

Beyond My Odyssey

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I dedicate this book to four very dear men in my life: to my Dad who lovingly corrected me and supported me, and

to my brothers: the dearly departed Joaquín who counseled and inspired me with dedication, and Enrique who patiently tolerated and endured me, as well as still-living Antonio whose experience serves me as a guide, which I hope will continue

for many years to come.

PROLOGUE

Beyond My Odyssey is a new book of lived experiences, this time in the first person, in which Roger R. Fernández delights us one more time from his home in Los Angeles, the United States of America, country where he has lived practically since his youth. It is the fourth one of his “personal odyssey”. During a cruise through Tierra del Fuego (Land of Fire), a fellow traveler suggested to him Odyssey Dreamed as a more appropriate title, for he perceived what his eyes were contemplating as a real dream.

Beyond My Odyssey takes us traveling with the author through inaccessible places for the common of mortals, but brought to the reach of our imagination thanks to Roger’s talent and ability to mould in paper what his eyes were seeing.

In the years 1950-1955, Roger and I were studying with the Marists at their International Saint Francis Xavier School, located in the little town of Grugliasco in the Italian Piedmont, very near Turin. I remember that to incite us to contemplation, one of our teachers, Brother Heliodor Balko, would frequently repeat the following quotation from a French writer: “Qui a beaucoup vu, peut avoir beaucoup retenu”, which is to say: “Whoever has seen a lot may have retained a lot.” It is obvious that Roger Fernández has kept in mind the wise advice of that Hungarian teacher, Heliodor Balko.

The reader will enjoy, as I have enjoyed, the reading of Beyond My Odyssey, delighting in the infinity of historic and experienced details that Roger has adroitly laid to bear with his style so personal, of exquisite simplicity, doing without unnecessary decorations, allowing the imagination to divert itself in what is being read.

Beyond My Odyssey offers a first chapter on “the art of traveling” with ten norms that every traveler must consider before undertaking a trip. Two chapters are dedicated to each of two voyages: the first, a cruise along the extreme coast of South America, and the second, a trip to the Philippines for family reasons. Between the two trips, the author inserts a third chapter whose title “Wrangling Quells” has the flavor of an epistolary discussion whereby Roger lays open his own version, as a person living in the United States of America, of the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001 and their post consequences. And, as nothing less could be expected, the

book concludes with a chapter dedicated to his beloved Bierzo, and in a very special way, to the two villages where he spent the first years of his life: Los Barrios de Salas and Fuentesnuevas.

The reader will move along, understanding, as he goes beyond each page, in the first place, the so-called “Cone of South America” with its valleys and fractured grounds, fiords and glaciers, “Penguins by heaps”, the Chilean Patagonia from Punta Arenas to Cape Horn, Tierra del Fuego...and then in the Atlantic, something about Argentina and Uruguay, all of it soberly described and ornamented with very interesting references to history.

In the trip to the Philippines, the reader will take delight in truly celestial places, such as the “Pagsanjan Gorge” and its deafening cascade, besides an unending number of exotic names, such as the “Chendol” drink, the “Durian” fruit “that smells like hell and tastes like glory”, or the “Barangays” etc...

I wish to leave in writing the pleasant and gratifying surprise it meant for me to be able to read the four books of “The Odyssey” lived in person by my friend and old college companion, Roger Fernández, while encouraging him, at the same time, to continue sharing with his readers his addiction to traveling, though the title “Beyond My Odyssey” sounds to me like the end.

José Diego Rodríguez Cubero

## CHAPTER 1

### THE ART OF TRAVELING

“There is no frigate like a book to take us lands away”, wrote the American poet Emily Dickinson in the second half of the 19th century. She thus expressed, as an illusion, a human aspiration that history records as action: from the primitive nomads to the modern astronauts, the human being has always sought to conquer sea, land and space to better its condition, realize dreams and ambitions or broaden knowledge.

In truth, the art of traveling has always fascinated the human mind and has flourished as a literary form from time immemorial. Several adages, proverbs and sayings reflect this truism in many diverse and varied cultures. While a wise Genoese adage prudently asserts that “It is better to wear out one’s shoes than one’s sheets”, a very stimulating Arab proverb affirms that “Voyaging is victory”. For his part, Cervantes has written a practical Spanish saying that advances the accepted assertion that “On a long journey even a straw weighs heavy”.

Unquestionably, many people travel much more nowadays than in times past. To move by air from city to city, from country to country, from continent to continent has become routine, even after September 11, 2001. At the same time, adventurous trips to less known, or rather out of the way places come now in tour packages. Even thus, the classic concept of voyaging, which is that of going to a place radically different from one’s place of departure, has almost disappeared. The most successful ones in this regard are those done in cruises, whereby the traveler succeeds, at times, in visiting out of the way ports and going on excursions to places far away from all civilization.

### VITAL EXPERIENCE

My vital experience seems to confirm that traveling or wandering through the world creates addiction, invigorates the body, enriches and broadens the spirit and knowledge, and frequently becomes a source to prolong conversations. Similarly, it makes valid, once more, American writer Mark Twain who ratifies that “Travel is fatal to prejudice, bigotry and narrow-mindedness”. It could hardly be otherwise, since by traveling we become “citizens of the world” and open our minds to new cultures.

It has certainly been my fate to have lived a life somewhat adventurous, risky and daring, but also protected and somewhat favored. However, I would like to make it clear, before anything else, my total agreement with Italian dramatist Carlo Goldini who, towards the half of the 18th century, observed that “A wise traveler never despises his own country”. As for me, not only have I never scorned, nor will ever scorn my beloved Spain nor my “Small Fatherland”, El Bierzo, but rather, I resort to them for consolation, fortitude and rejuvenation. For that reason, I decided to write the first chapter of this book with the purpose of sharing with my compatriots and readers some of the benefits that I have harvested from traveling beyond my literary odyssey.

Frequently, travelers must elevate their sights to establish aims and goals as difficult to reach as high to contemplate. There is, besides, a challenge to explore the planet, a lure or enticement to dare the unknown world in order to achieve greater satisfaction, to venture into a constant aspiration in the human being to know more and to go farther: to contemplate, lastly, the eagerness to abandon the trodden path and encounter something new, something mysterious. It is fitting to examine if the unhappiness and sadness that at times besiege our lives emanate from a single perspective that fills our existence.

For me, the places that I visit seem to absorb the memories that I have created for myself. Wherever I go, I stumble into my past, which those remembrances always stamp and will never be erased because of them. However, though not necessarily incompatible, memory and comfort are frequently at odds. When I mend my difficult moments, memory appears first... then I happily hear the transcendent music that my remembrances compose, frequently consoling, but always vital and essential.

Among the messages that emanate from my memories are found, besides those from my nostalgic childhood and youth, foretaste and curiosity in traveling, attraction of the exotic and the sublime, the necessity of a fantasy escape from city to countryside, or the latter from the former, and the high light to which the art can take the human being to appreciate its environment.

For the enthusiastic and confident traveler, the perspective of wandering translates, essentially, into a vision of adventures, pleasure and enjoyment, free from the anguish and anxiety of the hidden or the unknown and the comforts of the daily routine. As for me, far from dreading the unknown, I try to delve into it and make it my ally. I consider traveling an escape of enchantment and understand the inevitable reality that, to be a good traveler, the best way to know and experience a place that I wish to visit is to abandon myself completely to it, and not to an imagined fantasy or to a reality close to the one I have left behind. That is how I have been able to confront and overcome the challenges that I have frequently faced in life.

#### THE 10 COMMANDMENTS OF A GOOD TRAVELER

After reading the first two books of my autobiographical trilogy, several readers asked me to write some basic suggestions to travel as comfortably as possible and be worry-free.

There are several types of travels and, of course, each one requires different preparations to carry out and attitudes to take along. A business trip is not the same as one dedicated to study. Furthermore, not every study trip is equal. A research tour that takes the traveler to several localities in a country differs from a program of expansion of knowledge, but centered in a university city. There are, in addition, tourist voyages that concentrate in seeing, observing, evaluating and comparing, but devoid of the purpose of studying.

Whatever the object of one's trip happens to be, some norms are indispensable to achieve the highest degree of success. The traveler needs open mindedness, a pleasant disposition towards flexibility, positive expectations, much enthusiasm and unexhausted wealth of courtesy. To better help the interested reader, I would like to print here THE 10 COMMANDMENTS OF A GOOD TRAVELER, which I used to distribute to my students to prepare them for their international study abroad in Salamanca, Spain and Florence, Italy. I stumbled upon this anonymous but very valuable true gem while making preparations to conduct my first group of students of the Study Abroad Program of the Los Angeles Community College District in which I exercised my professorial duties:

1. Thou shalt not expect to find things as thou hast at home, for thou hast left home to experience things different.
2. Thou shalt count every moment as precious and use it well for thou might not pass this way again.
3. Thou shalt not let other travelers get on thy nerves, for thou hast paid good money to take this trip and to enjoy thyself.
4. Remember to take half as many clothes as thou thinkest thou shalt need and twice as much money.
5. Know at all times where thy passport is, for a person

without a passport is a person without a country.

6. Remember that if thou wert expected to stay in one place, thou wouldst have been created with roots. Get thee out and explore.

7. Thou shalt not worry, for he that worrieth hath no pleasure and few things are fatal. Take along a positive attitude.

8. When thou art in a foreign country, be prepared to do as the local people do. Observe their ways and try to understand them.

9. Thou shalt not judge all the people of the country by the person who hath given thee trouble.

10. Remember thou art guest in other lands. He that treats his host with respect shall be honored.

Finally, well informed and serious travelers must bear in mind at every moment that they can only profit from a trip according to their degree of compliance and the amount of care they personally put into it. Similarly, they have to constantly assume the role of travelers who accept challenges and totally disregard the role of tourists who compare what they see with what they invariably notice in the surroundings of their place of provenance.

It was precisely conscious of all these norms that I made my most recent cruise through South America to enjoy its extraordinary beauty, its mysterious origins, its abundant fauna and delightful flora.

## CHAPTER 2

### OVERPOWERING CRUISE

“I am the Albatross that waits for you  
at the bottom of the earth.

I am the forgotten soul  
of the death sailors  
who crossed Cape Horn  
from all seas of the world.

But they did not die  
in the furious waves.

Today, they fly in my wings  
to eternity,  
in the last trough  
of the Antarctic winds.

Sara Vial, 1992

This quotation of Chilean teacher and poet Sara Vial, who in 1955 met Pablo Neruda in Viña del Mar, Chile, faithfully conveys a glimmer of the majestic feeling of gravity and solemnity of the passengers that encircle Cape Horn. It also reflects accurately the sense of importance and seriousness that assumed, at least for me, the cruise that my wife Lucille and I made through South America during the second half of February and the beginning of March of 2003. It was, above all, a memorable cruise that deeply affected me for its historical and

cultural meaning, for the frantic and radicalized world atmosphere of the moment and for the peace and spiritual joy that I experienced in the Norwegian Dream liner.

Such an evaluation of that instructive cruise is inevitable if a serious analysis is made of the circumstances that conditioned its realization. We lived through a truly moving moment when we stopped to contemplate, from the liner anchored in high seas, Cape Horn where 149 shipwrecks have been registered from 1643 to 1990. On the other hand, agitated protestors, enraged by the possible war in Iraq seemed to compete to fill the streets of cities throughout the world. Furthermore, and for the first time in my cruises, I was able to find spiritual refuge attending daily mass, I managed to enlist in an excursion completely conducted in Spanish by a Spanish lady from Barcelona and felt encouraged to take classes in Argentine tango taught by the married couple Miró, Christian from Buenos Aires, Argentina and María from Madrid, Spain. The effectiveness of the trip was also influenced, as will be evident later on, by the erratic climate, lack of good transportation and, at times, though seldom, poor preparation of guides that occasionally turned out to be practicing students.

## SANTIAGO, CHILE

Our traveling date from Los Angeles via LANCHILE was February 15, 2003. In spite of arriving at the airport almost three hours before departure, the waiting line to pass security checks was so immensely long that, had it not been for a lady in a wheelchair who claimed us as her family in order to go through a very special line (though we were only acquaintances), the airplane would have perhaps left without us. Waiting already inside were some of our friends from NORGEN who had also accompanied us in the Alaska cruise already described in my book *Odyssey Resumed*.

We left Los Angeles in the afternoon. We made a one-hour-and-a-half stop in Lima, Peru. The lighting of the Peruvian capital could be seen from the plane as a huge tapestry of stars. It just presented to the onlooker an impressive view of cosmogony. During that short stay we could not leave the airport, but we had the opportunity of doing some shopping. In a store that showed some articles that interested us, we had to wake up the clerk who seemed to be enjoying a very pleasant dream. Thank God that there are still some honest people in this world: anyone could have stolen his items for sale without him noticing a thing...

Less than four hours later, we landed in the Chilean capital of Santiago early in the morning and were taken to the Sheraton Santiago Hotel, surrounded by beautiful gardens, luxuriant vegetation and a delightful view of Andean peaks covered with snow. We had over six hours to gloat on a good breakfast and wait for the departure to Valparaíso where we would embark for the cruise. During that hanging around period, walking the hotel surroundings, I stumbled unto the Metropolitan Park of Santiago from where the visitor can relish a privileged view of the city.

With a 712 hectares surface, which includes the Chacarillas, Pirámide, San Cristóbal peaks and Bosque Santiago, the Metropolitan Park is the biggest urban park in all of Chile and one of the biggest in the world. Until the beginning of the 20th century, those peaks were rocky places, devoid of any vegetation. Fortunately, in 1917, a law passed allowed the creation of a public park in that location under the auspices of the Ministry of Housing and Urbanism.

Since then, the park has undergone a truly remarkable development. Nowadays, a funicular takes the visitor to the entertainment center of the park during the season from November to March. There, one can find the Mapulemu Botanical Garden, the huge Tupahue and Antilén swimming pools, a beautiful green area with great distribution of Chilean flora and numerous picnic areas, which the Chileans call "implementadas", where families can go picnicking or on excursions. It is just an exquisite location.

The panoramic visit of Santiago took place by bus on our way to Valparaíso, one and a half hour from the capital. Though very sparing in explanations, the guide uttered a few somewhat interesting statistics, some of them very well known around the world. It is common knowledge that Chile is the longest and narrowest country in the Americas. It consists of approximately 2600 miles in length and an average of 11 miles in width. All through its territory contrasts abound: the Atacama dessert in the North, a fertile orchard in the center, and virgin forests, lakes, volcanoes and snow-capped mountains in the South. This shows very unique landscapes as is the case of the majestic Andes range. It also implies great challenges to resolve successfully monumental

problems in telecommunication and land transit. On the other hand, Chile is divided into 13 regions, of which Santiago is the Metropolitan Region. With its seven million inhabitants, Santiago is the political capital of the country, in spite of the fact that the Congress resides in Valparaíso.

What stands out in the run through the city is the remarkable amount of construction work in progress. Though the edifices being built are many, what impresses most is the configuration of a freeway under the main course of water supply. It was scheduled to be finished in 2005. However, there is little heavy industry which, according to the guide, is found further south, particularly in Concepción.

Of special interest to the traveler on the way to Valparaíso from Santiago is the serene and appealing open space along Ruta 68, a four-lane modern highway, two in each direction. Other than the two tunnels that must be crossed, one and a quarter mile long the first and half a mile the other, the panorama is ornamented with lush and delightful vineyards. I felt that I was traveling through Tuscany in Italy or El Bierzo in Spain.

A very peculiar detail catches the eyes of the tourist. To lessen or to blot out air pollution in one of the villages, they have started building, at the lower slopes of the hill, houses that have a very peculiar characteristic, asserts the guide: "all of them have been built in colonial style".

We crossed two very beautiful valleys: the fertile and lush Valle Curacaví, which produces abundant fruit, and Valle Casa Blanca, very rich in white wines, but not in red ones. This valley owes its name to the fact that there was a very big white house where travelers used to stop to eat, sleep and change horse.

We also went by a famous sanctuary erected in honor of the Immaculate Conception. Every December 8, when pilgrims come from all corners of Chile, all roads leading to it are closed to all car traffic.

## VALPARAÍSO, CHILE

Valparaíso constitutes, not only the port city of the same name, but also Region V of the country. In the stretch of Santiago-Valparaíso, Ruta 68, the auto-car travels alongside a forested nursery of trees that are bred there to be planted later on throughout the country. We also travel alongside Lake Peñuelas. Built between 1895 and 1900, this artificial dam supplies potable water to the upper sections of Valparaíso and Viña del Mar. Both of these cities form part of the Peñuela National Reserve that belongs to the Valparaiso Region. Located about 20 miles from the port, that national reserve occupies a surface of 9,094 hectares, at an altitude of anywhere from 1078 to 1960 feet above sea level. It enjoys a pleasant average temperature of 14° Celsius (57° Fahrenheit) and a medium precipitation of 520 mm. (20 inches) annually. Amidst a very rich fauna of mammals, fowl and fish, as well as a diverse flora of introduced trees such as pines and eucalyptus, and native trees as "quillay" (soapbark tree) and "litre" (of the terebinth tree family), the Peñuelas National Reserve enjoys a lay-out of 14 picnic areas with bench-tables, fireplaces and trash disposals.

The city of Valparaíso itself sits on the hills as the oldest city in Chile. Today, it has a population of about 700,000 inhabitants and has become the most active port of the country. What most impresses the tourist is the view of its houses, packaged among its 32 hills, seemingly without motive or cause, without noticeable architectural sense or detail of any particular order. Before such a spectacular environmental atypical disorder, the visitor cannot help but marvel and ask, somewhat confused: "How can those people get to their houses?" The landscape is so incredible that even those of us who have seen the scenery of San Francisco of California become stunned.

Proceeding from Santiago, we enter the city through Avenida Argentina, a wide and crowded street, so named to honor Juan Bautista Alberti, one of those who initiated and promoted the writing of the Argentine constitution who first retired to Valparaíso, until he finally moved to Paris, France, where he died.

Another surprise that intrigues the tourist is a statue dedicated to San Juan Bosco, founder of the Order of the Christian Brothers in Turin, Italy, as readers of my Odyssey to Opportunity may remember when I describe my studies in Grugliasco, in the outskirts of that great Italian city. Similarly, the visitor is surprised by a flea market, like Madrid's "Rastro", but much more similar to the open market of Calais, France, which I delineate in my Odyssey Fulfilled.

## PUERTO MONTT, CHILE

This was our second cruise after September 11, 2001. The boarding in Valparaíso turned out to be fast and much easier than I had ever imagined. New security measures had already been implemented. For the first time, all passengers had to notify the civil authorities, before boarding, of their participation in the cruise. This new requirement does not impose any sacrifice, improves the security system and also accelerates the boarding process. No complaints were heard from passengers, but praises were rather common.

At six in the afternoon, then, the Norwegian Dream sailed towards Puerto Montt, the first port of call, known for its lakes and volcanoes. It belongs to Region X – Los Lagos publicized to the tourists as a “naturally wild paradise, immersed between Andean peaks where the spirit of southern Chile lives”. Furthermore, it represents the door to Patagonia. The sea was quite stormy due to the gusty and cold Antarctic winds. Still, we could sleep well.

The port is a big bay of calm waters, protected by mountains of the Tenglo Island, a narrow and rocky coast. Founded in 1853 by Vicente Pérez Rosales with the help of German immigrants who had come to settle in the surroundings of Lake Llanquihue, Puerto Montt served for many years as a “support town” in the colonizing effort. Nowadays, it is the capital of “Región de los Lagos”, has a population of more than 84,000 inhabitants and enjoys a remarkable development that rests on some thirty salmon hatcheries, a vigorous forestry, fishing industries and companies of local service.

Being a very rainy place, the climate is affected by a precipitation of an average of 225 days annually, which produces a landscape truly worthy of contemplation that brings enchantment and repose. I had already become aware of that delight and calmness through a video that I used to show to my civilization and culture students. However, now I could feel it and see it personally as self-evident. Nevertheless, at the present time, serious problems of circulation disturb that tranquility. Due to the good economy of the region, many people rush to live there. The fleet of cars grows and the number of streets remains the same. Many black cars can be seen that resemble taxicabs. In reality, though, they form part of the public transportation system.

Before proceeding to the chosen excursions, we took a panoramic tour of the city, during which we traveled along the coastal avenue, similar to the Havana and Santo Domingo dykes. The guide would point out places of interest and narrate something about their historic importance to the locality. That is how we stumbled into a market of local arts and crafts where we could value, for instance, sweaters made of alpaca wool. We also drove by the “Museo del Papa” (Pope Museum), founded in 1986 to celebrate and commemorate the Holy Father’s arrival in Latin America. We were also made aware of some of the peculiarities of the Cathedral, built in neo-classic style in 1856. It stands as the oldest building of the city. After the 1960 earthquake, its façade was rebuilt with wood. Though it still preserves a strong classic look, its dome was modified to Byzantine style. The guide called our attention to La Escuela San José, one of the best schools in the country. It is a free Catholic school for girls up to the sixth grade.

All houses are made of “larce”, which is the most commonly used wood, typical to the region. It is worth noticing that each house differs from the other by their painted roofs in many and diverse colors. Roofs of houses are painted due to the climate, which is to say to the abundant rains. Citizens can become owners of their house either by following a private process or availing themselves of the help of the government to acquire living quarters. They save one thousand dollars and apply to obtain their own home. This public process can take up to two or more years. Then, they pay monthly, until they finish paying their house.

Exiting Puerto Montt for the various excursions, a big surface can be observed sprinkled with somewhat attractive green round shrubs called “chacais” or “ulex”. They are not native to the region and were brought by the Germans. The local people consider them a plague because of their unusual growth. They have very strong roots, flourish twice a year and produce yellow flowers.

During clear days, the Osorno volcano can be seen, in its splendor, some 8,500 feet above sea level. It can be reached by traveling through a stunningly beautiful landscape along Lake Llanquihue, the biggest in Chile, a clean and cold water lake where salmon can be fished. In the olden days, the lake served as a means of communication or transportation between the surrounding villages. Nowadays it is mainly for tourists.



Salmon was introduced in the region only some twenty years ago. It procreates and grows in fresh water and later develops in salty waters. It constitutes a great source of work and thus generates important income in the area. In fact, salmon is now the prime export of the region, and second in the country. It was rather surprising to hear the guide claim that Chile ranks today as the second country in the world to export salmon, second only to Norway.

This Chilean region is also rich in wood, from the pine and eucalyptus trees of its dense forests, and ranks as the second most important export of the region. Mountains of sawdust in the port reminded me vividly of Chalmers Port, at the entrance of the city of Dunedin in New Zealand, which I described in *Odyssey Fulfilled*.

Primarily, the surroundings of Puerto Montt form part, however, of a land of volcanoes (50 volcanoes can be counted), of lakes and of very thick vegetation. In light of these details, I selected an excursion that would fill my intense desire of getting imbued by that environment. For the first time in all my cruises, I chose an excursion completely conducted in Spanish. Though she understands and speaks Spanish very well, my wife Lucille chose to accompany our good friend Amante in her excursion in English.

All that I have just described is found on the way to the Petrohué waterfalls and to Lake Todos los Santos (All Saints), better known as Lago Esmeralda (Lake Emerald) because of the vivid green-blue color of its waters, which accentuates in intensity according to the sun's light reflected upon them. Once at the lake, we boarded a "catamaran" (like a ferry) to enjoy the beautiful landscape of forests of a fascinating blend of native trees, a most delightful panorama crowned by the volcanoes Osorno, Puntagudo and Tronador, which that day were covered with snow. It is good to bear in mind that, with its 10,900 feet above sea level, Tronador is the highest peak in the region. It was a marvelous cruise of some 45 minutes in the tranquil waters of that lake, considered as one of the most beautiful in the world. In spite of experiencing a little bit of cold at times, it was nothing that a good cup of hot coffee could not cure.

In that same lake, and in the shape of a delightful narrow beach, the Petrohué River initiates its course. We later visited a charming waterfall in a locality of the same name where waters flow between unique formations of volcanic rocks and lava.

Petrohué means "place of the petro", a small insect that stings like a grey fly. However, what must worry the tourist while visiting the Petrohué Waterfalls is not so much the itching of that little insect, but rather the danger that the uneven road leading to the cascades represents, for it is partly slippery and always very crowded. Walking with extreme care, the visitor reaches the leaping places of the river. They bear some similarities with the "Bufadora" (the Puffing) of Ensenada, Mexico, already described in *Odyssey Fulfilled*. In these cascades, however, the foam does not "jump" up, but rather falls. Besides, in Petrohué, the rocks are volcanic.

On our way back to the port, we stopped at picturesque villa of Puerto Varas, known as "the City of Roses" for the many and varied rose-bushes that decorate its colorful surroundings on the shores of Lake Llanquihue. Moreover, it can proudly show eight houses declared "Monumento Nacional" (National Monument). Founded in 1854, that pleasant and attractive German colony bears the name of Antonio Varas, one of President Manuel Montt's ministers. It has 54,000 inhabitants and a university. Due to the increasing demand in housing, it has become a satellite community of Puerto Montt. Through it passes the Carretera Panoamericana, an approximately 14,000 miles long highway that stretches from Alaska to about 150 miles south of Puerto Montt.

We also crossed through Chiloé, a native community where descendants of the "Huiliches", still conserve local customs and traditions. They dedicate themselves to fishing and agriculture, and manufacture the best arts and crafts of the region.

## CHACABUCO, CHILE

With a little bit of professorial nostalgia, I prepared myself mentally to bid farewell to such a lovely corner of the world and explore, further south, the 11th Region of Chile, known also as Región Aisén del General Carlos Ibáñez del Campo. It is considered the most humid and windy territory of Patagonia. We called at Chacabuco port, which offers to tourists landscapes of spectacular natural scenery. Still virgin to the tourism of masses, it suffers the effects of a very limited tourist infrastructure: the buses have to come from a town 150 miles away

and the guides that accompany the sightseers are students, anxious to share their region with visitors and make their visit memorable.

“Transshipping terminal and port for large boats”, Puerto Chacabuco is a small fishing village of about one thousand inhabitants and the entry door to the Aisén Region (from the English ice end). Packing sea products, especially trout and salmon constitutes an important industry. That charming and picturesque little town, active and flourishing as it is, can only offer basic services. It has two schools, a hospital and two restaurants that serve excellent food near the disembarkation area. Everybody knows each other and everyone seems “good and decent”, the guide informed us. The two main sources of work are fishing and the military.

The region benefits from the four seasons, at times all on the same day. It even snows in the nearby Andes around whose peaks a condor can be seen flying. It is the third largest but least inhabited region of the country: 85% of its territory is virgin land, interrupted only by some cultivated fields around the Carretera Austral (Austral Highway) between Chacabuco and Coihaique, the capital of the Aisén Region. It exhibits a garden of spectacular beauty for nature lovers and a sorrowful deception for tourists interested in historic buildings: there just aren't any.

At about 5 miles from Chacabuco, Aisén (also written Aysén) was some time ago the Region's capital. It has now some twenty thousand souls and lost its capital title after huge fires during the 1960 decade, which lasted ten years, since the “lenga” wood keeps the fire alive in its roots. After those fires, “originated by the colonizers to inhabit the prairies”, “great erosion resulted, which ran aground the port”. From then on, large ships anchor in Chacabuco while only fishing boats and schooners reach land in Aisén. Similarly since then, Coihaique, with a population of 50,000 has maintained the title of capital of the Region.

An excursion through delightful surroundings, with an impressive view of the Andes, took us to Reserva Nacional Río Simpson (River Simpson ...) of 41, 369.5 hectares in extension. During one hour of bus riding, one could behold splendid landscapes of rivers whose transparent blue waters, at times, flow amidst deep cliffs. Other places of great scenic beauty awaken the interest and curiosity of the tourist, among them a hill, or rather a round rocky peak, which due to its shape covered with snow resembles an English muffin and is precisely named “Queque inglés” (English cake). Similarly, two seductive waterfalls catch the eye of the visitor: el “Salto Velo de la Novia” (The Veil of the Bride Jump) that allows tourists to walk to its edge, and “Cascada de la Virgen” (Waterfall of the Virgin) which forms a crown and a mantle of water and can only be admired from the bus. “Each February 11, people of the region come to bring flowers and candles to Our Lady of Lourdes”, commented with pride our guide, a young female student.

For travelers of an adventurous spirit, the excursion of Chacabuco and its surroundings could be very ideal. Those interested in enjoying nature, to walk in the open air and make a detailed study of nature in Patagonia can join other excursions to the “Parque Aiken del Sur” (Aiken Park of the South). The tour includes a two hour walk through the forest and shores of the river, during which sightseers can discover fascinating details of the flora and fauna of that humid and windy zone of Patagonia where there is no air pollution and people live long lives.

## PUNTA ARENAS, CHILE

As previously stated, Puerto Montt represents the entry door to Patagonia in Chile. In addition, its rugged and deep coast gives birth to estuaries with steep rocky shores, narrow arms of the sea or inlets that penetrate the littoral all the way to Cape Horn. Its scenery has repeatedly been compared to the beauty of the coasts of Norway, New Zealand and Alaska. Though there is, indeed, great scenic beauty, those analogies do not convince me, for those estuaries are too wide to produce the impressively dazzling natural beauty of the Norwegian fjords, the Interior Passage of Alaska or the Sounds of New Zealand. The liner anchored awhile to allow passengers to contemplate Glazier Eyer, some 150 feet deep and 3 miles long. On the other hand, we could not appreciate the awe that causes Glacier Amalia because it was dark and cloudy. The small section that could be seen of that 2.5 miles long glacier seemed impressionable. Its highest peak reaches 2500 feet in height.

In the stretch between Chacabuco and Punta Arenas, spreads one of the most courted fjords in the world by scientists and explorers in waters up to 16,000 feet deep: the small but famous and attractive Magellan Strait.

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