

Hello!

I am about to start the next major section of my trip as I take a big jump flying from Lima, Peru to Santiago, Chile this Thursday (Jan 11th) to make my way down to Patagonia.

I have spent the last 12 weeks heading south from Panama City to Lima and it's been an incredible time.

For clarity I have been traveling thus far with a friend I've known since high school named Ethan so whenever I say 'we' that is usually who I'm referring to.

Prologue & Panama

Before starting this trip I had almost nothing planned--only the end-goal of hopefully finding work down in South America or something that would give me inspiration for a future career or potentially more schooling. I also had my experience in Asia two years ago to use as inspiration for what I wanted to accomplish from a backpacker's viewpoint: meeting really cool people, seeing incredible places, and now, practicing my Spanish after years of neglect. With those ideas in mind, I embarked with few expectations leaving a lot of room for new impressions. Unfortunately, my first few weeks consisted of me finding myself unable to separate from the experiences I had backpacking in Asia. I couldn't help but compare everything I was doing now to what I had experienced then which led to a sort of disappointment but also just a strange lack of excitement.

That feeling lasted briefly but Panama and Medellín, Colombia encompassed much of it. Panama City was an interesting way to dive into the journey. The city itself wasn't especially beautiful or nice, has many neighborhoods that are still developing and a coastline that is a bit odd and somewhat polluted. The city is relatively flat (it has hills but not huge ones like what I would be seeing in the Andes) and the skyline is covered in high rises. There is an old colonial part of town which is quite beautiful, but has a stretch of highway that circumnavigates it as an elevated roadway above the water.

A major difference from Asia that I noticed was that our hostel had to be secured by a high concrete wall with an electric barrier on top. Every time we wanted to enter or exit we had to be buzzed in or out which was in stark contrast to the hostels throughout Southeast Asia. A strange, not very welcoming way to begin.

Ethan and I spent 5 days in Panama City with a day trip to the canal. We had originally planned on taking a 5 day boat trip that goes from Panama to Cartagena, Colombia via the San Blas islands--a string of picturesque Caribbean white sand islands which we would stay on each night of the trip. We ended up not doing this luxurious voyage because that alone would have cost us \$550 each. Instead we decided to find other ways to Colombia but learned that there is no land route to cross the border as the two countries are divided by an intense jungle that is both dangerous by nature and filled with illegal activities.

We begrudgingly bought plane tickets to Medellín, Colombia and began what felt like was the true start to our trip.

Colombia

Medellín and Bogotá

First off, Colombia is awesome. Colombia as a country and Medellín specifically have a pretty bad drug trafficking reputation from the 80s and 90s. On top of that their government has been full of corruption since then and is somewhat still corrupted (from what I've heard). This has led to the very bad image that has kept the country from being a popular tourist destination until recently. Before traveling I had heard from friends and knowledgeable travelers that Colombia has changed and become a haven for backpackers and tourists alike with a cheap cost of living, beautiful nature and cityscapes, and friendly people.

Back in the 90s Medellín was supposedly the most dangerous city in the world, with murders happening all over town on an extremely regular basis. The city has since gotten a grip on such intense crimes and has flourished into an incredibly fun and safe place to visit. How the government managed to positively change things so effectively is still somewhat of a mystery to me.

This city was very clean and organized and efficient, an extreme juxtaposition from Panama City (I don't mean to sound so harsh on Panama City...it was just, different). It was also high up in the Andes which means that unlike the tropical environment of Panama City, I was pleasantly treated to a nice dry and cool (sometimes rainy) climate with temperatures in the day usually in the 70s and night temperatures in the 50s or 60s. This also meant the landscape was awesome. Huge mountains all around leaving the city of 2.4 million covering the valley floor and the mountain sides as well. Because there were neighborhoods up along the mountains the public transit metro system had gondola cable car lines that could take you high above downtown for no extra cost of riding the metro train (Medellín and Panama City were actually the only two cities I've been to that have a subway/light rail transit system which I still find strange). These mountainous neighborhoods also meant that at night you could see twinkling lights high up all around you. Really, really neat.

After enjoying the cleanliness and friendliness of Medellín for about a week, Ethan and I did a quick weekend trip two hours away to a gorgeous lakeside town called Guatapé. This town was a colorful (each building had a brightly painted, different colored facade) vacation town for locals and tourists alike. We considered this our weekend getaway to relieve all the stress of the city (because we have been living such stressful lives). It was here that we met an extremely energetic, boisterous, and friendly Coloradan named Ned. I didn't know it yet but Ned was to be my travel partner for Patagonia months down the road.

From there Ethan, Ned, and I took a mountainous bus ride to Bogotá-- the 8 million person capital of Colombia. The scenery and climate was much like Medellín but with big mountains on

just one side, and urban sprawl for miles on the other. This city was also higher at an altitude of about 8000 feet.

Bogotá was also an extremely fun city. Ned introduced us to a Colombian friend he had met earlier in his travels--a woman named Estephanía who would later provide us with housing and local entertainment at the cost of speaking only Spanish. In Bogotá we also met up with a fellow Oregonian that Ethan and I knew from high school, Maura. She had been living there since July and also had some local connections in town who helped show us the fun things to do. Between her friends and Estephanía, we all spoke a ton of Spanish and felt as though each of us were improving greatly. Some of the most fun I've ever had was spent sitting around a table at a bar drinking beer and figuring out how to say things in Spanish (some of these new friends didn't speak any English which added to the challenge). Another quick note, it was also here in Bogotá where Ethan met a French girl who he would later buy a plane ticket to France to somewhat romantically pursue (really entertaining story but not quite on topic here).

In total we spent almost 2.5 weeks in Bogotá. We even left and came back after visiting a relaxing small town called Villa de Leyva (home to the most complete plesiosaur (big aquatic dinosaur) fossil in the world). Bogotá itself was neat (and full of incredible museums), but it was really all of the friends we met there that kept us from leaving. During our few nights in Villa de Leyva, we met a woman named Natalia who kindly invited Ethan and I (and later, Maura) into her home in a city south of Bogotá named Ibagué. It was during this interaction that we made plans to have an American Thanksgiving dinner there. I must point out at this point that we have actually been really loving the South American cuisine. Huge plates of rice and beans or lentils with a big cut of meat, a few veggies (or a delicious plantain), a bowl of awesome soup, and usually a fresh juice for only a few dollars. For whatever reason having this almost identical meal everyday has not gotten old, but an American Thanksgiving would be a really nice treat.

Thanksgiving and smaller destinations

We had since split up with Ned who was off pursuing other attractions around the area and Ethan and I convinced Maura to join us 5 hours south for this extravagant Thanksgiving dinner we were going to prepare. Ethan is an incredible chef who loves cooking and also all of the cliché traditions of Thanksgiving. He took charge and spent the holiday cooking a giant stuffed chicken (we couldn't find a turkey in Ibagué), gravy, stuffing, apple pie, pumpkin (squash) pie, cranberry sauce substitute made from local tart fruits, and mashed potatoes while Maura and I made eggnog. The most amazing thing was that he did all of this without a working oven and instead cooked both the pies in a toaster oven, and the chicken on an electric skillet covered in tin foil. And of course, we did all of this while watching the Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade and, more importantly, American football games.

The Thanksgiving feast was topped off with some local empanadas cooked by Natalia as well as a ratatouille dish and crème brûlée cooked by a new French friend, Alberic. We were joined by Natalia's son, brother, and brother's friends to help us consume the mountain of food.

Unfortunately, due to the technical defects of the electric skillet, the food wasn't actually ready until after 8pm.

After Thanksgiving Ethan and I continued our way south. Maura went back to Bogotá while we went to the Utah-esque redrock Tatacoa desert, the town of San Agustín situated next to an incredible archaeological site (also where I would make the decision to shave my beard and continue my travels with a mustache), and Mocoa, a town on the edge of the jungle where we hiked to a beautiful waterfall oasis.

Ecuador

Quito and Cotopaxi

At this point in the trip we were finally leaving Colombia and made our way to Quito, the 2.7 million person, 9,300ft capital city of Ecuador. Another beautiful mountainous city littered with Spanish colonial architecture. We coincidentally got there right in time to celebrate what is essentially "Quito Day"--a day to commemorate the founding of the city by the Spanish (celebrations included drinking publicly in crowded streets and walking between free concerts that were set up in park blocks). The city was also filled with wonderful markets where I found myself splurging on new wardrobes.

Meanwhile since Bogotá, I had stayed in contact with Ned who was working his way south at a different pace than us. We had planned on meeting up again in Quito but his plans changed and that wasn't going to work out. He and I however had talked about going to Patagonia together and it was here that I bought plane tickets for both of us to fly down there the second week of January. Extremely excited to have made a concrete plan for once--and the fact that I would have an energetic and friendly travel partner for Patagonia.

This city lies just south of the equator line and it was from here that we went on a day trip to see the equator monument. Seeing the equator was cool but, as we learned, the equator "line" is actually 5km wide and the exact center wasn't as scientifically significant as we had previously thought (feel free to google equator science tests if you would like to read the debate between facts and myths taking place at the tourist trap).

What I found more incredible was the day following the equator, when we partially summited an enormous volcano that looms near Quito named Cotopaxi. Cotopaxi is a 19,347 foot active volcano that can be summited by experienced climbers with actual mountaineering gear. We did not meet that criteria. However, we had heard from a friend at the hostel that you could cheaply take a bus south of the city and then hop in a pickup truck on the side of the road and a man would guide you up the mountain as high as you could go without gear. Ethan, three other friends from the hostel, and I did just that and it was amazing. For much of the approach to the mountain it was cloudy and we couldn't actually see the monstrosity that was beside us. As we rounded it, the wind managed to blow the clouds away and we caught glimpses of what we were facing.

The truck drove us as high as it could and then we hiked up this path of rocky switchbacks taking stops every five minutes to catch our breath. After maybe 45 minutes to an hour we reached the base camp where the experienced climbers would begin their climb to the summit. We continued on for another 20 minutes to our destination at the bottom of the glacier which was at about 16,400ft. During the hike I found myself very short of breath and if I didn't stop to breathe I could start to see glittering stars in my vision. It didn't affect me much, as soon as I took a few deep breaths I felt fine but apparently Ethan struggled with this more.

The entire hike we found ourselves on and off in the clouds, with wind blowing them over us and across the huge mountain. As we reached our destination the clouds all suddenly parted and we got a sunny and incredible view of the summit and the vast valley below. It was surreal. The five of us and our guide relished the moment and we toasted it with some beers that we carried with us (which is very much against altitude sickness protocol). After soaking in the magical moment Ethan and I belted out the 1980s classic "Africa" by Toto as we descended and I felt an overwhelming sense of fulfillment and joy.

Ecuadorian Coast

After Quito, Ethan and I had plans to finally make it to the coast. It had been nearly two months and the only ocean we had seen thus far was the somewhat bleak coastline in Panama City. We were both very much enjoying the mountains and cool weather but Ethan had been nagging me to get to the beach so he could "lay on the beach and drink a beer", a goal of his he had had for his birthday in early November which we had now missed by over a month.

At a recommendation from his sister, Ethan and I went to a small beach town called Canoa. Nothing incredible here, just an extremely relaxing, quiet coastal town. (I also want to mention that within two days we went from 16,000ft to sea level. This part of the world is wacky.) We spent a few days there that consisted mostly of sitting on the beach and reading books. Not many other backpackers there but we saw the occasional one walking the streets and met a few others in our hostel.

From there we hopped on a bus to drive us south along the coast to Montañita, a much more popular coastal tourist destination. This town is somewhat of a party town and has that depressing reality of western travelers who come here to drink heavily and make fools of themselves, all while the locals put up with it in order to make money--and while any culture that may have been there is destroyed.

All depressing themes aside it was actually a really nice, clean, and pleasant beach town. Yes, I did partake in some alcohol consumption, and yes part of me feels guilty for supporting that awful aforementioned stereotype--but apart from my water bottle getting stolen, I did have some of the best nights of my life. Not because of alcohol or partying, but because Ethan found himself at a bar with a man working there who had a bunch of spare instruments lying around, including a drumset. I had previously been complaining to Ethan how much I was dying to play the drums as of late (a hobby, for those of you who don't know, that has gotten much more

serious in my previous years while living in Denver) and he came running to me one night telling me about this drumset that I could play. Long story short I spent the next three nights at this beach town jamming on the drums with some random guitarists on a makeshift stage at a bar on the beach. One guitarist in particular was unbelievably skilled and could shred through covers of all sorts of classic rock including a moment of pure ecstasy for me playing with him while he killed it on *Sympathy for the Devil*. (P.S. I got stung by a jellyfish while swimming in the ocean here, those really hurt.)

Guayaquil and Cuenca

Ethan and I had an extremely important deadline to meet which forced us to leave the lovely Montañita to get to Guayaquil-- Star Wars. Ethan is a huge Star Wars fan and I myself do really enjoy the series through all of its faults. We had been planning for weeks now where we were going to be that would have a movie theater in which we could see the release of the new Star Wars movie, and that would have it in english. We left the beautiful beach town to go to the Panama-City-esque port city of Guayaquil--the largest city in Ecuador in order to see what turned out to be an extremely disappointing Star Wars movie. Guayaquil was also nothing special. A big city with minimal attractions and very few backpackers. We spent two nights there and then worked our way south again to the city of Cuenca.

Cuenca was back up in the mountains (it was really weird doing all this back and forth between sea level and 10,000ft) and was a much smaller city than the ones we were used to (only about 400,000 people). It was also home to a big university which gave it a college town feeling. It was a neat city with more colonial architecture, an archeological history, big churches and huge amounts of Christmas decorations (it was less than a week to Christmas). A very beautiful town to walk around but we had a plan to make it back to the coast for Christmas so spent only two nights there. I plan on heading back through Cuenca much later in my trip on my return.

Peru

Máncora and Chiclayo

In Cuenca Ethan and I met a lot of cool people at our hostel including some really funny guys we had met way back in Guatapé. All of them were headed south to the Peruvian coastal city of Máncora--which was apparently the place to be for Christmas. We found ourselves on a night bus (something that I had been told to be quite careful of theft on) and had a two and a half hour border crossing at 1:30 am.

We made it to Máncora at around 5:30 am and checked into our hostel. This town and coastline was much different than what we had seen in Ecuador. The landscape was dry and dead like a desert in contrast to Ecuador's coastline which was much greener. The town was more sprawling and less of a 'cute touristy town' with more development and to-be developed lots. Still, after getting some sleep I found plenty of people there to make the time enjoyable. Our hostel and other hostels reeked of the 'party backpacker' scene with activities centered on drinking and drinking with some extra drinking on the side. Ethan and I had been doing a really good job of not drinking everywhere we went. He doesn't drink very much and I was loving how

much money I saved by not drinking as well. We did, however, find ourselves drinking here which did prove to be quite fun.

We enjoyed Christmas here with all of the friends we had made and then decided to keep working our way south. It was pretty odd being on a tropical beach and away from family for Christmas this year. I definitely felt a bit homesick, wishing I could take a few days to spend the holiday with the family and then just as easily resume my travels. All things considered I have been very fortunate to be able to travel like this so I really can't complain.

A quick update on other things--the food in South America has stayed relatively delicious, still consisting of the same main ingredients we've seen elsewhere (except for the coastal food which has been an awesome diet of extremely fresh fish and ceviche (raw fish served as a watery veggie dish--really, really good)). Also things are still relatively cheap. Big cities and party towns tend to have more expensive food and accommodations (hostels for ~\$10 a night, cheapest meals for \$3-5) but smaller towns we can find a bed for \$5 a night and meals for \$1.50.

It was now nearing the new year and I was back in contact with Ned who wanted to meet up with Ethan and I for new years. We decided Lima would be a fun city in which to celebrate 2018 and we had met others who were planning to do the same. However, the bus ride from Máncora to Lima was supposedly 22 hours long and we needed a way to break it up.

Ethan and I found a bus to Chiclayo which was about 7 hours south from where we were and would only be another 12-14 hours from there to Lima. We stayed a night in this town we had heard nothing about but discovered that it was home to many incredible archaeological museums from the pre-Incan civilizations that used to occupy this land. We made a day of that and hopped on our night bus to Lima.

Lima

Lima is a big city. It didn't feel like it, but according to Wikipedia it has a 'city proper' population of over 9 million making it the third biggest 'city proper' (not including metro area) city in all of the Americas behind Sao Paulo and Mexico City. That fact alone was wild to me. I know metro size really helps determine the feel of a city but still, it blew my mind.

Anyway, Ethan and I made it to our hostel and spent the morning discovering how expensive it would be to eat and stay here. That's always a bummer. The city itself is a coastal city but I was surprised by how pleasantly temperate the climate was. This city had also been described to us as a city that is "literally falling into the ocean" as the city's skyscrapers back right up to these cliffs that are overlooking the ocean and you can see how it's being eaten away. It will be interesting to see what happens to Lima in the coming decades.

Our neighborhood was definitely the fancy one. We were surrounded by extremely expensive houses and fancy apartment buildings, nice looking high-rises and expensive restaurants. There

was even an outdoor mall literally built into the cliffs, overlooking the ocean. This is definitely a city filled with successful, high class people. Apart from the bus ride approach into the city, we hadn't really seen many other neighborhoods. The outskirts did look more like a developing community filled with dirt roads and poor construction so I'm sure the city has all of the same faults as any other big city. The city center was very European, just like the other big cities we had seen thus far. It is a city that I'm sure could warrant weeks of exploration.

Ethan and I didn't do much of that. We spent the first few days exploring areas within walking distance from the hostel. Really we were just killing time waiting for Ned to show up, who at this point we hadn't seen since early November. Right before Ned made it into town I met an awesome Californian named Steve who had just begun his trip. He and I had a really great conversation about life and traveling. He reassured me that this trip is a great way to find inspiration for whatever it is that I want to do (he had found such inspiration traveling in Southeast Asia and after seeing the number of amputees from landmines he felt inspired to go to grad school in developing new technology for prosthetic limbs).

Shortly thereafter Ned showed up and our reunion was accomplished. Ned, Ethan, Steve, and I wandered around and got along great. The next few days were spent enjoying Lima with this crew and others here and there. New Year's itself was fantastic. Ethan cooked up an incredible carbonara in the hostel kitchen and we shared it with a large group. At midnight we all stood on the cliff tops and watched as thousands of fireworks spanned the entire shoreline. What a remarkable setting.

Huaraz and the Santa Cruz Trek

At this point Ned and I had 11 days to kill before flying out of Lima to Santiago, Chile. I have left Ethan's plans largely out of the story thus far but he had previously decided after much deliberation that he wanted to see Europe. He has never been and throughout this trip has been so fascinated by the European colonial architecture that I know he would absolutely have the time of his life exploring where it came from. On top of that, he fell in love with a French girl in Bogotá who has stated she would love for him to visit France--and he has a handful of other friends there to visit as well. Long story short Ethan has a flight out of Lima also but is instead headed to Paris on January 22nd.

The three of us needed to figure out what to do and didn't want to spend all that time just sitting around spending unnecessary money in Lima. A fellow backpacker we had met back in Máncora had told us about this awesome relatively cheap 4-day backpacking trek you could do in the Peruvian mountains near a town called Huaraz. Ned, Ethan and I booked an 8 hour bus to this town and found ourselves signing up for the biggest adventure on our trip thus far.

We weren't totally sure that we were going to commit to this trek yet, Ethan and I didn't have real camping gear and there were plenty of other cool day hikes to do around the area. While researching this trek though, we managed to get roped in by a local who really sold it to us. It sounded incredible. He was able to provide Ethan and I with tent, sleeping bag, and pad rentals

for a reasonable price and said we could easily take public transportation to where the trek began. Before we knew it it was 5pm and we were to wake up in 12 hours to go on this 4 day adventure. Ned and I were extremely pumped. This was like a practice round for whatever trekking we may be doing in Patagonia.

We frantically scrambled through town with this man to find our rental gear. Then Ethan, Ned, and I bought all the food we would need and I even bought some knock-off brand hiking shoes as my running shoes weren't going to cut it. We spent the remainder of that night packing and orchestrating with our hostel to store our excess things with them.

The following morning we woke up and were well on our way. We took the local van transportations referred to as 'combi's' or 'colectivos' and wove up the mountain passes through these incredible glaciers. We met some fellow backpackers, a Canadian named Andy who was to join us the whole trek, and a French-German couple who we would see sporadically on the trail. Ethan explained on the van ride that what we were seeing were glacial 'U-shaped' valleys caused by the movement of glaciers sweeping through the area--much different than the standard 'V-shaped' river valleys more commonly seen in places like the Grand Canyon for example. Just the van ride up was unbelievable.

Apparently, we were doing this trek in the rainy season so it was to be significantly less crowded with a distinct possibility of getting rained out and not seeing the mountain views. We passed by many mountains, some of which couldn't be seen but occasionally were lucky enough to catch glimpses of the 20,000ft monstrosities. What I didn't realize was that I was about to face two of my least pleasant experiences in recent memory all while being surrounded by breathtaking beauty and nature.

The first day of trekking was great. We climbed up some hills and through these beautiful glacial meadows with enormous mountains on either side. It wasn't too long of a hike and I'm not sure what altitude we started at but we set up camp that night at around 3900m which is nearly 12,800ft. I felt great that entire day not a problem carrying all of my stuff and the altitude felt fine. After setting up camp it rained that night but was sunny the next day. Our tent was wet but we figured as long as it only rained at night it wouldn't be too bad. The second day was to be the hardest day--the day that we hiked to the apex of our climb before heading back down into more glacial valleys. We were to have an elevation gain of 900m bringing us to our highest point at 4800m (about 15,700ft) but I figured it was still lower than Cotopaxi so I should be fine.

I was wrong. I hadn't spent enough time acclimating to the altitude coming up from sea level in Lima to Huaraz in the mountains. Every step I took uphill made me feel noxious and woozy. Each minute I would stop and catch my breath, oftentimes having to support myself on a rock. It was miserable. I had never felt so defeated. Normally, including day 1, when I hike I can usually just put my legs on autopilot and go forever. This was different and Ned and Andy were happily trekking right along while Ethan was keeping me company in the back as I took my sweet time. I kept thinking that once I took a break I could start up and go for a little while but immediately

after resting I would feel it again and think that I needed to stop. To make things worse I would look up and ahead and see what I was facing! It was so insane! I had to make it to the top of this crazy steep rocky pass bordered by extreme landscapes on every side. I knew there was absolutely no other option but going ahead and still felt impossible. It was miserable. I was so unhappy.

Lucky for me my friends were extremely supportive and helped me through it as much as they could. After at least 4 hours of near-death uphill battling we made it to Punta Union, the 4800m pass and had the most amazing and rewarding view of the Lord-of-the-Rings-esque valley below that we were to hike through. From that point on I felt fine and the rest of the hiking was no problem.

Day three brought a new adventure. We hiked from our extremely scenic camping spot up to an optional side-path to see a beautiful glacial lake. This lake was bordered by some incredible ~5700m mountains, one of which is supposedly the mountain that is used by Paramount Pictures in their iconic ring of stars opening sequence. Unfortunately, the clouds didn't let us see much of the mountain itself but the area was still spectacular and my altitude sickness was no longer affecting me. Ned and Andy jumped in the freezing glacial water and then we were on our way. The sun came out and things were looking up. Little did we know rain was on the horizon and it was not going to go away.

We descended from our the top of one of these U-shaped valleys into the riverbed meadow below which was a really, really unbelievable experience but we did so in the rain. My rain jacket is a knock-off North Face I bought in Vietnam and therefore was not very waterproof. My backpacking backpack is one I've had since I started Boyscouts nearly 15 years ago and does not have a rain cover. My pants are hiking pants and breath well but are not waterproof. And my shoes I just bought and were decent... We were wet. All of us. The others had better gear and weren't as wet as me. Their backpacks stayed dry but mine almost completely soaked through. We spent at least four more hours hiking another 20km in the steady rain and were so wet and cold and tired and all we had to look forward to was a wet campsite with no fire and no shelter except for our still wet tents from the previous nights and what I was to discover would be a damp sleeping bag (not to mention that this rental sleeping bag was already not super warm). It was miserable. Why would anyone voluntarily do something like this? It was an amazing and spectacular setting but getting to that campsite only to peel off my wet clothes to get into a wet sleeping bag in a wet tent in frigid mountain weather was not ideal.

I did somehow convince Ethan who still managed to cook dinner that night to bring me a bowl of hot lentil soup while I sat shivering in our wet tent watching Seinfeld on my phone. Things were looking up in the world.

Day 4 was nice. All I wanted was for the sun to shine and it did. It was also an easy hiking day on the way out of the mountains. It was either all entirely flat or downhill as we descended from

the massive U-shaped valleys to a greener river valley between waterfalls and eventually popping out between giant Arizona-like rock formations in a small mountain town.

We made it back to Huaraz and hung out all of our wet gear and relaxed. The trek was a big learning experience for me. I knew I had wanted to go and do trekking in Patagonia (one of the main attractions of the area) but I wasn't sure how serious I wanted to be and this Santa Cruz trek taught me my limitations. I may be in the market for some new gear as I work my way south.

What's ahead

Now I am waiting for my departure from Lima and am planning on spending the next few months in Southern Chile and Argentina enjoying the Patagonian summer while it lasts. My goal is to make it as far south as I can and then loop back up through Argentina somehow eventually making it up maybe to Uruguay or Brazil. Later, I will plan to go through Bolivia and revisiting the unseen parts of Peru and probably back through Ecuador and Colombia as flights home from there are much cheaper. (I even have this wacky dream of someday riding a cargoship to make it back home, that would be cool.)

From what I've heard Patagonia is extremely expensive and there is a distinct possibility that I will run out of money while down there. With that in mind I may find myself looking for volunteer opportunities that would allow me free shelter or food. I plan on sticking around this general region until late March when my mom and Glen plan to fly to Argentina and visit me (hopefully Charles will do the same?).

As far as more serious work goes I've met many people on my trip who have found jobs teaching english, either privately or to public school students. There are ways to find legitimate work which requires a visa I do not currently have, or I can easily find under the table teaching jobs as well. I have heard though that these don't pay very well and only help to offset expenses. Still, native English speakers are in high demand and if I would like to pursue this I'm sure that I could.

I have also met some other travelers who have told me about other work opportunities whether it be working on farms or in hostels for money. An Argentinean friend even told me her family runs a hostel and there is a chance she could find me work there. Another thought I have had fleeting in my mind would be to pursue Argentinian wineries as I have some winery experience from Oregon.

Long story short I still do not know what I would like to do. Maybe I'll find some awesome work and stay down here for a long time, or maybe I will run out of money and decide that I would like to rejoin the real world. Part of me is even jealous of Ethan going to Europe and wishes that I could work for enough money to continue my travels on another continent after South America. Either way I am excited to see everything that I can and meet more incredible people while

doing so. I hope everyone is doing well and I'm excited to see you all in the future, whenever that may be.

P.S. I have been uploading some pictures to facebook. I apologize for those of you who do not have a way to see them there. If I were a better person I would upload them elsewhere or even embed them in this novel I just wrote, but I'll be honest--I'm not going to do that. Maybe you can try and scroll through the photos while reading this and figure out which pictures correspond to which cities. I'll leave that challenge up to you, but feel free to ask me for clarification. If anyone wants to talk I can be called through WhatsApp using my real phone number! +1 541-225-7238!