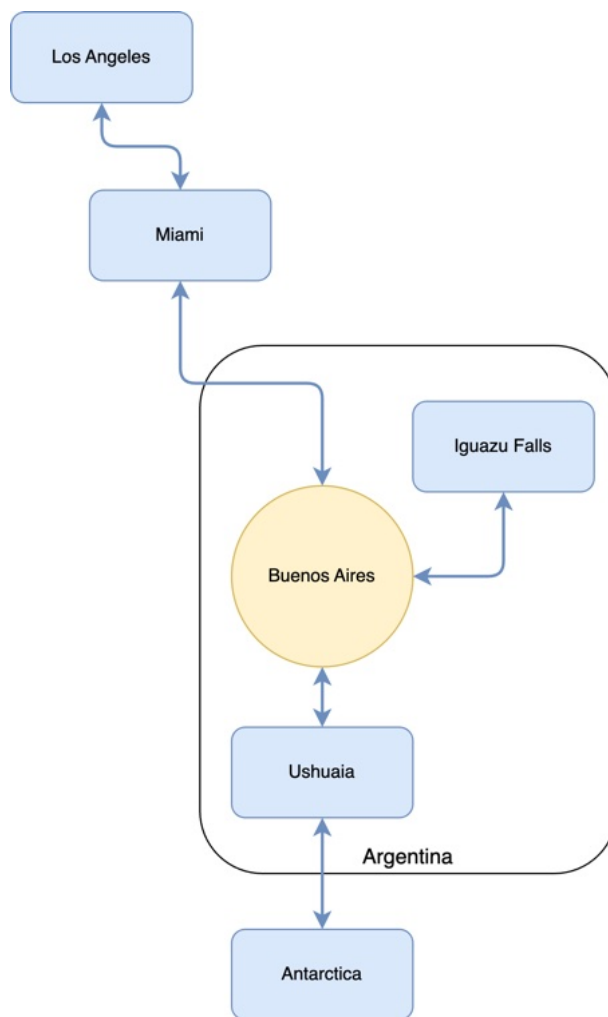


## Allison & Steve are off to Antarctica!

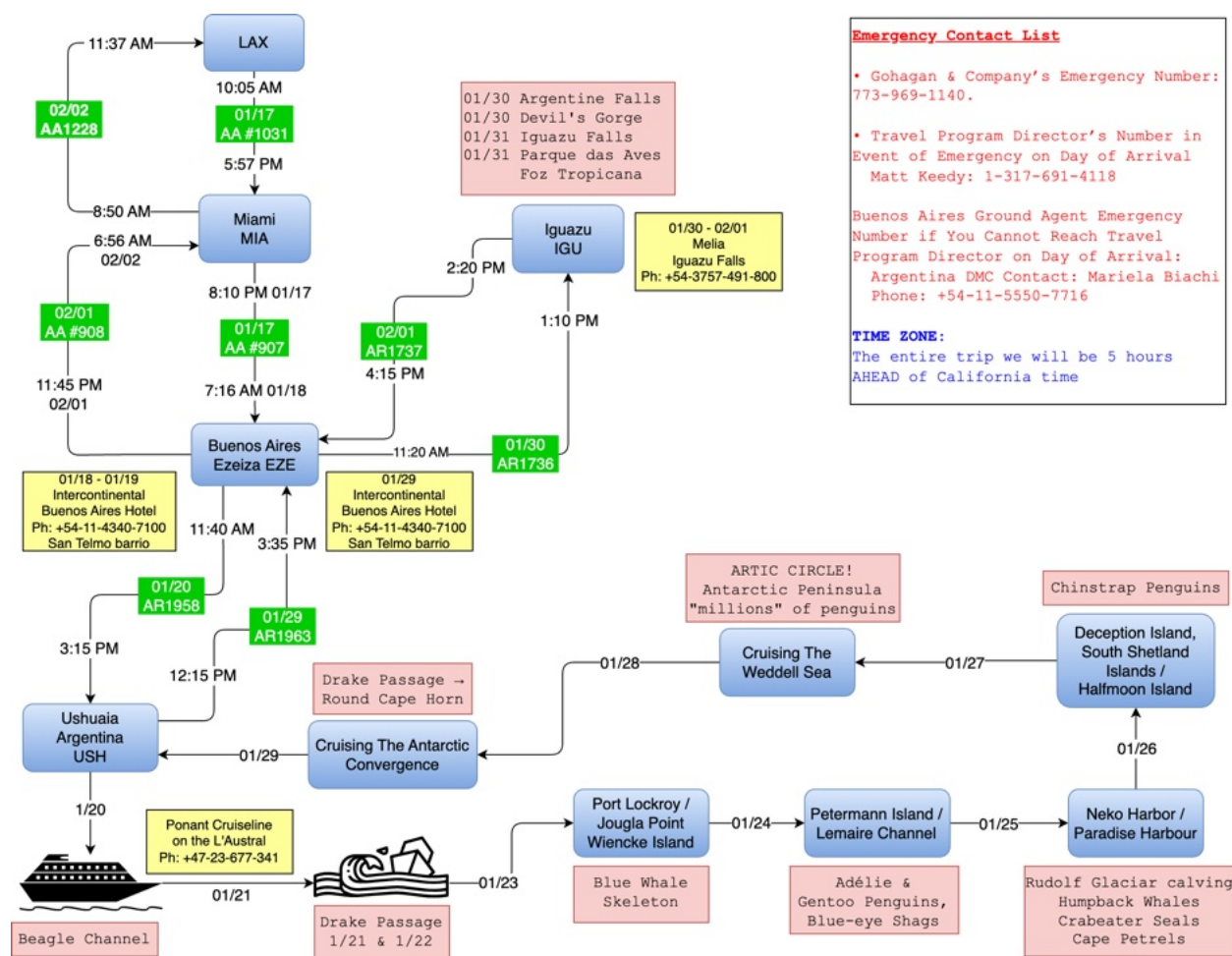
We went to the Arctic in July 2022, the tropics in August and we're going to the Antarctic in January 2023! This is your email that lets you, with no friendship penalty points, opt out of my fascinating travelogue. A few people have taken me up on this idea and we remain friends to this day. As we get farther south on the planet, we will likely end up out of range from even Satellite Internet so you will likely have a few day's respite from me during those times.

We leave on January 17th and return on February 2nd. Here is a super-simplified version of the diagram of our trip. We go in and out of Buenos Aires 3 times.



But the real excitement comes if you try to interpret our trip through the full diagram.

If you want to stay on distribution for my nonsense, please retain this handy dandy diagram (suitable for framing) as a reference guide:



Bon Voyage!

Allison & Steve

p.s. for those of you worried about the Tesla, Ada, and Grace, don't be. Tesla is at her vacation home with Lindsay, Nolan, Forbes, and Siena. The kids are much more attentive to her (which we THINK she likes) than we are! Ada and Grace will be well cared-for by our in-home cat sitter, the venerable Alistair.



## Antarctica Travelogue - Day 1/2 - Buenos Aires

A long-standing tradition for my travelogue is that I get confused on the days. Don't think I've done that already - it's just that it took us the better part of two days to get to Buenos Aires! Let's start our adventure at the Los Angeles international airport, shall we?

You know that thing where you're chillin' in the Admirals Club at Terminal 5, contemplating what free food you're going to eat while lounging with power to your laptop and then you decide to look for boarding time from Los Angeles to Miami on your mobile pass and it says Gate 157 which is in Terminal B? Like as in BRADLEY INTERNATIONAL TERMINAL? Yeah, that happened.

Luckily, the lovely woman staffing the front desk at the lounge said, "Don't worry. You were at the right terminal to check your luggage, and if you just stroll 10 minutes down to the left, you can walk to your Bradley terminal without exiting security.

Here we are calmly strolling as instructed - the correct terminal is above our heads!



The cost of business class for this trip was prohibitively expensive (I mean like you could buy someone a house in the rural US midwest prohibitive). But Steve was able to move some frequent flyer miles around between our accounts and for a "small" fee get us Business Class for 3 of the 4 legs of the trip.

But then tragedy struck - look how far away our seats were!



But then we got lucky, the people were no-shows, and we arm-wrestled the flight attendants into letting us switch to the middle two before they upgraded two lucky passengers.

I'm sure you're relieved to know that the tragedy was averted after all.



We arrived from the 9-hour redeye at 7 AM Buenos Aires time. Shockingly when our travel group (University alumni groups from across the country) were through border control and immigration and was bussed to the Intercontinental Hotel by 9 AM, our rooms were not ready.

We were prepared for this and had packed on top of our suitcases a set of summer clothes since it was going to be in the 80's in Buenos Aires. We took off on foot to explore the city.

The obvious thing to do is to go see the Pink House in the Plaza de Mayo. Think White House, but pink. We were told the President only works here, and he helicopters in from his residence daily.



We were getting a bit peckish so we stopped for brunch. Warning! They serve you an obscene amount of food for not a lot of money. I ordered an "American Breakfast" of bacon and eggs. I was

indeed served bacon and eggs. And sausage. And a breadbasket with 12 rolls in it. And toast. With whipped butter and jam. And orange juice. And two maple syrup croissants. AND a Bailey's Cream cake!

I hate food photos as a general rule but this photo is of MY food before Steve's food was delivered.



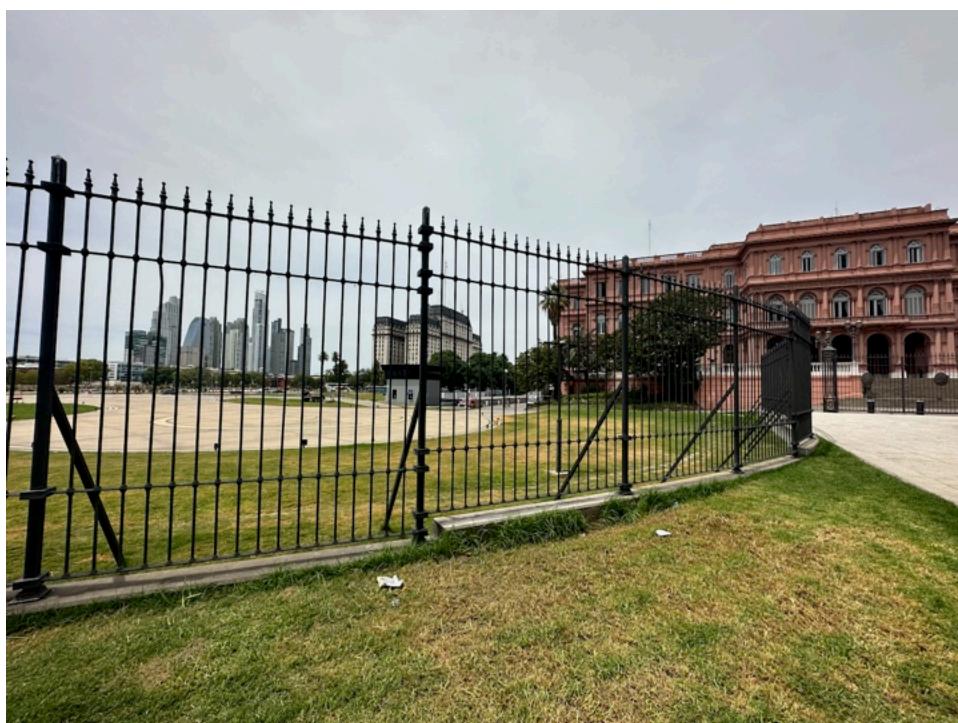


We waddled back to the hotel to get hats (it was supposed to be cloudy but the Weather app lied). Then I convinced Steve it would be fun to try to walk to the ocean. I wanted to stick my piggies in the Southern Atlantic Ocean.

This turned into a 4-mile walk but it was awesome.

We walked behind the Pink House - and look what we found! It's the President's helipad. I knew you'd feel better having that little factoid proven out.

In our quest to get to the ocean we had to cross a canal, and while I had picked a boring bridge, Steve found this nifty one with a elderly schooner museum next to it.



The nifty bridge turned out to be called Puente de la Mujer, and if my complete and utter lack of the Spanish language isn't failing me, it appears it was made out of 100,000 recycled plastic bottles. Plus evidently stainless steel.







We appear to be below the minimum required number of selfies so here we are on the nifty bridge.

Since we chose to go off the beaten path, instead of seeing all of the statues of old famous dudes that drove the future of Argentina, we found the Monumento al Taxista. Hey, maybe taxi drivers drove the future of Argentina?

According to Apple Maps, between my piggies and the Southern Atlantic Ocean was the Parque Mujeres Argentinas, which was a big green blob that I took to be a protected park.

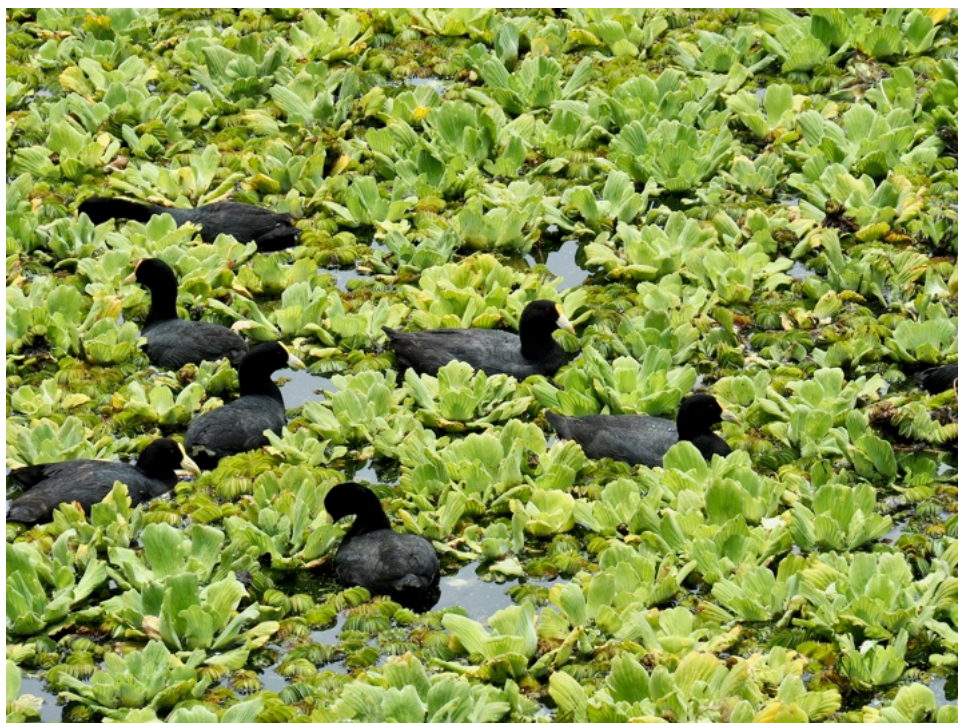






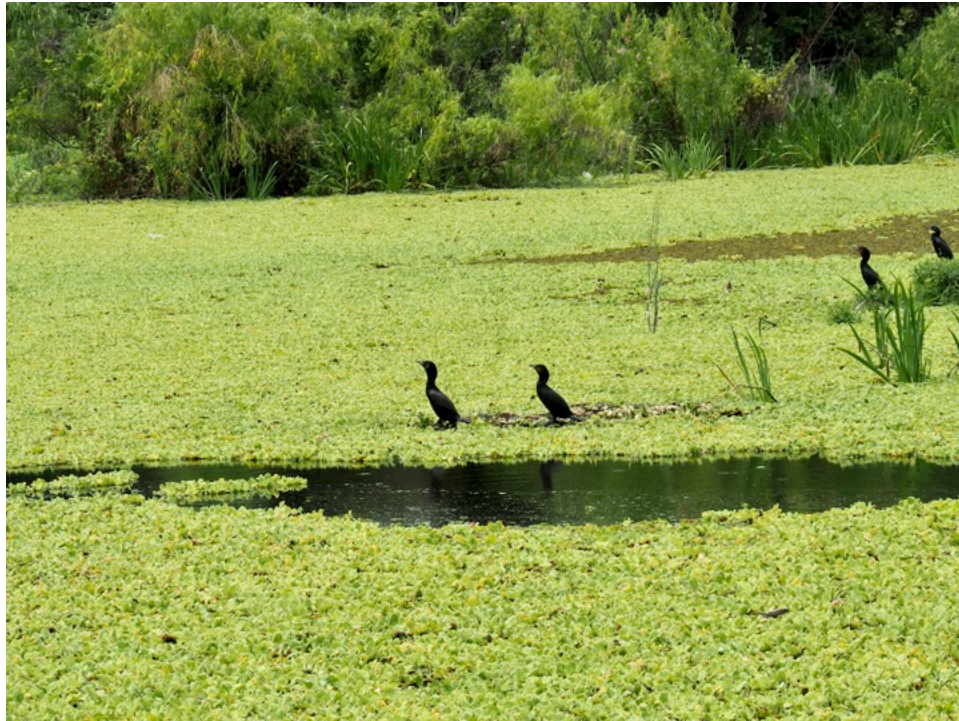
But it turned out to be much cooler. It was a glorious marsh filled with birds. Here we are blocking your view of it:

While we were looking at the birds, a gentleman came up and started telling us what they were called. He repeatedly said these little black ones were patas. He said it over and over and over again. Finally he said, "In English ... um ... quack quack?" He was telling us that they're ducks.





These looked like Cormorants in the distance to me.



I liked this shot because it's hard to figure out where the bird is in it.







These were Steve's favorite because they could walk on top of the foliage. Look closely and you can see that they have GIANT toes (claws?) that allow them to do that.

When we finally made it to the ocean, it turned out to be a very industrial port, and sadly I could not get my piggies in the ocean. Right behind that ship, right above Steve, you can see the opening to go out to the ocean. Oh well, we wouldn't have seen that awesome marsh if we hadn't tried to see the ocean.







On our way back, Steve had to chase some little kids off of this Ode to Lipstick statue.

Back in town, I took this picture of what is probably a church with a name because I liked the juxtaposition of the different colors and architecture of the Plaza de Mayo.





We made a list of our observations so far of Buenos Aires:

- A lot of police officers are women. They all carry guns (the men too).
- A lot of people smoke.
- Food portions are gigantic and inexpensive.
- When crossing the street, a white walking stick figure light does not necessarily mean that the cars will stop
- Walking paths are not particularly accessible, especially down near the harbor.



## Antarctica Travelogue - Day 2.5 & 3 Buenos Aires

I've been summarily corrected by some smarty pants people on the trip who explained that we did not make it to the ocean. We were technically at a river - Río de la Plata. At its widest it is 139 miles across! I looked it up to verify the smarty pants and it's considered the widest river in the world and is indeed fresh water. So I guess it's ok I didn't try to stick my piggies in it.



Last night we went to the liveliest part of town I've heard so much about. We went to dinner with Andrea Ghez and her son Evan. He's a senior in mechanical engineering at Johns Hopkins so we had a lot to talk about. He said that he'd heard good things about a restaurant/bar called Las Galgos so we set off on foot for the one mile walk. That's not far for intrepid walkers like us, but we'd walked 4 miles in the sun (87°F outside) earlier that day so it seemed farther.

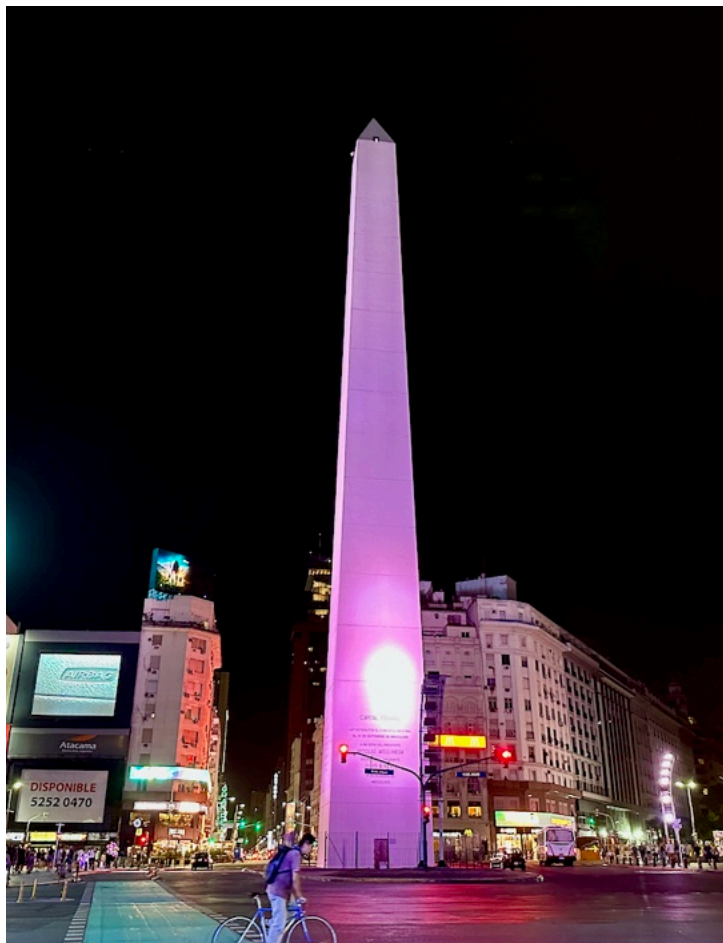


When we arrived there was a MASSIVE crowd of people at the entrance. We were chagrined. Obviously it lived up to its reputation. Then Evan said, "maybe I should just go check."

It turned out the crowd was not there to go to the restaurant at all (though it was pretty busy inside). The crowd was friends with an artist who was going to be unveiling his mural on the wall right next to the restaurant's main window! We got a table inside, had fabulous drinks (I had a Martín which is some sort of lovely gin drink) and excellent dinners. I ordered what it said on the English menu was an omelet, but Evan explained in Spain at least that word meant more of a quiche. He was right and it was delicious. Sorry, Molly, no food photo.



When we came outside after dinner, the stunning mosaic mural had been unveiled. That's Lionel Messi, the star player for the Argentinian soccer (football) team who just won the World Cup this year.



Speaking of the World Cup, this is the Juan de Gary obelisk in the hopping night-life part of town. You may remember seeing it because ...

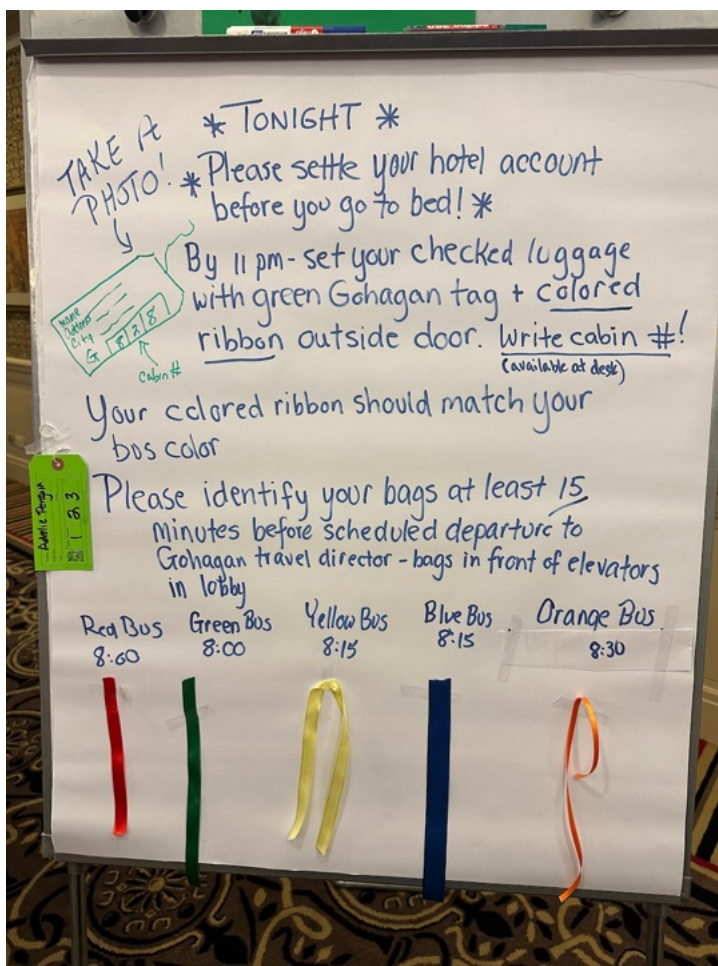
When the Argentinians won the World Cup, this was one of the iconic photos on the web.



We laid our little punkin' heads down around 11 PM last night after a fun night of frivolity. Lindsay was surprised that we were able to do as much as we did after traveling nearly around the clock. I have to confess that we may have had nap time yesterday afternoon.

And day 3 begins...

This morning we had a VERY IMPORTANT BRIEFING where they explained in great detail an incredibly complex set of instructions on how to leave our bags. We have one color of ribbon for which alumni association we're traveling with (UCLA is blue of course) and another ribbon for whether the bag is going to go down to Antarctica. The tag should be green but it should have your cabin number on it for the ship, but no green tag should be on a bag you're leaving at the hotel to await the trip to Iguazu falls, unless you're not GOING to Iguazu...



This is just one of three of the instructional pages we have to follow. Just what are the chances everyone gets this right? After the VERY IMPORTANT BRIEFING, they took us on a nice bus tour around the city. We started in a very touristy but charming area called Boca, which is the original port.





Steve and his little friend at the souvenir shop.

In a 180° turn in terms of local culture, we went to the Cathedral Buenos Aires. It was very nondescript on the outside, where the only hint that it was a church was the 12 stone columns outside representing the 12 apostles.







When we were walking in we saw the changing of the guards for the cathedral:

Which raises the obvious question of, what are they guarding? I promised this travelogue would be low on facts but I'll slip this one in and hope no one notices. They're guarding the Mausoleum of General José de San Martín. Evidently he was in command of the winning side at the Battle of San Lorenzo which appears to have been a turning point in the Spanish-American war in the 1800s. Ok, that's enough facts.





Besides guarding a mausoleum, the guards did one interesting thing. If you got too close to them, accidentally or on purpose, they banged their swords down really hard on the ground which made a HUGE sound. Don't worry, they didn't break the marble because they have little wood blocks on which they can do their banging.



See? You don't get that kind of info in most travelogues.



I wish we could have stopped at this park - check out this cool sculpture!  
Evidently, at one point in time, the rose was articulated so it would open and

close. It reminded us of seeing The Bean in Chicago with Dean and Suzanne. It is, quite imaginatively, called Flor de Metal.



The last place on the tour we went was to a cemetery: Cementerio de la Recoleta.





It was a maze of mausoleums that were really fascinating.





But Tour Guide Maria was excited about the cemetery for one specific body. We were there to see the tomb of Eva Perón.





All of the tour guides who have driven us (ok, there's only been two) are very excited about the main avenue which is named after a date, which seems kind of weird to me. It's called Avenida 9 de Julio, or 9th of July. It's named after their declared Independence Day from Spain in 1816. They also mention every time we're on this particular road that it's the widest avenue in the world. But it's actually a boulevard, so I don't know about that.

They would be very angry with me if they knew I didn't send you a photo proving how wide it is. We're in a bus traveling along side what you see here. The second path next to us is foot traffic, and then you can see more lanes going in the same direction, and beyond that you see the metro line, and beyond that past where you can even see, is the traffic flowing in the opposite direction. I bet you can see this "avenue" from space.



We had ice cream for lunch at 2 which wasn't enough to hold us over, so "dinner" at 4, and at 6:45 we're going to see the Tango because Jim and Lynda told us we have to. And it's for dinner.

Tomorrow at the crack of doom we get driven to the airport and fly 4 hours down to Ushuaia (which no two people pronounce exactly the same), and board L'Austral, our ship for the next 9 days, if my cipherin' is correct. Check the diagram on your refrigerator if you want to be sure.

Satellite WiFi is really a poor way to communicate so I may even have to shrink down the photos for the travelogue to get them to squeak through, but I'll try to get out as many messages as I can.

Steve pointed out that we forgot to do any selfies today (didn't seem right at the mausoleums, right?) He says this was a "selfless" day.



## Antarctica Travelogue - Day 3.5 Buenos Aires

When last we left our heroes, Steve and Allison were about to go to a Tango show because Jim and Lynda told them to. We had the option to go to a show that would get us back at midnight (that would be "no") or one that left at 6:45PM and would get us back to the hotel by 9:15PM.

We boarded the little bus with our collegiate friends (this is an alumni tour group) for the 0.5 mile trip to the Tango place. The venue was gorgeous with dark wood and stone walls and a stage in front of us for the after-dinner Tango show. They brought us a lovely Malbec red wine, and took our dinner orders (included in the \$75 price). Our appetizers arrived - a caprese salad for Steve and grilled eggplant with balsamic vinegar for me.





We were about halfway through our appetizers when...

A man came hurtling out of the kitchen fervently addressing everyone at the dinner tables ... in Spanish. After many sentences he finally switched to English and said three words: "EMERGENCY! GET OUT!"

Turns out there was a fire in the kitchen! 🔥

Luckily one of our table mates had the great idea to grab our wine glasses as we hustled out as rapidly as possible to watch from across the street.

There was much commotion for about 45 minutes, and then we were instructed to enter the Michelangelo restaurant right next door! As we waddled in with our now-empty wine glasses, the fire department arrived.







Now here's the crazy part of the story. They seated us, handed us nearly identical menus, and picked up our orders right where we left off, including a new bottle of Malbec for the table! The sirloin steak was amazing (evidently beef is one of their main exports). Here's a quick shot of the new and fire-less dinner:

Jim & Lynda were not wrong, the Tango show was spectacular. A big surprise to me was the variety of acts.

The women kept flinging their heels between the men's legs and never once did I see them crack a shin, but I couldn't help but wonder what their shins look like during practice of a new routine!





The orchestra was one of my favorite things to watch. See the violist on the right side?



He and the cellist kept sharing some sort of private joke. They'd look at each other and start laughing, right in the middle of the dancing or when they were on stage by themselves. The accordions were amazing, and the guy on the left ALSO kept goofing around, joking with the bass player. Also of note is that the bass player was the spitting image of my brother Jan ... who was a bass player.

The pianist appeared to be the conductor, where often the entire orchestra would turn to look at him for a tricky bit, and the pianist ALSO kept joking around and making them laugh.

The music was great and it was really fun to see them enjoying themselves so much.

Here's a terrible photo of the most amazing act of the night. This was a percussion act where the guy was beating this drum and the woman was swinging these hard balls around on the end of ropes. I took a slo-mo video of them just to try to see what the heck they were doing, and this is a screen capture that doesn't do it justice.



She swang these balls around at an alarming rate, banging them on the ground in a rhythm along with the drum and she went faster and faster and faster. Eventually, he left and came back with rope balls (there's probably a better name for them) and then started swinging them around in circles AT EACH OTHER. It was terrifying and mesmerizing and we were riveted to it.

Ok, FINE. I give you a TINY clip of the guy doing the rope balls and the woman playing the drums. Fingers crossed the airport WIFI (with VPN on of course) will upload this.



But here's the thing. The show went on ... and on ... and on. It was pushing 90 degrees inside by our estimate and we did not get out of there till 11:30 PM! Remember we signed up for the snug in our beds by 9:30 PM show!

They told us as we left that as compensation for the annoyance of a fire, they gave us the \$150 show for the price of the \$75 show. I joked to our seat mates on the bus that I would have paid an extra \$50 to leave an hour earlier and they wholeheartedly agreed!

Now that we've had a good 5.5 hours of sleep and we're at the airport ready to fly to Ushuaia to catch the ship, we're happy we saw the show and that we had an adventurous story to tell.

Off to Antarctica next!

## Antarctica Travelogue - Day 4 Ushuaia, I Hardly Knew Ya

After our night of fire and frivolity, we woke up yet again at the crack of doom, shoveled down a quick breakfast (granola and fruit yogurt if you must ask) and were hustled onto busses to travel to the airport. We had a charter flight for our 160 future collegiate passengers down to Ushuaia.

Ushuaia is at the very southern tip of South America in Tierra del Fuego which is in the region of Patagonia. I haven't been able to verify this, but the tour guide for the 30 min from the Ushuaia airport to our ship said that we were closer to the South Pole at that point than we were to Buenos Aires.

She said we were 3000 miles from the pole, 1000 miles from Antarctica, and 4000 miles from Buenos Aires. It's kind of head explode but I'll show you my



new favorite photo from the trip. I call it "You are here." (We're the blue dot.)

For those of you who need to hear a word in your head in order to remember it from reading, Ushuaia is pronounced "Oo-soo-wy-ah". It comes from the Onawo indigenous people. We've heard every pronunciation possible from every guide on every tour, so make it your own. Landing in Ushuaia,





no matter how  
your pronounce  
it, really let us  
know that we  
weren't in  
Kansas any  
more.

The tour guide  
explained to us  
that we would  
now be  
boarding our  
ship:





She was just funning us though. The beautiful French ship L'Austral

What would a cruise, or they like to call it "expedition", be without the mandatory evacuation drill?

We also had a little talk by the captain and my favorite, Cruise Director Cedric. He was hilarious. He was walking us through which things were on which decks, like the bar, restaurants, and medical. Then he was talking about the gym (which got a





laugh by itself) and he said, "It's great to go up there, run on the treadmill, and look out the vast windows to watch the Orcas diving out of the water to eat the penguins." (Ron, he was joking.)



We had a lovely cocktail party on the top deck at 7 PM as we set "sail" out of the Beagle Channel towards the infamous Drake Channel.

The sun sets very late here so we watched it

till about 9:30 PM. This was taken a bit earlier but is my favorite view. On the right side are the Andes on the Argentina side, and on the left of the channel is Chile.



The captain told us the often ferocious Drake Channel was predicted to be very gentle for our crossing over the next day and a half and here's fingers crossed it holds true.

## Antarctica Travelogue - Day 5 The Drake Passage

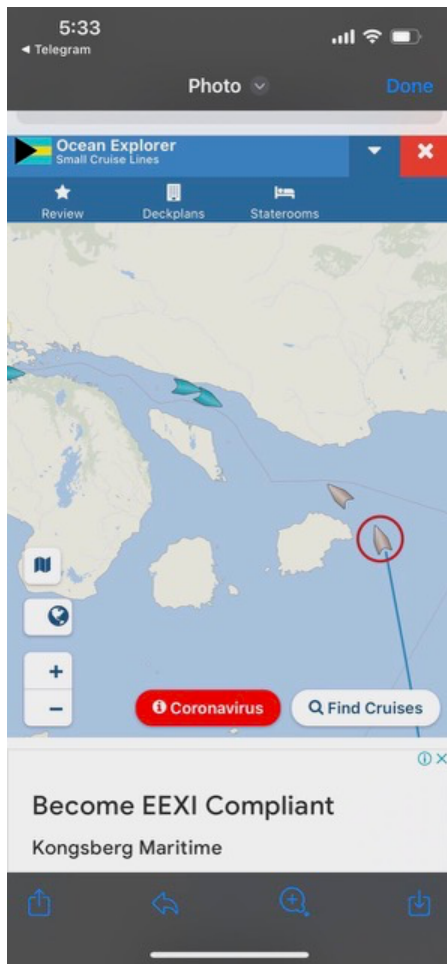
I forgot to include the most important photo from the day we boarded the ship - mandatory evacuation training - I knew you didn't want to miss it.



We're smiling here but it's a serious affair and we now understand our instructions. The idea of abandoning ship in the middle of the Southern Ocean... 🤖

As mentioned yesterday, we set out via the Beagle Channel, and around 10 PM we entered the Drake Passage. I'm assuming it's named after some dude named Drake but I'm too lazy to look it up. Maybe Sir Francis Drake? I'm just spitballin' here.





Around that time, we got a *phone call!* Lindsay used Telegram voice calling over data to alert us to the fact that her mother-in-law Teri was on a ship about to pass by us on their way back from Antarctica! It may not be as exciting to all y'all as it was to us but we were excited. The red circle is Teri's ship, and the forward of the two blue ones was ours. She was hoping we could wave at each other as the ships passed.

It got to be pretty late at night, so we texted with Teri and all decided that getting into bed was fine and we'd wave in our dreams to each other as we passed by.

Now onto Day 5:

We expected the day to be boring, since we were

just going to be at sea all day. Steve captured this shot of me in my happy place.

They didn't give us time to be bored. We had a briefing with an introduction to the expedition crew



(the folks who will take us onto land). We were quite excited to find out that kayaking might be an option! I know, most of you think we're nuts for going on a trip like this in the first place, and you think we're off our rockers to think kayaking is a good idea, but that's where we find our joy.

The second half of the meeting was mandatory IAATO training. IAATO is the International Association of Antarctica Tour Operators. It's a consortium of different countries that have made rules to protect the unique environment of Antarctica. They also explained that no country can have a territory here, which is why there is no country of Antarctica (Tom keeps reminding me of that.) We learned that we cannot sit down or set anything down on the snow (or do a glacier slide) because Avian flu is an issue here and they're worried that we might pick it up from one colony of penguins and then transfer it to another. They also explained that we would have to go through a decontamination of all of our outer clothing before being allowed to go to shore. The main thing

they're worried about is that you'll carry some seeds that would introduce plant life to the area. The decontamination procedure would include vacuuming any soft fabrics, especially velcro.

Before I go on, I need to introduce you to someone. I'd like you to meet Rico. You may have seen him in movies such as Madagascar. He's a friend of our buddy Ron, and he's quite the world traveler. When he found out we were going to Antarctica, he just assumed he'd be allowed to come on the trip with us to meet his relatives. He has a soft spot for rum, and was pretty excited to find real Havana Club rum on







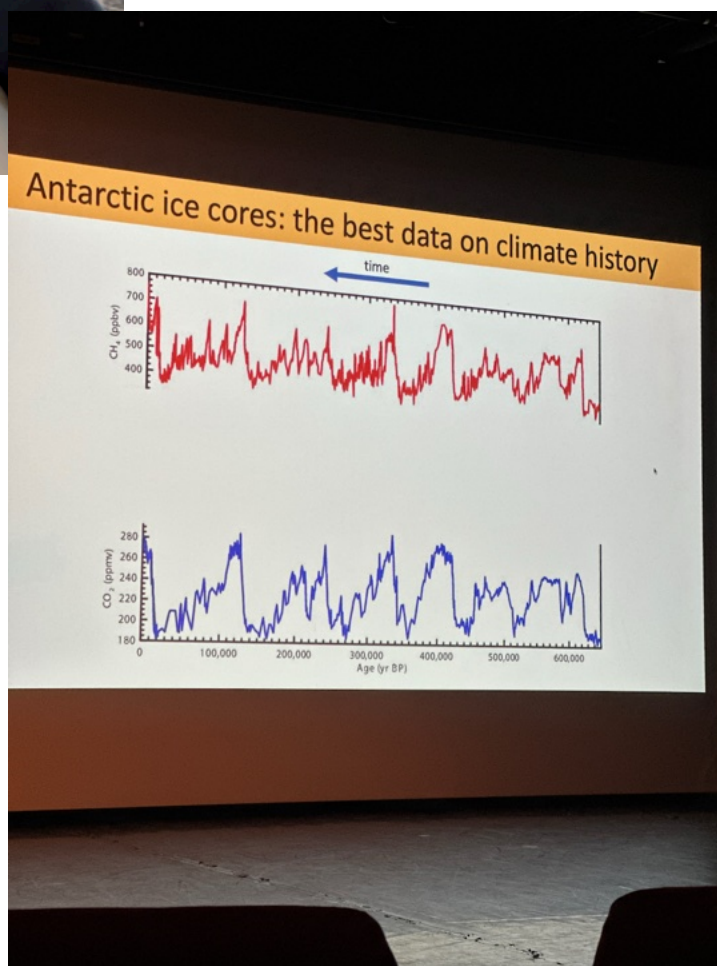
the ship that can only be acquired in Cuba.

As Rico would be going ashore with us, it was important that he be decontaminated. I only wish I had the bandwidth to send you the video of this, but a screen capture gets most of the essence:

We saw two lectures, the first of which was by Dr. Jason Briner of the University of Buffalo where he walked us through how they take

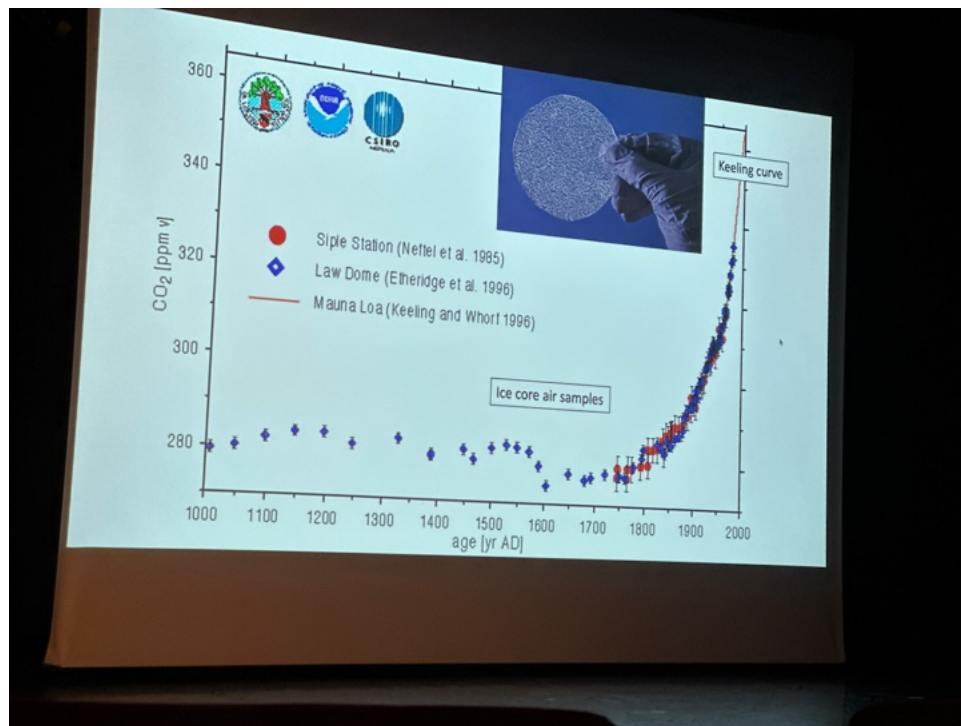
core samples of the ice sheet in Antarctica. These core samples of the ice are very narrow (like a pinprick in the giant ice sheet) but they gather them down to 2.5 miles below the surface of the ice sheet. They stop just shy of hitting the ground underneath.

When they take these core samples out, they can analyze the air bubbles in the ice cylinder, and literally go back in time to understand the composition of the air that was trapped within. The oldest



bubbles are 650,000 years old.

In the graph to the right, you can see the levels of carbon dioxide and methane rising and falling over the hundreds of thousands of years, showing a cyclical global warming pattern as a natural effect of the planet (more explanation in a bit. Note the peak value of these natural rises are at most 280 ppmv (parts per million by volume.)



This is the kind of data that makes some people think that humans aren't the ones to blame for climate change. But there is, of course, *one* more bit of data to be added to the graph, and that's the data after around the 1800s when humans began to contribute to greenhouse gasses.

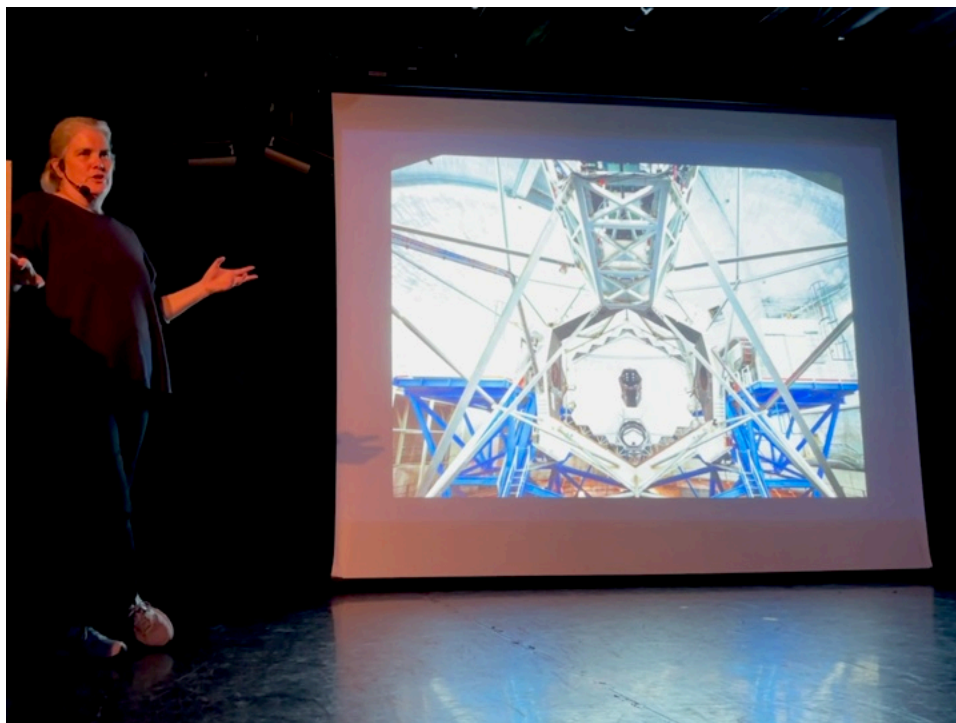
The graph above starts at 1000 AD with the carbon dioxide levels around 290 ppmv, but we've shot that up to 360 ppmv by the year 2000. He went on to show us current data, for January 21st, 2023, which were around 380. So, yeah.





While the results are certainly undeniable and undeniably problematic, the science of how they figured this out was fascinating. Ice bubbles under the Antarctica ice sheet. We then had our opportunity to pick up our

pre-issued boots and our parkas. The boots stay here, but the parkas are ours to keep. We think they look pretty snazzy.



You may remember from our Iceland trip that we traveled with Dr. Andrea Ghez, the fourth woman in history to win the Nobel Prize in physics. She's on this trip as well (why we originally signed up) and we got

to attend her first talk. She's an astrophysicist, and this talk was about the tools of astrophysics and the advancements in ground-based telescopes. UCLA and Berkeley jointly run the Keck telescope in Hawaii, which at 10m is the largest aperture telescope on the planet. She also started telling us about the planned 30m aperture telescope that will be able to see even more.

After the lecture, we went to lunch, and were joined by Jason AND Andrea and her son Evan. Andrea asked Jason to explain why the earth's orbit causes the periodic climate changes he showed that were learned from the ice cores. They got into a fun discussion of the shape of Earth's orbit (Andrea's view is it's *basically* a circle for approximations, but its eccentricity turns out to be important in this context.)

Jason explained that there are two other effects: precession, which is the change in the tilt of Earth's spin axis relative its orbital plane, and the direction of that tilt. These three things, when combined, change the amount of solar radiation the earth receives, which causes the cyclical rise and fall of greenhouse gases over hundreds of thousands of years. It was a pretty cool discussion.



After all that science we felt the need to cleanse our palates with a nice Chardonnay in the Observation lounge before dinner.

The captain announced that because we've had such calm seas, and



because we had a nice tailwind, we would be arriving after a day and a half at sea instead of two full days. That means we expect to go to Penguin Island via Zodiac in the early afternoon tomorrow. Rico is VERY excited.

## Antarctica Travelogue - Day 6 Shetland Archipelago

Remember I said that the captain said we made such great time across the Drake Passage that we were going to go out on the Zodiacs to Penguin Island? Well, by the time we made it there, the wind was whipping up to 50 MPH and the waves were getting huge. So, in the spirit of expeditions, the adventure was cancelled. We are quickly learning to roll with it.

At least my hair looked good.



Instead we went to a lecture on the Cambrian Explosion and how animal life formed. It was mind-numbingly dull, but at least the presenter spoke without enthusiasm and made sure to have at least 60 words on every view graph.

As soon as he finished we hoofed it up to the observation deck and were delighted to find that we were in a huge and very calm bay, surrounded on every



side by glaciers coming down from magnificent cliffs to the ocean. We were at



the Shetland Archipelago, a collection of islands just off of the continent. We were surprised to see structures on land - this is the Polish Station.



While we were waiting for the next lecture, which would be by Jason Briner who talked about the ice cores and climate, the captain came on the loudspeaker to announce that the bay was calm enough that we would be able to go out on Zodiacs here after all! They didn't tell us what we would see but the adventure would begin.

While it wasn't all that cold out, the seas were quite choppy. Waves were coming over the bow and over us, but we had weatherproof gear on so it wasn't too bad (I actually loved it). As my mother always said, "We'll dry!"



Steve asked our naturalist Lisson on the Zodiac what the glacier in front of us was named and she said that none of them are named! I asked about a prominent peak we were viewing, and she said, "What is your name?" And when I replied she said it's called "Allison's Peak". She then told us the glacier in front of us was named Steve.

Lisson also explained why these are called the Shetland Archipelago. She said that they're at the same latitude as the Shetland Islands off of ... um ... Scotland? Wales?



Here is a truly awful photo of the first penguin we saw on Antarctica:



(Seriously, who puts a photo THAT bad into a travelogue?)

Ok, let me make up for that by a really cool photo of our ship with a Glacier Steve behind it.



Lisson pointed out that there were waterfalls up near Allison's Peak and that the wind was so fierce you could see the water being whipped UP the mountain.



I won't even pretend to know what we're doing tomorrow so I'll just leave you with one last (not technically a selfie) showing how bundled up we are when going on these expeditions.



## Antarctica Travelogue - Day 7 Snow Hill & Brown Bluff

Before I get started telling you about our day, I want to share a very short audio clip of a typical message from our captain. He's got a great sense of humor and a thick French accent that needs to be heard.

We traveled overnight to Snow Hill Island for the express purpose of going to a 4-room hut. While the story of the hut is fascinating, the hut itself was not, and the time it took to have 150 people traipse through it was an exercise in standing and doing nothing for a very long time. As one passenger said to me, "They oversold it."

5 Swedish explorers and 1 Argentinian astronomer were dropped off on the island to spend the winter. But the ship that was sent to come to pick them up got caught in the ice and the ship was crushed and sank. The crew survived. The original 6 were left not knowing what was happening. They ended up spending 22 months in this little hut. Their provisions ran out of course, and they



had to resort to eating penguins and using the fat to make oil to burn to heat their tiny hut.

They eventually set out on foot to see what they could find (Including walking to the continent across the ice) and one day came across a group of what looked like giant penguins. They were black from head to toe. But upon closer inspection, they discovered that these were the rescue humans. They were black from the soot of seals and penguins they'd been burning. (I was never clear why the OG group wasn't all black.)

So that was a crazy coincidence, right? But then the two groups walked back to the hut, and some time after they got back, a ship called The Uruguay arrived from Argentina and rescued them all.

Dr. Ghez was annoyed that there was no information about what astronomy the Argentinian guy actually did while he was there, and we could find no mention of it when we found cell service. Cool story, right?

In the early afternoon, while we traveled to our next destination, Dr. Ghez regaled us with the story of the science that earned her the Nobel Prize in Physics.

Thirty years ago she proposed trying to figure out if we have a supermassive black hole in the center of our galaxy. A black hole is something with zero size (or size so small we haven't been able to measure it yet) and yet huge mass. That mass has a gravitational pull so large that nothing can escape it, not even light.

Her proposal required following the motion of the stars at the center of our galaxy to see if they were orbiting in a repeatable way. The proposal was rejected because they said it wasn't possible to observe stars at the center of our galaxy. Over the next twenty years, she worked the problem (and the system to influence people to let her try) and technology advances allowed her to pursue it. And she discovered the beautiful S02, a star that rotated around something in a period they were able to record through a full orbit.





And the next thing you know, 10 years later here she is seated next to the King of Sweden at the Nobel Prize dinner.

While the morning 4-hour hut excursion was not remarkable, the afternoon was worth the price of admission to this entire trip. We went to Brown Bluff (which is part of the mainland) where we were greeted by penguins!

Everywhere we looked, this was happening!





Our continental landing included around 40,000 Adelie penguins and 4000 Gentoo penguins! They went literally as far as the eye could see. The Adelie are the ones with a white circle around their eyes.

The Gentoo have orange on their beaks (and teethies!

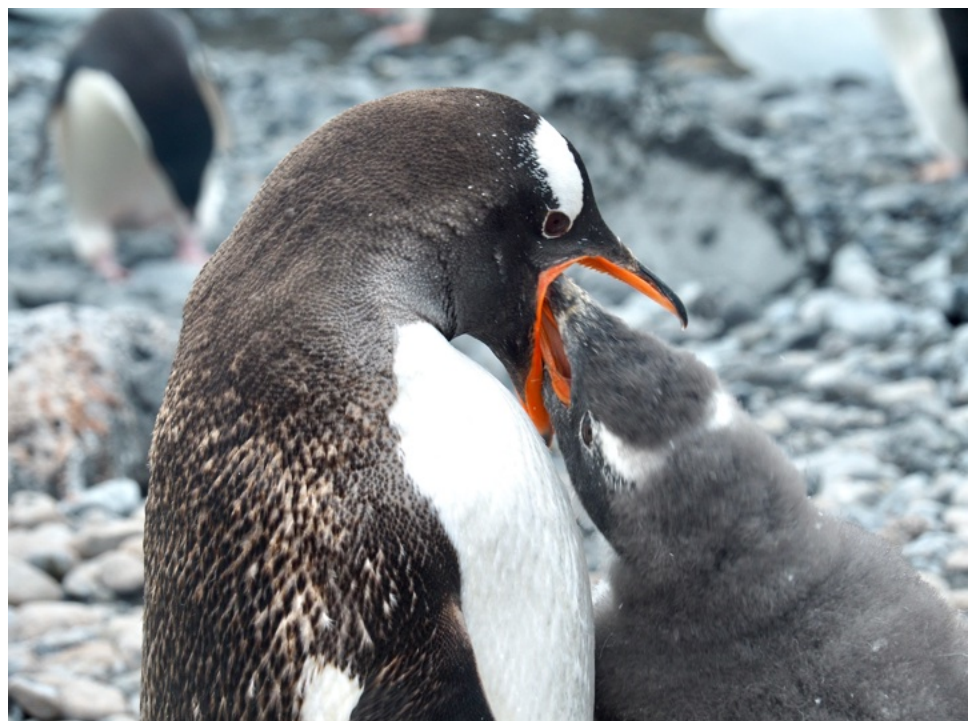






The adolescent Gentoos were clearly getting enough to eat...

And here's how they eat:



We had a chorus line of Adelie by the shore:



Check out their feet!





Proof we didn't buy these photos off of someone else:



A fur seal was lounging on the beach with the penguins:







And there was a Giant Petrel just hanging out on shore. The Giant Petrels are scavengers who the naturalists explained will put the penguins out of their misery if they're too badly injured to survive. They're such givers that

way. They also eat unattended penguin eggs.

I'm sure all of you are wondering how Rico's reunion went with his cousins. You can clearly see that he was delighted to see them again.





I tried to get a nice shot of our ship L'Austral from the shore, but Herbert photobombed it.



No idea what adventures are coming tomorrow but this was the greatest day ever.

## Antarctica Travelogue - Day 8 Where Are We Now?

Each evening they tell us where we'll be going the next day, and we have a neatly typed agenda for the upcoming day delivered to our room. Last night was like all the others.

In the middle of the night, a horrendous wind whipped up, strong enough actually open our door onto our balcony! We had wondered why the stewards always used the deadbolt on our balcony door, and now we knew why. When we woke up, the wind was still kicking up in quite a frenzy.

The captain started his morning address by making whistling wind noises into the microphone. He proceeded to tell us that the winds were up to 60 knots! Knots are kind of like miles per hour and if I had Internets while I'm typing this I would tell you the unit conversion. We were all very relieved when he told us our morning Zodiac trip was canceled.

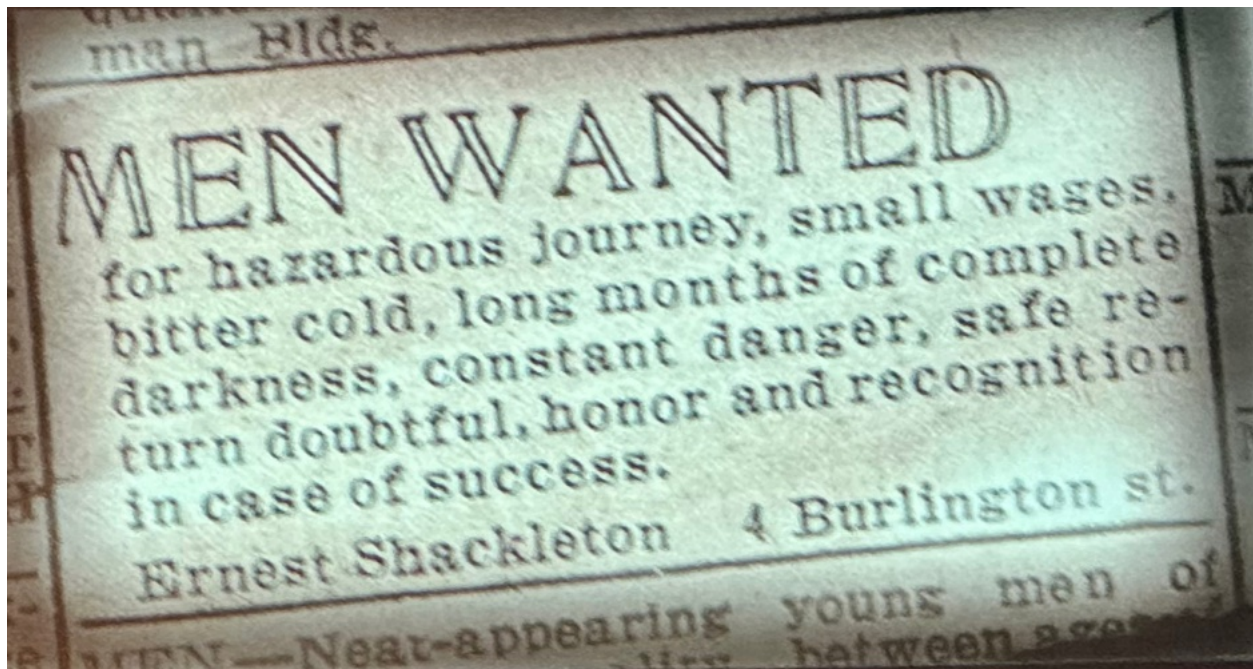




Here we are pretending it's pleasant outside.

Instead of the Zodiac adventure, we were treated to a dramatic storytelling of the adventure of Captain Shackleton and his ship, The Endurance. If you haven't read the story or seen any of the videos, I highly recommend checking it out.

This is the actual ad that Shackleton put in the newspaper to get people to join him.



I can't recount the details here, but the basic plot is that he was supposed to land in Antarctica on the North side near where we are and walk across the continent where he and his men were to be picked up by a return vessel. His ship got stuck in the ice and crush and then sank. Things went downhill from there. The good news is that they all lived but it was a horrific tale.

We had a ways to go before arriving at our next destination so we actually had a second lecture where we learned all about the Krill. I thought it was going to be about the TV show The Orville, but it was about the Antarctica crustaceans instead.

It was actually fascinating. They told us many facts.



The captain alerted us to killer whales off the bow so the entire ship raced to the bow. Not the most amazing capture but it was still cool to see. Later during dinner, another pod swam past as we viewed them out the window we were sitting next to while eating dinner. We didn't even have to race to the bow.





The afternoon was amazing. Here's the two of us suited up for a Zodiac trip along with our friend Hilda who was on the circumnavigation of Iceland as well. Her husband is reading these, so 🙌 to Hilda's husband!



Here was our starting view of the Zodiac trip...



A couple of Weddell seals were sunning themselves on the snow. One of them is making a snarky face like my brother Grant used to make in photos just to irritate our mother.



We wound through these amazing cliffs of snow:





We were all captivated by the views and the exclamations of "Wow!" And "Look at that!" filled the air.



Look at the clouds shrouding a mountain in this shot - Lisson said that peak is 8,200 feet!



Everywhere we turned was a view more amazing than the last.



This is my favorite view as we glided into the protected bay. I might make this one my desktop wallpaper.







Then our guide, the delightful Lisson, opened a box at her feet and pulled out a bottle of champagne! Seriously, we're at the ends of the earth in a rubber dinghy drinking champagne.

The good news is that while we were gone, Rico was in charge of the bridge.



Tomorrow's adventure awaits.

## Antarctica Travelogue - Day 9 Portal Point and Danco Island

I entitled the last letter "Where are We Now" because I honestly didn't know. Because the weather is constantly changing, the agendas they gave us were more of guidelines. Yesterday when we went to the bridge to tell Rico it was Happy Hour, I pointed at one of the onscreen charts and asked one of the officers where we were. The officer said, "I don't know." I didn't feel so dumb but it was concerning that he didn't! One of the other officers did know where we were, and the first one showed us the paper chart where we were.

We were between a set of islands, Eta, Zeta, Omega, Gamma, Delta, Kappa, Omicron, and Lambda. Collectively they're called the East Melchior Islands (or maybe Archipelago, I'm never sure.) We think they should've been called the Greek Islands.







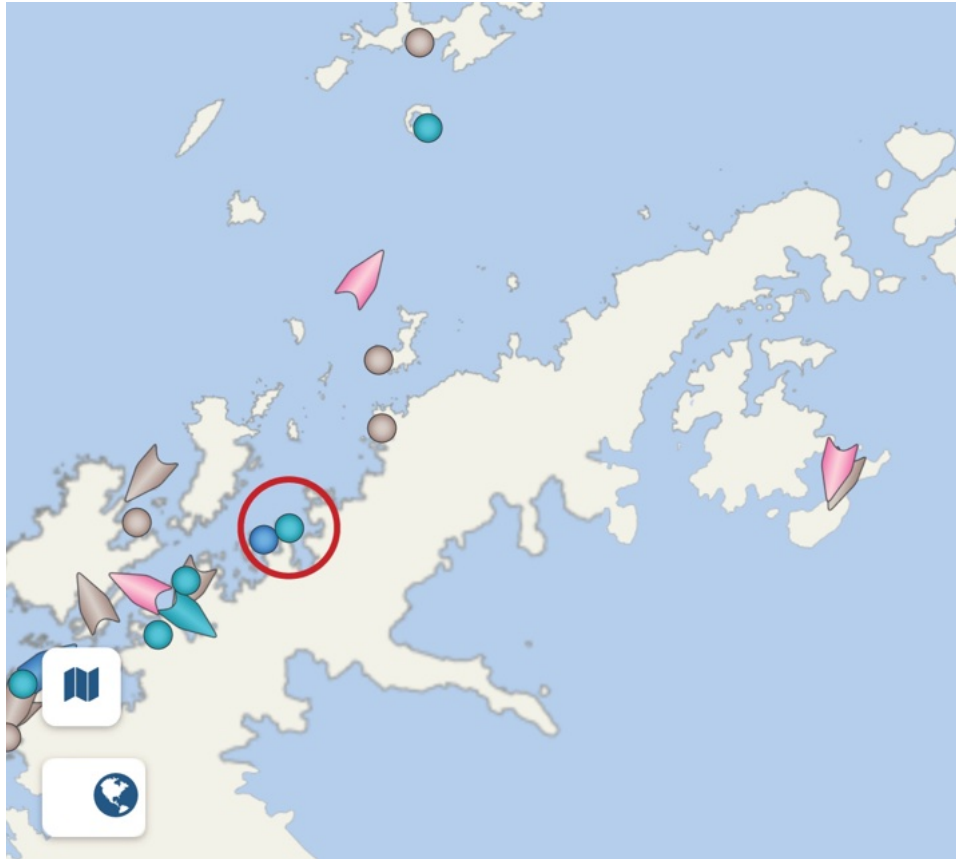
Remember when Rico had to go through the vacuum cleaner before being allowed to go to shore? There are more things we have to do. Before we go from the ship to a landing, we have to walk through a disinfectant bath in our boots. If you have walking sticks, the points have to go through it too.

When we return, we have to scrub our boots in these baths - mostly to remove penguin poop.

If we have been in penguin poop, you turn around and lift your heel, and a woman power washes the bottoms of your boots after you go through the scrubber.

Then you go back through the disinfectant again before getting back inside the ship. We're all getting quite adept at the process and we're happy to be helping to keep Antarctica in as pristine a condition as possible.





This morning we went to Portal Point, which was our second continental landing. They made a big deal that we got two continental landings but it all seems awesome to us. I took this screenshot from

[cruisemapper.com](https://cruisemapper.com) - the blue dot inside the red circle is us. This is the Antarctica peninsula and we're on a small peninsula on the north side.

I'm having trouble coming up with superlatives to describe the scenery.





We hiked to the top of one little hill in very deep snow - you can see it in the background of this next photo with little peoples climbing it. Nolan's mother Teri was here just last week and was wind-whipped and cold, but it was warm for us and I actually unzipped my jacket and removed my hat.

Then we hiked up a bigger hill - maybe 150 feet? Again in deep snow that challenged our balance. We did not fall down but many people did. I did

wonder why I'd left my walking sticks gently folded up inside our cabin.



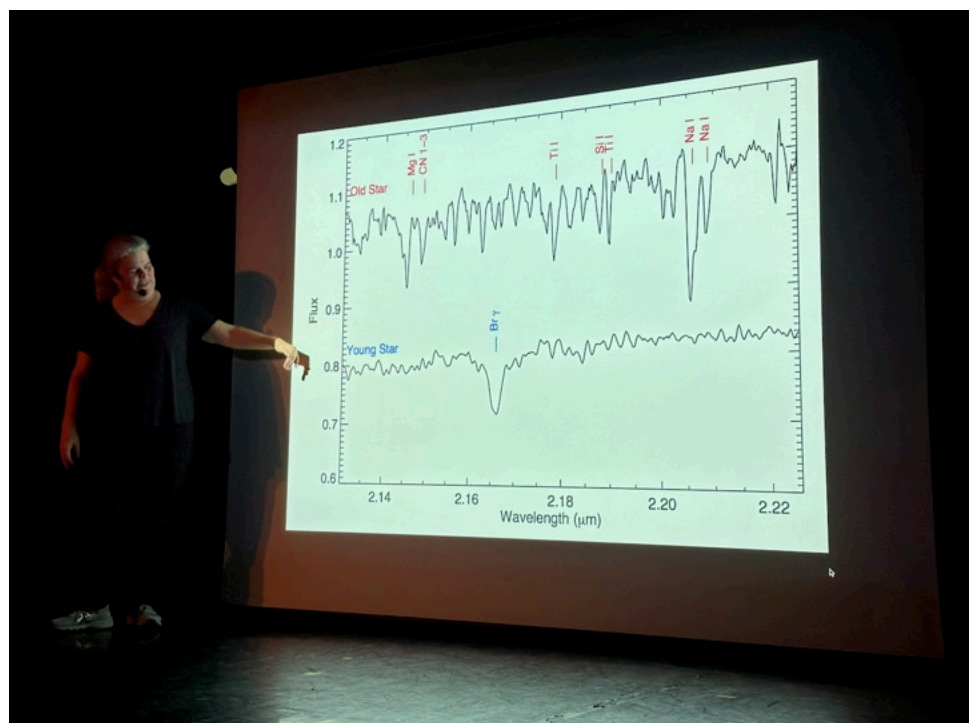
Happy hikers:





Another happy hiker.

In the afternoon, we listened to Andrea Ghez's final talk entitled "Expect the Unexpected" where she explained how they assumed they would find old stars near the supermassive black hole, but instead found predominantly young stars. Of course for a scientist, that's AWESOME. It means there's more to learn and understand.





But then the captain interrupted her, telling us that there were Humpback whales breaching in front of our ship. She said, "LET'S GO!" and we all ran up to the observation deck.



Here's my favorite shot - I call it, "the shot I almost got".



After that, the momma and her calf started swimming right toward us. On the left is the momma and the baby is flipped over goofing around. They were so close I actually had to zoom OUT to get them in the frame.



Steve got some good video and on it, you can actually hear them making all these cool whale sounds. Unfortunately with near-zero Internets I can't include a video.

When we got back, Andrea finished her talk, including showing us a never-before-presented image from the James Webb Space Telescope looking at the center of our galaxy. That was important





because JWST isn't designed to look at stars, but her team worked with the Webb team and figured out a way to get new information anyway.

In the afternoon we traveled to Danco Island. I don't swear by that spelling but that's what it sounds like when French people say it. It's named after some dude named Emile Danco who died here in 1898. If I could look it up to confirm the spelling, I might.

We signed up to do one kayak trip in lieu of a Zodiac trip. The tricky bit is kayaking is "weather permitting". When we came into the protection of the island, it was sunny with a very small breeze. Within 20 minutes of arrival the wind had kicked up to 20MPH and our kayak trip was canceled for today. We have more opportunities, and we know that whatever we get to do, it will be awesome. Here we are suited up in our "dry suits" as a test drive:



I'll mention that the kayaks are the only thing that costs extra. Well, that's not exactly true. The top-shelf booze and special wines are out of pocket too but we've been able to suffer along with a "local" Argentinian gin that I forget the name of every time I drink some.



Danco island turned out to be amazing. It's home to colonies of Gentoo penguins, and they're nesting right now. One thing you don't get from the photos is how incredibly stinky they are!

Two of the newest members of FOR (Friends of Rico):



Some stinky penguins.



I can't send a video but here's a small audio file of what they sound like. They're not only stinky, they're also noisy.



I don't mean to say we're getting blasé about penguins (because we're not, but the real star of the show today was the views. We hiked up and at the top asked a woman to take a photo of us with Andrea Ghez and her son Evan with the amazing

scenery behind us. The tour photographer said, "I'll do it!" and captured this shot.

We stood up there for a long time at the top just gazing around saying, "Wow. Look at that! Did you notice that?" We felt very lucky.





But back to penguins. We got to see what they call the Penguin Highway. Here it is during rush hour.

We did not have the right-of-way, so that was our excuse for being late back to the Zodiac (not because we fooled around too long enjoying the views at the top.)

Penguins AND scenery:





Adorable but dirty and stinky.



Adorable and not dirty nor stinky.





After our exertion, Rico insisted that we taste the Havana Club rum he'd been eyeing. It was lovely!

Then he joined this lady...





And these ladies:

This morning when I was walking down the hall towards the Zodiacs, a woman yelled out of her cabin, "Good morning Rico!" We're going to need a bigger clubhouse.



I said no food photos but I'm going to break my own rule. This is the single best thing I've eaten all week. It's chocolate something in French. I wanted to write a poem to it.



That's it for now  
- tomorrow is  
our last  
excursion day!

## Antarctica Travelogue - Day 10 Whalers Bay on Deception Island & Robert Island

Remember that diagram I sent out for you to frame on your refrigerator? With the exception of today's trip to Deception Island and a reference to the Shetland Archipelago, we didn't end up going to *any* of the places they said we'd go to. They continuously remind us that this is an *expedition* and that change and adaptability are the name of the game. Weather changes everything.

But before I get into today's adventures, I wanted to show you the power washing I mentioned last time. Our new friend Bob yelled, "UP AGAINST THE WALL AND SPREAD 'EM!" When we had to do this:



I knew your lives wouldn't be complete without that photo.



While the first group of kayakers got to go out a few days ago, today was our last opportunity and the wind and waves were far too high. We are on an *expedition* so we were fine with it. We DO plan on spending \$700 on something frivolous though with the money we saved!

## Whalers Bay

Before we went ashore at Whalers Bay on Deception Island, they showed us a short documentary on the history of this island. The island is the caldera of a volcano, and with an opening at one side, it made an ideal location for the sealing and whaling industries. They showed us a gruesome video of whales being processed and explained that the entire fur seal population was killed for their fur during this time. They went on to detail how very little of the whales were used and they'd throw the carcasses in the bay, forming an unimaginable sludge of smell that attracted carrion birds by the thousands. Sounds like a fun place for us to go, right?

Well, the island had a different idea. The volcano erupted (I forget the year, you can make one up) and destroyed the entire area of production. The humans had time to escape via helicopter. I feel like the island just said, "Ok, enough of you, I'm starting over.) There are enough structures remaining after the volcano to let you peer back into the past.

The giant oil drums:



There was a cemetery here at one time (with 200 people working here, things happen.) After the volcano eruption, all of the tombstones were gone, but one coffin rose back to the surface. They later added two crosses for the ones that had been lost.



This is Biscoe House where the people in charge lived while the workers lived on the boats in the harbor.





A little artsy fartsy photo:



The farthest in one direction we were able to walk was the airport hangar.



This view from the hangar looking back shows you in the far distance a u-shaped valley in the hills beyond. That's called Neptune's window, and Steve and I chose to walk with a guide named Jeremie all the way up and into the window to look out the other side.



Here's a shot we took later that shows how steep the last bit of the hike was:





A view into the past.



Along the way, we met a few fur seals. Isn't this one adorable? Looks like you could just go up and pat it on the head, doesn't it?





Until they turn and charge at an *alarming* pace!



The jawbone of a whale...





Previously we'd seen the noisy Gentoo penguins and the adorable Adelie, and on this island, we found the third type resident in Antarctica, the Chinstrap penguins. They look like two pairs gossiping about the others to me.



The view through Neptune's Window on Deception Island:

Our view from the top doesn't look that dramatic until you see how far we hiked:



I took this photo of the dock as a juxtaposition against the volcanic rock. In the background, you can see the green moss beginning to come back as the island heals itself.

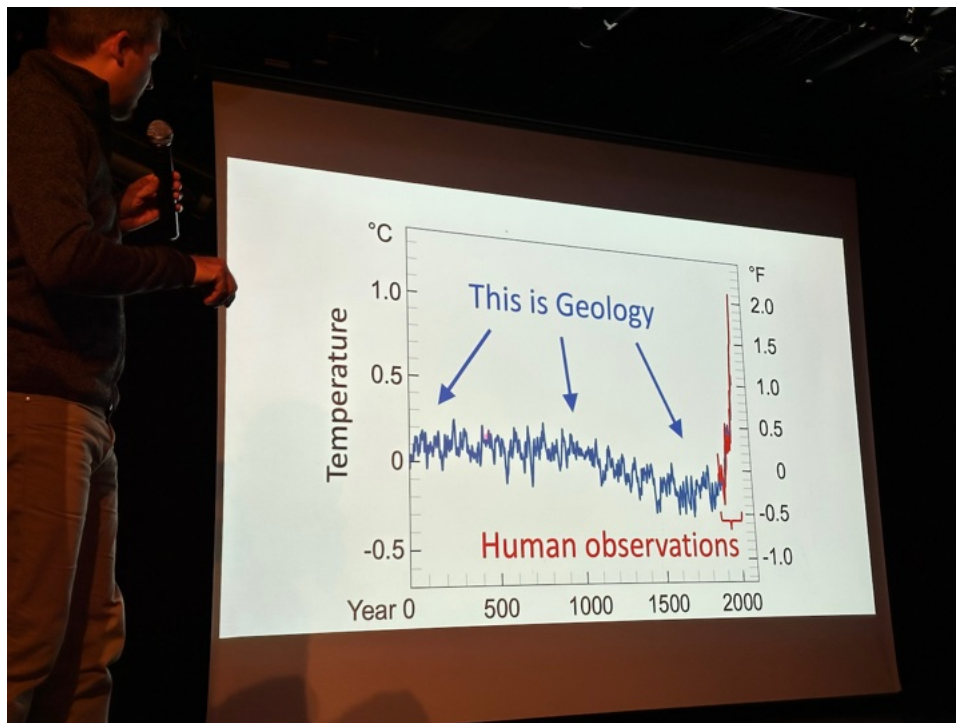




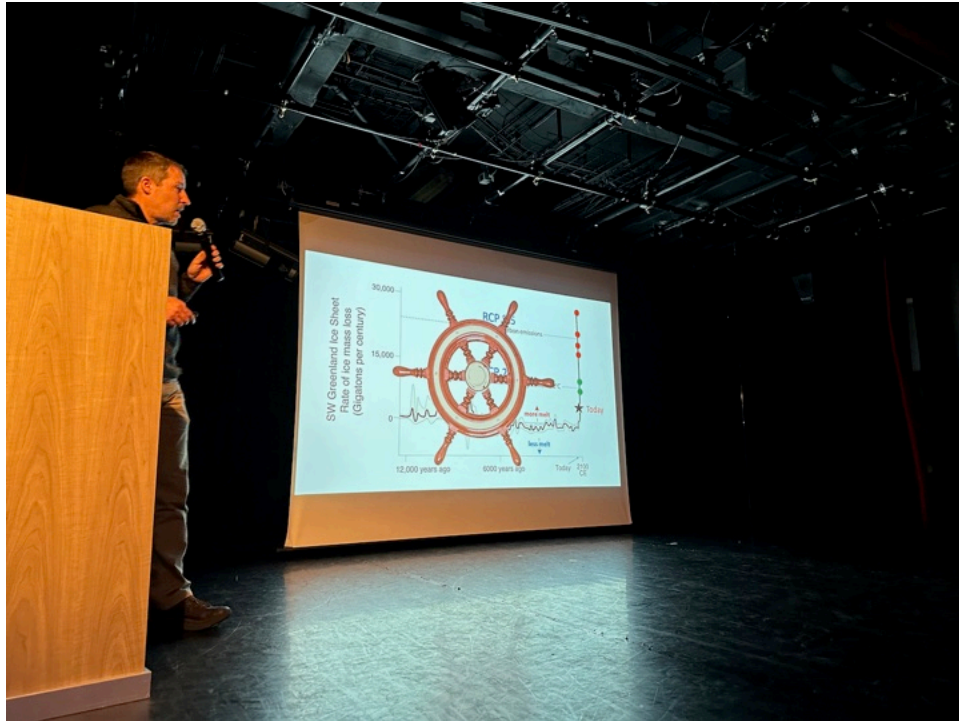
## Afternoon Lecture

After the morning excursion, we saw a great lecture by geologist Jason Briner about his research in Greenland. His team goes out into the lakes formed by glacial melt, and takes core samples (much like the ones he talked about in the ice shelf). In this case, they analyze the core samples by carbon dating the fossils in the mud they extract. The mud has layers, where the white clay-like layers are when the glacier melted. That lets them plot the time in-between big melts.

From this data, and working with other teams, they can map the temperature change over 2000 years, and overlap that data against human observations and the data align in the past few years. You can see the effect in the last 20-30 years on the rise in temperature.



His ending conclusion was interesting. Their models can project a range of temperature change. He said that if we do the right things, like following the Paris Accords agreement, the models predict that the temperature will start to go back down. But if we do business as usual, they continue to rise out of control. He superimposed a steering wheel on the graph to denote that we can steer this ship and turn it around. Nice bit of optimism.



Rico really enjoyed the lecture (he loves geology) and asked to meet Jason.



## Robert Island

I forget where we were supposed to go in the afternoon, but the weather did not permit us to go ashore. Instead, they chose to go to Robert Island to see the Southern elephant seals. The first couple of Zodiacs went out toward the chosen harbor, but when we were halfway there, the guides on shore radioed out that the seas had come up and it was too dangerous for us to go ashore at that harbor.

We puttered around the harbor waiting for further instructions. I'm not gonna lie, it was challenging my spirit of adventure to think that we would miss our very last excursion of the trip, and miss seeing Southern elephant seals. I got to see Northern elephant seals on Santa Barbara Island about 40 years ago but these were *Southern* elephant seals.

They did some reconnaissance and found that the little harbor on the other side of the peninsula was a much better landing spot. We were able to go ashore, and it was a short walk for the people who had already landed to trot over to our side so they could get back to the ship.

Southern elephant seals have what's called sexual dimorphism, which means vast differences by sex. Get this, the males are 3-7 TIMES as big as the females! We didn't see any of the big boys, and they said it's kinda hard to tell the difference between young males and adult females.



And there's always a dork in the crowd:  
Wait, two dorks in the crowd.



Aren't they sweet?







And a chinstrap penguin on her way to work.

This walk wasn't cold but it was raining the whole time. I made Mon Capitan pose with me for a photo.

Shortly after this photo was taken, Mon Capitan went way out toward the cliff, stomping on the green moss (they'd specifically told us to never walk on this fragile new vegetation) and went way too close to the birds nests in the area. Thomas the Naturalist ran over to him and dressed him down for his misdeeds. When Thomas came back, he said, "everybody has to follow the same rules, but I bet I'm getting gruel for dinner tonight.)

There's a lovely bird that lives here called the Skua. From what Jeremie the Naturalist told







us, the Skua will actually grab young birds out of the nest and throw them down the cliff to kill them. This one landed maybe 20 feet away. Then flew 10 feet away. Then 4 feet away...

And suddenly flew straight up

and came for the head of our new friend Peter. I yelled at him to put his hand up because that's what they told us to do if this happened. It keeps them from pecking your head. He thought I was joking around and that I was telling him to try to get the bird to land on his arm! He came away from it unscathed. I just wish I'd gotten a photo of it!

A Gentoo wished us goodbye:





Wet but happy adventurers:



During cocktails, Rico met up with fellow traveler Owlie:



When Andrea found out that Jason got to pose with Rico, she begged for the opportunity to meet him. He can now add to his list of accomplishments, "Hung out with a Nobel Laureate".



(She asked for a copy of the photo of course.)

Tomorrow and the next day will be traveling across the Drake Passage again, so expect my witty conversation to be about the color of the paint on the walls of our cabin and the speed of the elevators, and other exciting adventures.



## Antarctica Travelogue - Day 11 & 12 The Drake Passage

I promised you that the two-day trip through the Drake Passage on our way back would be lacking in interesting scenery and animal life, so I've combined the two days together since they were virtually the same.

So let me tell you about the paint color on these walls...

But seriously, in contrast with our trip out, we experienced some huge wave action coming back. When our delightful captain came on the PA system, he said, "We had a little bit of rock and roll!"

There was one casualty from the rocking and rolling... At least it was mercifully quick when she was decapitated.



Throughout both days we continued to rock and roll. It reminded me of all the different ways my mom would describe seasickness. She'd say people were

“green around the gills”, but my favorite one was, “Do you feel urpy?” Geez, mom, if I didn’t before I do *now*!

The ocean, while making us urpy, was gorgeous with the waves off the bow.



About the most interesting thing that happened was Naturalist Jeremie talking about baleen whales. I hope I actually get the facts right on this one. Buckle up, no pictures, only sciency stuff.

## **The Circle of Life**

Whales poop out iron-rich feces, which fertilizes the ocean floor. This helps the growth of phytoplankton, which helps make more zooplankton. Phytoplankton are by gross mass bigger than the human population. Guess who eats the phytoplankton and zooplankton? Our little friend the Krill. No, not the ones from



The Orville, the once in the ocean we learned about the other day. But get this, Phytoplankton release oxygen into the atmosphere, and the suck IN Carbon Monoxide (CO<sub>2</sub>)! How cool is that?

It gets better though. Guess who eats the Krill? The baleen whales. Now, why is this important? Because when they die, they take the CO<sub>2</sub> from the Krill to their watery graves. 33 TONS of CO<sub>2</sub>!

This all becomes important when you think about the whaling industry. We kill most of the whales, which means they don't poop in the ocean which means the phytoplankton have nothing to eat which means they don't release oxygen to the atmosphere and don't suck in the CO<sub>2</sub>, which doesn't get eaten by whales and taken to their watery graves.

The good news is that with the exception of 3 countries (Iceland, Norway, and Japan) we've completely stopped whaling. Blue whales are increasing in population at a rate of 8% per year, and the fabulous humpback whale is growing at 10% per year! While we killed a quarter of a million humpbacks, their pre-whaling levels will be reached by 2050. So, yay!

## **Penguin Fact**

Naturalist Maria taught us some cool stuff about birds, and I remembered one whole fact. You know how penguins are always poking their beaks into their feathers like they've got fleas? I wondered what they were up to. Turns out they have a little oil gland and they poke it with their beaks and then distribute the oil all over their feathers and that's how they stay waterproof. Who knew? Ok, Rico knew.

## **Your Questions Answered**

As I write these travelogues, I've gotten a lot of questions so I thought I'd answer them here.

Q - What kind of gin do they have on the ship?

We have enjoyed our daily gin and tonics with Brighton London Dry gin, which was sold as a “local” gin. I don’t remember London being in Argentina though.



Q - What’s the ratio of crew members to passengers on L’Austral?

There were 156 crew members and 157 passengers, so a mutiny was always possible.

Q - What is life like on a small ship (vs. the giant 3000 person cruise ships)?

The cabins on L’Austral are pretty roomy with almost all of them having private balconies.

The thing about being on a small ship is that it takes no time to do anything. Want to go the observation deck because Mon Capitan says there’s Orcas off



the bow? If you're near the bow already, the farthest you have to go is an elevator ride up 3 flights. If you're at the stern, it's 3 flights of stairs, dealer's choice.

The worst wait we had was when a lecture would end on deck 4 and dinner would be immediately afterward. We sometimes had to wait FIVE MINUTES to be seated.

In a small ship you get to know the staff. Christian made our lattes every morning in the main lounge, Momo was the waiter we liked and we always beelined for his tables. Eduardo made our evening drinks.

Q - How many different-colored luggage tags are required to organize 157 people?

Matt from Gohagen (the travel company that runs these alumni group travel excursions) was a beast at keeping us organized. Imagine 157 people on the way back from Antarctica, where some are flying directly home afterward but some are

going on to Igazu Falls (like us). Some have set up their own hotel arrangements, some are staying at the airport till their late-night flights, but others are just going to live at the airport for the evening.



Oh, and we had two bags each - one for the 9 days on the ship and one for the 3 days in Iguazu, where one bag stayed back at the Buenos Aires Intercontinental and one went with us on the ship, and then that gets reversed!

He did all this with an incredibly complex set of colored luggage tags and ribbons. Let's say you're assigned purple because you're UCLA and you're going on to Iguazu. And right now you're in your hotel room looking at pink tags knowing you did it wrong...

Q - What was your nighttime drink?

Glad you asked, we had White Russians every night, light on the cream, heavy on the Kahlua and Vodka

Technically no one asked me any of these questions but I felt like telling you about it!

## **Final Passage**

The captain awoke us to a distant view of Cape Horn. He said it was too rough to take us closer but we did get to see it.





Time for a selfie!  
This is us as we  
come into the  
Beagle Channel  
which separates  
Tiera del Fuego  
from the islands  
that form Cape  
Horn.



When we landed in Ushuaia  
(which they call “the end of the  
world”) we had time to walk  
into town after dinner, so we  
went out with some friends. We  
went looking for a bar that Evan  
had heard about and did NOT  
go here:

But we did go here. It was a funky bar made inside a railroad car (or faked railroad car). Evidently the IPA called Léun (a nano brewery) was quite tasty.



When we first came aboard L'Austral they mentioned that they try to be as green as possible. For example, they give us nice refillable water bottles so we don't



use a bunch of plastic. When we came home from the bar in Ushuaia, we noticed something interesting. All of the other ships were lit up like Christmas trees, but our ship was dark. That's L'Austral on the left.

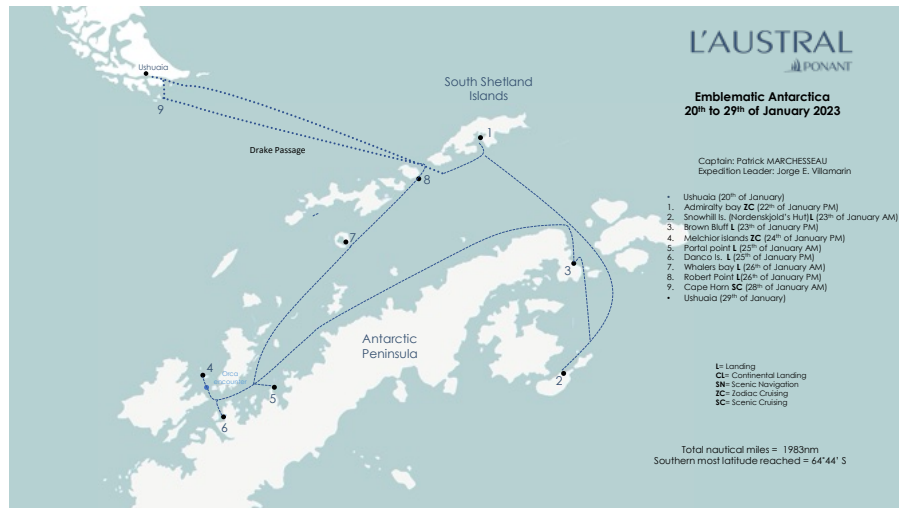


The last thing our tour operator (Matt of colored luggage tag fame) said to us was something to think about.

"Traveling - it leaves you speechless, then turns you into a storyteller," are the prophetic words of the world traveler and Medieval Moroccan scholar, Ibn Battuta.

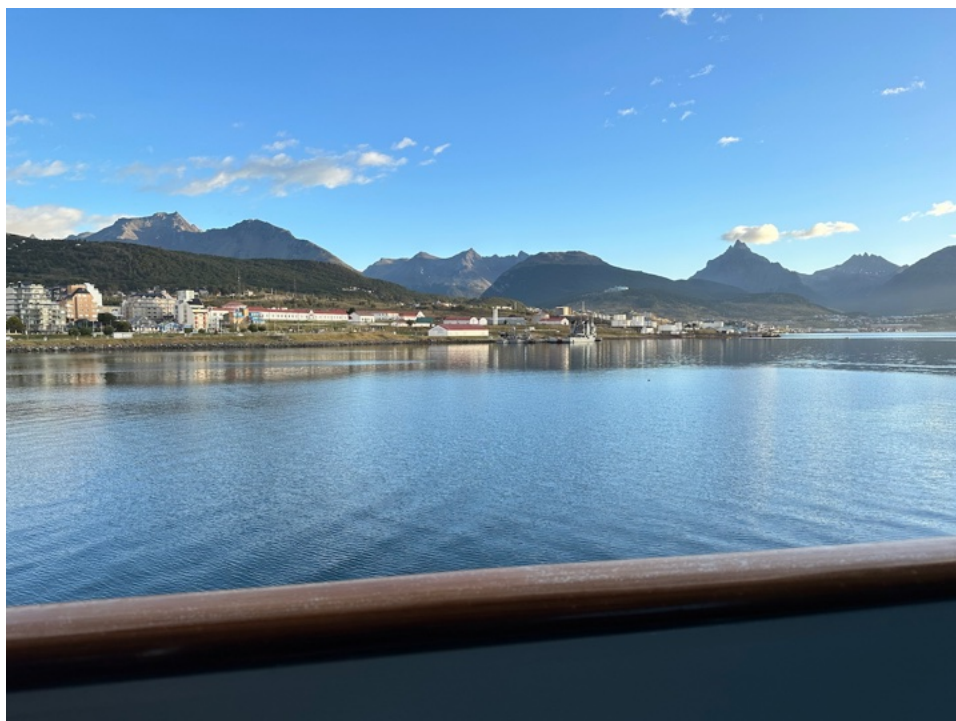
## Antarctica Travelogue - Day 13 Planes, Buses, and Hotels

I meant to end the message about the end of the trip on the ship with a map that shows where we *actually* went (not what the framed diagram on your refrigerator says).



Tiny print but those who actually care probably have a magnifying glass!

We spent the last night on L'Austral in Ushuaia, and awoke to a lovely sunrise



over the Beagle Channel with the Argentinian side of the Andes in the background. Ok, technically it wasn't sunrise by the time I got up but it was still nice lighting.



It was actually a rather exhausting day. We took a bus from the ship to go approximately one mile where they dropped us off in town to kill some time walking around. We did manage to find a nice coffee shop after getting a little stretch of our legs.

Then we got to get back on the bus to drive to the airport. When we got the airport, we boarded a bus to get to the itty bitty charter jet.

Proof!



And no that's not a decapitated mannequin head coming out of the overhead compartment.

Guess what we got to do after the plane? Yep, back on *another* bus! Those

color-coded luggage tags were also what told us which bus to get on. We're purple now when we used to be blue. It's very confusing.

We got to the hotel around 5 PM after all those buses. Needless to say, our highest priority was to take a nap.

We walked .7 miles to a restaurant called Grandes Carnicerias del Plata that was recommended by a fellow passenger. Before we left, I checked Apple Maps to make sure it was open and it said it was permanently closed. Apple Maps is sometimes wrong, so I check Yelp and it said it was open. Welp, chalk one up for Apple Maps. 🙄





We wandered down the street and found a fun little restaurant/bar called La Poesía. By lovely I mean that it had gin. We did have to suffer with lemon instead of lime but we're nothing if not adaptable.



Buenos Aires is one of the least expensive places to eat and drink we've ever been. We each had a gin and tonic (I had a local gin and Steve had Tanqueray). Steve had a local beer and I had a glass of Malbec (sadly both were unremarkable.) Then we had GIANT steaks that were amazing. Argentina is known for its beef. Oddly the steak came with ham and eggs!

Total cost? \$35.



We had always heard of Buenos Aires as being the “Paris of South America” but we have found it to be a rather bleak and crumbling place. Here’s a typical building from our walk back from dinner down narrow sidewalks on narrow streets.

And here’s a wheelchair ramp on the sidewalk.

I didn’t mean to end on such a down note but there you go. Tomorrow should be more fun. We get to get on a bus to go to the airport to get on a bus to get on a plane to get on a bus to go to the hotel ... and THEN it will be amazing!





## Antarctica Travelogue - Day 14 Iguazú Falls

I'll probably mention this again in my recap, but Argentina is very sparing in its paper products. Steve's dad, Ken, would have a terrible problem here. Napkins are at most 2 inches square, Kleenexes are even smaller, and let's not even talk about the toilet paper. We asked for sparkling water in a restaurant (don't drink the tap water) and it came in a glass that was a smidge larger than a shot glass along with a tiny doily of a napkin.



We arrived in Iguazú after many buses and planes. By the way, the accent is on the “ú”, so it’s pronounced ee-gwah-ZOO.

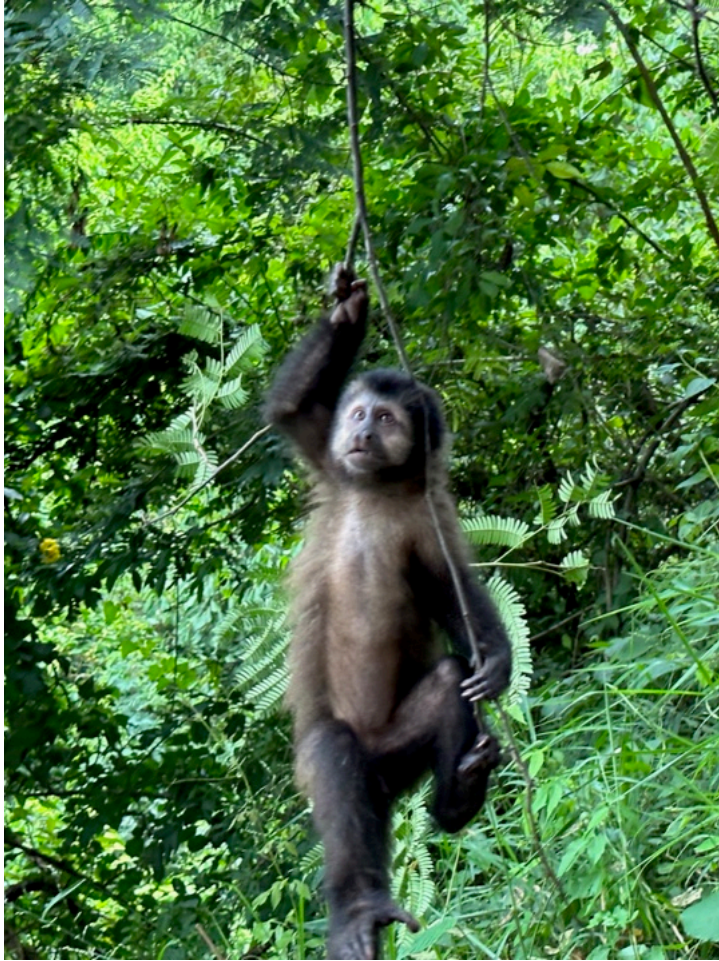
We arrived at the Gran Meliá Hotel and “Gran” was underselling it. This is the view from the lobby when we walked in. In the background, you can see the falls and in the foreground the largest pool we’ve ever seen in our lives. We’ll come back to the pool in a bit.



Our rooms were not yet ready, they immediately whisked us off on a walk to the falls to no objection by the crowd.

We were joined on our walk by Capuchin monkeys. Our guide, Celese, told us they have very human expressions. I’ll have nightmares about this little fella for a long time.





Celese explained to us that in addition to having horrifyingly human expressions, they're very clever and very strong. She stressed that you absolutely *must* lock your sliding glass doors onto your balcony. She said that they can open the doors, and they know how to open the mini bar, and they *will* eat all of your snacks!

We started to get glimpses of Iguazú Falls:







I became a hero teaching other iPhone users how to create those creamy waterfall photos that the real photographers capture.

Short tech interlude for iPhone users who want to try it. Take a photo in Live mode.

After you take the photo, tap on the “Live” icon in the upper left, and change it to Long Exposure. If you haven’t jiggled the camera much, it will create the effect you see above. Pretty nifty, right?

We were in love with the falls, even as our guide was explaining that we were only seeing 25% of the falls because we were on the Argentina side of the Iguazú River.





It was still amazing:



And it keeps going...







Steve (and his mom Merlee) both don't sweat much at all. It's very weird - Steve can play an hour of tennis and not even get damp. But Steve met his match with the Argentinian rainforest.

I pride myself on being a truly terrible bird photographer, and while this is a truly terrible photograph, check it out - we saw a TOUCAN!







Next up in Wild Kingdom were the Coatis. They just came trundling along the walkway - and some of them jumped into nearby trees.

We were discouraged to pet them though.





In a less dangerous and terrifying animal sighting - how about a cute little turtle on a rock? (Ron - TURTLE HEAD!)



We found some nifty-looking chairs to rest on when we got back to the hotel. And no, don't think for a moment that I'M sweating. I'm *glowing*.





After we all checked into the hotel, we instantly went to the giant infinity pool. I'm not joking - this pool was 50 meters across, and 25 meters wide! Trying to give you perspective, we took this shot from the far side of the pool looking at the hotel.

I'm a pretty strong swimmer, and I never successfully swam underwater the WIDTH of this pool!



The water was so warm, probably high 80s, that Steve didn't slow down getting in. We also think it might have been a saltwater pool because it definitely didn't make our eyes sting with chlorine. It was just barely salty though and felt great.

So picture this. We're hanging out with Bob and Nancy-Ellen and a bunch of our other friends from the trip when someone notices that there are a bunch of capuchin monkeys on the balcony of the second floor on the far right. Nancy-Ellen says, "Wait, Bob, is that OUR room???" She confesses that in spite of being told about the monkeys by the tour guide AND having the warning repeated by the hotel staff during check-in, she's not sure she locked the sliding glass door.

So Bob goes to the room and finds a nice little crowd happily eating \$28 worth of hotel mini-bar snacks from his room.







But the best part of Bob's monkey business adventure was when he noticed one monkey with the spare battery for his digital camera!





Joke's on him though, it's not a genuine Canon battery, it was a cheap knockoff from Amazon.

Bob and Nancy-Ellen made the best of it and enjoyed the view:

Let's finish this off with one last photo of the amazing Iguazú Falls:



Tomorrow, the adventures go over the top!



## Antarctica Travelogue - Day 15 Iguazú Falls From Brazil

It's hard to imagine that our first day in Iguazú wasn't our best day in Iguazu. As you'll recall, we did a short walk to the Argentinian side of the falls and viewed them at river level and found them amazing.

But today was at least twice as amazing. I'm on real Internets now so I hope you don't mind me sending you larger photos!



We drove from Argentina to Brazil to see the view from the other side of the Iguazú river.



When we got to the other side, we had an option to view the falls from above in a helicopter! Do you think Steve and Allison said, "Yes please?" Rico snuck in too.

I have completely run out of superlatives.

Forgive the reflections on the front windshield...







It was a very short 10-minute flight which was actually perfect. When we landed, we crossed the street and went to a bird sanctuary called Parque das Aves. This little fella was trying to sneak out

through the double doors as we are in.

We saw a lot of cool birds, a boa constrictor, and a cayman. They didn't look too threatening though.

But she did. Except. I think her head is upside down?







Break Time for a super dorky  
touristy photo:







I thought we took photos of the names of every bird so I'd be able to tell you what they were, but I guess my "low on facts" promise will have to live on.

I seem to remember this was some kind of eagle?

Are you lookin' at me???





Selfie time! (And yes, my glasses are fogged up from the humidity!)



Some owls for Diane:







You know how with fireworks there's a grand finale? Our grand finale was to be taken into the Macaw sanctuary. They were stunning in their colors.

I'm not sure this will convey the effect of how crazy it was, but here's an 8-second, low-res video of how the birds were flying right over our heads:







After all that excitement, we finally went on a walk to see the falls from the Brazilian side. Our guide Selese said that we were only seeing 25% of the falls from

the Argentinian side, and boy howdy was the other 75% HUGE.

They just go on and on. They said there are 275 separate falls and on an average year they are pouring 200,000 gallons per sec of water!

One of the guides explained that in one extraordinary year, the falls poured 12 *million* gallons per second! He AirDropped us this photo montage with a drought year (2006), an average year, and a flood year (2005).







I thought the big panoramic view I showed you was our best view because we started to walk up at this point. But then we got to what's called The Devil's Throat.

Now ... what are those people doing out on that walkway? You can tell that is future us!

It was SOOO much fun out there! I am always happiest when I'm in or near water.



A fantastic season finale to be sure. We started walking back up the walkway, only to find that the path was now going to take us *right up to the waterfall!* I



wish you could HEAR the thunder of Devil's Throat when you're that close to it. Steve had a *little* bit of trouble tearing me away from the water...







I survived being pulled away from the waterfall by another trip to the infinity pool where I learned about vodka mojitos from my new friend Nancy-Ellen.

Dinner on this trip *a/ways* lasted until 10PM on this entire trip, and this night was no exception. Shortly after this photo was taken with Bob and Nancy-Ellen, I literally collapsed. They can testify to this fact - we were sitting on stools with no backs and I was just DONE with that. The vodka mojitos had *nothing* to do with it.



Tomorrow's installment will be about our travels home, but it's not without more adventure!

## Antarctica Travelogue - Day 16 Iguazú Falls from Above and The Voyage Home

Yes, that title was a Star Trek joke. For the rest of you non-nerds...

For our last morning in Iguazú, we had three choices:

1. Sleep in, eat a late breakfast, lazy around
2. Take another walk to see the falls
3. Take a 45 minute open-air truck ride through the rainforest on Sendero Yacaratiá to then get on a boat that would travel down the river through small rapids and then shove us UNDER the waterfall

Does anyone have a guess which one we chose?

With fellow thrill seeker Nancy-Ellen:







We're going to be going into that raging fall on the far left of this image:

When packing for this trip we had to make a

lot of decisions on clothes (dressing for sub-zero temps in Antarctica and tropical summer in Argentina) and on tech to bring. We carry a lot more tech than most but Steve thought he probably didn't need his GoPro for this trip. That just MIGHT have been the wrong decision.

Here's our favorite photo from under the waterfall - taken with his iPhone!

Yes, we paid extra to do this.

When Steve and I took the kids to Hawaii many years ago, we took a hike to a waterfall and



swam in the pool at the bottom. We had a lot of fun trying to swim under the waterfall. It doesn't matter how strong of a swimmer you are, you couldn't swim all the way under. That got us wondering how on earth this little boat was able to power us so close to the actual falling water.

Steve asked, and the boat has two 650 Horsepower outboard motors. That's 1300 horsepower! And of course split into two motors allowed them to pivot the boat around to ensure that we were all equally drenched.

We had 45 minutes upon return to the hotel to shower and finish packing and hop on yet another bus off to the Iguazú airport. From there we flew to the Buenos Aires domestic airport. Knowing it's the domestic airport was important because in order to get home we had to get to the international airport. What does that mean? ANOTHER bus ride of a full hour!





It was strange as we took all of these final trips because at each changeover, a few friends would disappear because they had different plans or flights. I said at the time that it was like being in one of those science fiction movies where people keep disappearing. Finally, it was just Steve, Rico, and me on our penultimate (9-hour) flight from Buenos Aires to Miami.



We managed to stumble through immigration and customs to enter the US in Miami, and then had a wait for our final flight. As we waited, there was a couple sitting across from us and the guy was doing something interesting. He started by trying to saw through his water bottle with an airplane-safe metal butter knife. His wife didn't seem to notice. Then he got some wooden swizzle sticks and started carving them with the butter knife. He made slots in some and thinned others down and then started assembling.

He had forgotten to bring an iPhone stand so he could watch a movie on the plane, so he made his own!



After a truck ride, a boat ride, a truck ride, a bus ride, a plane ride, a bus ride, a plane ride, and one more plane ride all in one day, we were a bit faded towards the end.



We managed to stay awake till 8:30 PM after showers and three loads of laundry but were very grateful to keel over into bed.

It was an amazing adventure and we loved every minute of it (except that hut tour). I'll publish a few final thoughts soon as an epilogue for my final installment.

# **Antarctica Travelogue Epilogue**

## **Overall thoughts**

I said this at the end of the last letter, but if you ever have the opportunity to go to unusual places, really consider taking the leap and doing it. We'd never even heard of Iguazú Falls but now it's a core memory of the awesomeness of our planet. We're a bit geography-impaired but even if you have heard of these places, go for it.

Traveling with educated people (like this alumni trip) means that everyone you sit next to is interesting ... and interested. They have stories to tell and questions to ask and you're unlikely to find anyone dull or close-minded.

While on the ship, we spent a lot of our time meeting new people. When we did the 3-day excursion to Iguazú, it was a small subset of the original group that went with us. That created an interesting side effect. When we went to the pool, it was no longer meeting new people, it was visiting with good friends. I really liked that feeling.

Antarctica wasn't as cold as we expected, the Drake Passage is just as wild as they said, and we still debate which is the best penguin. While the white circles around the eyes of the Adélie penguins make them quite striking, the Chinstraps are the cutest. The Gentoo win for loudest and stinkiest.

Having champagne in a Zodiac nestled between glaciers and icebergs was an experience we'll never forget.

## **We had enough time**

When we circumnavigated Iceland in a Ponant ship with Gohagen as the travel organizers, we spent a lot of time going inland via busses. When we'd get to a waterfall or other cool thing, they'd let us out of the bus and say, "You have 15 minutes!" Everything was super rushed after a long time of travel.



In contrast, on this trip, we had far more time. We'd have assigned times to get onto our Zodiacs (we were in the blue group), and when they dropped us off, they'd tell us what time to get back on. But that was more of a guideline. Some people would want to go back after just a half hour, but others (like us) wanted more time, and we just got back on the next Zodiac available when we were ready to go.

When we went to Iguazú, I was so worried I wouldn't get enough time just to watch the falls. But even I found it was enough time. I could just lean on the railing and breathe it in for a long time. It was glorious.

### **Let's talk coffee**

Argentina makes really good coffee. The French coffee on the ship was dreadful. I'm not a coffee connoisseur, but this was a widely-held opinion. Steve and I brought our thermal travel mugs on the trip and he discovered that bartender-made lattes were highly preferable to the regular coffee.

But when it comes to pastries, the French know their place in the world. I may have eaten a few croissants. For some reason, the Argentinians think that croissants need to also be drenched in syrup. It sounds like a good idea in theory, but in practice, it destroys what makes croissants so very delightful.

### **Big ship vs little ship**

When we went to Australia and saw a total eclipse of the sun near the French-owned islands of New Caledonia, we were on a 3000-person cruise ship. While we had a great time, it would have to be an extraordinary opportunity to talk me into going on a ship that big again. The crowds were overwhelming, you had to make reservations 3 months in advance if you wanted to go snorkeling, and we were in line for everything. We're not into gambling, which seems to be a big draw of the big cruise ships. I don't like dressing up either, and the whole fancy dining experience is lost on me. Packing dresses and high-heeled shoes is not my idea of fun.

On the small ships, you get to go to much more exclusive locations. Years ago we went to the Galapagos on a tiny ship with only 30 passengers and we loved having these little excursions where the larger ships couldn't go. It feels special, not like being part of a mob.

## **Entertaining captain**

We're a fan of the Ponant ships. They're elegant but accessible. Our favorite part of them is the adaptive stabilizers that kept the ship from rolling too badly as we navigated the swells of the Drake Passage.

The Captain Marchesseau of L'Austral was a special treat. His morning wakeup call was filled with humor. When we went to see penguins early on, he started making penguin noises into the PA system just to make us laugh. We tried desperately to capture him doing it but it was too quick.

Andrea Ghez had dinner with him one night and she told us that he told an amazing story. He was the captain of a ship called Ponant when it was captured by Somali pirates! Only the crew was aboard but it was evidently quite harrowing. Remember the dramatic movie with Tom Hanks where the same thing happened? That was not our captain's story, but our captain said it was very similar to his experience!

The harrowing capture and negotiated release is written up in this Vanity Fair article: <https://www.vanityfair.com/news/2009/04/somali-pirates200904>

## **The Drake Passage**

It's very hard to shave your legs on a ship rolling in 18-foot waves in the Drake Channel.

## **Tech in Travel**

When we go on these adventures I like to report back on what tech worked and what didn't work. If you'd like to hear about that part of the adventure, here's a link to this year's installment:



Tech on Travel - the Antarctica Edition <https://www.podfeet.com/blog/2023/02/tech-on-travel-antarctica/>

## Friends of Rico

Let me end this epilogue with a short video that Steve created (with a little bit of help from me) that will give you a flavor of Rico's vacation to Antarctica and Iguazú. I think you'll get a kick out of it. At least it makes US laugh!



I hope you enjoyed my nonsense writing and we'll talk again when next we go on a big adventure!