

MARCH, 2014: BUENOS AIRES AND PATAGONIA

PART I - USHUAIA, ARGENTINA AND CAPE HORN, CHILE

Trama-Hawk to Ushuaia: I thought all the Trama-Hawks had either crashed by now or had been scraped, but evidently there are some left in Argentina. The small plane is why one is limited to the amount of luggage you can take on the flight from Buenos Aires to Ushuaia.



Flying low and slow, the views are great and the birds are friendly...

The airport in Ushuaia, (actually the old airport). They do have a new airport with big boy planes not far away for those that prefer non-Trama-Hawk transportation (as we did of course). Ushuaia is commonly regarded as the southernmost city in the world (a title long disputed by smaller Puerto Williams nearby). Ushuaia is located in a wide bay on the southern coast of Isla Grande de Tierra del Fuego, bounded on the north by the Martial mountain range (shown behind the airport in the photograph) and on the south by the Beagle Channel.

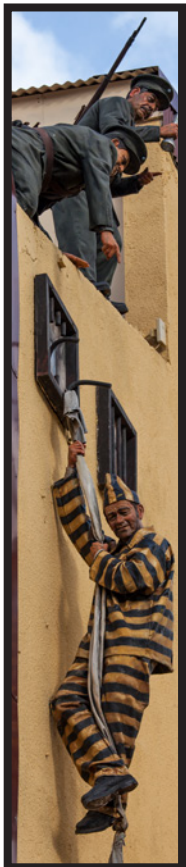


In customs I had some difficulty and had to hire a local Ushuaia attorney of dubious character with the name of Christopher Fernández de Kirchner. It seems my baggage was just slightly overweight and I had not declared that on the correct form in Buenos Aires.

Christopher said there was also a special Argentine floating holiday tax that had not been taken into account.

I had only intended to be in Argentina for one more day before heading into Chile, but the tour did take us back into Argentina in a few days, so taking care of these issues now seemed appropriate.

I was also told all my baggage would be forwarded to the cruise ship once the fines were paid and an additional baggage handling fee for that was assessed.



After I paid Christopher, (he said he would take care of delivering my payments of the fine, taxes and whole mess to the appropriate agencies, departments, and bureaus), he then advised me of the customary routine for exiting.

As it turned out, Christopher was also a licensed and governmentally authorized tour guide and provided us with a tour around Ushuaia and to the end of the Pan-American Highway.



Sadly, some of my fellow travelers got their instructions mixed up and were not able to re-join the tour.



On our way to the end of the Pan-American highway we passed the southern most golf course in the world (albeit 9 holes, played twice for 18). Being on a tour it was not destined for me to get to play there.



The end of the Pan-American highway in Tierra del Fuego National Park. 17,848 Km from Alaska.

Fall was already here and trees were turning colors, early even by Patagonia standards.



A couple of birds seen along the way. Ringed Kingfisher to the right and a male Upland Goose below.





We found that our cruise ship had been damaged by a recent storm, beached and then taken over by pirate birds.

We then had to transfer all our stuff to a secondary, smaller cruise ship and then finally headed south and out towards Cape Horn. At least we thought so, as it was very confusing to those of us following our route on the map. We watched in the darkness of night as the lights of Ushuaia continually changed positions and appeared in positions that they should not have been had we been headed in the correct direction for Cape Horn.

As it turned out, for an hour or so the cruise ship zig-zagged back and forth across a watery imaginary line called the Argentine and Chilean border in order to "correctly" stamp every single passport in the right spot... both physically (like in the right spot in the passport) and geographically (as on the correct side of the border "when" stamped)... such is the pissing contest that continues between Argentine and Chilean governments. We will experience this once more in a few days when we return to Argentina from Chile up north, but traveling by bus.



The next morning, all our passports in order we assumed, a Cape Horn landing was successful. Very calm seas once we were there, at least my patch and insides said so.

Cape Horn lies within what are now Chilean territorial waters, and the Chilean Navy maintains a station on Horn Island, consisting of a residence, utility building, chapel, and lighthouse. A short distance from the main station is this memorial, including a large sculpture made by Chilean sculptor José Balcells featuring the silhouette of an albatross, in honor of the sailors who died while attempting to "round the Horn". It was erected in 1992 through the initiative of the Chilean Section of the Cape Horn Captains Brotherhood.





The Horn Island terrain is entirely treeless, although quite lush owing to frequent precipitation. Cape Horn is the southern limit of the range of the Magellanic Penguin, Wendy's most important visual quest on our Patagonia adventure.



650 Km. (about 400 miles) south of Cape Horn is the ice of Antarctica, but you will need to sail through the dark, gloomy and treacherous waters above and avoid all manner of dragons, demons and mayhem first!

We choose to consider ourselves lucky enough at even getting off the ship at Cape Horn and unanimously choose to bypass any Southern Ocean crossings. After our short visit to Cape Horn, we retreated by Zodiac off the cape to the mother ship anchored a safe distance away!

After retreating to the Mother Ship, we headed back north towards Ushuaia and the relative safety and howling brutality of Patagonia's inside passages. Next up was our multiple day tour of glaciers and Mother Ship disembarkations, (weather permitting), all the way to the big one at El Calafate, Argentina... the Perito Moreno Glacier.



.END of this issue of the *Flying Pig Adventures*