



## Sample Patagonia's Remarkable Terrain During A South American Cruise

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By [Kühl Editor](#) on August 27, 2018

I stood next to the railing of our rear facing cruise ship balcony as we headed south along the Argentinian coastline. The moon shimmered across the wake of the boat as I recalled my experiences in Buenos Aires, Montevideo, and Punta Del Este and thought about the land and sea adventure that awaited me.

While in port, I would sample segments of Patagonia's vast wilderness in both Argentina and Chile and

eventually disembark in Valparaiso, Chile. At sea, I could retreat to my oversized balcony for a panoramic view of Cape Horn, the Darwin Glacier Fields, the Strait of Magellan, and the Chilean Fjords.

## Puerto Madryn, Argentina

Since Magellanic penguins can be found along the southern coast of Argentina and Chile and on neighboring islands from September to March, I chose the El Pedral Lodge shore excursion. It offered an intimate encounter with this threatened species that was first discovered by the 16th century explorer, Ferdinand Magellan.

Unlike other locations where busloads of visitors flock, our tour was limited to sixteen. From our van, our group walked along a path leading to the coast. I stopped frequently to admire the penguin parents who were taking care of their new offspring. If anyone came too close, the penguins' heads would move from side to side with increased intensity. We were instructed to respect the penguins' territory and to slowly move away.



*Magellanic parents protect their offspring, Puerto Madryn, Argentina*

On the rocky beach, the penguins waddled in groups and then frolicked in the water. Other penguins loved congregating together; some rested while others stood erect. When our allotted time had come to an end, it was hard to leave these intriguing penguins.

## Cape Horn, Chile

I had another day and a half at sea before I reached Cape Horn. I bundled up. The outdoor temperature dropped

approximately ten degrees every twelve hours. The ship swayed as it responded to rougher waters and brisker winds. The balcony furniture slid across our deck in unison with the rocking boat. Mother Nature had a distinct advantage over the ship's stabilizers and modern technology.

I entered a part of the world where it's common to have 278 days of precipitation. The captain reported fifteen foot swells and 70 mph winds. By the time the ship reached Cape Horn, the ship was less than 500 miles north of Antarctica and at the northern boundary of the Drake Passage.

The captain skillfully maneuvered the ship around the Isla Hornos a few times so that everyone could take pictures of this modest landmark that has a handful of buildings, a lighthouse, and an albatross sculpture that memorializes the individuals who died trying to "Round the Horn."

## Ushuaia, Argentina

The next morning calm waters and a multicolored sunrise had replaced the overcast, gloomy skies and tumultuous sea. While I was sleeping, the ship had anchored at Ushuaia, also known as "the end of the world." This southernmost city in the world is the capital of the province of Tierra del Fuego. In retrospect, I wish the itinerary allowed for more time to explore this region. My full-day shore excursion offered only a tiny sampling of some of Ushuaia's treasures. I felt rushed at each place.

### Parque Nacional Tierra del Fuego

I trekked on a small portion of the 5-mile path labeled Senda Costera (Costera Trail) at Ensenada Zaratiegui. The root covered trail entered a deciduous beech forest that was adjacent to the shoreline and was estimated to take three hours to complete.

At the Centro de Visitantes Alakush (Visitor Center), my fellow travelers stopped for a snack and meandered through a tiny museum that catered to a Spanish speaking audience. I wandered on a trail where I took photos of the majestic lake framed by mountain ranges. The tour made another brief stop at Lago Acigami before heading to the wood planked dock to board our Beagle Channel boat at Puerto Arias.



*View from Alakush Visitor Center, Ushuaia, Argentina*

## **Beagle Channel Excursion**

The high point of the day was the Beagle Channel excursion. The captain steered the boat toward popular wildlife habitats where seals sunbathed on rocks. Birds were plentiful, and a lighthouse made a noteworthy appearance. The jagged mountains with snowy peaks added another layer to this photo opportunity.



*Beagle Channel wildlife, Ushuaia, Argentina*

By the time I returned to port, my toes and hands were icy cold. I wasn't prepared for the unrelenting wind that negated the warming effects of the bright sunshine or the storm clouds that loomed overhead near the end of the adventure.

## Cordillera Darwin

Soon after sailing away from Ushuaia, the cruise ship passed by seven glacier fields that are referred to as Cordillera Darwin (Darwin's Glacier Fields).



*Darwin Glacier*

## Punta Arenas, Chile

In the morning, I explored historical sites near the port. Later on, I joined an afternoon hike in the Reserva Nacional Magallanes. Our tour guide took us to the Sendero de Chile Sector Las Minas, a 2.2-kilometer trail. I was protected from the elements on the muddy path lined with silver and white barked trees splattered with forest green moss. Near the apex, I entered a meadow. A short distance further at Mirador Zapador Austral, I had a panoramic view of the entrance to the Strait of Magellan and a distant view of our ship.



## Strait of Magellan and Chilean Fjords

During two consecutive sea days, I sailed through a portion of the Strait of Magellan and on the next day through the Chilean Fjords. The captain navigated the cruise ship through a series of narrow passageways that resembled a complex maze filled with islands. Low clouds, a steady mist, and a rainbow created a mystical effect.

Even though it was a tad chilly, I ate on my cabin's balcony and read a book while periodically admiring Mother Nature's wonders.

## Puerto Montt, Chile

After two days of eating and relaxing, I explored another part of Patagonia. The Sendero Laguna Verde in the Parque Nacional Vicente Perez Rosales was merely an emerald green pond surrounded by lush vegetation while the Sendero El Solitario was an actual hike on a 6-kilometer trail. Unlike the path in Punta Arenas that ultimately reached a peak, this terrain was slightly rolling. The volcanic ash trail increased the difficulty level since the sand-like surface is more challenging than compacted soil.

At one point our guide appeared perplexed. A recent heavy rainstorm had created an extremely deep gully. There was no way to avoid the mini canyon. Everyone had to traverse down the steep sides, walk in the muddy flat area, and then climb up a steep embankment.



*Heavy rain created a gully on the Sendero El Solitario trail, Puerto Montt, Chile*

Part of the thrill of hiking in an unknown region is encountering natural phenomena. Had I visited this region before the storm, I would have had a totally different experience. Since the hike's detour had taken extra time, the stop at the waterfalls at Sector Saltos Del Rio Petrohue was abbreviated. I scampered to the waterfall, but didn't have time to explore any of the nearby trails.





*Petrohue Waterfall, Puerto Montt, Chile*

## Valparaiso/Santiago, Chile

After 14 days aboard the Celebrity Infinity, I disembarked in Valparaiso. I left South America with a love of being with animals in their natural habitat, an appreciation for the early explorers who navigated without the advantages of modern technology, and the desire to plan a future land trip that spends more time exploring Patagonia's varied ecosystems and terrain.

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When Sandy Bornstein isn't trekking in Colorado or writing, she's [traveling with her husband Ira](#). After living as an international teacher in Bangalore, India, Sandy published an award-winning book, [May This Be the Best Year of Your Life](#), as a resource for people contemplating an expat lifestyle and living outside their comfort zone. Among other things, Sandy writes about family, intergenerational, and active midlife adventures highlighting land and water experiences. All photos by [The Traveling Bornsteins](#).