took part in the *Nueva canción* movement in the 60s and 70s. Like Piazzolla and Gardel, her heritage still lives on in the current musical landscape.

Today Argentina has major rock and electronic scenes with artists whose fame stretches beyond borders (Gustavo Cerati, Gotan Project, Babasónicos).

To learn more about Argentinean music, from its history to current trends and movements, the website Sounds and Colours is an excellent resource on the subject.



Seen

If you get into Argentinian cinema, there's no escaping the omnipresent Ricardo Darin. He stars in many of the country's most internationally renowned films (*Wild Tales, El Secreto de tus ojos, Nueve Reinas*).

Argentine cinema covers a broad array of subjects but common themes include social problems and corruption. These subjects are often treated with a large dose of irreverence and dark humor.

I watched a lot of movies during the trip but the one that struck me the most was a documentary about folk singer Mercedes Sosa, *La voz de latinoamerica*. As a long-time fan of the singer, I was left speechless by this touching movie and learned a lot more about the person behind the singer.

La soledad es un pájaro grande multicolor que ya no tiene alas para volar y cada nuevo intento da más dolor (lyrics of *La Soledad*)

Read

From indigenous fables to modern tales, South American literature is rich and diversified. I was lucky to spend a few weeks studying with two teachers who were well-versed in this subject. We read works by Cortazar, Borges and Garcia Marquez among other important authors. Having the possibility to read and analyze them within this context and to talk about them with locals was an interesting experience.

The one book that stuck with me throughout the trip was Uruguayan author Eduardo Galeano's *Espejos* (mirrors). A fascinating collection of short texts recounting various events in world history. From Confucian China to ancient Greece to the horrors of South American dictatorships, I fell in love with his way of portraying history using poetic language and sharp wisdom.



Music on the bus

Many of my best travel memories are related to music. Whenever I'm alone or traveling on a long journey, I need to have earphones in my ears. In some ways, it becomes like a soundtrack. When we travel, we are so much more attentive to every little detail and bound to perceive things in another way. Our relationship to time is also different. and this, to me, transpires to music.

Music is a huge part of my everyday life but when I listen to it while traveling, I analyze the instruments and the lyrics in a much more profound way. I experience the music instead of just listening to it. Many great musical moments occurred throughout this trip (see the songs mentioned next to each place we visited). However, the bus ride between Buenos Aires and Bariloche stands out. There were hours of writing in my journal, getting lost in my thoughts and letting my body and ears vibrate to the tune of the following soundtrack (full albums):

Tori Amos (Little Earthquakes)/ Elliott Smith (Figure 8)
Ibeyi (River)/ Rodrigo Amarante (Cavalo)
Eels- Beautiful Freak/ Neil Young (Harvest)
José Gonzalez (The Secret life of Walter Mitty/
Ali Farka Touré + Ry Cooder (Talking Timbuktu)/
Patrick Watson (Love songs for robots)

South American hospitality

A look at some of the places where we stayed during our trip

Bottom: My bedroom at Mariela's house in Bariloche

Right: Michel at Teodora's house in Mendoza

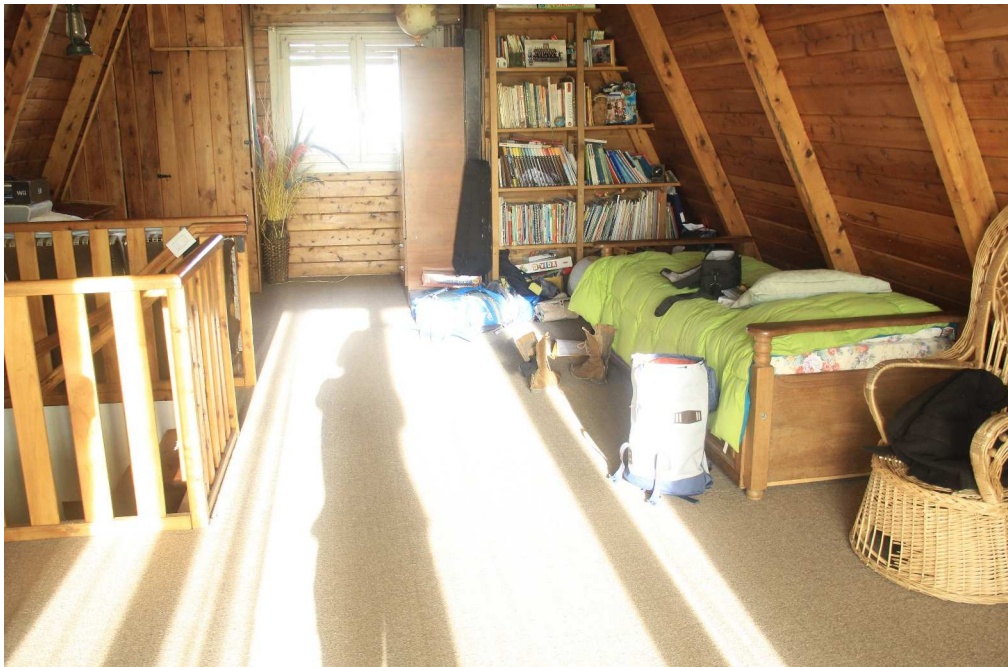
Top left: My room at Hostal Sirena in Pichilemu

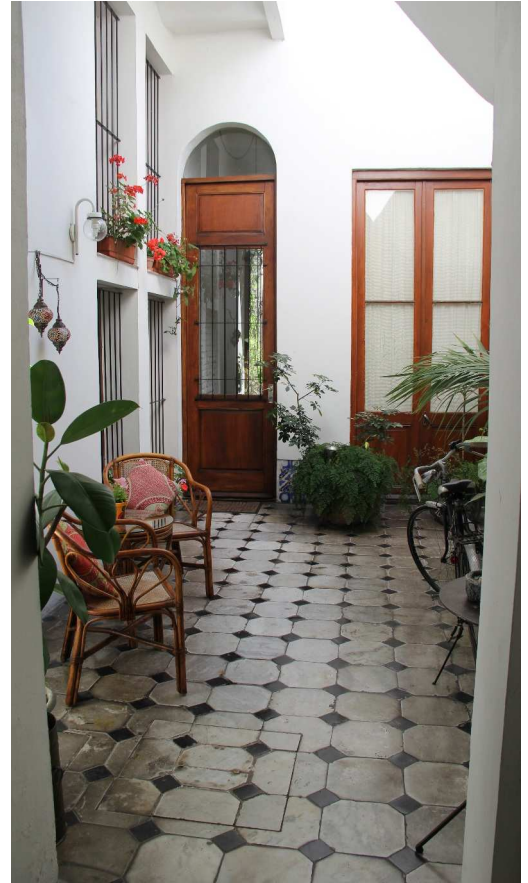
Top right: Casa Estrella Azul in Tilcara

Bottom-left: The view from our apartment in Santiago

Bottom-middle: Our cute little kitchen in Buenos Aires

Bottom-right: the entryway to Nadia's in Montevideo





On the road

We spent a lot of time on the road, taking twenty hour bus rides from one destination to another or aimless road trips in our rental car. There's so much to see looking through a windshield. Landscapes, small towns, statues, political posters...

There are also hundreds of animitas and santuarios (shrines) dedicated to accident victims or unofficial saints such as Gauchito Gil (seen below).





People

**Generous. Open-minded. Thought-provoking.
Cultured. Fun. Friendly. Warm. Patient. Lively.
Helpful. Welcoming.**

Escuela la Montaña: Omar, Sasha, Uxue, Veronica, Matthew, Isabela, Eduardo

Mi familia de Bariloche: Mariela, Agustina, Melina, Jose Luis

Buenos Aires: Luis (our favourite driver), Ricardo (number 1 fan of Carlos Gardel, we spent hours talking as we waited at the Retiro Bus station), the couple dining next to us at Chan Chan, Elisa and her husband(In the footsteps of the dictators guide), Maria (Parilla Food tour guide), Veronica and Manuel (Tierra Negra cooking class)

Our amazing hosts: Cesar, Nadia, Monica, Teodora, Raul

Montevideo: Jorg (owner of the Museo de los Andes)

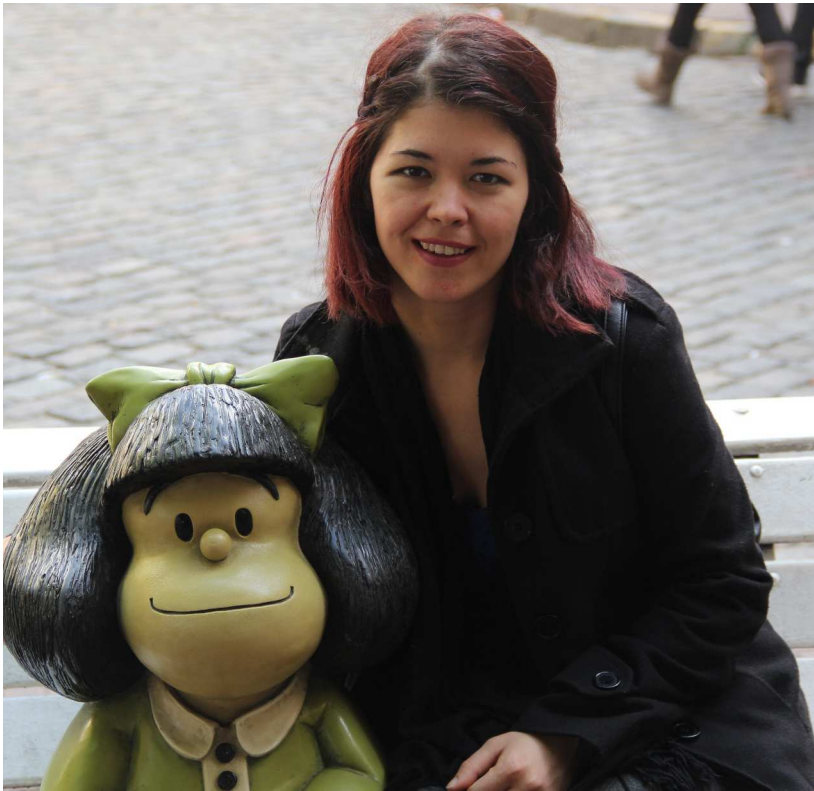
Valparaiso: Claudio and Lucrezia (owners of the Hostal Portobello), Maria Victoria (my spanish teacher)

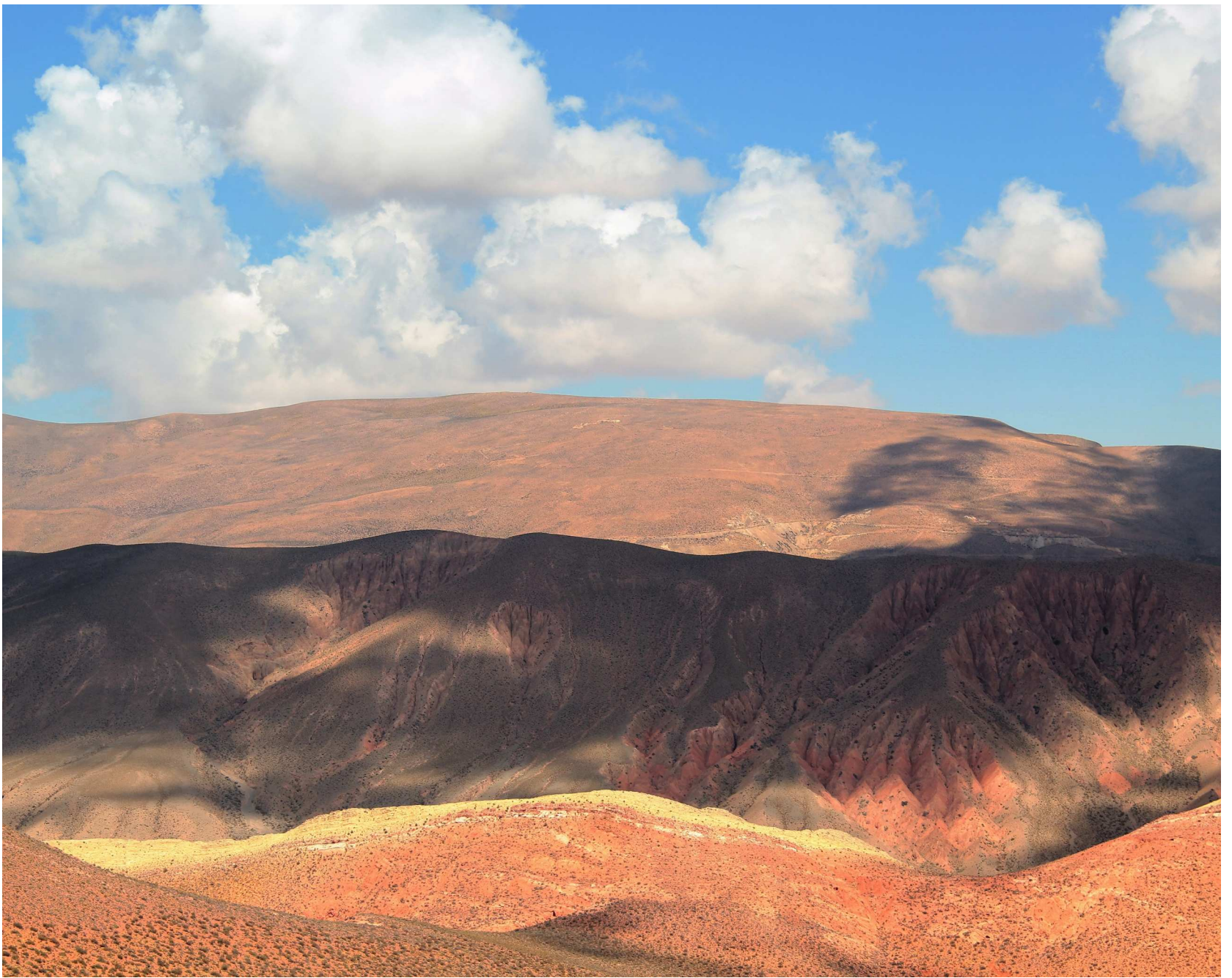
Pichilemu: Macarena and her daughter, Maria and her mother and brother

All in all, we had very few bad encounters, if any.









I have created a playlist with most of the songs and albums mentioned in this book at the following link:
<http://astorytellinghome.com/2016/01/09/the-soundtrack-to-my-trip/>



