

May 31st, 2018

As I write this I am sitting by a wood burning stove in a small house in a town of 500 people on the Chilean side of Patagonia. I am currently surrounded by fantastic snowy peaks although there is no actual snow in town. I've found that the mountains in Patagonia however incredible they are, aren't actually that tall and the town I'm in is only about 1000ft above sea level. Because the elevation and latitude (relative to the equator) are similar to Oregon, the climate here is much like a Northwest winter making me feel right at home.

This house that I am living in has converted it's main living space into a brewery that can brew up to 900 liters at a time--significantly bigger than any homebrewing I've ever done but still quite small for a brewery that actually bottles and sells its beer.

I'm currently a volunteer at this brewery in exchange for an incredibly cozy room and three meals a day (with the occasional beer). Right now I am the only volunteer for the month long span I've committed to which means it's just me and the extremely friendly couple who lives here and runs the brewery.

My duties so far are pretty simple, usually the more delicate work is left to Mario, the real brewmaster, while I do much of the busywork. Work including things like milling grains, weighing grains, cleaning fermenters, or labeling bottles etc. Some days there is no brew work that needs to be done and I'll be asked to help out with other things around the house such as stacking wood or helping with side projects.

The lifestyle here is one of tranquility and solitude. Apparently this town fills up with tourists in the summertime (many are regional tourists from Argentina or other parts of Chile) to pursue the numerous treks around Cerro Castillo (the "castle-like" mountain that looms over the town) or the hundreds of rock climbing routes that are a 20 minute walk (or a 5 minute drive) away. However, since it is wintertime things are much calmer. Almost everyday Mario and his partner Root are the only two people I interact with, and some days they have to head off to the nearest city, Coyhaique (a metropolis of 55,000 people that's about an hour and a half away) to buy supplies and run errands that this small town can't accommodate. This gives me a lot of alone time to sit by the fire, look out the window at the mountains, and read *Game of Thrones*. On sunny days (probably about half the time) I can go for incredibly beautiful walks just outside of

town, otherwise I spend much of my time inside staying warm. The internet here is fleeting so I can't rely on Netflix which is probably for the better.

I recently talked to my brother on the phone and was telling him about my current lifestyle to which he said, "I've always wanted to try something like that" which is exactly right. I've also always wanted to try living a life of extreme simplicity without the drama of unnecessary social interactions or the busyness and action of everyday life. Right now my biggest stresses are to make sure the wood stove is perpetually burning and that the dogs living outside don't get into any big fights. I've been telling myself I'd like to try this lifestyle but I don't think I could do it for more than a few months, of which I am currently only doing one. Knowing that it will come to an end it is incredibly nice to embrace it while I can.

All of that being said I've had a very action packed 4 or 5 months since my last update (see email from January) when I came down to the southern part of the continent. I've embarked on a lot of crazy and unplanned adventures, met a lot of really awesome people, reunited with family and friends from Oregon, and volunteered in three different places. Way too much stuff has happened since January for me to sum up even every major stop so I think I'm just going to paint a broader picture of the journey I've taken and where I plan to go in the near future. If you want to hear the more absurd and detailed recollections of my trip give me a call or come find me in person (might be easier than you think!) and I'll give you an extremely long-winded, unnecessarily over-detailed, drawn-out description of something that probably wasn't that exciting to begin with.

Update June 3rd: I wanted to add that on top of my other fun duties here at the brewery today I had the opportunity to go fill up empty kegs with glacial runoff creek water as the entire town is currently without running water. The last three days have been well below freezing at night (13F/-10C) with high's hovering around freezing and apparently the town's main water source is frozen meaning we have to fend for ourselves if we want water. Luckily, like much of the glacial water in Patagonia this can be drunk straight from the creek itself as it could be a few days before our main water source thaws. Hopefully we get running water again soon!

January

On the 11th I flew from Lima to Santiago, Chile with my friend Ned with plans to immediately head down to Patagonia to do trekking, camping, sightseeing, all via hitchhiking. Yet, upon arrival in Santiago I was blown away at how different of a world I had just entered, enticing me to stay. It felt so European and, crudely speaking, developed. Now, much of what I had seen in

bigger cities prior felt very developed as well--Bogotá, Quito, Lima, are all really nice, clean, beautiful cities with a lot to love, but Santiago just had a different air to it (also smog, which is a problem due to its geography). The feeling was that it actually *was* more European due to large amount of immigration that has made both Chile and Argentina what they are today. This heavy European influence is something you don't see much of in Colombia, Ecuador or Peru other than the Spanish colonial architecture. The downtown streets of Santiago looked European, the buildings looked European, the people looked European, and the food was more European. It seemed no longer possible to find little restaurants with cheap daily menus that consisted of meat and beans, rice and plantains, and fresh squeezed juice. Now the restaurants were fancy expensive places with cuisine you could (probably) find anywhere in the US or Europe--or fast food chains. (All of that said, Ned and I were staying in a very nice part of the city and as you depart from the downtown area it starts to look much more like the Latin America I had come to know and love.)

On top of that, Ned and I were now significantly farther south than we had been before and suddenly seasons actually meant something. Our first experience was a lively summer evening with people spilling out onto sidewalks and pedestrian streets with live music, dining, drinking and socializing well past sunset which was around 9:30 pm, instead of the 6 pm sunset I had gotten accustomed to in the more tropical countries.

So immediately I had this romanticized vision of Santiago thinking, "maybe I should just stay here for a while and find a place to volunteer and enjoy this European-esque summer time" instead of heading down to the wilderness backpacking life that would be Patagonia. It was just a fleeting thought and not one I was going to act on as Patagonia was what I came to see and I had this window of summer to get all the nature I needed out of my system.

So as we started to make our plans to head further south I got an email from a UPS (University of Puget Sound, my alma mater) professor telling me that a former student of his was currently living in Chile and working in a university biochem lab down there. He put me in contact with her and said I should go and check out the lab and meet up! So after only about a day in Santiago I already had a hitch in my plans. For me, currently looking for inspiration on what I would like to do with my life, I thought it would be a really cool chance to go and see what a university research lab in Chile looked like. I also wanted to know if that type of lab work was something I could see myself doing, and lastly I would love to meet a fellow UPS student and find out how someone with a similar background to me ended up working abroad in a lab directly related to their degree.

I talked to this UPS student, Tracy, on the phone and found out that the town she was living in was about a six hour bus ride north (although in the opposite direction from where I was headed) and I could get there very cheaply. I thought it stupid to turn down this opportunity so I told Ned I was going to take a quick detour, spend a week up in Coquimbo and then head back south to meet him wherever he would be by then.

So after only four days together in Chile, Ned and I split up and I headed north while he headed south. Fast forward a bit and I found myself making some awesome lifelong connections in Coquimbo. Tracy, who graduated only a year before me, ended up being extremely cool and fun to hang out with. Not to generalize everyone I went to college with, but she reminded me so much of the people I knew from UPS it felt so familiar befriending her. Seeing her lab was cool, it reminded me that I do enjoy lab work but is not something I am interested in doing right now. It was also cool to see how this would-have-been friend from college has made a life for herself on the other side of the world and helped me realize that with the motivation I could absolutely do the same. During the week I spent hanging out with Tracy I learned that her summer break was about to start and she was planning to head down to Patagonia for all of February! This was great! Now I could plan on seeing Patagonia with her and Ned!

Also while in Coquimbo I spent my first night in a hostel run by a man named Noler. That night I got to talking with him and as we hung out we had a blast. His family is Chilean but he was actually born in the US in San Francisco and speaks fluent English. He told me all about his ambitious endeavours trying to run this hostel as a hybrid community space as well. The hostel was a beautiful hilltop mansion complete with marble floors, domed ceilings, a swimming pool, and a spectacular view of the city and ocean below. He mentioned that the following week he had a single large family book up the entire hostel and he would need help running the place for just that week. I told him I would love to help out if it meant living in this beautiful house and having a relaxing vacation away from my vacation.

So that's what happened. I stayed in Coquimbo an extra week to help clean Noler's hostel and afterwards headed south to Patagonia. While I was at Noler's, Tracy had already gone south so I made plans to meet up with her somewhere along the way, as were my plans with Ned. For one of the first times on my trip I was actually going to be traveling alone until I found them. That unfortunately happened over my birthday which I spent with new but short-term hostel friends. I was however, in the beautifully colorful seaside city of Valparaíso where I spent my birthday lounging on the beach.

February

At the beginning of the month I headed truly south with plans to hitchhike through all of Patagonia once I got far enough south of Santiago. After a Taco Bell related bus fiasco in the Santiago bus station I ended up on a night bus that brought me closer to Patagonia. As I got further south in Chile I started to realize that the landscape was beginning to look more and more like the Pacific Northwest. The geography in southern Chile and the Andes mountains has the same rainshadow effect that is found in Oregon and Washington with the Cascade mountain range--a green, wet, and rainy western portion, followed by dry and arid to the east of the mountains (in this case, Argentina). On top of that, the fjord landscape featuring islands and ocean inlets looked very similar to the Puget Sound and British Columbia coastline. I was beginning to realize that I had traveled thousands of miles to go to a place that looked just like home.

I spent my first week hitchhiking alone without a sleeping bag or proper camping gear (I bought a very cheap tent in Santiago for emergencies only) and knew that any night I would have to be prepared to end up on the side of the road, as there were never any guarantees with hitchhiking. This was a scary thought for me. I spent a handful of days relatively stressed wondering how I would survive without a sleeping bag if necessary on the roadside in Patagonia.

To preface this part of the journey I had come to South America without my camping gear purposefully as it is a lot of extra stuff to bring and I knew I would only be camping for a small portion of my trip. My plan had been that whenever I went on big treks that I would just rent camping gear (which can be done very cheaply). I didn't realize or think about the fact that I would be hitchhiking and thus a new set of problems arose. On the brightside, I had been previously told by an American girl traveling solo that hitchhiking in Patagonia is extremely safe and reliable. Apparently it's really common and an awesome way to meet new and interesting people. This reassured me that I would have minimal roadside experiences and figured that if she found it safe then I should be just fine.

So when I started this leg of the trip I crossed my fingers and hoped that wherever I ended up after each day of hitchhiking it would be somewhere relatively hospitable. And it more or less did! I got the hang of meeting highway strangers pretty quickly and had some of my best experiences that way. Some rides would be long ones that would drive me for hours and some would just be short ones. There were plenty of rainy days that first week and somehow I got extremely lucky to the point where I was never actually having to stand in the rain, or if I did there was some form of shelter available. Some of the positive highlights include joining a Chilean family on their vacation, meeting the whole family and their friends, riding in the car many miles, even taking a nighttime ferry ride with them to have them drive me further the next

day and even buy me breakfast. This experience was only surpassed by a ride I caught much later from a couple who saw that I was in need, called their younger relatives who then housed me for the night and fed me food and drinks while I hung out with them and their friends my age.

When things go well in hitchhiking it's really incredible. Tracy once described the experience to me as, "it feels so demoralizing when you're just standing on the roadside indefinitely waiting to get picked up until that moment when a car actually pulls over and offers to drive you. It's absolutely the best feeling". The whole idea of hitching a ride is such an alien concept to me. I would never think of going anywhere in the US and expect some stranger with good intentions to go out of their way to pick me up and actually take me somewhere I needed to go, let alone feed me or house me! The whole journey south was littered with stories like that, some time spent hitching alone which is often easier to find space in a car, and some time spent with new friends I met along the way or joining forces with Tracy or Ned. At times I would even find myself in a large line of other backpackers all fighting for a spot in a passing car, which oftentimes dissuades drivers from even pulling over.

However, as one might imagine, there are some very serious flaws with relying on the kindness of strangers who are conveniently going in the same direction as you. There were plenty of days waking up in the morning and leaving the comfort of *somewhere* to go stand on the roadside, having no idea how long you will wait there and if you actually get picked up, how far those people are going to take you. It makes for a lot of stress and requires planning around hoping that you have enough food and water to last until the next major destination. Sometimes you have to take risks-- if a car offers to drive you only part of the way is it more likely that you would get picked up by a potential car going the whole way from here, where you are sure there is food and shelter (as a fallback if you don't get picked up at all), or from some unknown midpoint between here and your final destination?

It was a constant battle at making decisions that could result in some pretty serious consequences, and any of you who know me well know that I *love* decisions. So there were some bad times spent on the roadside. At one point Ned and I spent two whole days waiting on the side of a windy, desolate road outside of town without luck. This meant spending two extra nights paying to camp in town, two extra days of buying food (which was expensive there), and in the end having to buy the overpriced bus ticket we were trying so hard to avoid. It's really really discouraging when you've spent all day on the road and every single car passes you for hours and hours and you've completely wasted that day. It's then made even worse when the other hitchhikers around you somehow got picked up while you weren't looking. (And then the same thing happens the next day February 18th and 19th RIP never forget.)

But I made it to the end! I hitchhiked (with the help of a few ferries and a bus or two) all the way south through Patagonia on both the Chilean side and Argentine side and ended up at the self-proclaimed "southernmost city in the world", Ushuaia, Tierra del Fuego (Argentina). In between all these crazy roadside journeys I got to see the astounding beauty that is Patagonia. While parts of the landscape reminded me of home, there were also many incredible and extreme geographic features that are what give the region such fame.

As I mentioned earlier, the mountains in Patagonia aren't necessarily super tall (many are actually the height of much of the Cascade range in the US) but their formation and geology are what make them incredibly unique. Many of the peaks I saw were composed of intense jagged spires jutting vertically upward hundreds of feet. On top of that there were many peaks that had unbelievably cool geologic intrusions of different rock types meaning crazy multicolored striped jagged spires that were so incredibly surreal. It was awesome. Although I did a lot of camping during my time down there, most of it was camping within towns for economic reasons (much cheaper than hostels) and would often involve me asking around for blankets to borrow. The hikes I went on to see these incredible peaks were always day hikes which meant I wasn't able to go as deep into some of the national parks as other, more prepared backpackers like Ned. I wasn't very upset by that though, the little gear I had was not adequate for it and I still got to see incredible sights and saved money on expensive camping/backpacking fees.

During the whole month of hitchhiking and actual hiking down through Patagonia, I ended up spending some of the time with Ned, although much less than originally planned, some of it with Tracy, some with an awesome Italian I met named Luca, and some of it alone. Some time spent meeting really friendly families, or really awesome truck drivers who are stoked when I share with them my entire collection of classic rock. Sometimes these hitching experiences go smoothly and sometimes you end up camping on the roadside fitting three people into a two person tent with only two sleeping bags. All in all it was a super crazy adventure and what I have taken out of it is that I will never miss a sleeping bag more in my life and I am done with hitchhiking for a very long time. There are so many more stories from that month that I would love to share with anyone who wants to know so please let me know.

March

Partway through February I had made plans using the website Workaway to find an opportunity to volunteer at a hostel for three weeks in March (I used this same website to find my current brewery position). This volunteering would be done in exchange for a bed and three meals a day and was in a beautiful outdoorsy Patagonian town called El Bolsón. El Bolsón is in the northern

part of Patagonia on the Argentine side so I booked a flight from Ushuaia near to El Bolsón, thus undoing all the progress I made hitchhiking in only a few hours.

I then spent the next 18 days helping out at a very laid back hostel, which had a customer base that consisted mostly of regional tourists and families (who only spoke Spanish). I had just arrived to this town and didn't have much helpful information for guests on top of which I find both the Chilean and Argentine accents relatively hard to understand and discovered quickly that I would make a pretty lousy receptionist.

So I helped out where I could. I cleaned where cleaning needed to be done--but they hired another woman to do the deep cleaning so my tasks were pretty simple. I helped with laundry and watering the garden and picking raspberries off the vine that would later be made into jam. I also did help people check-in/out when necessary but that was about the limit of my ability. It was pretty funny. I felt bad that I couldn't be of more use but I was one of three volunteers and honestly they would have been fine with just one.

During my free time I would either explore the surrounding green and mountainous countryside or wander around the 19,000 person town. I went on a lot of these adventures with my Italian friend Luca who was visiting on his way back north, and the two of us met an awesome girl named Melisa who acted as our tour guide and drove us around to see all the coolest sights.

It was a fun and relaxing way to spend the better part of the month--nice to be still for once and actually know where I was going to sleep each night and have my meals all planned out. At the end of this 18 day "work" stint I headed a little bit further north to the town of San Carlos de Bariloche (or just Bariloche) to start the luxury leg of my trip that would involve meeting up with my mom and her partner Glen.

They had been planning a two week trip to come see me in Argentina and arrived in Buenos Aires from Oregon on the 19th and quickly flew down to meet me in Bariloche. We reunited in the hotel and I found myself suddenly getting spoiled by private rooms, nice bathrooms, stable internet, and really delicious meals. It was great--and seeing my mom and Glen was awesome too.

Bariloche is one of many Argentine towns settled by German immigrants and has very obvious signs of that in its architecture, food and beer, and lifestyle among other things. It is a very popular destination for outdoor activities--still in Patagonia it finds itself right up next to some spectacular mountains and situated on the shores of a beautiful lake (which all honestly looked a lot like British Columbia to me). In the wintertime it is home to the largest ski resorts in South America (a fact that a stranger told me and I have not bothered to double check) and much of the town definitely has that ski-town atmosphere.

Immediately Glen and I were complaining. It just felt so touristy! Everything was absurdly overpriced (at least for South American standards) and we both thought the nature looked too much like home! All of our complaints were in good nature as the three of us actually had a thoroughly enjoyable week split between hiking around awesome mountains, to lounging in town and eating out. It was, after all, very beautiful and a fun place to be--and it was really fun to be with the two of them!

My vagabond backpacker lifestyle had taken a sharp turn into this awesome all-expenses-paid vacation and our next stop was to fly over to Buenos Aires. We spent the next week there continuing our ritzy habits of eating out, going to museums, going to tango shows, and even paying to see an orchestrated operatic piece of music by Rossini in an historic theater. By the time it was over I didn't want it to end. I had gotten so accustomed to the generosity and all around pleasant company of this older generation in my family it made me wish that I were flying back to Oregon with them. After two short weeks we had a teary-eyed goodbye as we parted ways and I was back on my own.

April

Being on my own didn't last long however. I both quickly made friends at my new hostel in Buenos Aires, and I reunited with a friend I had previously met in Ecuador who lives in a suburb of Buenos Aires. I was then visited by yet another Oregonian, my childhood friend Ben with whom I attended elementary, middle, and high school and who had booked a three week vacation to come hang out in Argentina.

He and I spent the next few days leisurely exploring some nearby neighborhoods. Buenos Aires itself I find both a really beautiful and vast city and yet not a super unique one. It didn't feel like a latin american city and instead a weird mix between a western European city and New York with maybe some other generic US city. I really did enjoy it though, full of life and energy, tons

of very beautiful neighborhoods each with their own distinct characteristics, many of which had very cool architecture and style.

After the city Ben and I headed to the Buenos Aires suburb to stay with my aforementioned friend. It was there that we discovered our love for a new budget airline that would allow us to cheaply fly back to Bariloche and El Bolsón where we visited Melisa who kindly housed us. Then we flew up to Mendoza (the wine capital of Argentina) where we one day rented a car and I paid off my hitchhiking debt by picking up some friendly backpackers and driving them into town. Next we had a brief visit in Córdoba where we met some other friendly Americans and finally we returned to Buenos Aires. It was an action-packed loop that really added to the inefficiency of my trip and we squeezed it all in just a few weeks. We met some awesome people during that time and discovered that we had a lot in common when it came to travel habits. Regularly we would find ourselves in a hotel or hostel and encourage each other to just lounge all day, sitting in the sun, relaxing and playing video games.

During this time Ben would regularly pitch to me his case for why I should come back to Oregon this summer and encouraged fancier accommodations and food as to ensure I would run out of money and be forced to end my trip earlier than planned. I begrudgingly indulged in some of the more expensive treats (including a healthy dose of asados, the argentine-style barbecue with pounds and pounds of red meat and wine) but the real problem was that generally speaking, Argentina is expensive. Eating out wasn't much cheaper than it would be in many parts of the US, and the transportation costs were really starting to add up. I held true to my plan though and repeatedly told him that I wasn't going to ditch the rest of my trip just to relive an Oregon summer that I had experienced so many times before.

Things change though and after he left I felt like I really *was* on my own. The last five weeks I had spent with family and friends and the three weeks before all of my personal needs were taken care of in El Bolsón. I had to face the reality of making travel plans again, diving headfirst into smalltalk at hostels for social connections, and figure out how I was going to afford everything to achieve what I wanted out of the rest of my trip. It was daunting. I had forgotten how to be a backpacker and wasn't ready to go back to eating lentils and rice, sleeping on creaky hostel dorm room bunk beds, and having to make friends so I could find companionship for sightseeing. I had never felt more jealous of Ben going to Oregon and the thought of returning home.

The day after Ben's departure I made an awesome new friend in the Buenos Aires hostel, a Coloradan living in New York named Zoe who would serve as my personal counselor the

following week as I struggled to figure out what to do with my future. She had recently finished volunteering for three months in the wetlands in Brazil and was eager to tell me all about it. Her recounts of Brazil made me both excited by the prospects of seeing the vast country, but also stressed out and upset knowing that my travel plans could not afford such a thorough journey.

My original vision for this trip included heading up to Uruguay and Brazil after Argentina, with plans to only see major landmarks in Brazil--Rio de Janeiro, and Sao Paulo to name a few with a plan of someday returning to see the other corners of the country. However, the way Zoe described all these different parts of Brazil had me realizing it was seeming less and less worth the cost of the visa just to see the few spots I had planned.

When calculating my finances to see if such a thorough trip to Brazil were possible I learned quickly that it wouldn't be. I could afford to see some parts of the country if I spent all of my time going from volunteer job to volunteer job without ever a chance of truly being a tourist and exploring. I would gain insightful experiences by working places no doubt but I wanted the freedom to pursue more than just that.

On top of my inability to complete the trip that I had initially planned, I was feeling increased desires to make it back to the US to visit family sooner than later. I began to think that it wouldn't be worth scraping by for three extra months of my trip unable to afford any niceties and diving into savings to see the remaining parts of South America. It would make much more sense to check a few last important destinations off my list and then call it a trip after 9 months instead of a full year (not to mention all of my clothing and gear were conveniently falling apart).

The week after Ben left, Zoe and I headed to the northeast corner of Argentina to see Iguazú Falls, the famous and picturesque Amazonian waterfalls that make Niagara Falls pale in comparison. It was after a day of wandering around the although breathtaking and enormous falls that I got really fed up with tourism. While the sights were fantastic the amount of people there was unbearable, not to mention the skyrocketed costs of everything. We couldn't move through the walkways because they were so packed with people and it was extremely hot, humid, and sticky (we were at the edge of the Amazon rainforest after all). It was the kind of destination I felt like I had to see and was super glad to have done so, but now have no desire to end up in a tourist trap like that again.

So that night I started making plans in my head as to how I would end my trip early. What places did I have left that I needed to see? What was worth skipping and coming back to for another

trip? Would I actually be happy once I got back to the US to find myself in the swing of real life again--having to work? Where would I even live once I got back to the US and how could I assure that I would be satisfied there? These were all problems that urged me to travel in the first place and it wasn't that I no longer wanted to travel, I just really wanted to see friends and family and enjoy certain niceties that you can only get by being at home (or at least in the same country). Zoe was a proponent of this as well, saying that I should definitely make Brazil a separate trip and not skimp out on it. Her and I parted ways and I continued to ponder this plan.

May

With the idea in my head that I might be ending my trip in mid-July, I went to check a few more places off my list. I took some lengthy bus rides across the northern part of Argentina back to the west. I knew I had this brewery job coming up on May 15th in Patagonia and in these two weeks I wanted to see a tiny bit more of Argentina, and then cross back into Chile to see the Atacama desert.

The Atacama desert was cool to see but again I was so fed up with these tourist destinations. The entire town of San Pedro de Atacama is one big tourist trap. While it's nice looking and fun to walk around, the storefronts consisted of overpriced restaurants or travel agencies with agents on the streets hounding you about the different tours that you can go on. And the thing is, you *have* to take them up on it if you want to see any parts of the desert--that or rent a very expensive car to drive to the locations yourself while still having to pay the numerous entry fees.

The Chilean side of the Atacama desert (a large portion is in Bolivia as well) is divided into the different landmarks you can see there. Lagunas, geysers, rock and salt valleys (the salt flats in Bolivia) etc. and each one of those requires booking a separate tour which each has its own entrance fee on top of the tour cost. This means that if you want to do tours of two or three parts of the desert you will easily be spending at least \$100. My time in Atacama was short lived, both because I was tired of spending money on preorganized expensive tours, and because deserts aren't comfortable places to stay--it's too hot in the day and too cold at night, why would anyone live there?? All that said, it was very beautiful and the vast dry landscapes were really awesome to see.

From there I headed south making a stop for a few days to visit Noler and Tracy again in Coquimbo. I had a blast and somehow got VIP treatments as Noler had an empty 8th floor apartment right on the beach, and then got to hang out in Tracy's 16th floor apartment that overlooked the harbor! It was hard to not want to mooch off of their kindnesses for longer.

From there I bussed to Santiago followed by a cheap flight down into the middle of Patagonia where I am now, thus completing the least efficient, most roundabout and circuitous path through Chile and Argentina.

Looking forward

After all of that I have now more or less mapped out the rest of my trip. I have been in contact with my brother Charles as for months he has been trying to visit me. Back in March we had an idea of backpacking Machu Picchu together sometime in August or September to wrap my trip up. When my plans began to change I was able to get him to fast forward his trip and come visit me at the end of June. Once I finish volunteering at this cold and isolated (yet tranquil and cozy) town on June 15th I will head to Bolivia for ten days and jump over to Lake Titicaca (on the border) and then up to Cusco, Peru where I will meet Charles. He and I plan on trekking the five-day Salkantay trek up to Machu Picchu itself. We will then have another week or so in Peru to see whatever else we want and will then fly out of Lima on July 10th and go to Oregon together. He had been wanting to plan an Oregon visit anyway and this way he can do it all in one three week trip. I couldn't be more excited.

As for real life once back in the US I have some ideas that are keeping me very excited. Earlier in my trip I had thought seriously about where else I would like to travel someday and what are the destinations next up on my list. Right now that plan is as follows: go to Japan, Korea, and then take the trans-siberian railroad across Siberia, ideally stopping in central Asian countries like Mongolia and Kazakhstan to eventually end up in Moscow and then see Eastern Europe (it's a lot and very ambitious but hopefully made possible with a handful of volunteering). What I would love to do to make that happen is spend the next year in the US working and saving up money and ideally being able to go on that trip come summer 2019 (for an indefinite length of time).

Immediately upon returning to the US in mid-July my plan is to head up to Seattle where I will live with some very close friends and for now retake the reins as a Lyft driver (something I had done in Denver the month before this South America trip) as it is both an easy way to make money and something that I can do right away. I plan to make lengthy trips to the East Coast to visit family in both New York and Virginia and then spend the whole fall and winter possibly in Seattle finding a more serious job or continuing to drive Lyft for the time being.