

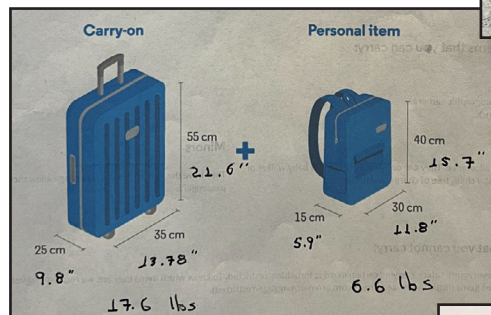
ANTARCTICA

PART I: SEATTLE TO USHUAIA, ARGENTINA

Our trip to Antarctica *was*, as they say, to be the '*once-in-a-lifetime-adventure*'. Unfortunately, for us anyway, there were way too many reasons that were not on the positive side of the ledger. We did persevere through all the obstacles thrown our way and in retrospect, we had many memorable moments that were on the positive side of the ledger. Our Shackleton Antarctica jackets were well earned to say the least! Maybe we didn't have to spend several winter months stranded on Elephant Island, eating penguins and seals and living under an overturned life boat like Shackleton's crew did, but it sure did feel like it a couple times!

We spent an inordinate amount of time in the months ahead of this trip on how and what we were going to pack and such. The greatest limiting factor was the carry-on luggage allowances on the regional Argentine airline we were going to fly on. We wanted to carry on the items we could not easily replace in Ushuaia should our luggage not make it. In addition, the maximum weight the one checked bag each of us would be limited to was 33 pounds. My camera gear alone was more than the combined carry on weight limit. Between us both and carrying a certain amount of each others stuff, we managed to stay within the limits on all accounts.

We did purchase some Apple AirTags to track our luggage. As it turned out, they provided anxiety, relief and entertainment all at the same time. One of the first obstacles thrown our way was the last minute ruling from the ship that we had to have a COVID-19 PCR test done within three days of getting on the ship. Since we planned to spend two days in Buenos Aires prior to our flight to the ship, that left us with just one day, Christmas Eve, to have the test done locally. Since our flight left too early in the morning on Christmas day, we were also having to travel Christmas eve to Seattle to stay overnight in order to catch the early Christmas day AM flight. In our area we were left with one option to get PCR tests done and get the results so we could send them to the ship expedition staff. Living in a small town is nice, but this can also mean limited options for many things as we had to pay dearly for those tests at \$250.00 each. So another \$500 vested into an already '*once-in-a-lifetime-expensive*' adventure! And... we both tested negative!



12/24/2022 10:07 AM - C	
Component	
COVID 19 PCR POCT	Not Detected
Influenza A PCR POCT	Not Detected
Influenza B PCR POCT	Not Detected



As we tried to get on the ferry to Seattle, I jokingly took this 'AREA CLOSED' photo. Turns out it was a metaphorical premonition about the next few days and our overall trip to Antarctica.

We arrived early the next morning at the SeaTac airport, to the holiday season air travel chaos and the unprecedented continent-wide weather 'event'. While the Seattle area was clear of weather issues by one day, the weather issues across the rest of the continent resulted in our flight to Houston being cancelled. We were not going to make our connecting flight out of Houston to Buenos Aires (and our two day stay in Buenos Aires) even with the planned seven hour layover in Houston. There were no seats available to Houston for several days they told us. After several hours of trying to find alternative routes, they (United Airlines) said they could book us on a flight to Denver later that night, we would have to stay overnight somewhere there on our own, then catch an American Airlines flight to Dallas the next day, where we could catch a ride on

American Airlines to Buenos Aires, however... it would not be Business Class as we had paid for, but coach. Coach is not usually an issue with us unless it is a flight over four hours... like the ten hour flight to Buenos Aires. It would get us to Buenos Aires a day later, but we did plan two days there just in case 'something' went sideways. Now we would have only one day, but we would still be able to make the flight from Buenos Aires to Calafate, Argentina and then onto Ushuaia. We thought about it a bit, but since we were now into the trip for the COVID-19 tests and the overnight in Seattle already, we decided to tough it out in coach and pay for another nights lodging in Denver somewhere. After all, it was to be the '*adventure-of-a-lifetime*'.

We found a place to stay near the Denver airport pretty easily and the next day the flight from Denver to Dallas went pretty smoothly. We felt we saw the light at the end of tunnel, but we were mistaken...

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Our flight out of Dallas to Buenos Aires was late boarding due to a discrepancy in fuel calculations that needed to be resolved before take off. It seemed like a good idea to us at the time.

We finally boarded and taxied out to towards a runway, only to pull over and... well... wait... for some sort of nose gear alignment indicator error to be figured out. They couldn't do it on the tarmac so we taxied back to the gate and... well... waited... until they finally said to de-board the plane and... well... wait...

I kept getting messages of further delays, until about 2 am when they said go get a room and come back tomorrow.

At this point it was getting iffy that we could make it to Buenos Aires in time to catch the regional flight from Buenos Aires to Calafate and then onto Ushuaia. And the flight out of Buenos Aires left from another airport at least an hour's drive away from the airport we were to land at. We consider getting our luggage and seeing if we can find another flight to Buenos Aires but since our baggage was already on the plane and it was 'just being delayed' (albeit 12 hours now), not canceled, we could not retrieve our luggage.

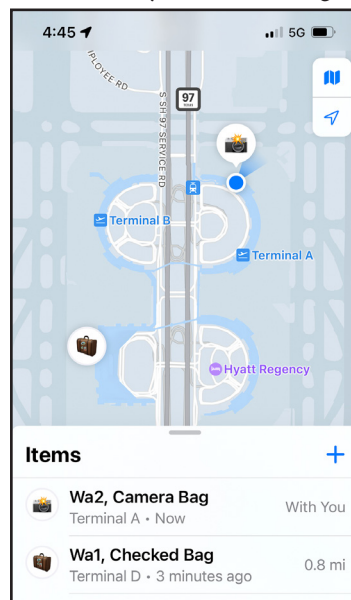
We get Meal Vouchers but could not find anything open at that time of the morning. And what can one even buy in an airport for \$12.00? A bottle of water at that airport was more than that!

Some people get Room Vouchers, but thinking we would only get a couple hours of sleep and have to go back through security again when we came back in the morning, we opt for the floor of the airport instead. As it turned out many people that did choose the Room Voucher route found there were actually no rooms to be had once they got to their designated lodging.

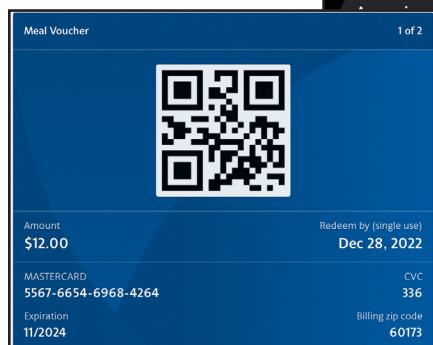
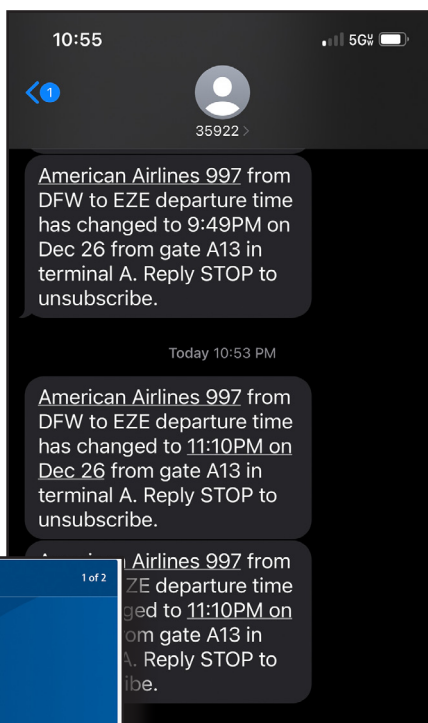
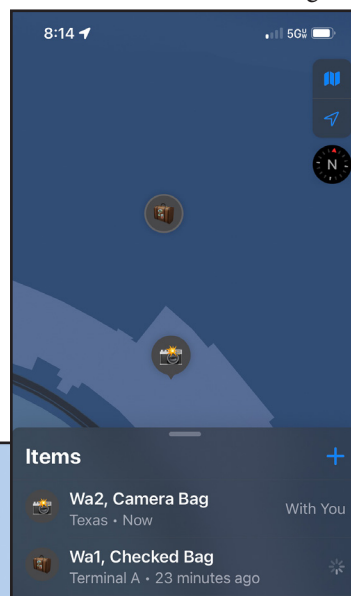
I had been tracking where our ship was and could clearly see it was on the way back to Ushuaia from an Antarctica trip. We still had 'some' hope of making it on board before it left on the Antarctica adventure we were booked on, albeit it was a little hope.

Still, I could see that it was getting more and more likely that we would not make it on board before it left. With that in mind I began thinking of alternatives once we got to Argentina and missed either the regional flights to Ushuaia and/or the ship departure.

The anxiety side of AirTags



The relief side of AirTags



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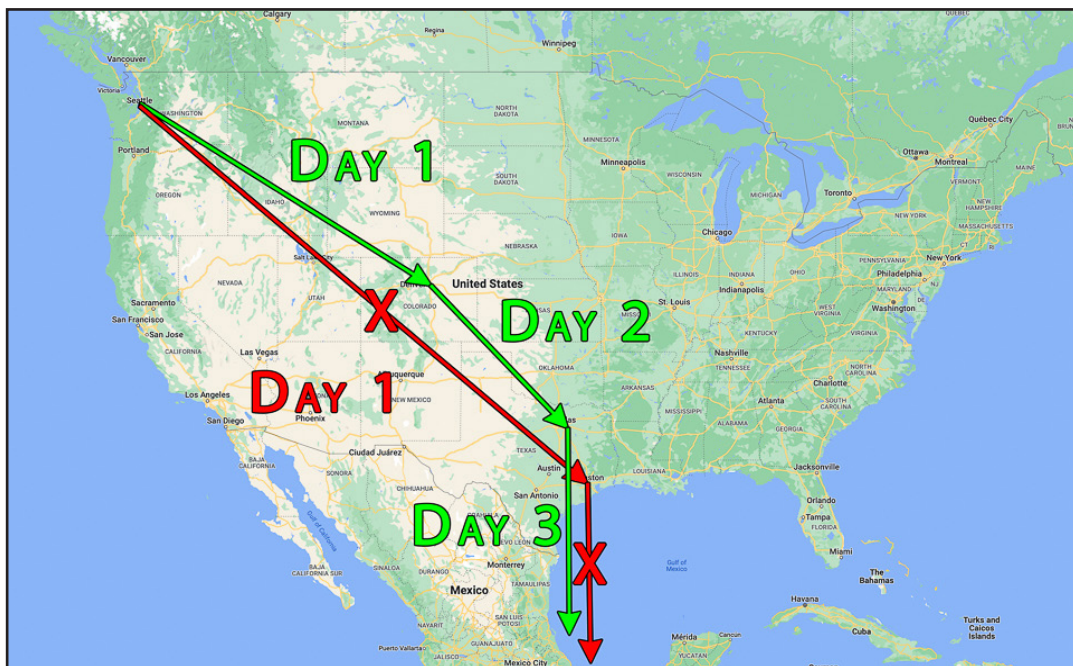
So, our two nights in Buenos Aires in case things went sideways got used up before we even exited the USA.

We arrived in Buenos Aires about two hours before our flight was supposed to fly out of that different airport in Buenos Aires. Luckily, we were able to arrange a driver beforehand that would take us directly to the other airport as soon as we cleared customs. That all worked okay except for the anxiety the drivers car clock produced as it was one hour ahead of time for some reason. I kept looking at it and having depressing thoughts. In the end we got to the other airport less than an hour before we were to take off for Calafate and Ushuaia.

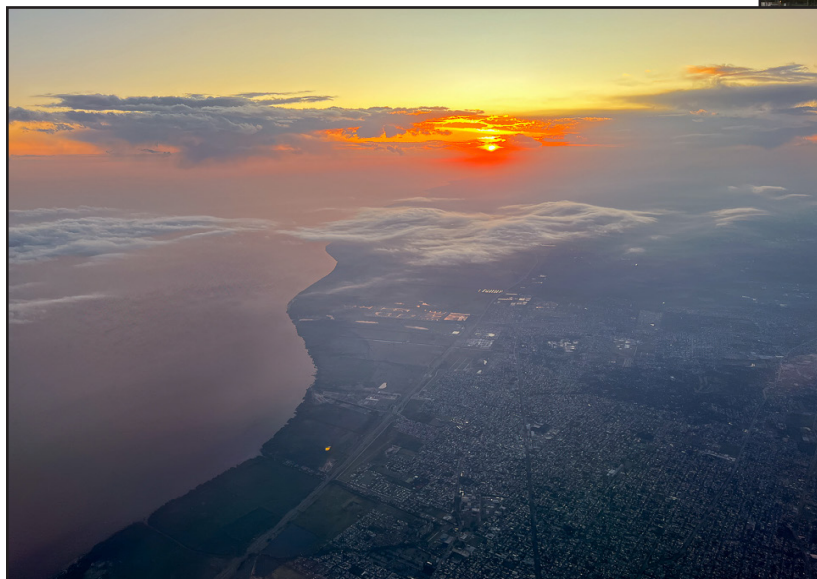
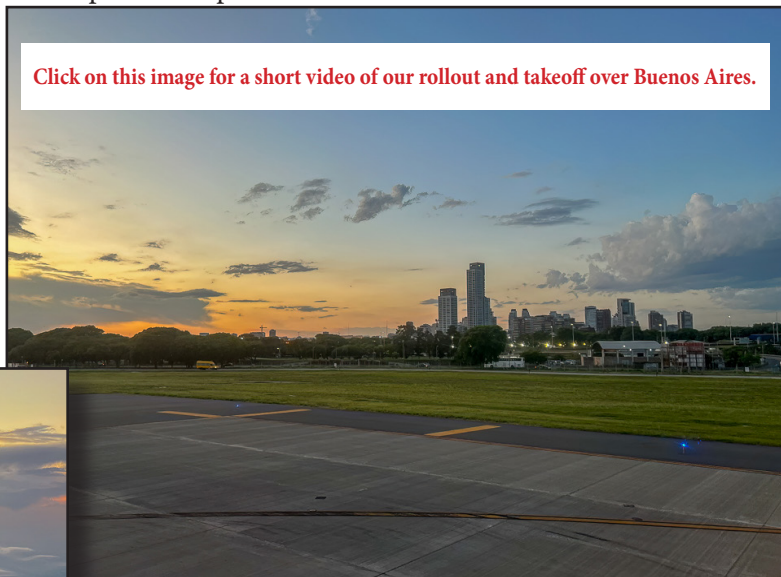
Even that flight had it's own issues. We were bused to the plane and as we were just about to board it they found some problem with it. We were bused back to the terminal and eventually taken to a replacement plane.

About an hour late, about 5 am, and just as the sun was starting to come up over Buenos Aires, we were cleared for takeoff and rolled down the runway towards our short stop in Calafate. We were afraid to say "*we made it*" even at this point and neither of us dared voice our shared sense of relief.

We were asked to keep the blinds down during takeoff and climb out of Buenos Aires. I am not sure why, but when I peaked out there were green laser lights coming up from the ground. Eventually, we were treated to a nice sunrise as we climbed up and out of Buenos Aires.



Click on this image for a short video of our rollout and takeoff over Buenos Aires.



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In a couple hours we were descending into the Calafate area. We have been to Calafate before, but I had not realized just how flat and barren the land was to the east of it, even though Calafate is right at the base Andes mountains to the west.

Below is the Santa Cruz River, the out flow from Argentino Lake (the biggest freshwater lake in Argentina) to the Atlantic Ocean about 235 miles to the east. Argentino Lake is fed by several Andes glaciers in the Los Glaciares National Park, including the notable and famous Perito Moreno Glacier.



As we came into the Calafate airport I noticed a race track below. No red and white checkered corners indicating the potential for a Formula One like track though, but a dirt track of some local importance.



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After our short stop in Calafate to unload and load a few passengers we continued on to Ushuaia. By afternoon we were in our room overlooking the Ushuaia Harbor.

I still feel a bit of direction confusion when it comes to Ushuaia. In the view to the right, my mind tries to fool me into thinking I am looking north. Although Ushuaia is at the southern most tip of Argentina it is not the farthest south land in South America. Many say Ushuaia is the southern most city, but in fact, the city, port and naval base of Puerto Williams on Navarino Island in Chile is the southernmost manned settlement in the world.

From our room window (photo to the right) we actually look south over the Beagle Channel to Chile. On the other side of those distance hills is Cape Horn and the dreaded Drake Passage, gateway and toll taker to Antarctica... as well as dragons, deadly sea monsters and other mayhem!

The next day we did a short birding trip before an afternoon boarding onto the MS Seaventure, the ship we spent the next three weeks on exploring Antarctica, South Georgia Island and the Falkland Islands. As a special treat for our small group of birders we are traveling with, a mandatory trip to the garbage dump to see the world famous White-Throated Caracara. It seems all knowledgeable birders know of this place and if a birder finds themselves in Ushuaia it is a mandatory stop. A distant view was the best I could do with my camera, but all the birders seemed very satisfied with their views through the leader's scope.



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That afternoon the MS Seaventure headed east in the Beagle Channel and towards the Drake Passage. We passed several ships in the process of resupplying and readying for trips to the Antarctica.

We passed the Viking Polaris that had been hit by a rogue 40 foot wave while crossing the Drake Passage, killing one passenger and injuring a few others just a couple of weeks prior. We could make out the makeshift repairs and coverings on the windows that were caved in by that rouge wave.

We were soon to have our own drama crossing the Drake Passage.



Should we go to Antarctica again via ship, we would probably opt for a bit larger ship like this Hurtigruten one below, the MS Roald Amundsen.

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It was not long before we saw our first Penguins on this trip, on a small rock islet in the Beagle Channel.



Late that afternoon as we were about to turn south and enter the Drake Passage we saw the last bit of calm seas and blue skies we would see for days. The Drake Passage is considered one of the most treacherous voyages for ships to make. Currents at its latitude meet no resistance from any landmass, and waves top 40 feet, hence its reputation as "the most powerful convergence of seas".

The next issue of our *Flying Pig Adventures* will be about the Drake Passage, Antarctic Peninsula and Weddell Sea portion of our trip, (and the toll Wendy paid, and still is, for our crossing of the Drake Passage).



The following are some results of the birding we did around Ushuaia.

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