

At last, 28 members from SCSC found out where PATAGONIA is located! Yep, that's right, the trip that has been talked about for the past year at meetings and happy hours finally happened and it was "the trip of a lifetime"!

Thirteen of the group began their journey a few days earlier than the others so they could travel to the island of Rapa Nui, formerly known as Easter Island. After we were "leied" at the airport we drove a short distance to the Hotel Hanga Roa Ecovillage & Resort where we stayed for our time on the island. Some of the tired and weary travelers, Charlie Roberts, Lisa Wilson, Joan Korpai, and Nancy Richard all took advantage of the spa services at some point during our stay. Nancy, Joan and Maureen also had an evening ritual of happy hour on their lanai overlooking the pacific sunset. The highlight and reason for visiting Rapa Nui was getting to see and walk among the 900 + Moai sculpted from the volcanic basalt and tuff that formed the island thousands of years ago. Each day we visited the ruins of various villages built by the first peoples of the island and protected by the Moai structures. We celebrated our last night on the island by attending a local performance of Rapa Nui music and dancing with some of the locals, particularly our tour guide for the week, Roberto. The performers came out into the audience and painted our faces before the performance and then later chose the rowdiest among our group (Bill Brown, Maureen, Ray Wolford, Mary Ann Harrell, & Lisa) up to the stage for some wild moves! For some this was the highlight of the whole trip!

This group of 13 flew back to the mainland to meet the rest of the travelers in Santiago, Chile. The newest arrivals had spent the day touring the city center with highlights, such as Alameda, Cousino Palace, Central Market and San Cristobal Hill, and then both groups were able to end the day back at our hotel for a welcome dinner. We were introduced that night to our in country tour director, Lucas, who would remain with us through Buenos Aires. It was an early night to bed since we had a 4am ride to the airport to fly further down south to Punta Arenas, Chile, the "city at the end of the world". After arriving for the next leg of our journey into Patagonia, we boarded a bus for Torres del Paine, the national park of Chile. Our first stop was at the sheep ranch, Estancia Cerro Negro, where we were treated to a delicious lunch of lamb roasted on a large open pit. We also enjoyed an assortment of Chilean wines and the country drink of Pisco Sour. After lunch we walked over to the shearing barn for a demonstration of sheep shearing and got to examine the various qualities of sheared wool. The wine drinking at lunch helped most of us with a nice siesta on the bus ride to the park!

We all nestled into our fabulous lodge, Hotel Las Torres, in the park for several days of hiking and boating adventures. We had various activity options, some more active than others, so a good time was had by all! The meals were all on site since there are not a lot of traveling options in the park. We often had choices of lamb, beef, salmon, and even guanaco, a relative of the alpaca and llama, which was tried by Bobby Viktorin. I think Jim Walker, David Walters and Kim Crutchfield may have tried it too but wouldn't own up to it!

We had to leave the beautiful Chilean park and cross the border over into Argentina to visit Los Glaciares National Park. After a

somewhat interesting border crossing (small concrete building with a couple of flagpoles in the middle of a sheep pasture) we traveled on to El Calafate, Argentina where we would spend two nights at the Hotel Kosten Aike. When we arrived, we had a wonderful late-night dinner with wine at a local restaurant, La Posta. After a good night's rest we visited the Patagonian Continental Ice Field of Perito Moreno Glacier. This is a beautiful place with mountains, glaciers, and lakes. A few adventurers, Stan Kuper and Barbara Carlson, had the great luck of getting to go kayaking between the icebergs out in the lake while Bill Brown and Tami Kawasugi got to go ice trekking up on the glacier. The rest of us opted for the glacial boat ride and various hikes and photo opportunities on the metal walkways along the lake followed by a delicious lunch served in the lodge restaurant. And then there's the wild adventure Sarah Granbery had in El Calafate. But, we'll let her tell the story of that adventure that left her face scraped and bruised with two black eyes!

The next morning, we flew to Buenos Aires to our 5* hotel in the Recoleta neighborhood for 2 nights to see the sights of Buenos Aires! We experienced the old historic cemetery, some of the group opted for an Italian dinner the first night, while others made their own dinner plans. The following day we had a morning bus tour of the city and then a few, Bobby & Carol Viktorin, James Barbee, Louella Stellar, and Marsha Lutz, just had to go shopping and Ann Rogers, James Schneider, Jenny & Andy Berg, Lawrence Chan, Randi Martin and Sarah took a scenic boat ride along the neighborhoods built around the Tigre River delta. That night the group went to dinner at El Viejo Almacen de Buenos Aires and enjoyed the beautiful and energetic tango show in the theater portion of the restaurant.

The post trip to Mendoza, Argentina, the home of the Malbec grape, was enjoyed by 10 diehard travelers or maybe wine drinkers?! The group left Buenos Aires for a short flight to Mendoza where they stayed at the Hotel Diplomatic with views of the Andes Mountains. The morning we arrived our guide, Fabian, took us on a tour of the city described as a "green city in a desert". He was a good historian and told us about the importance of Mendoza in the fight for independence from Spain. He also gave us recommendations for nice restaurants and wine bars for our leisure time that afternoon. The next morning the "wine Ambulance" picked up the ten of us and rushed us to the wineries we would visit that day. The first stop was Dante Robino, a winery in business since 1920. We were given a tour of the facility where the grapes are processed into wine and then taken to the beautiful tasting building for our own private tasting experience. I'm not sure but Linda Kuper may have bought the winery before we left the grounds. The second winery is called Achaval Ferrer and their vineyard has been in existence for over 100 years. They also had beautiful old olive trees and press and bottle olive oils. Our last winery stop was on the beautiful grounds of ReNacer. They have a lovely restaurant on a small lake and it was a perfect weather day for open doors. We all enjoyed strolling the grounds and taking photos while we waited for our salads, roasted vegetables, and grilled ribeyes! We all agreed it was the best meal of the entire trip! It had been a long hard day of wine tasting! This great meal gave this hardy bunch of ten adventurers the nourishment to take the long journey home! That's another story that can be shared at another time!

