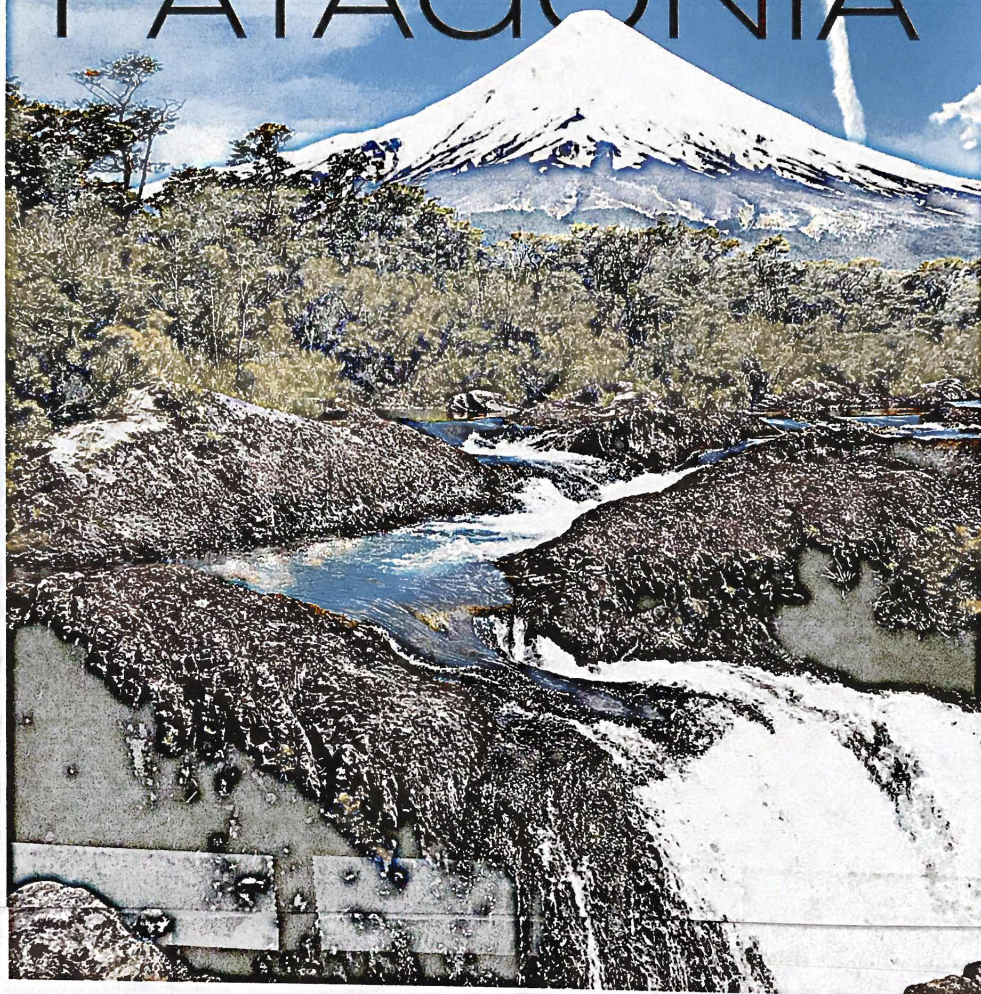


travel

THE PLEASURES OF PATAGONIA

HAWAII'S BACKYARD
Waimea's ticked pink over its
annual Cherry Blossom Festival
» E6

SIGNS OF HAWAIIAN LIFE » E2
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*The city at South America's southern tip calls
with majestic glaciers, museums and more*

Story and photos by Julie L. Kessler
Special to the Star-Advertiser

GROWING up with Hawaii's sand and surf, Patagonia and its glaciers have always been on my bucket list.

Arriving in Chile's capital, Santiago, my travel companion, Maui artist Janet Davis, and I spent a couple of days acclimating while enjoying this European-inspired city's most important sites.

Santiago Centre and Bellavista

Santiago's Plaza de Armas was created for strolling. Its 18th-century Germanic neoclassical Cathedral Metropolitana — the seat of Chile's archdiocese — and Correa Central — the Central Post Office — housed in an ornate 19th-century French neoclassic building were resplendent. The nearby pedestrian walkways of Paseo Ahumada and Huérfanos have cafes, shopping and entertaining street performers.

A few blocks away the Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes is one of South America's most important museums. Built in

Please see PATAGONIA, E7



Snowcapped Mount Osorno, top, is often referred to as Chile's Mount Fuji, top. The author, above right, and Maui artist Janet Davis aboard a Silver Explorer Zodiac near Pío XI Glacier.

IF YOU GO ...

Patagonia

Silversea offers all-inclusive expedition cruises from Valparaíso, Chile (near Santiago), to Tierra del Fuego's capital of Ushuaia in Argentina.

» **Cost:** Fourteen-day all-inclusive rates start at \$7,800 per person.

» **Phone:** 888-978-4070

» **On the Net:** Silversea.com

» **Packing tips:** As weather changes quickly in Patagonia, it's best to pack waterproof pants, along with scarves, hats, gloves and sunglasses.

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PHOTOS BY JULIE L. KESSLER / SPECIAL TO THE STAR-ADVERTISER

PATAGONIA

Continued from E1

1910, this palatial French neoclassical structure with art nouveau details has an enormous vaulted glass ceiling and houses a permanent collection of more than 2,500 pieces. The Museo de Arte Contemporáneo is connected to it and houses another 2,000 paintings, sculptures and photographs. Santiago's Bellavista neighborhood provides great people watching near the university, and at Patio Bellavista a large selection of handcraft shops, restaurants and bars beckon to enjoy an afternoon pisco sour — a delightful, ginger-colored, brandy-based cocktail.



A 90-minute drive through verdant hillsides and vineyards brought us to Valparaíso, the embarkation point for Silversea's Silver Explorer. We would head southbound to the tip of South America, ending in Ushuaia, Argentina, known as "the end of the world."

The Silver Explorer's 144-passenger expedition ship is designed to navigate remote waters in luxury with all-suite accommodations, including a personal butler. Onboard there was a small fitness center and cigar and piano bar lounges. There were also lectures in marine biology, anthropology, ornithology, geology and botany. On our voyage there were 102 passengers, mainly Americans, Canadians, Aussies and Swiss, including six from Hawaii.

Valdivia and the Lake District
Docking in Niebla, 600 miles south, we drove to the small city of Valdivia, visiting the Mauricio Van de Maele Historical and Anthropology Museum. Formerly the home of German political exile Carlos Amwandter, who founded Chile's first brewery, the building has impressive period furnishings, including an unusual two-sided piano.

Valdivia's colorful central fish market along the riverbank featured several salmon varieties while enormous, gooty sea lions lollied nearby hoping for scraps.

In Puerto Montt, snowcapped volcanoes, Orsuno, Calbuco and Tromador, are visible at every turn, each majestic like a phoenix rising. Often referred to as Chile's Mount Fuji, Osorno — which last erupted in 1869 — is most impressive with its perfect apex.

Riding a catamaran on the 72-square-mile Todos los Santos Lake and hiking along the ski-lift

path at the La Burbuja Ski Center provided spectacular views of Osorno. As clouds started to roll in at the ski center, the atmosphere changed, resulting in a sundog — an optical phenomenon where refracted light from ice crystals acts like a prism. To us nonmeteorologists it types it appeared as an eerie, unexpected solar eclipse.

At the Petrohue River the rapids were intensely cobalt. Our final stop in the region was Puerto Varas, a charming lakeside town possessing a strong Germanic architectural influence.

The Chiloe Archipelago

Cruising southbound, the Chiloe Archipelago consists of a large island and several small ones. On main Chiloe Island is its tiny capital, Castro, has candy-colored, pastel-hued buildings and Chiloe's most seminal landmark, Iglesia San Francisco. With its neogothic facade constructed entirely from native woods, this UNESCO-protected church built in 1910 was the brainchild of Italian architect Eduardo Provasoli.

Remarkably, there are 16 UNESCO-protected churches in Chiloe that together make up a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

Driving an hour west, we arrived at Chiloe National Park to walk the Tepual Trail. With 300 rainy days a year in the region, shades of emerald and jade prevailed. In the park are pudu deer, Darwin's frogs and gato colocolo (wildcats). A vast wealth of flora and fauna included naica plants that resembles kale but possesses leaves the size of gargantuan golf umbrellas. Just as Hawaiians use ti leaves for imu, Chileans use naica to cover their enquentros (underground ovens).

Northern Patagonia

As we passed through the English Narrows — indeed narrow at 540 feet wide — breakfast was busy. First a pod of Commerson's dolphins — with distinct panda-like coloring — swam along side the Silver Explorer, followed by several Magellanic penguins diving for their own breakfast. Afterward I enjoyed a fascinating lecture on Charles Darwin's contemporary Alfred R. Wallace, author of the still-in-print "The Malay Archipelago," first published in 1869, which influenced Joseph Conrad's "Heart of Darkness."

One of the expedition's highlights was Pto XI Glacier, the largest in the southern Patagonia ice field and named after mountaineer Pope Plus XI (also called Bruggen Glacier). At 488 square miles it's the largest glacier in South America. In Zodiac boats from our ship and decked in waterproof pants, several top layers, hats and gloves, it was a chilly 35 degrees. Within 200 feet of Pto XI, we



The town of Ushuaia, the Argentine capital on its portion of Tierra del Fuego, is also known as the "end of the Earth," top. Above, some spires of Pto XI Glacier are the largest in South America at 488 square miles. Below, a vegetarian dish prepared by Silversea's Silver Explorer Executive Chef Pia.



stopped for photos. At that moment another Zodiac approached with Silver Explorer executive chef Pia aboard. Like a fantasy, she handed us glasses of champagne and macadamia nut cookies. Explorer Ferdinand Magellan no doubt would have swooned in disbelieving decadent delight.

With massive sapphire-tinged spires, Pto XI is immense and intensely beautiful. Here one can experience glacier calving, where the glacier reaches the sea and large ice pieces break free and float away. The astoundingly loud crack of calving is heard before breakage is seen.

A thunderous rumble is followed by a tumbling explosion as ice separates and crashes into the water, followed by several waves. It's remarkably silent to Mother Nature sounding off warning shots to Father Time indicating potential danger lurking in the foreground. At the gangway on return, the crew piled us with hot hand towels and steaming apple tea. In continuing natural grandeur, like an orchestral crescendo, a huge rainbow caressed a mountain peak just near the glacier's western edge.

Southern Patagonia and Tierra del Fuego

The edge of Puerto Natales sits on Ultimo Esperanza — known as "last hope" — as the body of water bearing the last hope for early explorers searching for the Strait of Magellan. This small town with a grassy square, church and a few bars and restaurants is the jumping point for Torres del Paine National Park 70 miles away.

As we made our way toward the park, woolly Merino sheep grazed on lush hills. Onward we came to a

herd of guanacos — cute members of the camelid family that possess an abiding love of long-distance spitting at humans from deep within one of their four stomachs. Having already showered, I carefully avoided their spit-shot.

Though November marks the beginning of Southern Hemisphere springtime, as we entered the park it started to snow. In typical Patagonian fashion, all four seasons seem to pass in a day. Passing ethereal Nordskjold Lake, we saw bursts of fiery red-orange wildflowers dotting the hillsides. We hiked 20 minutes up — easy on rough shale rock — to the mineral-rich turquoise Salto Grande waterfall. At the hill's bottom a lone orange-breasted, long-tailed meadowlark posed regally for photos.

Several black-necked swans welcomed us as we returned to the Silver Explorer.

As the ship passed through the Kirke Narrows, we collectively held our breaths. Though the measured width is 450 feet, the actual passage is 240 feet, making this transition especially delicate given the currents.

Arriving in Punta Arenas, we donned sunglasses for a sunny stroll through the town, which possesses some excellent examples of French neoclassical architecture. Within three minutes skies

turned, snow started falling and out came hats and gloves. Ten minutes later the weather pattern reversed and off came the accoutrements.

Punta Arenas' Museo Salesiano had an excellent collection of regional wildlife taxidermy and artifacts of indigenous peoples. Also on display were several photos by mountaineering priest Alberto Maria de Agostini that resulted in the production of several regional maps.

The last full sea day we cruised amid the Garibaldi Fjord, arriving at the massive Garibaldi Glacier. The temperature was around 35 degrees but felt colder as the wind whistled and snow started falling. The Silver Explorer floated amid icebergs the size of Volkswagens as our Zodiac sped away toward the glacier. An enormous condor flew overhead, and several calvings occurred, resulting in wave sets. It was an otherworldly experience.

Ushuaia, the world's southernmost city and capital of the Argentine portion of Tierra del Fuego, served as Argentina's prison between 1906 and 1947. It also serves as the final jumping point for ships departing for the Falklands, Shetlands, South Georgia and Antarctica.

As we disembarked, I thought of all the natural marvels we had experienced. I remembered Anne Stevenson's words, "The sea is as near as we come to another world." Nowhere is this truer than in Patagonia.

Julie L. Kessler is a travel writer, legal columnist and attorney now based in Los Angeles and the author of the award-winning book "Fifty-Fifty: The Clarity of Hindsight." She can be reached at Julie@VagabondLawyer.com.