

Pamela Hurd

From: Pamela Hurd <pam@gphurd.com>
Sent: Saturday, December 17, 2016 10:58 AM
To: 'pam@gphurd.com'; gphurd@aol.com
Subject: South American Wilderness Adventure Begins #1

Hello Everyone!!! Hope you are all looking forward to a fabulous Christmas & New Years. We are currently in Iguazu, Argentina & have already experienced the first couple of days of our Wilderness Adventure in Argentina & Chile (& a half day in Brazil!!!).

I was not altogether this year & didn't get any pictures of our Christmas Dance's, either the Annual Thursday at Greenfield or the new one this year at Monte Vista with Bill & Carol Goss. Both were great fun and we even had a very successful BYOB at the Thursday one that we'll very likely continue!!!

Anyway, this year, due to a change of schedule from our Holiday Vacation program with OAT, we left on Tuesday, 12 Dec for Buenos Aires. This was the start of our Wilderness Adventure with John & Connie Hibner and Marlyn & Michele Batchelor with a Iguazu Falls Per-trip and an Easter Island Pre-Trip.



John & Connie met us at Tom & Marge's & they drove us to the airport on Tuesday. We had a wonderful lunch at 4 Peak Beer Brewery at the airport & then flew from Phoenix to Dallas, with a 2 hour layover & then direct flight to Buenos Aires! It was an overnight flight to Buenos Aires & we arrived there about 8:30am. The flight out of Phoenix was one of the clearest days I've seen. It was lovely. The flight from DFW was mostly in the dark & smooth, although we did experience some turbulence just before landing. The only other time George & I have been to Buenos Aires (for a cruise with Anderson's, Brown's, & Kingsbury's in 2006), it was an incredibly bad storm & we were bounced all over the sky with people screaming & throwing up!!!). This approach & landing was much much nicer!!



It was an easy debarkation & no lines through Immigration or Customs. Even got our bags in a short time. We were out the doors & looking for our OAT representative in about a half hour! Didn't immediately see our yellow greeting sign, but soon realized that Adrian was just in the second row of greeters and only stood about 4'11"! He's a cute little blond about 30 – 1st generation Argentinian born to a Spanish Mom & German Dad here in Buenos Aires. We'll see him as a local tour guide on Sunday when we come back to begin our main trip. He led us to our small bus for transport to our hotel, the Arc Recoleta. Met our first additional OAT traveler, a really sweet single traveler from San Francisco. Took about 45 minutes drive to our hotel where our overall OAT trip guide Nicole was waiting for us with rooms already assigned & keys waiting!!



Nicole (she's from Chile) let us run up to our rooms to freshen up & we met back downstairs in about 2 hours for a short walking tour just about 5 blocks square around the hotel to orient us & probably to let us get some exercise & get over the little bit of jet lag. Only 4 hours time change, but we had flown overnight, so we were all groggy. Marlyn & Michele arrived just in time to run up & brush their teeth & join us on the walk! The only real place of interest from our walk was a beautiful book store that is in a restored Opera House. It was gorgeous!



The walk was officially over at the bookstore & we were given 3 hours off before our official first meeting for instructions about our pre-trip to Iguazu Falls. The evening meal was on our own, so we decided to go ahead & eat before our 6pm meeting. Connie spotted a nice looking restaurant next to the Bookstore, so we enjoyed our first meal! I took a picture of Michele's beautiful vegetarian salad instead of my Argentine Steak & French fries!! Here's was prettier, but my first Argentine steak was awesome!!! It was a lovely restaurant & our combo meal had included an interesting appetizer of sliced pepper sautéed in olive oil on thinly sliced French bread. Yummy!

The rest of the day was spent with a nap & our meeting. Then we had a welcome party for just our group in our room (we were all ready for bed by 10:30pm since we have to be downstairs by 6:30am tomorrow!!!!). The folks for this trip were divided into teams by Nicole & our 3 couples are now the Condors!!! So the Condors had a successful first day & we're ready for the true adventure to begin on Thursday!! I'll end this first travelogue so that I can get it sent off & I apologize for so much writing! Iguazu Falls will be more pictures & less crap!!

Chow for now & hold on for a fun filled adventure!!!

Lots of love,

George & Pamela

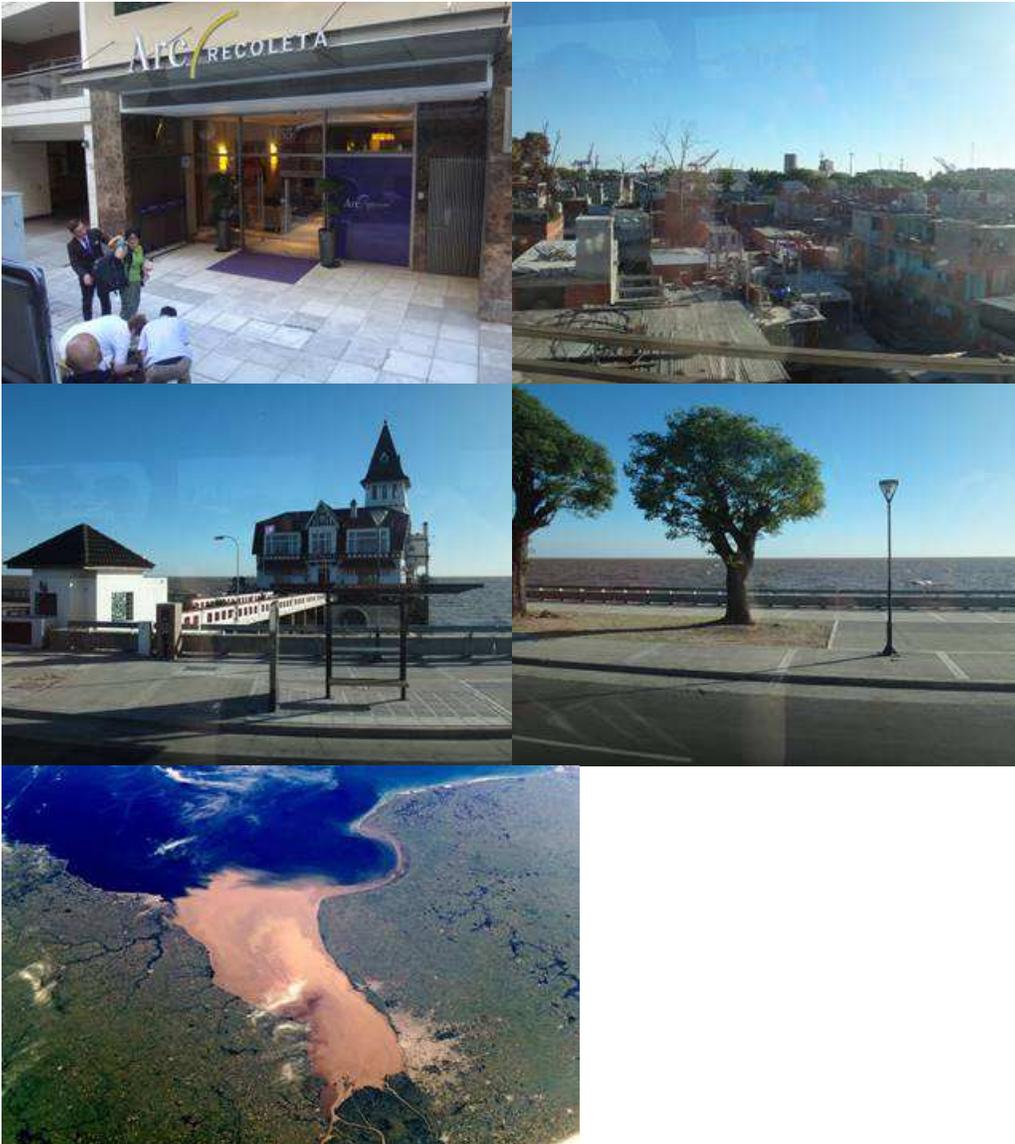
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Pamela Hurd

From: Pamela Hurd <pam@gphurd.com>
Sent: Sunday, December 18, 2016 12:57 PM
To: pam@gphurd.com; gphurd@aol.com
Subject: South American Wilderness Adventure, Iguazu Falls, Brazilian Side #2

Hello Guys,

Let's get going!!



Enroute to the Domestic Airport (not the same airport we arrived in yesterday), we passed the usual cluttered mass of apartment dwellings & then we drove alongside this massive river – the Rio de la Plata. It forms the dividing line between Argentina & Uruguay. Here, where it empties into the Atlantic Ocean, it is nearly 1.2 miles wide. Huge unsettled waves pounded against the shores. I downloaded this aerial view of the river from Wikipedia. There were individuals fishing along the shore, but we didn't see any boats.



Before I go any further, I have to present what will be the daily picture of John's socks. Every single day, we will anticipate his lovely legs!! Several of you other dancers should be jealous!



Our flight from Buenos Aires to Iguazu City was uneventful. Nicole had warned us that the internal flights were quite unreliable & that a 2 hour delay was considered on time, so we were a bit worried, but we were really on time & even picked up our luggage quickly. Soon we were in another bus with our adorable young local guide, Marcos & heading towards the border of Brazil. After making it through Immigration on the Brazilian border, we hopped into another bus that would take us to the Brazilian Iguazu National Park.



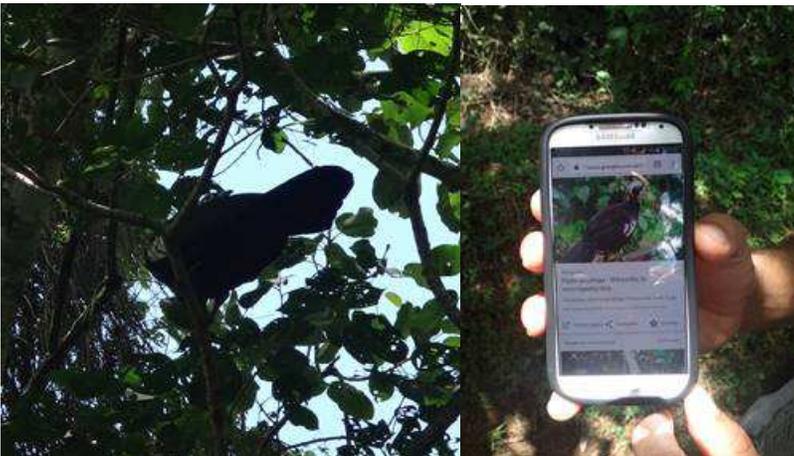
We crossed over the Iguazu River that forms the border between Brazil & Argentina & forms the falls. I downloaded the picture above from Wikipedia & it's taken from the International Space Station. As you cross over the bridge, there are cement barriers along the railings, first half is Argentina's colors, and half way across, they are painted in Brazil's colors!!



We stopped at the Brazilian National Park Welcome Center for about a half hour to grab a bite to eat. It was about 1:30pm & we would spend 2 hours walking the one path on the Brazilian side. It was only about a mile long. Marcos told us that we could take our own time & would meet back up again. We started at the National Park Hotel (only one actually in either of the National Parks – with an overnight visit starting at \$600 a night US!!



Our first view was incredible. Nicole had warned us to keep moving because each viewpoint would be better than the last. From our first glance, we knew it was going to be amazing! Then say that 20% of the falls is on the Brazilian side & the remaining 80% is on the Argentinian side, so we came to this side to be able to look at the ones on the other side from across the river.



As we continued on the path & around the first corner, we saw this huge bird. We were laughing that it was a Condor! Turns out it was a Pipile Jucutinga which is an endangered species that Nicole had never seen before, so she was very excited!!! Marcos showed us the information on his cell phone with a picture of it! We didn't get a very good picture, but we watched it quite a few minutes!!



We continued around the path & it just got better & better.



And better!



We were seeing quite a lot of creatures too. The long distance one is hundreds of Black Vultures in the trees on the Argentinian side. And several different kinds & sizes of lizards.



And several different types of mammals: a Gouti (type of rodent, he's maybe a foot long) and lots & lots of Coati. They are in the raccoon family & considered quite a pest, but the babies were just adorable. Lots of very graphic warning signs everywhere about avoiding getting bitten. They have lots of sharp teeth!!



And can't forget the flora! It is a semi tropical jungle here & the greenery was amazing. It is Spring, almost Summer & everything is growing! Kind of reminded me of going to a greenhouse garden. All the common green houseplants were here – Wandering Jew, Philodendron, Impatiens (sp?), Elephant ear, you name it & it was growing here.



Can't forget the butterflies. I tried & tried to get pictures of them. There were literally hundreds. This was the only one that cooperated!!! There were lots of spiders & other things (thousands of cicadas from the sound & from the shells on the bushes), but no pictures of them!



But overall – the Falls! The absolutely glorious, unbelievable, amazing, Falls.



The last walkway led us out over the water to a closer overlook. Literally in the spray.



And more!!



And more!!!!



And drenched George & Pam!



We took a short walk up to the top level to meet our bus. Enroute, we found this sign & found it quite interesting! “Naturally Inappropriate” is definitely one way to say non-potable!!!



Two final pictures of the falls & it was time to head back to the hotel. Amazing!!! And tomorrow is another full day on the Argentine side!!!





After a 20 minute drive, we were at our Amerian Hotel in Iguazu. It was a lovely hotel & our bags were already in our rooms waiting for us. We took off for an exploratory walk around the area. The inside was gorgeous.



The outside grounds were gorgeous also.



Found this adorable lady posing on the seating area outside! It's very comfortable by the way as we found out later!!



Our room was the 5 balcony over on the 2nd floor in the corner!



Next stop was a short half block away to a memorial view of the 3 countries borders. Paraguay is on the left across the Iguazu River, Brazil is across the river on the right and we're standing on the Argentine side. Pretty amazing, huh? Reminds me of crossing the Zambezi river 2 years ago and being at the confluence of the 4 countries!

We headed back to the hotel for a short happy hour before our dinner in the hotel! It was yummy! We enjoyed a social time in John & Connie's room afterwards to review our day & anticipate tomorrow! Then it was finally time for bed!!! Geez our life is tough!!

Wish you were here & sending love & hugs. More adventures soon!!!

Lots of love,

George & Pamela

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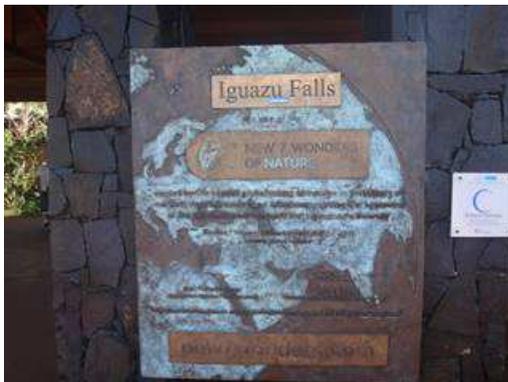
Pamela Hurd

From: Pamela Hurd <pam@gphurd.com>
Sent: Wednesday, December 21, 2016 7:25 PM
To: pam@gphurd.com; gphurd@aol.com
Subject: South American Wilderness Adventure, Iguazu Falls, Argentinian Side #3

Hi Guys,

So our pre-trip to Iguazu Falls, the absolute biggest falls system in the world continued today!

I've got to pass something on – I'm already several days off on doing my travelogue. My plan was to use the 5+ hour flight today down to Calafate to catchup. Unfortunately this morning as we were meeting to leave the hotel, we were informed that the Buenos Aires Union employees (including all airport workers!!!!) are on strike). Today was to be our first flight on the state run Argentina Airlines. SOOOOOOO, here we sit in the airport having a beer with fingers crossed that somehow, someway, Nicole will be able to get us on other flights. Apparently Lan Air is still flying, but city busses are also down. So far the airport is still serving food & folks are fairly friendly, but it's really sad for folks that are trying to travel for family holidays. We are luckily under someone else's control & she's in charge of making sure we have a place to stay tonight if all else fails. So, on to the Argentinian side of the Falls!!



The day dawned lovely sunny & clear. We had our buffet breakfast & headed out about 8:00am. Marcos showed us how they drink Mate. It's an herb tea/coffee type drink that the Argentinians drink mostly in the mornings, but we saw them all day long! It's quite distinctive. It's a round cuppish sort of container with an interesting straw with a spoon shaped strainer. They actually sell both the container & the straw in all the Tourist gift shops everywhere. He did mention that it was an acquired taste! We figure it's like Marmite!!! So not trying it! Anyway, on we went to the Argentine National Park. Only about 20 minutes. Iguazu Falls was added to the NEW Seven Natural Wonders of the World. And of course it is on the World Heritage list.



Unlike the less than 1 mile trail of yesterday, we had been warned that we would be walking more than 5 miles on the trails through & around the water fall system today. We had left early to get the first train to the upper most destination in the park – the Devil’s Throat. It was about a 15 minute train ride, past the middle section and on to the top.



Then we had about a 20 minute stroll along the metal catwalks (marked with blue arrow on map). (Note John's socks!!! We think he was trying to become an honorary Flamingo – one of the other teams assigned within our group). It was a gorgeous day – probably low 70's & totally clear.



We were looking for fish, birds & butterflies. On the way to the first viewpoint, we saw lots of Neo Tropical Cormorants & I did see lots of butterflies, but couldn't catch any of them for closeups. We also saw lots of other birds, but I couldn't catch them on film either. I believe Michele got their names though.



The plan was to meander along the cat walk & allow the main mass of people to get to the Devil's Throat & hopefully be returning by the time we got there. We could soon start to see the mist & hear the noise.



The view was incredible. I can't come up with sufficient words to describe it. I haven't had time to look up information on my own, but in general I was told that the falls were discovered in the late 1800's & the park was designated in the early 1900's, jointly with Brazil & Argentina. Around 1910, the plans were laid out & all the trails, lookouts, cat walks, etc were built then. Since then, only maintenance has been required. It is an elaborate system & completely amazing. How they accomplished the individual viewing stands is very impressive.



The noise was astounding & we were soon soaked from the spray. I took a couple of videos. I'll figure out how to put them in drop box or on youtube or something, it's quite unbelievable.



Looking across to Brazil.



I tried to take a panoramic, but it was so bright & with the spray, it didn't turn out to give any justice to it at all.



We could have stayed there ALL DAY!



Just more pictures.



Nicole came along to take a picture of us and we caught up with Marlyn & Michele.



The last overlook gave us the drop into the crevasse. Looked like it was the end of the world!



Final gift was a beautiful rainbow & then it was time to head back. Unfortunately (or fortunately however we should look at it), we had lots more things on the agenda and time was passing by!



On the way back, we saw several schools of huge catfish, 2 different turtles, & more of the cormorants.



As we were boarding the train to return to the middle section trail, we had this gorgeous bird (I apologize, but I don't remember the name & don't have internet to look it up!!), another Coati (this time in a tree!) and best of all this beautiful butterfly that landed on our seatmates nose!!



The middle loop of the falls was the longest with several viewpoints labeled. None were quite so exciting, but all were still breathtaking.



Just more pictures with different views.



And more.



Several of the last viewpoints allowed us to see down to the so called “inferior” or lower falls trails. The water was just so clear & powerful.



By now you are getting the point. I’ve never experienced anything like it. I’m skipping a lot of the photos. If anyone wants more, I’ll get them loaded onto Shutterfly & you can view to your hearts content. I probably have 1000!!!! One thing I’ve got to pass on. There was a sign about the volumn of water passing over these falls. The normal volumn of water is 1750 cubic meters per second. In 2014 that volumn increased to 47,000!!! It destroyed much of the upper level catwlks & they had to be replaced. Marcos said the access was closed for several months, but they had everything completely repaired in less than 6 months. Also, back in the 1970’s (don’t remember the date, there was a drought &

the falls were almost totally dry!!! Amazing to think of that. Apparently right now, the volumn is up to about 2050, so a little higher than normal.



The loop dropped us back at the train station where there were 3 places to eat. We had salads & empanadas & took the time to sit outside & relax. There were Coati's everywhere. Our guide had warned us to eat inside because they would hope up on the tables & steal the food & could get mean if you tried to protect it. We did & then came outside afterwards. There were men shoohing them off, but they came right back. The girls wandered off to the toilet, and while we were gone, George saw an incident with the Coati hopping up on a table & stole a young girls sandwich. Glad we had been warned!!



After l lunch we started down the "inferior" or lower trail for our afternoon adventure. Enroute, Michele spotted a Toucan!!!!



For the first time we were looking up at the falls. Just as impressive!!!



We visited a viewpoint that was almost in the falls. Giving us a preview of our upcoming boat trip!!



We enjoyed one more fabulous view before we got to our boat adventure.



So now we get to our boat adventure. I won't bother to include many pictures from this. We bought a video & I'll try to figure out how to make it available. Bottom line is that we all boarded the boat. This was one of the few "optional" tours of this trip. Kinda advertised as a "Maid of the Mist" type of excursion to float us close to the falls to experience the power of the water & get wet. That explains it kinda of like comparing the Disney ride, "it's a small world" to "the Hulk"!!!! It was a high speed boat that literally took us under – YEP I DO MEAN UNDER!!!! – the Falls. Wow, oh Wow, OH WOW!!! Only 1 of the 14 of us didn't participate. Shelley (she's a Nurse Practitioner and maybe a bit more sane?) elected to go shopping!



After getting us all situated & introducing our Captain, we left the dock very sedately & we spent about 15 minutes just driving slow circles in the relatively smooth water letting us take some individual pictures.



Then over the next 30 minutes, we took 2 high speed dives into one waterfall & then drove around the corner to dive into a bigger waterfall. It was simply incredible. Hopefully I can share the video!



We survived this exciting experience, although we were definitely looking like drowned rats!! & they whisked us on down the Iguazu River to disembark. They pointed out the coastline of Brazil on the other side of the river. We stayed on the Argentinian side. By the way, if by any chance you get to go here & want to take this tour (we used The Jungle Company), make sure to book the one that lets you embark from the Inferior Trail & disembark for the Jungle truck tour – if you go the other direction, it is a LONG steep climb in wet clothes up to the restaurant area after the dunk in the waterfall.



We took a short ride in the back of an open truck through the Jungle to a small native flea market. I forgot to take any pictures of it, but I did buy a small carved Toucan. Marcos assured me that all of these small carved trinkets were hand carved by the local folks. I didn't find any Made in China stamps, they were all totally different, and only cost \$2, so what the heck!



Back at the hotel, I spotted 2 beautiful birds during our Happy Hour. Marcos said that the first one is the female of the Argentinian National bird, a Rufuos Honero. The one on the right Lesser Kiskadee (type of flycatcher). They were both beautiful and we sure enjoyed watching them.



We ended the day with a lovely special beef dinner. I decided to celebrate with a bottle of champagne! Michele was handing out special Argentine kisses! It was a fabulous end to an awesome day!

More tomorrow!!

Lots of love,

George & Pamela

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Pamela Hurd

From: Pamela Hurd <pam@gphurd.com>
Sent: Friday, December 23, 2016 7:10 PM
To: pam@gphurd.com; gphurd@aol.com
Subject: South American Wilderness Adventure, back to Buenos Aires #4

Hi Everyone,

I'm sure you realized that the previous #4 was an accident! I finished up #3 and started on #4 in the bus ride today from Calafate to Torres del Paine NP. When we got to the hotel, I opened #3 to check it & send & for whatever reason, #4 went too. Sorry about that. Please just delete it! Since I'm behind already, let's just get on with it!!!



It was an easy flight on Lan Air this morning back to Buenos Aires. I could just see the mist rising about the Falls as we took off, just over the wing. Very cloudy day & it had rained through the night! And we were lucky enough to have 2 BEAUTIFUL days!!! Cool! Landing in Buenos Aires, I could see the rivers twisting & turning below us! It was a lovely view below, but again, it's a bit rainy. Don't have anything planned for today, so shouldn't make any difference! While we were waiting for our baggage, I got John to pose with his lovely socks!!!



After Nicole gave us our room keys & we got our suitcases to the rooms, we headed back downstairs for our Welcome Briefing & to meet all the people on the main trip. There had been 14 on our Pre Trip & the main trip added 10 more. Everyone introduced themselves with just a brief statement about why we were here for the Patagonia trip. I mentioned that it had been Michele's idea to go to Patagonia & then I had been pleased with the pre & post extensions.



Immediately following the orientation briefing, we had an Argentine Tango lesson. We really weren't expecting much since we couldn't imagine how they could teach a group of 24 folks that were mostly non-dancers (except for the 6 of us and one other couple that said they social danced quite a lot). It ended up being great fun. The lady did most of the teaching & she was awesome. She started everyone out just walking to the beat, then added some technique on pointing, stretching, going forward & back and then got folks together to do a basic. Then ochos. She realized pretty quickly that the 6 of us knew how to do it already & showed us a different way to do it. Anyway, really enjoyed it!



Then on to our Welcome Dinner. The owner was there to greet us & show us in. I forgot to take pictures of the food!!! Got the appetizer tray after we were almost finished with it! Padilla means "grill", so it was basically lots of types of grilled meat: blood sausage, pork sausage, kidney, and then a steak for the actual dinner. Everything was pretty good (didn't care for the kidney – it was pretty tough, but the sausages were nice & spicy).



OAT very rarely just takes you to a restaurant. There is usually something educational in their selections. This was no exception! The building dates from around 1730 and has an interesting history that has to do with a young woman that was promised by her father to marry an important older man in government. Instead she fell in love with a young minstrel & ran away with him. The Older man was not happy & had her tracked down & beaten. She died, but not before delivering a baby that was born in this house. The most interesting part is that there is a tunnel down below which is how she & the young boy originally ran away.



The tunnel connected the house to Church of our Lady of Bethlehem. Apparently quite a lot of homes had these tunnels during that time, for both safety & escape from marauders and to transport contraband! This particular one has been restored & there are displays with lots of the remains that have been found. It was pretty interesting.

That was it for our first day back. Tomorrow is busy day still in Buenos Aires, including a Tango Show!!! As to real time, we're actually in Puerto Natales & we'll board our boat tomorrow (24 Dec). We'll be out of touch for 5 days! So Merry Christmas everyone!! We send love & hugs from Chile!!!

Lots of love,

George & Pamela

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Pamela Hurd

From: Pamela Hurd <pam@gphurd.com>
Sent: Wednesday, December 28, 2016 5:07 PM
To: pam@gphurd.com; gphurd@aol.com
Subject: South American Wilderness Adventure, Buenos Aires #5

Hello Everyone,

Hope that you all had a very Merry Christmas & are happy & healthy!



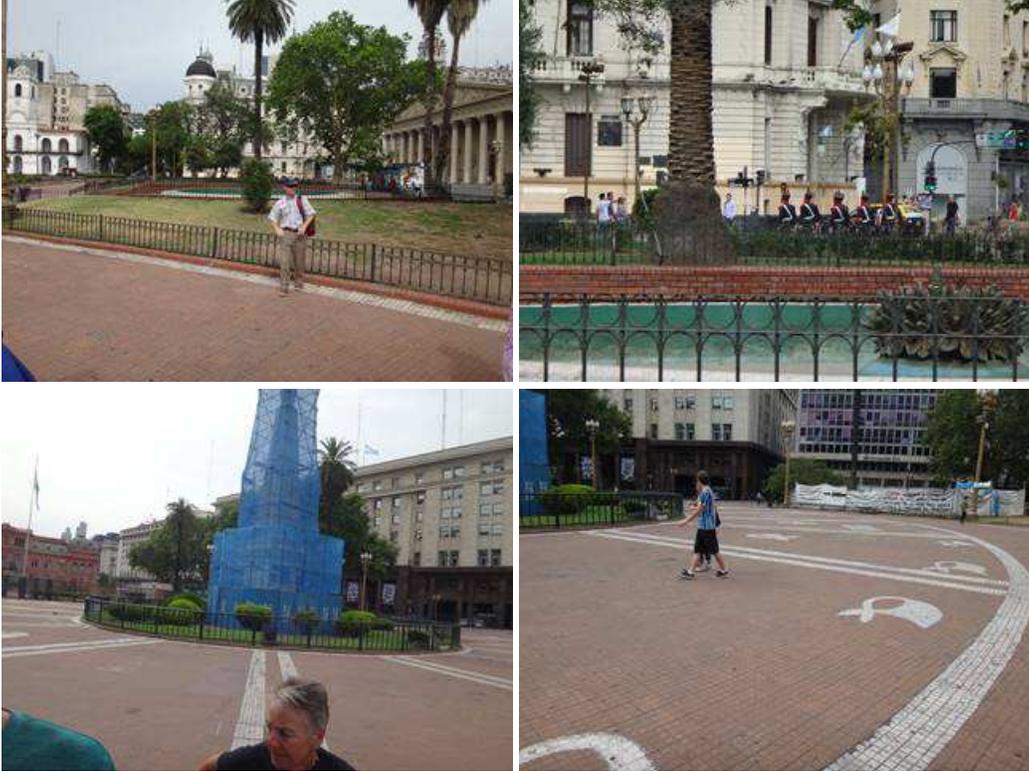
After my daily shot of John's styling socks, we left the hotel to meet Nicole & Adrian on the sidewalk to hear where our walk was going to head first!!! By the way, that's Barb with Nicole in the center picture. She has an awesome blog wildchileandargentina.blogspot.com. She's keeping pretty much up to date with the trip! Unlike me!!! She video taped the Tango lesson the other day & is posting the video on her blog – if you want to see us dancing tango in Buenos Aires!!



It was a quiet Sunday morning & the Argentinian's are typically late night socializer's & late morning riser's, so the streets were fairly empty. Adrian took us to our main destination of the Historical Square via a regular local bus. Even with a group of 24 folks, they are so far doing a good job of corralling us!



This was a typical square – government buildings on 3 sides – palace, offices with greenery in the middle. Very clean & not too crowded yet. Adrian explained that there were generally lots of police stationed here because it was the location for most of the political demonstrations. There is a permanent tent camp in the square for folks protesting the Falkland war. He said most were non-violent, but there had several where folks get too passionate & there were injuries & even deaths.



There was a formal changing of the guards, & he pointed out the permanent memorial with spokes radiating out to commemorate the Grandmothers who are looking for the lost children!! More on that lower down.



Most of us took a few minutes to explore the Cathedral on the Square. It was beautiful (active – there was a service going on while we were touring!). There was a statue to commemorate the only Argentinian Saint designated by the Catholic Church!



Even our Banos (toilet) stop was interesting as it was in a small shopping mall with statues of a sweet little grandma selling chocolates & a statue of the famous Argentinian Football (soccer) player, Diego Maradona. Saw a Sunday flea market as we left, but we hadn't had time to walk through it.



The next stop was quite sad. OAT always includes historical information about the places you visit, whether they are fun or not! In this case, a young man whose Mother was kidnapped & tortured by the government in the Military dictatorship between 1976 & 1983 spoke to us about that period. He was only 14 days old when she was taken. His father escaped capture, but remained in hiding until after the liberation. He was raised by his grandparents. She was one of approximately 24,000 people who disappeared during that time. It was not until after 911 that the DNA testing techniques were shared with Argentina that many of these people have been identified. Most were either dumped in the river (so called Death flights) or put in small unidentified community graves. After the liberation, several local cemeteries spoke up to say they had bodies, but instead of trying to identify them at that time, the bodies were all jumbled together & kept in mass graves. There is another organization that is trying to local children that were taken from their parents at that time & placed in homes of the military families. It was a horrid time in Argentinian history. I must admit I had never even heard of it. This memorial that we visited is much like the Vietnam Memorial with names & ages of those that have been identified. So far only about 5000 names are on the wall. Until recently, the known perpetrators of the kidnappings & torture were under asylum. Now they are being prosecuted. The “disappeared” as they are called were mostly between the ages of 16 & 24. Terribly sad situation.



They also drove us past the “barrios” or slums where 30,000 folks live within Buenos Aires. They are not documented, but they maintain their own schools & shopping areas. They illegally build homes within the area. The government can’t figure out how to take care of the situation! Of course they mainly want to take control so that they can tax them!



Next stop was the La Boca area. It was Buenos Aires first Merchant & Fishing port. It’s known to be rather dangerous at night, but it is certainly colorful during the day! 3 of the most famous personages are depicted on the balcony – the same famous soccer guy from the shopping area (Diego Magadon), Eva Peron, & . Several shops had Argentine Tango dancers out front & there were lots of girls dressed as either quite exotic Tango dancers or prostitutes or maybe a little of both. They were vying to have the guys take pictures with them!!! The cooking smells were wonderful from all the places grilling meat on their barbeques!!!



Finished up the city tour on the bus as it drizzled. Due to the rain, it had actually gotten almost chilly. Had expected too hot!! Actually a pleasant surprise to have the drop in temperature. Had the option to be dropped off for either shopping in a local flea market section or at the Café Tortoni, but elected to just return to the hotel.



Enjoyed a really yummy pizza for lunch. Called a Margharite, but we'd asked for peppers. Think we were misunderstood & it seemed to have pickles!!!! But tasty anyway!



After a short break to relax, we met up again to do our home hosted dinner. They had divided the group up into our regular teams (6 folks per household), so our Condor's went to Rodriguez's house. We were surprised to be met at the door by such a young man, then we were joined by his "friend." I didn't get a picture of her unfortunately. They were both in college & she was studying to be a structural engineer!!! Later in the evening when I mentioned something about his "girl friend," he immediately said, "oh no, she is just a friend – not a GIRL friend!!!" Thought that was adorable! They walked us down to the local grocery to buy some butter. He took us up & down each aisle & pointed out things like the Matte & canned Palm Hearts. Then back to the apartment on the 6th floor. Turns out it was actually his Mom & Dad's house, (Rachel (Mom) had done all the cooking & preparation! Although he did say that he had helped set the table! – Dad was working as a security guard somewhere.) He took us through the small 2 bedroom home with the tiny entry way & dining area. We didn't see the kitchen. He showed us lots of pictures of his extended family – grandparents, brother, & lots of pictures of his folks traveling places. They had knick knacks covering every spare inch of space. Said they had just started hosting dinner's for OAT. We were their 6th time.



Rachel had prepared crackers & dip (garlic cream cheese!) for appetizers, then meatballs & rice (we asked them what they called them & in confusion, Rodriguez said "meatballs?") And a yummy fruit salad with both chocolate & regular whipped cream for topping! Rachel did not speak much English, but understood pretty well if we spoke slowly. When they found out we were dancers, they asked if we knew ????. We said we didn't & Rodriguez & his Mom demonstrated! It was a single swing type of dance & they were having quite a lot of fun showing us! Wish we had had time to learn it!



The evening was a real pleasure. We laughed & chatted until the bus driver rang the bell to pick us up! Then Rodriguez escorted us all downstairs & gave us hugs & kisses. He said we were their best group by far!!! Thoroughly enjoyed it. Spoke to the other groups about their visits and they were all at huge places with multiple rooms & hired help! Totally different experience! Glad we got Rodrico!!



And the day STILL was not over! We got back to the hotel about 8:30pm and at 9pm, we left for the Argentine Tango Show!!!! It was the Esquina Carlos Gardel which is considered the top show in Buenos Aires. It was exceptional. The theater was beautiful & the orchestra was phenomenal!! And the Dancing!! Oooh la la!!! They were fast & amazing! There was one sequence where the guy had her bent back over his arm & licked her neck from breast to chin!!! George said he was going to choreograph that, but I squashed that idea!!! Think it would be too hard to write the definition on the cuesheet!!!! Ha!! Anyway, it was just awesome & we were all thrilled with the quality of the entire show.

Finally the day ended!! We were back at the hotel about midnight for a short night before we flyer to Calafate tomorrow!

More in the next episode! Stay tuned!

Lots of love,

George & Pamela

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Pamela Hurd

From: Pamela Hurd <pam@gphurd.com>
Sent: Wednesday, December 28, 2016 5:00 PM
To: pam@gphurd.com; gphurd@aol.com
Subject: South American Wilderness Adventure, Buenos Aires to Calafate #6

od Morning again everyone!! Best wishes to you all! Things are going exceptional for us! As usual, we are experiencing great weather & lots of new & different things! Let's get to it!!



So our flight to Patagonia was supposed to have been at 11am and on Aerolineas Argentinas for the first time. Our other flights to & from Iguazu was on Lan. We had our breakfast & most of us notice that there were several photos of the airport & the Aerolineas Argentinas counters with no one there, but lots of folks milling around. Of course we couldn't understand the Spanish dialogue, but we assumed there was something going on. When we met Nicole at 9am for our departure to the airport, she dropped the bombshell that ALL flights on Aerolineas Argentinas had been canceled for the moment. The Union was on strike (turns out there are maybe 60 strikes a year!!!) and even the local busses were on hold! She had been working since 5:30am to figure something out. In the meantime, we all went to the briefing room downstairs & had our welcome to Patagonia briefing that was supposed to have been after we were checked into the hotel in Calafate about 3pm. Then about 1pm, we headed to the airport. Things were a real mess there. She had us wait in the bus for as long as he could park in the loading zone, then we all went inside & we found a little restaurant that allowed us to sit for the price of a few beers & coffees. Nicole disappeared & about 3 hours later, she returned & she had worked a miracle to get us all booked on a flight out about 5pm. The original flight was to go down to Ushuaia & then over to Calafate, but she managed to get us on one that went directly to Calafate. Amazing. Still had a long wait in line at the gate, but we took off eventually & arrived in Calafate about 9pm. Not too darn bad!!



They dropped us off at our restaurant straight from the airport, Nicole went on to the hotel to check us in. We had 2 choices for dinner Lamb stew or salmon. Guess which one I took??? Yep, the lamb stew was wonderful! Hot, with vege's too. Note that it was almost 10pm when we were going into the restaurant & it was still light! Days are getting longer & longer!!



It was after 11pm by the time we got to our rooms! Long day (& not talking about the amount of light!!!!) But the room was beautiful.

I'll keep this one short & document our first hike in Patagonia at Los Glaciares National Park in the next one!

Sleep well & hang on for more!

Lots of love,

George & Pamela

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Pamela Hurd

From: Pamela Hurd <pam@gphurd.com>
Sent: Wednesday, December 28, 2016 6:47 PM
To: pam@gphurd.com; gphurd@aol.com
Subject: South American Wilderness Adventure - Los Glaciares NP, Calafate #7

Hello Again!

Have no time to waste with small talk – I'm behind & there are beautiful things to share with you!!!



We woke to a beautiful sunny day & actually had one of the most relaxing mornings so far. Didn't have to leave until 9:30am!!! We were ready for our first full day hike to see Perito Moreno Glacier! It is a UNESCO World Heritage site. The park was created in 1937 and it's the 2nd largest NP in Argentina – 1700 square miles & 50 large glaciers. One of the interesting facts about the glaciers in this park is that they form at a lower level (5000') so they are easier to reach. But before we head out, we get to enjoy a lovely buffet breakfast where all of the breads & pastries are home baked. It was wonderful!!



And of course we couldn't start the day without checking out John's socks! Now we're ready for anything Nicole can throw at us!!!



First stop was an overlook of Argentino Lake. We started our bird checklist. Here we found lots of Chilean Flamencos, not to mention Upland Geese, Swans, & lots of other water birds.



This lake is the largest fresh water lake in Argentina. It covers an area of 596 square miles and has an average depth of 492 feet!



Our next bird sighting was a Southern Crested Caracara right in the parking lot of our first WOW moment!!!! Pretty big bird in the falcon family.



The Perito Moreno Glacier is HUGE!!!! We are familiar with glaciers from our years in Alaska, but this thing is HUGE!!!! Most of us were anxious to pose for our Kodak moment, but I had to take a picture of Michele & Marlyn on the sly! Here's a quote from Wikipedia!! “**The Perito Moreno Glacier** ([Spanish: Glaciar Perito Moreno](#)) is a [glacier](#) located in the [Los Glaciares National Park](#) in southwest [Santa Cruz Province, Argentina](#). It is one of the most important tourist attractions in the Argentinian [Patagonia](#). The 250 km² (97 sq mi) ice formation, and 30 km (19 mi) in length, is one of 48 glaciers fed by the [Southern Patagonian Ice Field](#) located in the [Andes](#) system shared with Chile. This ice field is the world's third largest reserve of [fresh water](#). The Perito Moreno glacier, located 78 kilometres (48 mi) from [El Calafate](#), was named after the explorer [Francisco Moreno](#)”



Our hike along the viewing paths started at a Restaurant/Information center & I got a fairly decent photo of what was to be a pretty much constant companion for the trip – a Rufous Collared Sparrow. He's quite adorable & his recognizable "pip pip" call got to be really familiar. Our local guide, Gordy gave us our choices for today's hike & we started off clicking pictures of the first iceberg we could get close to!



The rest of the hike was spent snapping pictures of flowers, glaciers, birds, flowers, etc. It was beautiful! The little yellow fellow is a Grey Hooded Sierra Finch.



By the way, the Glacier is about 249' high for most of what we were looking at & more than 3 miles wide at the face we were looking at!!!



The viewing walkways were wonderful. Not sure that we have anything comparable in the US. We were taking the longest of the suggested walks. Nicole had given us "box lunches" (they were actually in a bag and consisted of an extra large sandwich (too big for 2, much less for one!), a box of crackers, a granola bar, a water, an orange juice, a cookie & a chocolate!) & we ate as we wandered along the paths.





There was a low growling & crackling audible most of the way we were walking. Occasionally we heard a more serious crackling & we could actually see enormous sections of the ice fall. I tried to get pictures, but without video, it doesn't show up. I haven't checked, but I think Barb might have gotten some for her blog! The only other significant event was that I dropped my favorite camera (again – I dropped it in London too) and this time it bit the dust. Luckily I purchased a new camera & I brought it with me! Didn't like it as much, but it still works!!! We finished the hike at the Glacier & ended up practically running for the bus as we had dilly dallied a bit too much & then got turned around at the point to get back on the return path! Made it back okay & the drive back to the hotel was easy! Even managed a short nap!



After we got back to the hotel, we had a couple of hours of free time. George & John elected to head for a walk into town to buy wine & Michele, Marlyn, Connie & I went to the Laguna Nimez & Bahia Redonda Bird Sanctuary. It was

about 6 blocks from the hotel on Argentinos lake & was highly recommended by our guide. I was piddling with my new camera & didn't get very good pictures, but the experience was wonderful! Added about 15 birds to our list & most ended up being ones that we could then readily identify for the rest of the trip. Like the Cara Caras & the Black Faced Ibis.



After about 2 hours wandering around the bird sanctuary, we made it back to the hotel to pick up John & George to head to dinner. Michele found a friendly puppy to rub & we noticed lots of beautiful flowers. The Christmas decorations are around, but definitely different! We had a lovely dinner at a local Micro brewery & even brought attention to ourselves when we were trying to demonstrate an Argentine Tango figure we had learned. The waitress noticed us & started playing Argentine Tango music! It was really funny!

So that ended another beautiful day in the land of Patagonia!! Tomorrow we move on!!!

Lots of love,

George & Pamela

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Pamela Hurd

From: Pamela Hurd <pam@gphurd.com>
Sent: Wednesday, January 4, 2017 12:09 PM
To: pam@gphurd.com; gphurd@aol.com
Subject: South American Wilderness Adventure - Argentina to Torres del Paine NP, Chile #8

Good Morning Everyone, Hope you all continue to be happy & healthy & looking forward to a super new year! We're continuing through our magical adventure, so let's get to it.



After breakfast at the hotel, we loaded onto the bus for a long (approximately 8 hour) ride in a bus to transfer from Calafate, Argentina to Torres del Paine NP, Chile. The scenery (while we could stay awake!!), was surprising. Flat, deserty, barren miles of absolutely nothing! Gordy, our local guide for this part of Patagonia kept up a steady stream of narration. One of the interesting facts he pointed out was that all along this empty stretch of highway, there were places where you could stop & hook up to both natural gas through the pipes & internet through the buried fiber optic cables. He said their homes were heated by Natural gas & his bill was usually only \$3 or \$4 collected every 3 months. So a little more than an American dollar per month!!!! Amazing. We would occasionally see flocks of birds (mostly Black Faced Ibis) circling overhead or a few Guanacos grazing along the shoulders.



After about 2 hours of driving, we stopped for a coffee/banos break in the tiny settlement of La Esperanza. Our guide said he would happily take us on a city tour or we could do the self-guided one by standing in the parking lot & doing a 360 degree spot turn!! The lady running the café/corner store was happy to take our American dollars for a soda or a pastry. Reminded me of some of the Alaskan bush villages.



But, true to form, while we were enjoying the highlights of the city tour, Michele was busily making friends.



We continued on our way with more of the desolate (tour book says “diverse”) flat plains to our turn off for the Chilean border crossing. At that bifurcation, we stopped at a local’s outdoor church of sorts where we made a beer offering to a South American Saint of Good Travels. Our guide told a long involved story of a guide that stopped & instead of leaving a beer, he actually took one & had a disastrous trip with one calamity after the other. Let’s hope our offer will be accepted & appease the Travel Spirits!



As we approached the Chilean border, things got a little greener & we could see mountains in the distance. There were a few ranches along the way also.



We made it through the Argentine Customs area in record time and then there was a “no mans” land of about 5 km, where Nicole presented Gory with his Argentine flag, she showed us her Chilean National flag & then showed us the Patagonian flag. She continually lets us know that she is from “the most beautiful country in the world!”



Just after crossing into Chile (they presented the staff with a case each of beer & wine & we breezed through the paperwork details!!!), we had a nice lunch of a traditional “chicken soup.” It was funny – large piece of chicken with a huge whole potato, huge piece of carrot & hunk of corn on the cob. We had had it once before when we had lunch in Santiago, Chile. The broth was quite tasty.



After we got back on the road, we started seeing large groups (herds? clusters?) of Lessor Rheas (were there Greater Rheas?) and Guanacos. The first picture was especially to get a “daddy” (not sure how Cota knew it was a “daddy,” but didn’t question her! Lessor Rhea with about 10 babies, but my non-zoom camera couldn’t get the little ones. They were crossing the road in front of our bus & all had to go through the fence! Scenery was getting more interesting too.



Nicole & Cota spotted a Gaucho on the side of the road & stopped the bus to run over & see if we could come over & chat with him.



Turns out that he works at a ranch (estacion) where they give horseback rides. The little boy is his grandson. Weren't the boots adorable? The last picture is from Barb. She just got that cute little face in perfection!!!



He offered to let anyone up on the horse & Michelle was ready & willing. The Gaucho was pleased that she enjoyed it. Nicole brought him a pound of Matte for his time & then Michelle gave him a hug. I think he was pleased with his trade.



We stopped for our first view of Torres del Paine NP. Wow! Oh wow!! We saw condors circling overhead (yes, it is those dark specks on the first picture!) & although there were clouds on the mountains, we could tell it was gorgeous! And not too cool, in the mid 40's.



About 4pm we stopped for our first hike in Torres Del Paine NP. We had packed our standard Patagonia gear in our back packs, so when we stopped for a banos break, we changed into thermal underwear under our safari pants with rain jackets on top & hiking shoes. Toasty warm since it wasn't raining!



Guanacos were everywhere! First thing that Cota pointed out was a Guanaco toilet pile! They apparently love to gather together for a banos break! The mountains seemed so close to us! Several times a herd of them would jump the fence & cross the trail in front of us – going in both directions!



Also rather disturbing, there were Guanaco skeletons everywhere also. She said they were probably kills from a Puma living in the rocky slopes above us. She gave us a demonstration of how a Puma jumps on & kills by a bite to the throat using Nicole!! Too funny.



We enjoyed seeing the Grey Hooded Sierra Finch, more mountains, more Guanacos (up close & personal!!!), & an Alpine (my word for it) lake as we hiked. We also spotted an Austral Negrito (couldn't get a good picture of him) that is also called a School Boy because his reddish spot is on his back & looks like he's carrying a red back pack. We saw him a lot, but he was so fast & so tiny, I could never get a good photo!



Our drive through the park continued (I'll get a picture of the park map to put in tomorrow's log so you can see our drive & the location of all our hikes). The mountains were spectacular. Most of the best views were from the other side of the bus & there was no place for the bus to stop for them, so just snapped a few across the aisle! We did make one stop at the lake just before crossing out of the park onto private property. The area is just Unbelievably beautiful.



Our day ended with a quick check in to the Rio Serrano hotel just outside the Torres del Paine NP. It was by far my favorite hotel & I can't believe I forgot to get a picture of the room! It was huge!!! One of the only ones with a King bed too. Most of the rest had twin beds. Anyway, it had floor to ceiling glass windows looking out at the mountains! The 3rd picture is from our window & also shows a HUGE jack rabbit, called a European Hare. They were lots of them! All our meals were in this enormous restaurant on the second floor & they were all buffets. Gorgeous view throughout the room. They also had thermos in the room with a mild tea to welcome us to the hotel! Sweet!!

Enough for now! Way behind on sleep! Gotta close!

Miss you all & sending love & hugs!

George & Pamela

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Pamela Hurd

From: Pamela Hurd <pam@gphurd.com>
Sent: Wednesday, January 4, 2017 1:53 PM
To: pam@gphurd.com; gphurd@aol.com
Subject: South American Wilderness Adventure - Full day in Torres del Paine NP, Chile #9

Hello Everyone,

Hope this missive finds you all happy & healthy. Our days continue non-stop! Had the buffet breakfast & out to the bus by 9am!



I snapped the daily shot of John's socks! He is snazzy today, but it's our secret since he's wearing his Patagonia gear to cover them!!! And Connie has her snazzy fur cap! Santa was there to wave goodbye! And on the bus we had our daily Language lesson – "I'm Cold", "I'm hot", "I'm hungry", & "I'm thirsty."



Our “idea” this morning as Nicole says was to check out the middle area of the park (yesterday we entered on the North east corner for our first hike) & get a glimpse of Grey Glacier. We drove to the park hotel (looked really fancy!) at Grey lake to have a banos stop before we headed out. Then into the woods to start our hike. Nicole & Cota always give us choices. We could 1) stay at the hotel bar(0 hiking time), 2) just do the forest part & return to the hotel (about 30 minutes), or 3) continue across the “beach” to a look out over the lake to the glacier (probably 2 hours).



Unfortunately it started raining as we began, but we soldiered on. John even braved the swinging bridge over the river.



I almost chickened out on the beach walk to the lookout because I was such a drowned rat through the forest, but Michele came to my rescue by loaning me Marlyn's hat to put on top of my hood & keep the water out of my eyes. Then they convinced me to take my soggy wet gloves off & put my hands in my pockets instead (much better!!).



We took turns lifting off in the 50 knot winds, but the rain stopped so it was much nicer trudging across the beach.



We all decided to make it up to the lookout, & turns out the view was worthwhile!



We could just see Grey Glacier at the far end of Grey Lake & we took turns posing in front of an errant iceberg that had calved & floated to our end.



The winds got a little stronger & lifted some of the clouds so that we could really see the glacier gleaming at the far end of the lake, but the guides said it was getting to 60 knot gusts and that was the limit for our safety there, so time to head back down.



The walk back was with the wind & it pushed us at a pretty good clip! There was a couple of gusts that flung gravel up & rattled against our rain jackets. Cota said those were at least 60 knots. Afraid to get too close to the puddles or we'd take a unexpected swim! John was waiting for us at the raised walk way in his "coonskin" cap! Always entertaining, that John!



The hike back to the bus was much more pleasant & uneventful other than some gusts as we crossed the swinging bridge. One caught Marge's hat & took it for a swim. The ride back to the hotel was full of gorgeous views of the mountains!!!



After lunch, we had our next big adventure – a horseback ride!!!! Yee Haw!! My horse was “Star” and she was a sweet heart. She was determined to be first behind the guide & never gave me a moments’ problem. Barb on the other hand was fighting her’s the whole time to keep up & not eat! He almost backed her (could have been the driver!! Sorry Barb!!) into the river!! Anyway, it was a wonderful adventure, but we were happy that it was not more than an hour as we were already walking bow legged when we got off!!!! Gorge was our guide & he gave us all Calafate berries (sort of wild blue berries) so that we would return to Patagonia!!



The scenery looked even more spectacular from the saddle of the horses! By the way, the saddles were a little different from what I knew of as Western saddles. We had a rope to hold onto instead of the saddle horn. They were a little

smaller also, but the bridle was much the same. When we rode through the herd of cattle, I was tempted to display my skills at roping (NOT!!).



We found that there were other friendly creatures here besides the dogs & horses!! The cats purr in the universal language!!



The last adventure of the day was a bird discovery with Cota. The Upland Goose & the Ashy Headed Goose marched across our path to the bird watching area. Cota said that they tend to flock together as the Male Upland Goose is more aggressive at protection & keeps predators away from both of them. As the evening approached, the mountains got more & more clear. It was breathtakingly beautiful. We were all doing our part to spot the birds. George had not taken the horse back adventure & was on his 2nd birding walk, so he was quite helpful in spotting & identifying. I don't think

I've mentioned that we were given 2 different bird guides (1st at Los Glaciares NP & 2nd at the Laguna Nimez Bird Sanctuary in Calafate). We managed to see & identify almost all the birds in them by the end of the trip. It was very satisfying!



Our walk lasted about an hour. We saw our Southern Lapwing. That was probably the one we saw the most consistently throughout the trip. I missed the picture, but one of the most fun moments was when we were tracking a sound of tiny tweeting & spotted a hole in a tree branch. While we were looking in it, a tiny baby bird peeked out! Cota was not sure what type it was because it happened so fast, but it gave us all a thrill!!!



By then, it was time for a group "Happy Hour" where we enjoyed Pisco Sours & some snuggling time. Wait a minute....that's George & Connie snuggling!!!! And of course I had to get the daily sock fix!! Oh no!!! It's rubbed off....that's George with wild socks!



There was a buffet dinner – please tell me I didn’t eat all of that? Did I? Well maybe some of it belonged to someone else!! Anyway, it was wonderful!



One last mountain shot. They were just soooooo incredibly beautiful!

Tomorrow we’re on the road again! Stay tuned!

Lots of love,

George & Pamela

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Pamela Hurd

From: Pamela Hurd <pam@gphurd.com>
Sent: Thursday, January 5, 2017 4:21 PM
To: pam@gphurd.com; gphurd@aol.com
Subject: South American Wilderness Adventure - Torres del Paine NP to Puerto Natales, Chile #10

Good Afternoon Everyone,

I'm having such a wonderful time on this trip & they are keeping us soooooo busy, I am despairing of accomplishing a good travelogue! I've gotten so far behind and it's all been so noteworthy that I don't want to skip anything! So I'll just plow along & we'll see how I do!! Andale!



The next morning again started with our hotel breakfast buffet. We were to be on the bus by 9am (Nicole considered that a late start!!). There were lots and lots of types of sweet breads. I asked Cota about one in particular (the middle picture). I don't have internet or I'd Google it, but she said they were called "chililitos" and were a special treat for the Chileans. It consisted of 2 crispy wafer type cookies with a butter cream filling & then cover with a merengue. She said folks that made them to sell wore all white with big hats similar to chef's hats & would come out of their shops waving white flags to let everyone know that they were ready to sell. I love that they use merengue so much. We had pavlova last night!! This was interesting too, although I wouldn't go for a second one, the cream filling was an odd flavor to me. They also served lots of cold vege's for breakfast – broccoli, tomatoes, olives. Eggs were usually scrambled & runny, with either cut up hot dogs (kind of Vienna sausages) or a strange meat that was apparently their version of bacon. This was not just this hotel, it was fairly consistent with all the breakfast buffets so far. Of course there was also coffee, yogurt (mostly pourable/drinkable), & different types of juices & cereals. Lots of sweet cereals usually – like cocoa puffs! Thought that was strange!



We lucked out with another beautiful day. The mountains were clearly visible from our room's window this morning. As we started our drive, I kept wondering if Lady Bird Johnson had visited here, because the roadsides are covered in lupines. Cota told us they are not native, but were brought in and spread from the ranches. Apparently, even though they are pretty, they are not particularly happy with them – they crowd out the local flora!



We were to take our last hike in the park enroute to Puerto Natales, hoping to get a closer view of the Horns. But the first stop was to the Torres del Paine NP Visitor's center to get a special stamp in our passports. There were lots of ducks (Cota said this was a Andean Ruddy Duck – note the blue bill!) and other water fowls in the lake outside. Cota gave us an overview of the park & the places we had been hiking. We had done the north east corner on the drive into the park and then the southwestern entrance yesterday morning.



This hike was in the central portion of the park & like I mentioned, it was to get a closer view of the “horns.” These are the most commonly recognized aspects of the Torres del Paine peaks (over 8000’ by the way). Dave, one of the guys in our group that works for the US National Park service, mentioned that recently Alaska Airlines had published a view of them in an ad campaign with a caption about coming to Alaska to see Denali. Apparently it caused quite a bit of flack!!! But beside the obvious scenery, there was the extremely interesting bubbles of vegetation & the lovely wild orchids! This was a “dog” orchid.



One of the sad stories that Cota related to us was about the fires. There had apparently been 2 fires in somewhat recent history. Fires here are terribly destructive. First off, once started, they are almost impossible to stop and secondly, they do absolutely nothing positive. There is no undergrowth to clear & the returning vegetation cannot catch back up

because there is practically no rain to promote it! The worst of it is that both fires were started accidentally by visiting Israeli Military who were defying park rules to have a fire in their campground. Apparently it caused quite a bit of animosity & the Israeli government has provided funds & volunteer maintenance help to help with the damage.



We were really lucky on this hike because not only was it not raining, but the wind had blown itself away as my Dad would say! We had a beautiful reflection in the lake. And our hike was wonderfully comfortable with the horns totally visible in front of us!!



The end of the hike at Pehoe lake was spectacular! We took zillions of pictures, but since I'm behind on my story telling, I'll restrain myself & only share one of our group pictures, a picture of our guides, Nicole & Cota, and one of the

Guanacos that peered at us from the nearby rise. As you can see, it had warmed up & we were all having trouble keeping all our Patagonia gear on!



On the way back, Michele spotted what turned out to be our 2nd variety of Patagonian orchid, the Magellan orchid. It was really pretty & very unusual. Then we veered off the main path to see a small, (compared to our remembrance of Iguazu Falls), but beautiful water fall.



By the time we got back to the bus (a little over 2 hours round trip) the wind had picked up & the horns were no longer visible! Our timing was perfect!!



Back on the bus, we all dug into our box lunch (3 small empanadas – vegetarian, salmon (I traded mine off) & beef), juice, cookies, & the best nut mix any of us had ever encountered!!) & Nicole had to practically threaten us to get us off for our last mountain photo stop! But it was certainly worth it!



We continued the drive back out of the park with beautiful views of the lake, more Guanacos, & lesser peaks of the Andes mountain range.



With another stop at the gift shop/convenience store at the northeast entrance to the park, we continued in the bus on south getting various views of small ranches, fields of lupines & finally our first view of the Chilean Fjords coast.



After getting settled into our tiny little rooms (with no view!), Michele, Marlyn, George & I took a walk downtown to buy our nightly bottle of wine! The grocery store was mobbed, it was the 23rd & folks were getting their final Christmas grocery shopping done!



Surprisingly enough George had his bottle purchased in less than 10 minutes, so we continued on for a discovery walk along the coastal walkway. There was a skateboard arena for the kids & lots of statues to look at.



But most enjoyable were the birds! We decided this was a Juvenile Black Crowned Night Heron. The Black Necked swans & their babies were precious. Michele had her fancy binoculars to bring in the details. Sure wish we had had Mike Sheridan, Ken Davis, or Tom Feluk to document some of these bird sightings!!!



We spied kayaks in the distance & decided to take a closer look. One of the guys was wandering around in the water (he did have on a rubber suit, but still looked really cold!!!). There was a sandbar with hundreds of birds gathered for the evening meal!



Speaking of meals, we had to run inside to meet for ours! Had time for our daily socks fix too!



Besides the included Calafate Sour (made with Pisco Brandy & Calafate berries), I tried a local beer with dinner. I didn't take a picture of the meal, but I cleaned my plate of the salmon steak!! Enjoyed it, but can't say I would ever order one on purpose!! But the Calafate berry parfait for dessert was awesome!



Most fun event of the day was a chance to DANCE!! Michele had discovered a small room with a smooth floor. We snuck in & George set up his speaker & computer. We dance Perfidia in Brazil and All I Do is Jive.



Marlyn made it an official ceremony by waving both the Patagonian Flag & the Chilean Flag! & I found a Christmas tree to commemorate the Holiday!



We went outside before retiring to our rooms to find it was a perfect summer evening, still & calm. A beautiful close to a perfect day!

More tomorrow when we continue south to Punta Arenas to board our boat, the Stella Australis!!!

Lots of love,

George & Pamela

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Check out our dance demo videos www.DanceRounds.info

Look at pictures, videos, & Photo books on Shutterfly <http://pamspicts.shutterfly.com>

Pamela Hurd

From: Pamela Hurd <pam@gphurd.com>
Sent: Friday, January 6, 2017 11:30 AM
To: pam@gphurd.com; gphurd@aol.com
Subject: South American Wilderness Adventure - Puerto Natales to Punta Arenas, Chile & board Stella Australis #11

Buenos Dias Amigos! Trying to get into the Spanish at least a little bit! Anyway, on with the show!



Up at 6:45am for luggage out at 8am & on the road at 8:45am. Bit dreary looking outside this morning. Another lovely morning breakfast buffet. Even had cooked eggs this morning!!



Lots of birds out on the used to be pier, mostly the 2 cormorants – Rock & Black faced. Saw an interesting statute. Cota said it was an extinct Sloth like creature from the dinosaur age. Picked up more wind as we drove south & the scenery was rather bleak.



I think I mentioned the other day that we saw a Father Rhea with lots of little ones, this was the real day we saw it & I had taken lots of pictures. It was great fun to see them all scurrying along and ducking through the fence!



Our bus drove onto a ferry & we crossed the Beagle Channel to an island heading to our first stop while the weather got a bit worse.



This was one of our “Learning & Discovery” stops. It was quite a large & active sheep farm (estancia). As we walked into the main building, we stepped on a glass topped wine cellar! What an innovative idea! Can we install one in our RV? Then on out across the farm yard (in the drizzling rain)!



First we watched a sheep dip (2 of our girls got to help dunk the sheep in the medicated water 3 times) and then across the yard to a barn filled to the brim with eclectic doodads!! Everything from a stuffed hairy armadillo to hundreds of tea pots to antique radio equipment. "The Pickers" would have been happy as clams to visit this place! It was a family owned farm and apparently the Grandfather had loved collecting. Finally one of the kids convinced him to put everything on display & invite wandering tourists in to view it!



Then they gave a demo of old fashioned shearing using scissors. Not too practical anymore, but these guys don't raise the sheep for wool anyway, they raise them to eat, so the demo was just for our edification!



Finally we got to see our one & only Puma on this trip!! She was raised from a kitten (11 years old now) – actually lived in the house for a short period until Grandma put her foot down since she refused potty training! As we walked off, one of our group dropped his cell phone just inside the fence. When he reached through to get it, several said (I didn't see the incident) that she hissed at him! Luckily it was just inside & he was able to pull it back through quickly!!



After our introduction to I think her name was “Daisy”, the Puma, they walked us through their yard (Shelley, the doctor of our group, couldn’t pass up the swing, even in the drizzle!!!) and we entered the outdoor kitchen. They greeted us (of course!!) with Pisco Sours & then showed us the traditional cooking method. A type of smoking over the extremely hot rocks. Then we watched as they hacked it up. I’m very glad they didn’t show us the slaughter itself!!!!



Inside where they had the tables set up for us, we notice several cute uses for the sheep wool that they gathered from their tourista demos: floor protectors & fuzzy flowers.



Our meal was the yummy freshly roasted/smoked lamb with salad, vege's, & a biscuit. Followed by a choice of desserts – the chess pie type I chose was really good. I had been thrilled with all the merengues & custards we were enjoying & it finally dawned on me something a friend mentioned when she first started raising chickens. She said she started scouring the recipe books for uses of all the scores of eggs she now had. Ta da! That explains all the egg dishes!!!



While we enjoyed our meal our multi-talented farm hand (he had sheared the sheep & hacked up our dinner) entertained us with a demonstration of herding the sheep using a horse & a dog. It was still drizzling & the window was streaked with rain, so not the best pictures, but you get the idea.



Back on the bus, we discovered our windows had been totally covered with streaks of mud, so no more pictures as we drove on to Punta Arenas. Luckily it was less than an hour's drive.



The bus dropped us off at the city square & gave us a couple of hours to do a little shopping & stretch our legs while Nicole went on to the ship to make sure we could board with as little fuss as possible. Luckily for George the expensive Jewelry store that we were anticipating was closed for Christmas (this was Christmas Eve after all!), so I had to content myself with a reversible pendant with Lapis Azul on one side & so called Moonstone with the Southern cross on the other (tried looking this stone up on line & can't locate it – man made maybe???) and earrings to match both from a street vender. At least these purchases didn't break the bank & I'm a happy camper!



We spent the remaining time in a hotel bar: comfortably warm with internet access – last minute calls to friends & family, enjoying Chilean beer, showing off socks, & Connie was flirting with a very jolly British Air Crew member!



In no time, Nicole had us checked in our floating hotel room. A joy to think that for 4 nights we could actually sleep in the same bed with no morning bag drag. Our quite large window afforded a nice view, but speckled with water drops, so ran to the upper deck to watch the tug come & escort us out of the port of Punta Arenas.



At 8pm (standard dinner meal time on board the ship – we considered it late, but early for the Chileans!) we scurried downstairs for our special Christmas Eve dinner. Not sure what the appetizer really was, but I ate it anyway & it was nicely appointed with a green something on top & the red something painted on the side. We met our waiter – Mariano & he snapped a picture for us, but with the light from the windows, you need imagination to really see us. There were 4 tables assigned to our OAT group: a table for 4, two for 6 & one for 9. That covered our 25 individuals including Nicole. Haven't mentioned anything about that before... it was a rather large group for one guide, but Nicole did a

wonderful job keeping track of us – guess she had had sheep dog training & we responded well to her nipping at our heels!! Seriously, we were lucky that all our group kept to the strict time schedule so we were all there for her “hop hop” command. If you’ve ever traveled with a group that had one or more individuals who thought the times were for others & not themselves, you know how annoying it can be. Our group all obeyed the rules.



Nicole gave us all Chilean book marks & I handed out Christmas blinkies. Michele’s immediately fell apart (I had no extras) & she arm wrestled Nicole (and won) for hers! We had a visit from Santa’s helper (the ship’s gift shop attendant) & Christmas Eve was over! George & I had never purchased rain pants & when we realized that we could buy them on board ship for half the price we’d seen them in Torres del Paine, we snatched them up! Guess you could consider that our Christmas present to each other. Ha!



We finished up our evening in the upstairs lounge watching our fabulous first sunset in Beagle Channel and listening to Sarah (one of the ship’s excursion leaders) playing Christmas carols on the violin. Deep sigh of contentment! Life is grand!

Wishing the same for you all – Merry Christmas to All & to all a Good Night!

Lots of love,

George & Pamela

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Pamela Hurd

From: Pamela Hurd <pam@gphurd.com>
Sent: Sunday, January 8, 2017 1:31 PM
To: gphurd@aol.com; pam@gphurd.com
Subject: South American Wilderness Adventure, Ainsworth Bay & Tuckers Islets #12

Hi Guys,

Spent our first night aboard the Stella Australis. Let's get straight to the first day's adventure!!!



Another fabulous day in the incredible vacation! Can't believe how lucky we've been with the weather! After we sailed from Punta Arenas through the Strait of Magellan, we made our way to Ainsworth Bay. We had a lovely buffet breakfast & then suited up in rain gear & lifejackets for our first excursion off the ship!



We all looked lovely! Fashion Models for the upscale Patagonian adventurer!!!



This group is so very happy! We boarded the boat singing & laughing! The girls (especially Michele) were happy to use George to hang onto in the zodiac!



We were all soooooo hyped up! It was our first zodiac landing! It was cool, but no rain & lots of blue sky!



Here's a quote from the Australis website about today's excursion - <http://www.australis.com/site/en/exploring-patagonia/excursions/> "One of the most spectacular spots in Patagonia, Ainsworth Bay is a lengthy fjord surrounded by pristine sub-polar forest and crowned by Marinelli Glacier, which flows down from the Darwin Ice Field. Protected within the confines of Alberto de Agostini National Park, the bay provides a habitat for southern elephant seals and many different bird species. Trails lead to streams and waterfalls, moss-covered rock faces, peat bogs, beaver habitats and along the crest of a glacial moraine."

They have some really pretty pictures about our adventures. This was our first introduction to Marselis. He was our guide during the cruise. There were several guides, but Marselis was actually in charge of the entire excursion program – Activity Program Chair? Or some such title. Anyway, he had his fingers in every pie to do with southern Chile. He has made documentary films, written books about Patagonia & the fjords and travels worldwide giving talks. He was wonderful to listen to and not too bad to look at. Didn't hurt to have a little "eye candy!!"



Off we went on our first hike. It was not strenuous at all, just a casual stroll through the alpine feeling tundra. We looked at everything from distant views of the mountains & glaciers to tiny berries (I happened to be right in front of him when he was describing this berry & he popped it in my mouth!! – tasted a bit like a sour cherry – maybe a cranberry?). I was very impressed with the trails, there were little bridges, wooden walkways over swampy places, & well marked walking areas throughout the area. I gathered that most were developed by the Australis company. You notice that Australis mentioned the “beaver habitats”? More on that later, but beaver & mink were introduced here in the late 1800’s for fur trading. They have done quite well for their species....but in the meantime since they have no predator, they are tearing up the flora & wreaking havoc with the birds – both habitation & eating the eggs. Australis is trying to train folks to hunt & trap them, but without much success – they are proliferating at an extreme rate.



Marselis pointed out the “false mistletoe” and invited us to take advantage of it. Lynn & Al were only happy to do so. Lots of the vegetation was described as “false” by Marsaulis. Tried to Google that, but couldn’t find anything about it. Apparently he was meaning that it’s similar to other vegetation, but not exactly the same? Like the “false mistletoe” was a parasitic growth on the trees, but didn’t look like our mistletoe at all. There was a wonderful little grotto area where we spent some quiet time to listen to the water dripping & the bird sounds. Then he pointed out all the different mosses growing around us (like we were in a rain forest!). He even brought out loupes for us to look closely at some of them. Incredibly interesting.



Too soon it was time to head back to the boat. On the way to the beach, someone pointed out the strange clouds. They expected that it meant a storm was brewing. The clouds reminded me of what we see often hovering over Mt Shasta. According to Marelis you very rarely see cumulous clouds down here and he had only seen lightning a couple of times in his life. Then we discovered a lovely reason to join the hikes! As we waited to suit back up in our life jackets, we were served Hot Chocolate with a slug of Johnny Walker scotch!!! Warmed us right up! Back on the zodiac, we were treated to more views of the glaciers & mountains around us. Even got to see a couple of Elephant Seals lumbering along the rocky beach to the water.



Even the trip on the zodiac's back to the ship were fun & exciting. Even though the water looks pretty smooth, you had a tendency to get splashed, so we were very happy we had bought the rain pants!!



We had a quick buffet lunch on board & then it was time to head back out. This trip was just a zodiac ride to see the penguins on Tucker's Islets. Little Sarah (remember the violinist from last night?) was there to help us on board. They were all very safety conscious & constantly reminded us of the drill – grip with forearm, not hands; sit on rubber side & slide your rump, don't stand; take turns on which side of the boat to go to. We were all noisy as we loaded and attracted the attention of a pod of dolphins!!!! I was not able to get any decent pictures, but they followed us for the 15 minutes over to the islet. Jumping & splashing all around us. I was startled by one jumping up towards my face as I got settled

in!! I'd heard about situations like that, but it was great fun in person! The more we yelled "wow", the closer they circled us! Even Marselis was whooping & hollering with us and he had to have seen them thousands of times!



And then there were the penguins. All Magellan or commonly called "JackAss" for the braying call they make. They are definitely not endangered – thousands of them all over the world!



I took hundreds of pictures of them – just couldn't quit snapping! But I'll spare you. Suffice it to say that we loved this portion of our trip!



We moved on to view a couple of the other islets & found an adorable Upland Goose family. Even Marselis got out his camera to take a picture. He said they were pleased to see them able to raise a family although he knew there were originally 5 goslings, so something had gotten 3 of them. Then Marselis offered his “mike” to Barb, asking her to sing us a tune as we toured the islands on Christmas Day!



Next stop was the cormorants – 3 types: Neotropical, Rock, & King. They aren’t endangered either! Years ago in China we saw a demonstration of the Chinese fisherman using them to fish for him! Had a ring around the neck so that when they caught a fish they couldn’t swallow it & would bring it back for the fisherman’s basket!!!



Last stop to see the cormorant nests on the cliffs. And then back to the Stella. They always reviewed the instructions for getting out of the zodiac – slide the rump, take turn with sides, step on the boards, on the rubber side, onto the ship – 1, 2, cha cha cha!



Back in the cabin, we saw the dolphins still circling the ship! We have friends in the Marine world now!



No time for napping before dinner, there was a private tour of the Engine room (we skipped it) and the Bridge. Marcellis gave both of them. He introduced Alex, the 2nd in command. He explained that even though they had all the newest in electronics, they still used the old charts to ensure they were going where they wanted to go! Amazing. While we were in there, alarms started sounding & Alex informed us that there had just been a 7.8 Earthquake centered in Chileon Island (long way north of us). Heard later that it was the largest earthquake of the year, but apparently didn't do any or much damage since the area is largely unpopulated.



Then it was time for another lovely dinner. This time ending with what became my most favorite dessert – dulce de leche. Sort of a caramel pudding with merengue topping! I had 2 of them! Yummy Yummy Yummy! We ended up our Christmas Day watching the sun set from the upper lounge!!!! Totally AWESOME!!!!

Hope you'll stay tuned. Having troubles with Outlook stripping my pictures and putting them in a windat file. Gmail users & Outlook users don't notice because they automatically open the file. But apparently AOL & Yahoo & Cox don't do it! Can't find a fix, so hoping that most of you get things correctly! Anyway, now we're back in Mesa & dancing is taking priority, but determined to finish this during the next week! The last week was the most exciting portion of the vacation, so want to share it!

Love you all & next missive I'll include a map to show you where we actually were sailing!

George & Pamela

Check out our web site! [Hurd's Round Dance Home Page](#)

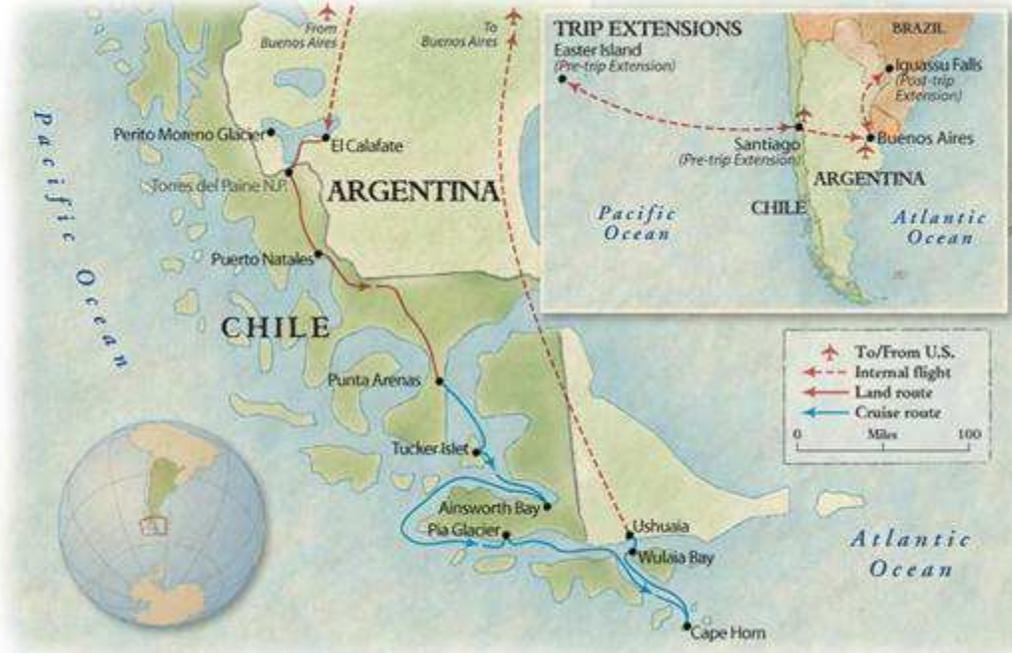
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Pamela Hurd

From: Pamela Hurd <pam@gphurd.com>
Sent: Tuesday, January 10, 2017 9:18 PM
To: pam@gphurd.com; gphurd@aol.com
Subject: South American Wilderness Adventure, Pia Glacier & Glacier Alley #13

Good Evening Everyone. Figure I should start this one out with a little explanation of exactly where we were traveling. Wish I was standing in front of you with a Wall map & a laser pointer!! But we'll do our best!



This is the overall map that is posted on OAT's web site. It should give you a general idea of where we are. We started from Punta Arenas the first night, sailing through the Strait of Magellan and into the myriad of channels between the islands that make up this part of the world & we had reached Ainsworth Bay sometime during the early morning (approximately 90 NM). That's where we took the hike I described yesterday and then we took the short sail backtracking to Tucker Islet.



During the evening last night, we had to cross into the Pacific Ocean. They had expected it to get rather rough at that time – sometime around 2 – 3am. We had secured everything (nothing loose on the counters or tables). I woke up during that time & snapped a picture out the window. Just saw a little white water, nothing drastic. To be honest, I had kinda anticipated some really rough stuff, but it never showed up. I love the noise of the water against the hull of the ship. Lulled me right back to sleep! The only morning activity was a briefing by Marcelis about the Tierra del Fuego area. Included lots of historical info about the 5 different native groups, geography, & history of the discovery. Interestingly enough Marcelis is of the belief that Magellan was not the true discoverer. He thinks that Magellan was actually traveling by maps provided by a Portuguese sailor. He had all kind of interesting data about it. Didn't make him very popular with the Chilean historians!! Told a funny story about how he had suggested to his 10 year old son that he should mention that in class and his son thought his Dad was CRAZY!!! Included another picture of our cabin since they moved the 2 twin beds together! Made it a nice big bed! And included the picture on our cabin wall of the island of Cape Horn! Our hopeful destination for tomorrow!!!



We were traveling through some pretty dreary weather through the morning. Didn't start our departure for Pia Glacier until about 2:30pm. In the meantime, we enjoyed lots of food!!! Buffet breakfast & buffet lunch! Gonna gain 10 pounds before we're off this ship!! The glaciers were all around us and there were icebergs floating everywhere!



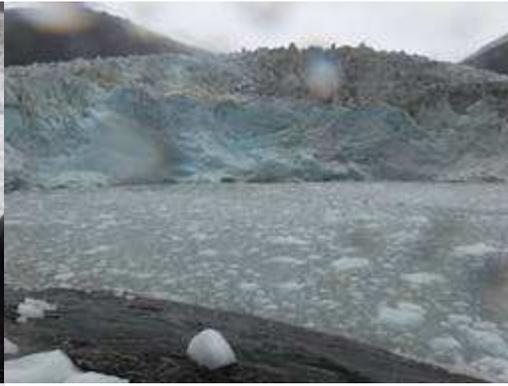
This was definitely a first. Zodiac to a glacial landing! In actuality it was not nearly as cold as it looked! With the ice all around, you'd think it was below freezing, but it was actually about 49 degrees! None the less, we were happy to have our "Patagonia gear" – including the newly acquired Rain pants!!!



Marcelis was the first out of our zodiac & gave us a demonstration of how they wanted us to lift both legs up & over together so you couldn't get trapped with one leg in & one leg out! Then up a slope away from the landing zone. It looked really really slippery, but it was just an illusion. Although damp, it was not icy at all.



Michelle showed how Patagonia gear can actually be quite a lovely costume for a fashion model in the Glacial world and I took a picture of the rock with all its lichens growing. Nicole had pointed out to us that the white ones were the slicky ones, so she convinced us to avoid stepping on them! I shot a photo of our ship in the distance. Safety appears quite a ways off!!



First off, we walked up to a high view point for a bit of a briefing. Marcelis didn't have us stay there long because he said he'd never been there when there was ice debris on those rocks. Made him believe that there had been some huge calving's & he didn't want us to be there to experience that!



We continued up the side of the hillside for views of the glaciers. The rocks looked like they were covered with ice, but it was just damp rock! The glacier was creaking & popping & it felt like we were right on top of it.



Soon we reached the rope that was there to help us both up & down the path for the steepest part. The view from the top was quite impressive. The ship is just a little light spot in the water on the right of the picture.



With all the calving's & a shift in the wind, our zodiacs are getting socked in with ice!!! It is definitely a cold, barren, landscape! Love our Patagonia gear – we were warm, dry, & comfy.



We didn't spend a lot of time on the top...decided with the ice moving in & the wind shifting, it might be time for a hasty exit. We made use of the rope to help our hike back downhill and wasted no time getting our life jackets back on. The zodiac drivers were having to use poles to push away from the ice & clear themselves a path.



Now we understand why our zodiacs have that reinforced steel netting on the front of them! Really glad that we didn't have to help pulling the boats up onto the rocks. And we all were really careful to follow directions & get both feet inside – Good Job John!! Making our way back to the ship, we were still fighting our way through huge icebergs! Now I know what being in the midst of an ice floe really means! Interesting experience – unless we do decide to go to Antarctica, guess we don't have to do this again!!



Back in the cabin, we snapped another “we did it” mirror selfie!



About 6:30pm (after a well-deserved nap), we all met up in the lounge for an entertaining Happy Hour. There was a string of glaciers – commonly called Glacier Alley. As we cruised past each one, our beloved waiters came around with special treats & of course drinks.



My pictures were all pathetic because I was too complacent with sitting in the warm lounge & enjoying my cocktails to go outside. The 4 glaciers were lovely & named for different countries – Holland, Germany, Italy, France. I borrowed the first picture of German Glacier from Barb’s blog (remember the link I gave you gave earlier for her blog? I just perused it myself – WOW! It’s awesome – please take the time to check it out wildchileandargentina.blogspot.com

This is the link again.). I copied the other 2 (Holland & Italian) from Wikipedia. These glaciers were all in the Alberto de Agostini NP.



Before dinner, we got our briefing on tomorrow's embarkation to Cape Horn. Australis is the only company allowed to actually disembark tourist onto the island. We were all very excited about the chance to step onto the island itself. They gave us advice on making sure we went up to the top first & in case the order was given to return to the ship. We would even be required to leave our life jackets on in case we had to make an immediate departure. Do you like the perfect head siloettes on the descriptions of itinerary? Now for the sad part – if we were lucky enough that the weather would cooperate...we were to line up for the zodiac at 6:45am!!!!!! Yipes! You know the Hurd's were excited about that!



We were lucky enough to see the lighthouse from our Celebrity Infinity Cruise in 2006. At that time, the cruise folks told us we were very very lucky because the ship could actually pause there for an hour to allow folks to take pictures. We will see if we are that lucky again! Nicole had warned us that the past few groups had not been able to land. There are strict rules on wind speed for the landing.



As usual, we enjoyed a magnificent dinner. I really dread getting on the scale back in Mesa (& I'm really back now & it was pretty awful – gained 4 lbs & it's not going away easy!!!). I got a nice picture of the lovely appetizer, but Barb had gotten a cook book publisher quality shot of the yummy tenderloin! It was one of the best pieces of meat we've ever had. I ate it so fast, I didn't even get a shot of the clean plate I left!

I tried to take pictures of the beautiful evening sky from our cabin, but by now there are too many water droplets & my camera wouldn't focus. It was gorgeous though & we left our curtains open to enjoy the twilight & so that I could watch the archipelago of islands as we approach Cape Horn. We were again warned that it could get rough overnight as we would be on the edge of the Drake Passage.

So ended another day of this perfect adventure.

Sending lots of love & hugs!

George & Pamela

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Pamela Hurd

From: Pamela Hurd <pam@gphurd.com>
Sent: Wednesday, January 11, 2017 11:35 PM
To: pam@gphurd.com; gphurd@aol.com
Subject: South American Wilderness Adventure - Cape Horn & Wulaia Bay #14

Good Evening Everyone!

Time to relive our last day on board the Stella Australis! And it started early early!!



I woke up about 5am to watch for our entry into the archipelago that includes Cape Horn National Park. Unfortunately our window was pretty speckled up, so the pictures aren't any good, but I was watching the sun rise & the white caps. It was looking beautiful outside, so we were feeling good about being able to make our landing. We were up & dressed in our Patagonia gear & ready to go.



With very little fuss, we were soon off the ship, into the zodiac (1st one to launch!), & onto the stairs climbing up the cliff of the 1394' high rocky promontory that makes up Cape Horn! Although there were 45 knot winds (60 was the max allowing us to land).



We wasted no time lolly gagging & headed straight up the boardwalk to the peak of the island. The whole island is a part of the Alberto de Agostini NP (southern most NP in the world!) and UNESCO named it a part of the Biosphere Reserve in 2005.



The walk was really not very far, forgot to look on my Fitbit to actually check! Phooey! Just looked at the website log & it shows about 2400 steps of activity in the morning of that day. Anyway, on the way up, there are several memorials & side viewing points to stop for photos.



A couple of folks (including Nicole – what a ham!!) were ahead of us, but we were among the first 5!! The large sculpture was erected by a Chilean artist in 1992 as a memorial to the sailors who died attempting to “round the Horn” through the years. Feels like you are on top of the world – although in reality, I guess we’re on the top of the bottom of the world???? Although not really the most southern point of South America (that honor belongs to Diego Ramirez Islands), it is the northern edge of the Drake Passage and marks where the Atlantic & Pacific Ocean collide. Quoting from Wikipedia “The waters around Cape Horn are particularly hazardous, owing to strong winds, large waves, strong currents and [icebergs](#); these dangers have made it notorious as a sailors' graveyard.” And “Many stories are told of hazardous journeys "around the Horn," most describing fierce storms. [Charles Darwin](#) wrote: "One sight of such a coast is enough to make a landsman dream for a week about shipwrecks, peril and death." But here we are! And we’ve actually braved the area twice!!



Next stop was the tiny chapel & the lighthouse. Enroute there was another memorial (we didn’t walk out to it) & we spied a “dance floor!!”



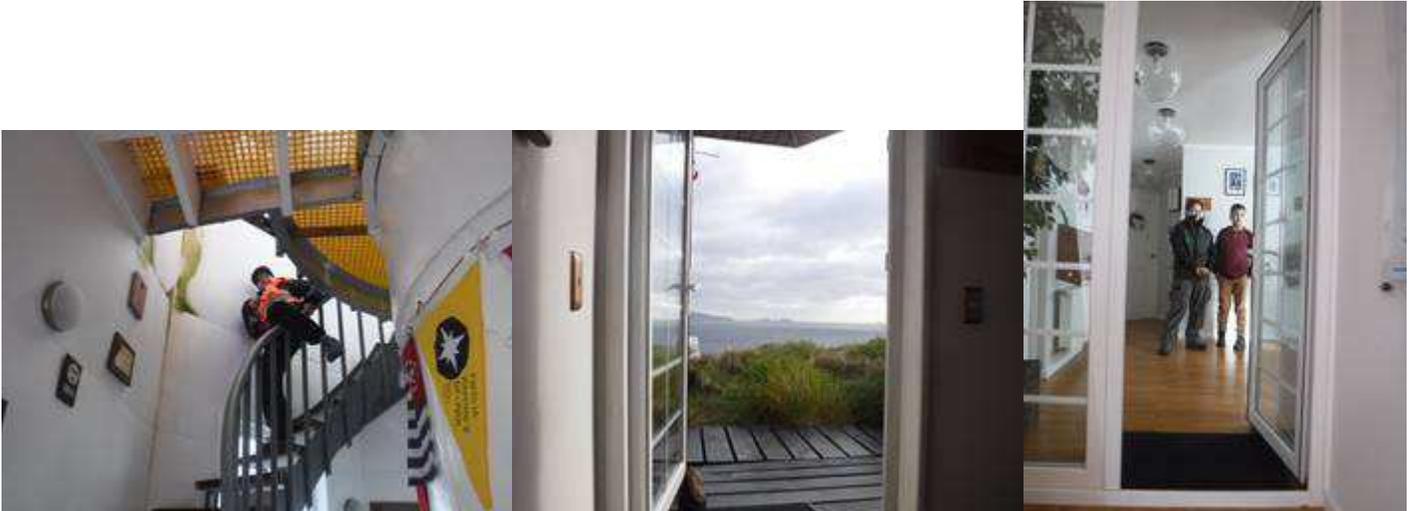
We danced a few steps, but the wind gusts were picking up & as George demo'd, it was a bit difficult to stand – much less dance! Looking in some directions it looked a little rugged!!!



We made a quick stop at the chapel (non denominational) & then on to the Lighthouse.



The lighthouse was not really very impressive – only one flight of stairs & the windows were filthy, so not much of a view. A lot better outside!



Michele considered sliding down the bannister but decided it might cause an international incident! I snapped a picture out the back door and then we went inside to meet the young wife & son of the Lighthouse keeper (you'll meet him in a minute). It is apparently a much sought after assignment – although totally alone for a year (except for the occasional tourists! – bet they could do without us!), the Naval assignment here includes a pretty significant salary & a guarantee of a 2 pay grade promotion. The young couple had just arrived about 3 weeks ago to start their year. There was an even younger girl, but I didn't get her picture. We had hoped to buy something (magnet or something tiny, but they only had a few pictures & keychains to sell).



Outside the door, I snapped a few more pictures & then.....we decided the time was right for a ROUND DANCE!!!! I sang I Wanna Hippopotamus for Christmas (only thing I could remember the tune & words for) and George cued. Let me tell you that doing a lariat in 50 knot winds is not a piece of cake!!!! Nicole got a video – over wine we’ll share it with anyone interested!! Marlyn went inside the lighthouse after we finished & said that the Young wife was asking “what were they doing????” I assume this was not a normal occurrence!! Of course they had only been there 3 weeks, I’m sure they would see it on a regular basis throughout the coming year – NOT!!



As we decided to head back, I snapped a picture of John & Connie in front of the chapel and then snapped a photo of the island’s helipad. I wonder how often the weather allows that to be used???? And then to give you an idea of the steep slope up, I paused on the stairs to take a shot. It is a nice protected cove for our landing.



The young Chilean Naval Officer was there to shake everyone's hand & wave as the zodiac's launched. I'm sure he loves this part of his job! Notice that there are 2 men in dive suits in the water helping to load the zodiacs? Those are our bartenders!! Everyone is multi trained. Unfortunately that meant that we didn't get our standard hot chocolate with whiskey as they couldn't stand around in the water & serve us whiskey. Darn!!



So we say goodbye to Cape Hornos island! A totally successful landing! George was definitely thrilled! And then to top it off, we got to see penguins swimming along beside us as we made our way back to the ship!



Back on board ship, we immediately went to an excellent breakfast buffet! Then enjoyed a movie about Shackleton's Antarctic Adventure. Excellent documentary about Shackleton's try at trekking across Antarctica & becoming trapped in the ice. Amazing story – if you haven't seen it, it is well worth watching. Made for IMAX, it is narrated by Kevin Spacey & keeps you totally on edge. Not sure it makes me want to tackle a trip to Antarctica though. I actually asked Marcelis about it & he suggested a flight in with a 3 or 4 day cruise. Going to research that. He said he really didn't recommend taking a cruise across the Drake Passage unless you were just really wanting to experience rough water. I think I'll pass on that. Then we got to eat AGAIN before it was time for our last excursion from the ship. Michele showed me what she actually thought about my continual papa razzi actions, but George didn't seem to mind. The water was pretty darn smooth for our trip over to Wulaia Bay.



This debarkation was simple & Marcelis was already on shore waiting for us. This was one of the locations that Charles Darwin visited in the HMS Beagle & the old radio station building is being renovated by Australis into a museum & memorial of Historical significance. This was originally the site of one of the region's largest Yamana aboriginal settlements. And unfortunately, also the site of well documented massacre in November 1859. All members except one (a cook that was still on board ship) of a missionary group were found clubbed to death by the Yamana.



This ended up being one of the most significantly strenuous hikes of the entire trip. The ship designated it as “medium high difficulty” and none of our group had any issues with it, but a few of our group (strangely enough it was the youngest ones!!) complained that it was too challenging! As before, Marcelis pointed out lots of interesting biological aspects, like the parasitic growths on the trees that can be eaten in a pinch as they are chock full of protein & nutrients, if not too tasty (according to his experience – luckily he didn’t make me try them!). There were several lovely views of clear running creeks & we found ourselves toting wood to help the ships crew that were put to work repairing our hiking paths!



The area was quite beautiful, much more green & older larger trees that we had expected to see this far south. Once again Marcelis pointed out the huge amount of damage that the feral beavers are causing. Everywhere you looked, there were downed trees with the tell tale knawed trunks. Really sad. We had sure hoped to see one of the many woodpeckers known to be in this area, but the closest we got was the holes in the trunks. Sure kept listening, but never heard one either.



But the best part of this hike was the scenery. The view of the bay was spectacular. So beautiful & still. None the less, I found myself snapping photos of the beautiful greenery at my feet too. It was soooooo green.



The trek down was uneventful. Strangely enough most decided to walk alongside the meticulously built board walks as they were a little slippery. But although pretty chilly (low 40's as was most of this trip), there was no wind which was a relief! And no rain which was lovely. Anytime you see a place this green, it's obvious that it rains here a lot!



The excursion ended with a visit to the radio station museum. The canoe was an example of a native built object, but only about a fifth of actual size! The most interesting was the “post office.” Just like the one from last year on the island in the Galapagos, there was a barrel where you could drop off a post card. All visitors were to dig through all the mail (Michele acted as the Post Office Employee for our group) & if there was one addressed to your home town, you were to take it & deliver it! Sorry, we didn’t participate – didn’t drop anything off & didn’t take anything! There were postcards from all over & there were definitely folks taking things to make a delivery!



Our trip back to the ship was uneventful & after a fun happy hour we got to EAT AGAIN!!! The last event of the cruise was a raffle of a chart & a flag. It was fun – one of our group even bid (although later she admitted she was really hoping not to win!) The chart ended up going for more that \$300!!!! Anyway, I tried to take some pictures, but they were blurry. So I’ll end this day with one of George’s pictures from the Kodak view point on Wulaia & my last photo of the evening lights of Ushuaia as we circled throughout the night.

Tomorrow we'll debark the ship for a day in Ushuaia! Getting close to the end! But of course we still have the most exciting visit to Easter Island to cover! Stay tuned!

Lots of love,

George & Pamela

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Pamela Hurd

From: Pamela Hurd <pam@gphurd.com>
Sent: Thursday, January 12, 2017 11:10 AM
To: pam@gphurd.com; gphurd@aol.com
Subject: South American Wilderness Adventure - Ushuaia #15

Good Morning Everyone! We off to start the ending of the main trip. No time to waste with small talk!



Just like the end of any cruise, you put out your luggage, go have your breakfast, and then report to whatever area was assigned for you to wait. The views from our assigned lounge were of a quiet, lovely city. Bigger than I had imagined, but cuddled in the arms of the surrounding Andes & water. Sure hate to leave the Stella Australis. Have really enjoyed the time on this ship.



And then there we were again – back on a bus. Just drove a couple of blocks & stopped at the Visitor's Center for anyone that wanted their passports stamped for "the End of the World!" Didn't bother with that, but wandered a bit to see a lovely flower garden. Just like in Anchorage, those flowers love the long days of sunshine, even if it feels pretty darn cold! Still in the low 40's, but much more humid here.



Another couple of blocks to a Memorial for the Maldives War. Extremely serious event for the Argentinians. More later when a war veteran came to speak to us.



Another stop, mostly to stretch our legs & wonder about things! It was a full street on the side of the mountain on the edge of town where individuals had built little shrines to their particular saint? Most interesting! We found a little one for Saint George! We had another little ceremony to present a beer to the Saint for travelers. Glad that Saint likes beer!



Another of OAT's Learning & Discovery stops – we visited the home of Gabriela (her husband mostly stayed in the kitchen & I never got his name, but quite an interesting fellow of German descent). Don't think they were typical Ushuaian's at all. They obviously had quite a lot of money, the home although tiny, was exquisite & full of very expensive looking knick knacks from all over the world – especially Asia & Africa. They had 2 adorable young pre-school girls & they even had them show us their rooms. She had made us a “so called snack” of a cheese roll, lentil soup, & 2 cake type desserts. Some snack!



After eating, Gabriela with the the help of Nicole & our local Ushuaian guide, Ines, showed us how the locals enjoyed their Matte. It is a coffee/tea type beverage that has a formal ceremony type presentation. Sort of like the Japanese Tea ceremony. It can be shared with friends or you can even drink it cold. They sell lots of Matte cup & straw sets to the tourists. We all tasted it (through the same metal straw – wonder what germs we passed on there?). Not bad – like a strong herb tea. The interesting thing about it is that after you put the herb in the cup, you keep adding hot water & try not to move the straw to disturb the matted mess inside! The straws are made with little strainers in the end to keep out most of the stems & twigs. Anyway, it was certainly an interesting experience.



After the presentation, we had Gabriela & her husband stand for pictures & then it was time to leave. According to Ines, the home was built in much the local manner. The couple would choose a lot – most of the time, the lot would not already have utilities. They would start to build a home, then submit a formal request to the city for the property. In that order, mind you! After several individuals were building in the same area, the city would then put in utilities. The homes were usually built one room at a time as money allowed. This one was also creeping up the mountainside with multiple stories. We looked through the neighborhoods as we continued our bus tour & that did seem to be the case. The house certainly didn't look like much from the outside – all local wood & corrugated metal sheets.



We continued our short bus tour around the town, then drove to our hotel for a short talk by a Maldivian War Veteran. The Brits called the islands, the Falklands. Anyway, sad story. The Argentinians were sorely unprepared for a war & sent very young (he was 17) untrained men to the islands to protect them in 1982. Apparently they really didn't think the Brits would use force. But they did and after 74 days, 649 Argentinians, 255 Brits, & 3 Falklanders had died. This young man was sent back home with memories of friends blown to pieces while they had no weapons to defend themselves & then no support at home. Apparently the current government is recognizing the issue & too little too late, they are providing services. Sounds like the type of story you hear many times world wide.



Ran upstairs to a pleasant surprise of a room (just another 1 night stand though!). Lovely mountain view from the big windows & and great kitchen/sitting area. Even a bathroom that you could turn around in!



Short visit to the Prison museum around the corner (first couple of pictures are actually from a Tourist shop on the street!). Rather dreary & other than a few interesting art exhibits, it was rather bleak. As many prisons, it was not built for comfort & taste. Apparently it was used for a lot of political prisoners too and was closed in 1949.



Then we took a short walk around town. Watched Michelle buy a couple of picks for her Mandolin & I enjoyed watching George chat with a local sailor.



Some folks were meeting for a Fresh Crab dinner, but we had a quick sandwich & spent our evening in the hotel. Felt nice to veg for a few hours! Especially with the lovely mountain evening light coming through the big picture windows!

So, tomorrow we fly back to Buenos Aires & prepare for Easter Island!!!! Yippee!!!

Closing for now. Sending love & hugs & wishes for Good Health & Happiness.

George & Pamela

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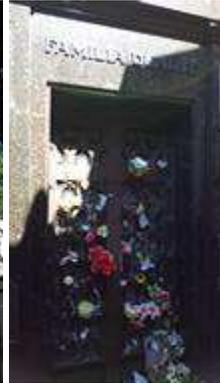
Pamela Hurd

From: Pamela Hurd <pam@gphurd.com>
Sent: Wednesday, January 18, 2017 12:08 AM
To: pam@gphurd.com; gphurd@aol.com
Subject: South American Wilderness Adventure - Buenos Aires to Santiago #16

Good Afternoon Folks! Hope you are enjoying a lovely relaxing weekend! We are currently in Mesa enjoying additional dancing with our regular routine due to a weekend festival with visiting teachers. Great fun, but hard to get everything done! Oh well, there's always tomorrow! On to our trip!



The following morning, we had an early bag drag to a 9am flight back to Buenos Aires. It was overcast & cool in Ushuaia & then after a 4 hour flight, we were back in Buenos Aires & high 80's! But the sky was blue & there were no airport employee strikes to cause us grief!



Another quick hotel check in (this was our 3rd time to stay in this hotel!), we were soon downstairs for a short walking tour with a different local guide – Claudio. The main objective of this afternoon’s walk was to visit La Recoleta Cemetery where the body of Evita (the notorious **María Eva Duarte de Perón** (7 May 1919 – 26 July 1952)) is placed in the family mausoleum. According to both Claudio & Nicole, the best way to start a family feud was to evoke a discussion of the Peron government. Suffice it to say that in Argentina, folks either love her or hate her. There seems to be absolutely no middle ground. More on that later.



The cemetery itself is quite interesting. It takes up 15 acres in the midst of the city & was voted as one of the 10 most beautiful cemeteries in the world by CNN in 2013. We visited it before in 2006 at the start of our Celebrity cruise. It is actually laid out to look like a city with wide boulevards between the tombs. I actually found that many of the tombs were in disarray. More than when we saw it 10 years ago. When I asked about that, Claudio said that since you could not “will” the tomb to a specific individual upon death, there were many of the family tombs that were in limbo as to who actually owned them & who was to pay for the upkeep. The “public” areas are maintained by the government, but not the tombs themselves. The cemetery was established in the late 1800’s when many Argentinians were extremely rich & powerful. Since then, the upkeep has skyrocketed & the families are not so well off.



Our tour of the cemetery ended at the “el Gran Gomero.” A huge Gomero tree that was planted back in the late 1700’s – possibly by the monks from the Recoleta or by a local land owner – depends on which story you believe! Either way it’s a pretty darn old tree & provided a cooling shade for another “learning & discovery” experience. A local business owner came to tell us about the abuses her family experienced under the Peron government. She was not an Evita fan at all! Her Mom had been a school teacher & they were given a made up history to teach in the schools, along with a changed map of Argentina that had an area named for Evita. If a teacher (as her Mom had done) refused to teach the “new” information, they were fired and/or punished somehow. Her family was abused by the Peron’s & help overthrow them. Of course the incoming Military regime was not any better (actually worse), so didn’t help much....but she still didn’t have any love for Evita! It was impressive to hear of how Eva had brought herself from being a “bastard” child to one of the most important figures in Argentinian history. Whether you loved her or hated her, you had to respect how she helped shape a country.



While we were listening to her talk, we heard unusual bird sounds & realized that the Austral Parakeet was flittering all throughout the trees around us. Never could get a good picture of one. Sure tried! Downloaded this photo from the internet. On the way out of the cemetery, we were confused by the huge metal netting under one tree. Our guide explained that the tree had huge cones that fell off & had been known to hurt people, so they had the net under it to catch them.



Back to the hotel & we had a group meeting with Nicole to get an overview of everything we had done!! Really? We really did all that? And there was still more to come for 15 of us!



Then on to our Farewell dinner. It was an excellent meal (once again it was Argentine beef & French fries!).



The best thing about the Farewell dinner was that afterwards we took a walk through the Puerto Madero commercial district after eating. The main goal (besides keeping us moving – Nicole was good at that!) was to see the **Puente de la Mujer**, “women’s bridge.” It is a rotating swing bridge that opens to allow water traffic to pass. It’s called “women’s bridge,” because several streets in the district are named for women. At the intersection for the bridge is the **ARA Presidente Sarmiento**, a museum ship from the 1890’s. It is the last remaining training ship from that era. The

entire area was full of beautiful hotels & restaurants & beautiful decorative lights. Loved the way the couples silhouette was displayed on the Christmas tree!



Thought I'd continue on with our last day in Buenos Aires. We woke the next morning to the sounds of birds in the trees across the street. I tried for pictures, but just got the lovely green leaves! Nicole had changed the schedule so that we had our last excursion in the morning, so we had our luggage out of our rooms by 8am & we were ready to go by 9am! John had on argyle socks! Wow! Way cool!!



As we left our hotel for our last excursion, we drove past the Floralis Genialis. It is a huge steel & aluminum sculpture that was presented to the city of Buenos Aires by Argentine architect Eduardo Catalano. I took the first 3 shots from the bus, but I downloaded the one from Wikipedia so you could see the whole thing. It is supposed to represent all

flowers of the world. It is supposed to open & close with sunlight & when it's closed, it has a red light that glows inside it. We never got to see it at night and the local guides said that it often didn't operate correctly & there was not any money to try & fix it.

It is 82' high and 85' wide when closed & 105' wide when open.



Our morning excursion was to take us to the port of Tigre (misnamed by European explorers who mistook the Puma for a Tiger!). This town was originally settled by Europeans who farmed the land & used the port to deliver their fruits & vegetables. Now it is mostly the starting point to get to the Parana Delta. It is a lovely "venice type" retreat area. The rich elite of Buenos Aires built the area up in the mid 1800's to escape from the city heat in summer & just to get away from the hustle/bustle. There are no streets – it is strictly traveled by boat. Although there is a direct train route available to the locals. As soon as we got into the town, we started seeing folks with piles of things that they were bringing to enjoy their retreat from the city! The ubiquitous mahogany water taxi's are everywhere.



As soon as we got out of our bus, our local guide, Carla, found & negotiated our taxi. I didn't get a picture of it, but they all looked exactly alike, so here's a picture of another one! Inside was a little wider than a bus with comfy seats. They served drinks & snacks for a fee. At first we all went inside & sat down as we started our tour.



First thing we realized was that there was every shape, size, & type of boat on these waterways! Several rowing clubs are situated out here & practice serious rowing skills. But there was also every type of recreational boat you can imagine!



And then we started seeing all the architecture. The most impressive was the Art Museum, but the residential homes ranged from “glorious” to “awesome” to “interesting!!”



One of the most interesting boats we saw during our 1 hour tour, were the “grocery” boats. They were supply delivery boats (Amazon on the waterways!!). Folks would leave out a certain type of grocery bag on their dock to identify that they needed something & the boat would stop at their dock. There were lots of different ones – Carla said their prices were not necessarily standardized & they didn’t always carry the same things, so just like you’d choose whether you want to shop at Walmart or Safeway, you would choose one of them that you liked! Folks could also pull up alongside in their own boat & do some shopping too!



Some places seemed to have a main house & several outbuildings. Carla said that folks would often build small separate cabins to rent out to help subsidize their payments. She said it was quite expensive to own something out here, but you could find reasonable places to rent.



We got to add to our birding list too. There were lots of water birds along the shore lines. Mostly types of herons & egrets.



There were quite a few damaged & abandoned boats. Not sure the story behind them! Anyway, I could put in lots of pictures, but figure I need to close it off. This was really an interesting area & we were both taking pictures like mad! I'll try to get them loaded soon onto Shutterfly in case anyone is interested in more!



One other thing I need to mention before I quit. There was a statute of a man that I had seen all over Argentina & I kept calling him Winston Churchill (probably because we just went to his museum in England in August!). Turns out that he was Domingo F. Sarmiento & was known as the Father of the Educational system in Argentina. Much beloved, he had a home in the Delta that is now a museum.



Our tour took us back to the hotel, where we had several hours to wait for our evening flights – us on to Santiago for our Easter Island post trip & 9 others to go home. We had one other funny experience. Since we didn't have dinner included & figured that the airport food would be crappy, we decided to find a place to eat. We tried the local mall, so spent 30 minutes or so walking around the mall (did some shopping, but the men put a kabosh on that pretty quick...darn it!). So decided to walk around the outside of the mall. Since it was an odd time for the locals to eat (about

2pm or so), there wasn't a lot open. Found this one place – it was 2 story & there were lots of people there – that's a good sign, right? So asked for a table for 6 (Hurd's, Hibner's, & Batchelor's) & they seated us upstairs where they gave us their 1 & only English menu. Milanese was their main serving! We could not for the life of us figure out what that was. Asked the waiter (who claimed to speak "excellent" English) & he couldn't describe it! Then, after we had ordered, we saw the sign on the wall – it was Wiener Schnizal!!! Cracked us up! Anyway, not a bad meal & an experience to remember!! Then we spent several hours sitting in the Hotel lobby waiting to go to the airport! Took a photo of the electric plug with folks all using George's outlet!!! Too funny! At least no fuses blew!

Okay! Enough for now. Next stop is EASTER ISLAND!!!! On the last leg! Don't go away!

Lots of love,

George & Pamela

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Pamela Hurd

From: Pamela Hurd <pam@gphurd.com>
Sent: Saturday, January 21, 2017 1:38 PM
To: pam@gphurd.com; gphurd@aol.com
Subject: South American Wilderness Adventure - Easter Island Day 1 #17

Yippee!!! I have finally gotten to the last leg of our extraordinary trip! It just seemed like it was one amazing highlight after another! So let's get on with it!



We flew from the small Buenos Aires airport once again (not the main International one thank goodness). Our flight left a few minutes late – about 10pm. We gained a couple of hours with the time change to New York time, but still, after getting our luggage (one of the girls bags had gotten misplaced) & going through Immigration, it was getting very close to midnight by the time we got to our hotel in Santiago! Didn't take any pictures of that room!!! It was awful! Tiny little thing that was very dark & they had stuffed 3 beds in it, so there was barely room to move between them! Luckily Nicole had experience with it and warned us that the thermostat was hidden behind the old style TV in the corner! So at least we could turn on a little air. The bad news was that we had to be up at 5:15am to have bags out by 6:15am!!!!!! Nicole had talked them into providing us some kind of early breakfast! It was a pretty funny breakfast! Even crazier, was that they had set it up in the lounge instead of the breakfast room & it was almost pitch black! I finally found someone to ask for a light & they did come & turn it on by the time we had eaten our cheese sandwiches!!! On the plus side, we were on the rode without any traffic. The valley was full of smoke from the fire down in Valparaiso. You could smell it. Was that a Condor floating above us?



I didn't have my preferred window seat on any of the internal flights that OAT arranged & I tried snapping some pictures over the lovely, quiet, & sweet young mother & daughter that I shared the 3 seat section with. Amazingly enough, unbeknownst to me at the time, I managed to snap the 6 Moai's that we visited for our Sunset Goodbye to the island! When I blew it up, you can just see the 5 sticks, with the 1 big one way to the left. Too funny! I didn't even realize it when I initially looked at the pictures! You'll see what I'm talking about later! Anyway, we were all very excited to land here. I didn't get any pictures as we got off the plane, which by the way was our very first flight on the Dream Liner! It's a gorgeous commercial jet! The only thing I didn't like was the 3 3 3 seat configuration. I've always enjoyed the 2 seat configuration for International flights. But the plane seems to have a little more leg room, comfortable seats & even the bathrooms have digital controls for the faucets! But the really funny thing was that here we are landing in the newest most technologically advanced commercial aircraft in the world & they rolled us stairs for us to deplane!!! Too funny. Felt very Hawaiian/Polynesian walking on the tarmac. Lots of flowers & native art & everything was green green green!



When we got through customs (it was extremely easy for the majority of us – but they were still looking for the one lost bag – yea, they found it!!!!), our local guides (Sophie & driver Caesar – pronounced seZAR) were waiting for us with beautiful fresh leis. Like most Island people, they were smiling & happy & very welcoming! The bus, however, was rather cramped (not a single extra seat!!!) & it was pretty hot & humid. Probably in the low 80's for both!



Checking into the hotel was a joy. The setting was beautiful & it was pleasant standing outside & enjoying the greenery & flowers. There was a lovely bird singing for us – turned out to be a Dark Faced Ground Tyrant that we saw everywhere.



The rooms were just so so,but the view was awesome! And we could hear the waves crashing on the rocks outside. Glad we get to stay here for 3 nights!



We threw our luggage into our rooms & made a quick wander around the hotel grounds as we waited for our first excursion on the island. Definitely a “Polynesian” feel to the island.



Sophie proved to be a really sweet, knowledgeable guide. Her first objective was to learn all our names. We helped her to remember Michelle by pointing out the similarities in her name to the Chilean president – Michelle Bachelet. From then on Michelle was “Madam President!” Strangely enough, our first stop was at a gas station!!! Sophie said to take a picture of it! It is the ONLY station on the island! We were stopping there to pick up snacks, wine, beer, water....anything we thought we might want for the next couple of days. Several meals were to be on our own for the next couple of days & we weren’t going to dinner tonight until 9pm!!! So we loaded up on chips, crackers, & assorted

Here's a map of the island. The Blue arrow marks our hotel. We're just to the south of the airport. The red lines are the roads. Our first stop was Orongo, marked with a red arrow. A very short distance from our hotel, but we had to drive around the end of the airport to get there. So it took 15 minutes or so to get there.



I'm not really going to try & give you a history lesson, you can look it up & read yourself if you want accurate details. But here's the way I understand it. The island seems to have been originally populated around 300-400 CE (Common Era – I had to look that up!!). About the same time as Hawaii. These Polynesians were ruled by a King system. These Kings had the statues built in their likeness to stand over their bodies & provide their clans with their power after their death. The world-famous statues were all produced from 400 – 1700 CE. More on them later. Today's visit was to a historical site of the Birdman Cult which seemed to have been between the mid 18th and 19th Centuries. This cult seems to have developed after the Kings obsessive building of the statues had deforested the island & there were wide spread problems with starvation.



Anyway, the most interesting aspect of this site was the annual race to collect an egg from the near by (that's relative!!) islet of Moto Nui (the largest of the islets in the distance – on the last day we took a small boat out to those islets, so you'll see them close up). We reached the view after a short walk along the edge of the cliff face. The race started from this point on the cliff face & the participants had to scramble down to the water (almost a 1000 foot cliff!) & swim (yep SWIM to Moto Nui), scramble up those cliffs & collect an egg from the Sooty Tern (which is no longer found on the island) and bring it back undamaged. According to Sophie, they were totally naked except for a collection pouch that they wore on their heads. This race was still going on when the first Europeans came to the island in the 1860's. The individual that won was celebrated all year & was given the right to distribute the food & supplies. Unfortunately many died trying. They no longer allow the race to take place.



There are also many stone huts that make up a ceremonial village surrounding this site. It's all a part of the Rapa Nui National Park & on the World Heritage List. There were young virgin girls that were separated from their families & held in some of these caves, fed & kept totally alone & in the dark (no sunlight allowed!!!). The winner of the race was given his choice of these virgins as part of his award. It's unclear what happened to all the others! Because they were kept totally in the dark, they must have been in pretty poor health too. Certainly wouldn't be a choice for the young girls!



Another amazing aspect of this first stop on the island is Rano Kau – the huge volcanic caldera this is one of the 3 fresh water lakes on the island. The caldera is more than a mile across. Because the walls are so steep, it is protected from most of the weather patterns around the island & has it's own micro climatic environment! Sophie told us that rapamycin was found & developed from a fungus found only in this caldera. Although there were not a lot of birds (apparently unlike the Galapagos, the birds that are found here are mostly common species from the Chilean mainland). I think was was another of the little Tyrants.



Sophie pointed out some petroglyphs (also from the Birdman Cult era) & some stone rings that might have been used for studying the stars, but I couldn't really see much in it.



We walked around for a different view of the caldera & took some pictures. An interesting side note – Nicole had mentioned Benjamin several times during our trip...a boyfriend that she had met on a previous trip & had maintained contact with through email & iphone talks. She had even had him say hello to us a couple of times on her ipad. Well, he showed up in Santiago & got permission to become a part of this last week! It was a total surprise for Nicole & we all enjoyed their comradie.



But the day wasn't over yet!!! Remember we started at 5:15am? And gained a couple of hours on our flight over? Well, after all it was New Year's Eve, so after a couple of hour's time to nap, dress, & meet for happy hour (had to eat some of those snacks we had purchased at the gas station! Ha! – discovered the crackers were kinda like unleavened bread, joked that we were having a Lord's supper!), we headed "downtown" (Hanga Roa – look at the map above) to celebrate!!! Sunset was AWESOME!!!



Nicole had arranged our New Year's Eve dinner at a very nice Belgium restaurant on the water front – Au Bout du Monde. We had a choice of filet of beef or tuna steak. George & I both had the filet & although it was not the best we've ever had, it was quite good! The dinner was not included in our tour, but Nicole did spring for us all a glass of bubbly for a New Year's Toast! Our restaurant was open to the surround area & there was a HUGE party going on across the street, right on the water. There was a live band with performers throughout the evening. It was perfect because we could enjoy the music (and even danced a little in the restaurant aisles – I even tried the man's part of a swing with Nicole!). But we didn't have to fight the crowds & it was still a low enough noise level for us to talk.



The highlight of course was the fabulous fireworks show at midnight. There had been a few all through our meal (which started about 9pm), but the real show started at midnight. This was our second time to enjoy a Chilean New Year's. Those guys love their Fireworks! We once again got to have a super stupendous amazing Anniversary celebration! 27 years!



Finally the long long day was over! We were thrilled that Nicole had contacts to get us multiple taxi's to get us all back to the hotel! Although it was a much smaller crowd than in Cape Town 2 years ago, but since this population is so much smaller, there were not many taxi's available & the roads were dark with no sidewalks so we couldn't walk back. It was a certainly a happy crowd that was out on the streets & there were parties going on everywhere! But we made it back to our hotel easily & fell asleep to the lovely sound of waves on the rocks! Had to sleep fast because tomorrow would be a big day with lots of new discoveries!

Hang on for more about Easter Island!

Lots of love,

George & Pamela

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Pamela Hurd

From: Pamela Hurd <pam@gphurd.com>
Sent: Monday, January 23, 2017 10:28 PM
To: pam@gphurd.com; gphurd@aol.com
Subject: South American Wilderness Adventure - Easter Island Day 2 #18

Good Afternoon Everyone. I'm anxious to continue our adventure. We were all pinching ourselves that we were actually on Easter Island. It's one of those places that you've seen on National Geographic since you were a child & it's hard to believe we were really on it!



Our morning was leisurely with a 9:30am tour start time. Nicole was actually rather leery of how the day would go since it was a holiday & the islanders (like everyone else!!) like to stay home with family on the holidays! But we had a buffet breakfast in this beautiful setting & then our guides met us with cheerful good morning happy new year hugs!!



Included the map again so that I can point out our different stops for today.



The tour would be a long one today (they furnished a box lunch!). Our first stop was Akahanga (marked with the blue arrow) – a pretty bleak barren landscape with remains of caves that had been Rapa Nui dwellings. Not much in the way of amenities – due to the tropical climate, everything was really done outside, so the cave was just for sleeping – no cooking or chores were done inside.



This was where we first started hearing about the pukao (or red rock head dresses that some of the later Moai were adorned with). Also where they told us that almost all the Moai had at some point been purposely toppled by the inhabitants. Apparently during & after the Birdman cult time frame when there were many clan wars, probably due to the food shortages. The top knots & the statues were carved out of entirely different materials that were from different quarries on the island. They would have been transported separately & placed on the head of the statue after

he was raised in place. Poor Sophie was trying to give us all this history & we're busy snapping pictures of each other & the incredible ocean views!



On the way back to the bus, we continued seeing Moai's that had been toppled with sometimes just heads or topknots scattered around. Starting to recognize the statues from the other rocks lying around! Due to the holidays, there were not a lot of vendor's out, so they highly recommended that we purchase anything we saw that we might want. Sophie showed us one of the little carved replicas of the most recognized Ahu's (the sacred base where the Moai's were placed). We'd visit that later. The few vendor's we did find were more than happy to take American dollars (or any other type of money we had to hand!). But they were not pushy at all, so that was a pleasure.



Next stop was Rano Raraku (marked on the map with a red arrow) – the Moai quarry (for about 95% of the Moai) in a huge volcanic crater. It is the epicenter of the Rapa Nui National Park. It's about a 2 mile walk through & around all the trails inside the quarry. Note John's lovely socks for today! Now we get to see the Moai upclose.



Here is where we all really started feeling the wonder that we were really there! It was amazing to find ourselves walking these paths surrounded by the enormous statues. Mind boggling to say the least. Okay, a little more explanation. Kind of like the Egyptians, these people believed that their Kings had a spirit that must be preserved. The kings would order a head made for them while there were still alive. Many were under construction at one time. They cost money & the size had to do with how much the king could afford to pay. The main cost though was the transportation to the statues resting point. Some of these huge statues carved out of a single rock weighed 85 tons! And had to be some how transported several miles. Notice the horses? The folks on Easter Island love their horses more than Texans!! They have free run of the entire island! No fences – at all!! Sophie was telling us that we are not allowed to touch the Moais, but you can frequently see the horses scratching themselves against them! Hummm? I was questioning the sense of this, because they seem to damage some areas & pose a bit of a danger to folks as they wander to and fro, but she says they are important historically. For many years after Chile had first claimed the island under it's rule, it took away the ability for the islanders to own anything – especially horses. So when they finally got their rights back, it was an important symbolism to be a horse owner.



Besides the excitement of seeing all the Moai's, it was a glorious day. Frigate birds circled high overhead & we were hiking up & down through a beautiful green landscape.



This was to be the largest ever Moai, but it was never completed. It was 69' tall and would have weighed 270 tons! Gives you an idea of how they carved the heads straight out of the rock.



This one moai is different from all the others. Most are standing with their hands folded in front, but this one is kneeling with hands on lap. And it has a rounded head. It is called the Tukutari & was discovered in 1955. None other like it have ever been found.



As we started the circle back out of the quarry, the views were incredible. We could see a HUGE group of Moai's on the coast below us (heading there after lunch). And then looking up at the cliffs, we could see many more Moai's half buried in the greenery.



We took a short walk past the main entrance to view the back of the crater. Another of the fresh water ponds on the island.



While we were viewing the lake, Sophie very enthusiastically described an annual festival that happens there every February. It includes a grueling triathlon consisting of rowing, swimming, & running while toting huge bunches of bananas. Her enthusiasm and description inspired me to Google it & I found these wonderful pictures I wanted to share. Apparently it also includes a body painting competition (for the young men) using traditional paints. She said points are given for the most accurate of traditional garb. She was in it one time & wore a dress that she had made of reeds. She got good points, but didn't win. She said the athletes prepare for months and she had sometimes seen young fathers running with their very young sons and when they get to the banana carrying, they will tie a single banana on a string! The bunches of bananas are apparently very very heavy. Sure would be something to see!



Nicole had a picnic area for us to sit & relax to eat our box lunches. The most notable aspect of this was that we were overrun by cats, dogs, & chickens!! The guides kept tossing food out in the grass away from us to try & keep them from under our feet. Anyway, it was nice to sit for a bit. We were lucky that it was not extremely hot & there was a bit of a breeze to help cool us down. As you might have noticed there are not many trees (those there were brought in since the entire island was cleared in the early 1800's). The quarry area can sometimes be extremely uncomfortable to walk due to the heat, but a cool front had saved us, it was only low 80's.



Probably the most exciting stop of the Easter Island stay!! Called Ahu Tongariki (marked with yellow arrow), there are 15 standing Moai of varying sizes, including the 86 ton Moai that is the largest ever erected on the island. Only one of the (2nd from the right) has a pukao. We all took turns taking silly pictures. Right after we got there, something stirred up the horses & 3 of them made a mad dash in front of the Ahu. I got a movie, have to figure out how to share that. The second picture shows the 3 on the right, but you can barely see them. One thing I haven't mentioned before is that they are always placed looking to the inside of the island. For a while folks said they used to look out to sea (remember all of them had been toppled by the time Europeans stepped onto the island), but they have since proved that wrong. Another thing is that they were not given eye sockets until they were raised. The eye sockets gave them the ability to "see" & gave them power. This Ahu was actually pushed into the interior by a huge tsunami in 1960 and was totally restored in the 1990's.



Although not our total group, we were only missing 3 folks, so got most of us! We walked around behind the Ahu just to get a different perspective & saw some spare heads & bodies that hadn't been put together. So this is a good time to point out that the Moai's were never intended to be permanently in position. When one king was replaced with another, they might topple the old king's Moai & put up a new one!



Continuing on, we saw one of the many herds of horses playing in a pond by the road. They sure seem happy & healthy! We made a short stop at Te Pita Kura (green arrow on the north side). It has 2 major sights, 1st, even though toppled & never reerected, this was the tallest Moai ever transported and erected on a stand. Didn't look very impressive after the other sites! Also, this grouping of stones is considered "the naval of the world." Legend has it that King Hotu Matua brought the big center rock with the first settlers around 450 AD (is that the same as 450 CE????). It is supposed to emit mana (spiritual power) to those you sit on the small rocks & place their hands on it. Of course we were not allowed to try it!! Sophie says it is magnetized & will make a compass go crazy when held over it.



Our last stop of the day was to Anakena (marked with orange arrow) – one of the only white sand beaches on the island. It has 2 Ahu's with 7 Moai's on one & one big one on the other.



I found this picture on the internet to give you an overview of the entire area. Only thing it doesn't show is all the people & the horses!



Most of the rest of the group went swimming. George & I found a picnic table & had a beer & watched the horses & chickens!! Although I managed to get photos with mostly scenery, there were really a lot of folks there, locals, not tourists! George got one of the real "beach scene." This is a favorite place to "hangout" and have a family picnic!



Our day ended with a relaxing Happy Hour, then dinner at the hotel! Wow! What a day! So far, I would highly recommend putting Easter Island on the bucket list – or if already there, moving it up a few notches!

Almost done!

Lost of love,

George & Pamela

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Pamela Hurd

From: Pamela Hurd <pam@gphurd.com>
Sent: Thursday, January 26, 2017 11:20 AM
To: pam@gphurd.com; gphurd@aol.com
Subject: South American Wilderness Adventure - Easter Island Day 3 #19

Hi Guys,

Hope you are enjoying Easter Island!!! It was amazing! Still can't believe I'm so far behind on my writing, but sure enjoying the review of everything we did! Like I'm getting to experience it all over again! So let's get to it!



I'll start again with the map to show you where we headed today!



After enjoying a beautiful sunrise & a lovely buffet breakfast, we headed to our first stop of the day's excursions – Vinapu (red arrow). This site was important due to the exquisitely carved & fitted stones of the Ahu. Reminders of

Machu Pichu in Peru. We were actually scheduled to have the morning off, but Nicole didn't believe in down time apparently!!!



Besides the wall of the Ahu, just the setting was interesting & there was another Moai to visit on the nearby hillside.



Next stop was the quarry of Puna Pua (marked with blue arrow). This is the quarry where the pukao (top knots) were made. There was a beautiful view of Hanga Roa down below. There were signs with explanations about the delivery of the top knots. It's generally assumed, but can't be proven that they were made round so that they could roll them to their destinations. And then it a further discussion on how they were placed on top. Some believe they were rolled on sand up to the top of the Moai after it was in place, while some believe it was strapped on the top of the Moai before it was raised to it's final position. Either way, it was a quite a miracle feat! Some were transported all the way across the island!!!



Next stop was Ahu Akivi (marked with yellow arrow). It is the only Ahu with the Moai facing the ocean. Supposed to represent the original explorers that came to the island & were looking off to their home island.



Back into the town of Hanga Roa, we made a stop at the local Roman Catholic church. I love the way the South American's combine their own religious beliefs with the Roman Catholic to make it their own. There were some beautiful wooden carvings that were obviously carved by the same hand. Sophie said he was a local that was unfortunately no longer living.



The outside was nicely landscaped, obvious that someone was caring for it on a regular basis. The locals were even enjoying an afternoon to play – but wait....that local looks strangely familiar, don't you think, Michele?



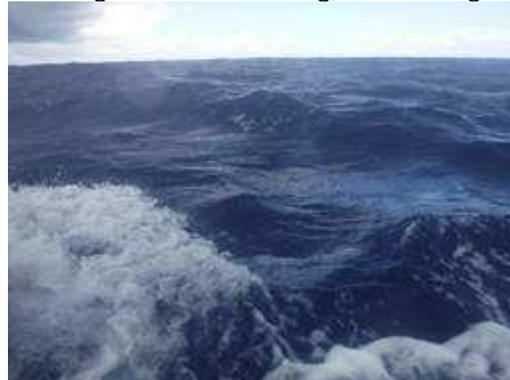
Then on to a coastal stop at Tahai Beach in Hanga Roa for a special included lunch. We'll be back here for our Sunset event this afternoon, so I'll get better pictures of the Moai then. But do note the eyes in this Moai. All originally had them, but the eye material has long since disappeared & this is the only one that we got to see with them. The local museum had more information & examples of that, but it never opened while we were there due to the Holidays.



This restaurant/banquet area has only been operating about a year – no building yet, just this covered tent (& was that really the stove/oven they fixed our lunch on?). The setting is gorgeous & we were lucky enough that the storm that seemed to be building off shore was still holding off! We were all impressed with the owner's headress until she admitted that they were silk flowers!! Oh well, still looked nice! Our lunch of empanadas (had a choice of a vege one – yea!!!) & tuna steak (oh well) was actually quite tasty! Had another version of the Pico sour – think this one was passion fruit or papaya?



We were supposed to have the afternoon off, but who needs free time, when you can take a boat ride out into the pending storm!!!! 6 of us and Nicole & Benjamin elected to take a closer look at the two islets, marked with a pale green arrow (remember from our first afternoon's tour of the Birdman Cult??). Enroute, we passed some of the remote caves in the cliffside where they had kept the virgins! If that thought isn't a bit chilling, I can't imagine what would be?????



So there's our goal to the front of the boat. The water was an unbelievable, almost purple color. Just amazing. We've been on lots of boats & in the water all over the world, but never seen water that color. Have no idea what causes it. The coming storm was giving us lots of chop, so we were enjoying quite a rodeo ride! I took 229 pictures while on the boat. I won't subject you to a full report including all of them – I'm already 3 weeks behind on this!!! But I'll try to get more of them posted on Shutterfly later on. Suffice it to say, this was a very enjoyable hour!!!



We got quite close to the cliffs of Moto Nui (the largest islet & where the competitors would have had to swim to & then somehow climbed the shiny smooth cliffs to get to the bird nests!!!!). The rocks glistened like glass & the water would shimmer down the sides of the rocks like tiny water falls. It was fabulous!!! On the way back, we took a detour to see the backs of the Moai where we had lunch. Gave us goose bumps to see them from the water! Also cruised by our hotel. You can get an idea of what a wonderful setting it's in! Before heading back to the dock, we watched a kayak paddling with purpose in the deep swells & floated closely by an anchored sail boat & a big tanker, but didn't see anyone on board.



We hadn't realized it when we were focusing on getting into the boat at the beginning, but our dock was the location where we'd stopped to see our first Moai on the afternoon of arrival. This time before we headed back to the hotel we circled around to get a glance at it's face & then to hear Nicole's history lesson on the horrid period of time when Easter Island was under the Chilean Military, just after it was annexed. Apparently the Chilean government had other things on

it's mind & let the military run amuck. It finally had to open it's eyes when several Rapa Nui's escaped to tell their tale of being imprisoned & starved by the military and the British company who had leased the island. There is no limit to evil people, world wide and throughout history!



After a very short turn around at the hotel, we headed back to Hanga Roa for our Sunset Appetizer Social Goodbye to Easter Island!!! First Sophie gave us a little more history about both the making of the National Park & pointing out the Rapa Nui boat launch harbor. We got another & closer look at the Moai with the EYES!! Can you imagine growing up on a small island with these imposing figures watching your every move? Especially if you believed in their psychic powers? Wow!



While we had been galivanting around, listening to Sophie, Nicole had been busy setting up a feast! She had promised us a Chilean wine tasting & she didn't disappoint. Here in this amazing unbelievable setting, she had assembled 5 special wines for us to taste, while munching on cheeses, crackers, & the always present empanadas! These were hot & fresh & I believe were the very best we had enjoyed! They were even a little greasy (and that's a good thing!!!)



We all were continually snapping pictures of the incredible sunset. AWESOME! How many people in the world have had this opportunity? We are soooooooooooooo lucky!



And we weren't even done yet!!!! Nicole had arranged to those who wanted (and of course we wouldn't miss anything!!! Not anything except sleep!) to attend a local dance exhibition! Thought it would be somewhat similar to the Polynesian dance shows that we have seen in Hawaii, Tahiti, & the Cook Islands. And it was similar in that they were dressed in native attire, but we had never had the opportunity to have our faces painted also!!!! Wow! Too cool! And then the dancers were amazing. Truly enjoyed it. Hard to get pictures, we were the last to arrive & my camera was not good at the low light & fast movements! George's did a bit better. The live band was exceptional! Really glad we elected to go!!



And the day finally comes to an end!!!! Our last full day on Easter Island! Tomorrow it's back to Santiago for an overnight & then back to reality!!! Keep on hanging in, just a bit more tale to tell!!!!

Lots of love,

George & Pamela

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Pamela Hurd

From: Pamela Hurd <pam@gphurd.com>
Sent: Saturday, January 28, 2017 2:52 PM
To: pam@gphurd.com; gphurd@aol.com
Subject: South American Wilderness Adventure - Easter Island back to Santiago #20

Good Morning Dear Friends & Family,

As I start to do this, my plan is for this to be the last report for this amazing vacation. Technically, we had nearly 3 days left, but with 2 long plane flights included, there's not a whole lot to truly interesting things to report!! So let's get this finished!!!



Our last morning on Easter Island, there was truly nothing scheduled. We were to load up on the bus about 1pm & our flight was to leave about 3pm. Sooooo, George & I elected to sleep through the buffet breakfast. Figured we could probably afford to miss a meal. We assumed (wrongly as it turned out) that we could eat lunch in the restaurant at the hotel. After our leisurely morning, we packed up, did a bag drag over to the office & found out that the hotel didn't start serving lunch until 1:30pm. A bit late for us!! Oh well! Decided we'd take a walk down to that service station where we'd stopped the first afternoon & just buy some snacks. Weather was looking a bit threatening, but the mile or so walk worked fine & gave us a few steps for the day! I didn't take a single picture during our walk, but it was just not too scenic with standard island vegetation & various dogs, chickens, & goats along the road to keep us company!



We hoofed it back to the hotel & found a quiet room off the restaurant to eat the rest of our unleavened crackers, some cheese, & to try the one beer that is actually brewed on the island (Googled it & it's considered the most remote Brewery in the world & the beer is brewed under a full moon using an ancient Paca recipe – humm – could be some exaggeration going on here). It was pretty good. I had tried the dark beer & after I felt a little buzz, I realized it had quite a strong alcoholic content. Oh well, they will not let me drive the bus or the plane anyway!



About the most exciting thing that happened while we were waiting to go to the airport was Connie spotting a tiny lizard in a flower pot. So that means we had seen both species of reptiles on the island! I think I had included the little skink looking lizard that we saw at the Moai quarry?



I snapped a few last pictures of the scenic hotel location & then we headed off to the airport.



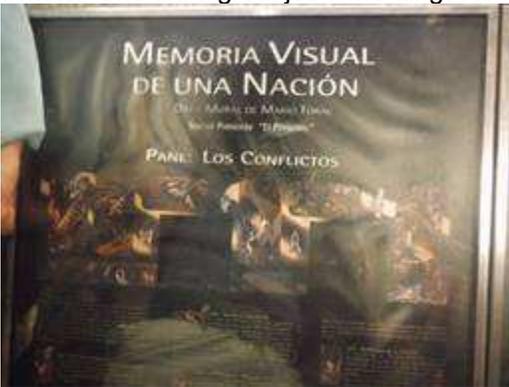
Several of our girls tried the local beer at the airport & then we were loading the Dream liner to head to Santiago. I think it's incredibly funny that we were loading the highly technical Dream Liner, walking out on the tarmac (note the highly secure fence around the runway – NOT) & climbing stairs. Got my last view of the island over laps to the window & this part of the adventure was already just a memory!! Wish I had gotten one last photo of a Moai, but was not to be!!!



Do you remember my complaint about the tiny dark room where we stayed on our night in Santiago prior to flying to Easter Island? Well, we weren't the only ones that had experienced that and although we had not complained to either Nicole or the hotel, others had & Nicole had insisted that we all get better treatment on this last overnight of our vacation!!! Soooooo.....take a look at this amazing suite we were given this time! Of course we didn't have long to enjoy it, we had gotten to the hotel about 10:30pm & after a couple of glasses of wine with our Condor buddies, we enjoyed the king size bed. We had to be checked out by 9am, but with that awesome shower, we did enjoy getting ready to face our last day! Thank you Nicole (& those that complained!!!)



Our last experience for this vacation was a walking tour of Santiago, capital of Chile. We walked from our hotel past a local shopping center to the subway. As our last learning & discovery experience, Nicole had Barb buy all our tickets! She did a great job & we all got to ride the train!!



We got off at the University of Chile's Metro station. Wow! This is a subway station!!! In 2011, Lonely Planet named it one of the subway stations worth getting off the train for and BBC named it one of the most beautiful stations in the world in 2014. The mural was painted by Mario Toral, a world renowned Chilean artist, born in Santiago. He completed the mural in 1999. The mural is a representation of the tumultuous history of Chile from it's violent Spanish conquest to present day.



From the subway, we walked on to Plaza de Armas, the central historic square. Had to get one last shot of John's socks!!! And got a kick out of the portable "kiosks" used by the Shoe shine guys in this busy business district!!! The day was glorious & the sky was a perfect blue to highlight the Chilean flag.



Like Central Squares the world over, there is the quintessential Political building, a Treasury building, and a Cathedral! This one is also listed as a UNESCO World Heritage Site.



And statues (is that Winston Churchill – Ha!!), both political & modern art. And folks selling paintings (all hand made of course – funny how so many look exactly alike), photo ops (who could resist a picture with an almost full sized stuffed burro???)



Nicole continued to fill our heads with info about the square being the central point from which all distances are calculated, showing how the city was laid out in distinctive squares along the river, & pointing out the Chilean crest (coat of arms). And a representative of a coin with the biggest volcano on it.



Before leaving the square we took note of a few unusual things – a local stand selling a “totally legal” cannabis energy drink (do we have that in the US yet???) & tables set up for the locals to play chess!! So do you need the Cannabis Energy drink to help with the chess games? We were just happy to be there enjoying the sunshine & the hustle & bustle.



The Mounted Police were more than happy to smile & pose for my camera & then John pointed out the interesting booties that the horses were wearing! How nice is that?



We stepped inside the Metropolitan Cathedral of Santiago to admire its architecture, completed in 1800. It truly was lovely.



We headed back towards our hotel on the Subway & stopped at Giratoria, a wonderful restaurant on the revolving 16th floor. This was the grand finale of our Wilderness Adventure!! The 360 degree view of Santiago was a fitting end to an incredible vacation!!! Although the view was a little blurry due to the fires in nearby Valparaiso, it was still magnificent!



While the meal (fish again!!! Ick) in my opinion was just okay (with a cup of espresso mud to finish it off!), taking pictures in the mirror overhead & hearing Lynn's poetic description of our 3 weeks together made it unforgettable! Great great fun! The only negative was that somehow, leaving the subway, Ben's cell phone was pick pocketed. Disappointing, but in a huge city with a population of 5,000,000 – not surprising! But the only incident in the entire vacation, so we were all lucky!!



Back at the hotel, we found that Nicole had arranged for us to have the use of our hotel room for the day while we rested in anticipation of the long flights back home. Nothing significant to report there, just napping & computer work. We all said our goodbyes to her as she headed home for a short break before she picked up her next group! Another OAT guide brought a bus to pick us up & we headed to the airport to go home. Got one last city view as we crossed the river. Couldn't resist snapping a photo of the "leg" statute over the river?



Our flight from Santiago to Dallas was on the Dream Liner again! Yea! And this time I had a window seat, so I got to play with the digital window shades! Cool! We landed in Dallas before sunrise & thought we were taking off for Phoenix with no problems, but the temperature had dropped & we had to be deiced before we took off. That was a new & different experience! Funny thing was that we were returning from a visit to the southern tip of South America, from hiking on glaciers!!! But there we had not had any freezing temperatures. Now here we are in Dallas having to be de-iced!! Anyway, eventually took off & had not problems. Landed to a beautifully clear sunny day in Phoenix. Ran all day trying to get unpacked & ready to go & even made it to the evening dance that Bill & Carol Goss were running for us! Felt nice to be back to the US with friends in our dance world!!

So this is the official end to our South American Wilderness Adventure! After we finish the the winter & spring here in Mesa, we're off to cruise the South Atlantic to Europe, teach in Germany, & visit Berlin & Northern Germany! You can anticipate a report about that in April!!! In the meantime, stay happy, healthy, & enjoy this wonderful New Year of 2017!!!

Lots of love,

George & Pamela

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