

South America 2008

Well Alison and I are home after a wonderful time and many adventures in South America. I will now try and paint a picture of what we saw, took pictures of, ate and drank and adventures we had including a few things that I thought I could not do. All I can say I was glad we had trained before we went as we did some challenging walks.

Monday 22 September

We left Coffs Harbor late what a way to start the trip and there was a decent wind blowing as well, spent the night in Sydney.

Tuesday 23 September

Well flying business class is the only way to go plenty of room and was able to sleep reasonably well. We arrived in Buenos Aires at night and it was late by the time we got to the hotel. The airport was terrible when we were there 10 years ago and its not any better we were lucky that we had access to the Condor Club not as good as the Qantas club but not out with the hordes and there was food of a type and drinks available.

Wednesday 24 September

Up at 5 am and back to the airport to fly to Santiago. We had great views of the Andes and their snow covered peaks they seem to be just outside the window it's a funny feeling being so high flying and the mountains are so close. Arrived late and met by our guide and driver two delightful people. Driven to the Hotel Orly a lovely boutique style hotel reminded me of a Swiss chalet. After a lovely lunch we were off to the pre-Columbian museum which had an incredible display of artifacts that are from pre Inca and Inca civilizations. Visited the house of the noble prize winner Pablo Neruda, which was full of art and French furniture. Walked around the Plaza de Armas which was full of stalls, buskers and a lot of people also there was an obvious police presence. Dinner was at the Astrid and Gaston restaurant and it was an incredible dining experience the food was delicious and the wines were excellent. Service was so good you felt like the only 2 people who were dining there.

First impressions of Santiago were that it is a clean city that felt safe and comfortable. I was surprised to see that it was not on the coast for some reason I thought it was coastal city. It is a city that is ringed by mountains and certainly makes flying in and out interesting there are clear and definite paths that aircraft follow. The mountains still had a reasonable coverage of snow. Temperature wise it was like a spring day in Orange. There was some haze and humidity was reasonably high. It also appeared to be what we saw a green city with lots of avenues of mature trees. People friendly and they looked prosperous.

Thursday 25 September

Up at 6am and off to the airport for our flight to Lima and then to Quito the capital of Ecuador. This city is a world heritage site which will ensure that the historical parts of the city are not destroyed and given that it was founded in 1534 it is an old city steeped in history. The elevation is 9,000 feet so we were conscious of the altitude but not worried by it. New guide and drive both nice people and obviously proud of their city and country. This time accommodation was totally different a B&B called the Villa Colonna located in the old city. A perfect location and a lovely place to stay. One cost we had not factored in was the charges for storing our luggage. Breakfast was large and substantial. The airport at Quito is out of this world it is located in the middle of the city with buildings at both ends of the runways and on either side there is no room for error when landing and taking off and as well it is surrounded by mountains and there are specific tracks in and out for the planes to take. Back to the Villa an old house that has been restored and is a typical Spanish concept internal court yard. Dinner once again was an experience of typical cuisine and beautiful Chilean wine.

Friday 26 September

We walked from our B&B down narrow cobblestone streets through the old city which has a Spanish influence and little shops everywhere where you can buy almost anything. Features of the old city included the La Plaza de la Independencia, several cathedrals with each one full of art work and gold and the Museo de la Ciudad that originally was a hospital and now provides an insight to what life was like in colonial Quito. We drove to top of El Panecillo which gives us an overview of old Quito. The city of Quito is a long settlement in a narrow mountainous valley. We then drove out of Quito to Rumicucho with lunch at El Crater. This was a fascinating place the clouds are forced up over the mountains and descend over the crater about lunch time each day. The loos at this restaurant were interesting the female door had a set of boobs and the male door was adorned by the male anatomy. We went to the site of the true equator 00, 00', 00" as calculated with the global positioning system. We were able to stand with both feet in each of the hemisphere it was a very interesting place with simple demonstrations using water to show the pull from each of the hemispheres.

Before dinner we walked in the old city and saw bizarre and fascinating gargoyles as well a horse drawn carriage ride around the old city which was a lovely experience. Dinner at the La Belle Epoque was very enjoyable food was delicious and the entertainment by 3 opera singers superb. It was also an experience of the country's laws as no alcohol was able to be served for three days before an election and as they were having their elections on Sunday it was water only can you imagine if we were to do the same thing here there would be a riot.

Saturday 27 September

Off to the airport at a nice time i.e. mid morning for our flight San Cristobal Galapagos only problem we missed the flight which was pretty distressing a combination of language issues and poor boarding processes by AeroGal. After much discussion we were rebooked to fly out next day and then we were driven to accommodation in the city which was a contrast to our previous accommodation but was fine we were able to have a meal there and our lack of Spanish was not a problem.

Sunday 28 September

Well we got the plane this time we were given VIP treatment. We were met and well looked after by a local guide. We visited the interpretation centre which was donated by Spain and focuses on the natural and cultural history of the archipelago, from its volcanic origins to the present which was very informative about how the Islands evolved, the flora and fauna and the impact of civilisation in this area. We saw seal lions pelicans and arrange of other birds.

We were taken out by zodiac to the Evolution where we were met by the Captain and the crew. It is obviously an old boat that has been refitted. The invitation to an open bar was offered and we will surely take up the offer.

Monday 29 September

Well our first night on board and slept well had my bands on just in case. We woke up to overcast weather anchored off the Island of Santa Cruz and guess who left there waterproof jacket in Quito that's right me but saved by the staff of the Evolution who provided me with a poncho. A civilized landing in that we left the zodiac (Panger) at a wharf in Puerto Ayora, then a bus trip to the Santa Cruz highlands driving through different levels of vegetation to the Los Gemelos and Cerro Chato volcanic craters. It was quiet eerie with light rain and low cloud, we saw several birds including flycatchers and Darwin's finches. Then we were off to see the giant tortoises what an incredible experience to see these large animals in a field slow walking and eating or sleeping was a pretty awesome sight. Then we had some mooring tea were Alex had some grapefruit which would have to be the sweetest I have ever eaten. A bar-b-que lunch and then back to the port and off to the Charles Darwin research station where we saw George a mature and famous tortoise and many others. Here at the research station they undertake biological research and conservation programs to ensure the ongoing life

of these incredible animals. The program also includes the eradication of feral pests such as pigs and goats which are interfering with the native animals. Saw nurseries where there were tortoises of various ages. I need to comment about the fruit there is no doubt about it Ecuador has an large variety of fruit that has taste and the ship had a great supply we had the choice of eating it fresh or drinking wonderful drinks made from strawberries, passion fruit guavas and many others. Upon returning from an excursion we were greet with a tempting fruit juice the only one I was not keen on was the watermelon one and there was always a variety of nibbles which were always very tempting and had to be eaten.

Tuesday 30 September

We sailed through out the night to San Salvador Island and had a wet landing. We saw sea lions, marine iguanas, several types of lizards and sally light-foot crabs. The iguanas are not as large as I thought and are a rather uninteresting color of grey brown but they certainly make you think about the evolution of the species and you can image the excitement that Darwin felt at his exposure to what was a rare glimpse of another world. We sailed past Buccaneers' Cove on the way to Bartholome Island and saw some very interesting cliff faces. Arriving at Bartholome Island we see the famous Pinnacle Rock. Off in the zodiac for a dry landing. We see Galapagos Penguin similar size to our fairy penguins, sea lions, blue footed boobies and pelicans which are a brown color and smaller than ours. We then climbed 368 steps to the summit and have a panoramic view over Bartholome and other central islands was reasonably hard work but well worth it as it was a spectacular view. This area has incredible volcanic formations including lava bombs, spatter and cinder cones. There were also some interesting cacti which are growing out of the lava surface. As we were enjoying the panorama one of our group spotted a pod of dolphins so we all rushed down the hill certainly a lot easier than walking up into the panga and off to find the dolphins which we did not find but it was fun any way.

Wednesday 1 October

This morning we are anchored off Genovesa Island which is noted for being the bird island. We landed at a rock formation that was called Prince Phillip's steps which was a bit tricky as there was a sea lion in the way but we all managed to get around with out disturbing the animal and falling into the sea. As we walked we saw red footed boobies, masked boobies and frigate birds every where. Also saw a range of other birds including mockingbirds, finches, swallowed tailed gulls and the brown pelicans. The birds sat and posed for us and it was a photographers dream so many subjects to chose from that the cameras just kept on clicking thank god for digital technology although the hard part is to the editing and I am not as good as Alison I tend to keep all the shots.

In the afternoon we have a wet landing at Darwin Bay beach where we saw nesting frigatebirds, Nazca and red footed boobies and herons

Thursday 2 October

Sailed all night to Fernandina Island and we are woken up at 6.15 am by Alex (our naturalist and guide) telling us that they have spotted some whales well you have never seen two people move so fast out of bed to the loo and dressed in I reckon all of 5 minutes then up the stairs to board the panga and we were off after the whales. It was a magic time the fun off spotting the whales seeing then blow and even though it was overcast it was a great way to start the morning. We are heading back to Evolution when we spot a pod of dolphins and the morning became incredible it was a large pod and it was like they were challenging us to race them which we did and it was just 12 people in a panga our ship the ocean and dolphins it was a great sight and one I will never forget. Back for a delicious breakfast and then ashore. Our landing site was a lava outflow which because it was wet from the retreating tide was a bit of a challenge to walk on but we all made it and no one ended up on their backs side. Here we saw a large number of marine iguanas and beautiful red crabs know as sally light foot. Here also was the flightless cormorants looks like ours but does not fly and they swim in the ocean to catch there food another aspect of the evolution process. Other birds we saw included great heron which were nesting and a yellow warbler. Of course there were yet again sea lions that have to be

photographers delight. Here we walked over the lava flows across crevasse which were rather deep and saw the end result of volcanic eruptions. Flora included cacti and mangroves. We also saw turtles both in the water and on the land and I found out that my camera can take great shots of the turtles in the water. This was a great morning. We up anchor and sailed short distance to Isabela Island landing at Tagus Cove. Once a shore we hiked up to Darwin's Lake and looked out over the many islands in the area including the Darwin Volcano. On this walk we had a truly wonderful experience. We came across a sea eagle which was as fascinated with us as we were with it. This bird literally sat on a tree branch just above our heads and talked to us and posed for its picture to be taken as you can imagine the fingers were very busy. Lots of birds including blue footed boobies, cormorants, penguins and a beautiful sunset.

Friday 3 October

This morning we are anchored off North Seymour Island. Ashore a range of wild life greeted us including sea lions, land and marine iguanas swallow tailed gulls boobies and the magnificent frigate birds. I have to say these birds are pretty ugly to look at but when you see the male with his blown up neck which is brilliant red it is a sight to behold and the chicks are gorgeous. Here we bunked the ship which meant we all had to stay inside while this operation takes place. Then we sail back at Santa Cruz and take a panga ride around at Black Turtle Cove and here in amongst the mangroves we saw turtles mating an interesting sight and juvenile sharks. This is our last night and our introduction to pisco sour and I am hooked.

Saturday 4 October

Back at San Cristobal coming ashore we pass fishing boat where they were gutting and filleting fish and they were surrounded by frigate birds and pelicans. Well didn't we have fun at the airport? We were given our set allocations and then they were changed which is fine but then this staff member comes up to our group and says no designated seats sit where you like and you are all first to go on board. Well that's fine we get into our seats near the front nicely settled when this obnoxious woman starts screaming at us to get out of her seat well I just sat but my wimp of a friend caved in and we moved and that's when I lost it. The air hostesses were of no use whatsoever. All I can say that flying with Aero Gal was a disaster and they certainly let down their country and I would not fly with them again. We were late getting back to Quito due to the weather but given the flight path the strip in the middle of the city and the mountains happy to be late.

Sunday 5 October

We woke to not a nice day but headed out for our drive to the Cotopaxi National Park and the highest active volcano. Along the way we passed some examples of the original type houses that the people use to live in not unlike those you see in Africa. In the national park at Lga Pimpiopungo at a height of 3830 m we walked around the lake was a slow walk because of the altitude but we managed had a shower of rain and then blue sky for awhile. We could see the volcano at this time. Then off to Hacienda La Cienega for lunch which was a lovely meal. The entrance was a long drive way with very old gum trees on either side of the road.

Evening meal at Osterlicht's Blu and once again a beautiful meal with lovely Chilean wine.

Monday 6 October

Sleep in then off to the airport to catch our plane to Coca to start our trip into the jungle. Well they announce our plane is late that's fine and as we look out the window and they are working on the nose wheel of the plane we were to fly in so not sorry we are late Another plane arrives and we are off for our flight over the Andes to the jungle. Looking out the window it was like being back in Papua New Guinea and even after we land felt the same. It was hot humid and tropical vegetation and of course it is on similar latitude to P and G. So here we climb into a canoe with an outboard motor and set off up the Napo River for a couple of hours. On the way we see an oil drilling site and hear how the burning off of the gas causes the death of millions of insects every day and how the water used in the drilling process is polluting the river. We arrive up the river

some two hours later and transfer to a smaller canoe which has two paddlers who are natives to this particular area. We now set off and paddle up blackwater creek what an experience here we are in the jungle on a not very wide creek in a small canoe and it is getting dark and of course in the tropics one minute it is light and the next its dark but wait for it we are paddling in the dark being guided by our native guide occasionally they turn on a light but his knowledge of the logs, bends and the way forward and his incredible eye sight makes for me an exciting trip. We saw lots of trees etc and fly flies which I have not seen for years they were on the banks and they were lightening the way like an airport run way. Also saw moths, bats and horse flies and there was the odd mosquito. We realize we are nearing the lodge as the creek starts to widen and we are also experiencing the start of a thunderstorm. Up ahead is the lodge and you think we have arrived in a beautiful spot and another adventure is about to begin. We are settled into our accommodation which is made of the local wood and has a high thatched roof. Modern bathroom and well protected from bugs with fly screens and mosquito nets. Here comes the one thing that was a bit hard to get use to on the bathroom door is a list of instructions the usual stuff but one bit that gets me is that we are to place our toilet paper in the bin and not the loo. It was a bit hard to get use to initially but then became the norm. This was fairly common occurrence in the places we visited apparently their sewerage system cannot cope with loo paper. I never asked what they did with it. Dinner and off to bed as we have an early start. This lodge is eco friendly and run by the local community. All staff are males and these people who wait on our tables have been trained extremely well they would be able to work in any restaurant. Overhead fan going a slight breeze and just the night noises of the jungle beautiful what a way to go to sleep.

Tuesday 7 October

Up at 4.30 am and off in our canoe at 5.30. Just a short trip across the lagoon and then a 45 minute walk through the jungle which was interesting the only problem was my glasses kept fogging up and the perspiration was a bit of a problem with the glasses as well just kept using the towel. We then climbed up an observation tower 112 m so for me to do this was a great achievement had a bit of vertigo but have had worse. We saw a lot of different types of birds including macaws and parrots. It rained on the way back but with it being hot was not a problem main thing was to keep the camera dry. Lunch and a sleep then back in the canoe across the lagoon and into a small creek once again we saw birds and caimans. Other Australians there mainly from Melbourne so we were able to get the football scores which caused a fair bit of banter much to the amusement of the other non Australian guests.

Wednesday 8 October

Up early this morning and down the creek to clay licks and there we a lot of parrots at each of the two sites. The parrots and parakeets come to eat the clay to aid in the digestion of their diet of unripe seeds and fruits. On our way back from the second clay lick we saw crested owls, I think a pygmy owl, monkey pygmy monkey and the giant otters. These guys were shy but we did get a good look at them it was exciting. Even though you have to look for the fauna when you spot a bird or a monkey or the otters it is an exciting and awesome moment.

Thursday 9 October

Well we got to sleep in until 6am. Over the lagoon was a light fog which showed the environment in a different light. By the time we left the lodge the fog had burnt off and we had a sunny day. We went down blackwater creek to the warehouse along the way both ways we saw birds monkeys and the otters again which was rare so we think we are pretty special having seen the otters so many times. This was a family group that they think a caimans attacked some time ago and it is only recently that they have sighted the otters again. We were treated to an afternoon thunderstorm which delayed our afternoon excursion. Went up a different small creek a short way then walked for awhile saw birds, plants ants nests and leaf cutter ants a type of ant that takes small pieces of leaves back to there nest. Walking back in the dark to the canoe was a bit of a challenge especially trying to keep the glasses un fogged and free of perspiration. We are going to another lodge in the morning apparently it is fairly primitive.

Friday 10 October

Left Napo Lodge at 6.30am with a thick fog over the lagoon but this burnt off by the time we entered black water creek. We saw macaws night jay and monkeys there is no doubt these guys are cheeky and agile the way they move about from tree to tree. Just before we got to the warehouse we came across a tree that had fallen across the creek last night and our way was blocked. Out came the machetes and path was cleared for us to continue also some one had come up stream from the warehouse and we left him to clear the rest. The level of the creek raises and falls on an almost daily bases as it is effected by rain fall and given we had a down pour the night before could see the effect on the water level. At the warehouse we transferred to a motorized canoe and then headed off up the Napo River to another lagoon. What a beautiful spot we arrived at a small wharf were there was a house built out of natural and local material. We had a glimpse of the fresh water dolphins that live in this particular lagoon. All the usual birds and also vultures were close to us. Had a lovely lunch a nice cold beer and then into a hammock for a sleep then off around the lagoon to look at the flora and fauna. We took everything with us to this site and that included all our linen the lodge had mattresses, food gas bottle and our own chef who was in his uniform for the trip. We had a shower no hot water but soap and it was refreshing. Off to bed under the mosquito net listening to the night sounds of the jungle

Saturday 11 October

Well we left our lovely lagoon and headed back up the Napo to the warehouse. They came looking for us as we were running later transferred to another canoe and was back at the warehouse in no time. Resting in a hammock when our guides tells us that the shaman is their and he will do a cleansing session. This small older man with dark skin tells me their will be noises and the movement of a tree branch. Apparently in village life he undertakes this ceremony at night and after he has taken a drug which was probably a haullicgenic type compound. I sit on a block of wood with my back to the Sharman and he begins it is hard to describe the feeling I had but it was a combination of peace and well being. Alison took some pictures and looking at myself I was well and truly relaxed it was an interesting experience for those of you who practice reiki it was similar experience but different. Back up the creek to the lodge and a late lunch which they held for us. Talking food I ate over the proceeding days some interesting food including raw beef and many varieties of potatoes. Also with each meal there was always a dish that was spicy and hot. Could not get a recipe but had oil, vinegar, chilies and Spanish onions. A small amount was enough because of it being hot from chilies but it really added flavor to soups and bread and I got to like it needless to say I stopped using salt which was a good thing. The other treat!!! was palm hearts as Alison said the only good thing about this dish was the dressing. The bread at the lodge was good not the sweet tasteless rubbish we got in some of the other places. On the way back we saw a zigzag heron and I got some great shots. Our guide Santiago a delightful young man who is passionate about his country and the environment showed us a presentation of maps and the effects of oil exploration and logging is having on Ecuador. The presentation was excellent and gave us a good over view of that part of South America. A large new group has arrived and we gathered they are a bird watcher group. Have developed quiet a taste for gin and tonic. The contrast between the Galapagos Islands and the jungle is that in the former you are literally falling over the wild life while in the latter you have to look for it and be quiet.

Sunday 12 October

Well this is our last day in what has been a wonderful experience in observing the wild life and seeing a small part of the vast species of plants and trees that are found in this area. We went for a slow trip down black water creek and saw lots of birds including a heron but the best part was the monkeys they were in fine form and the theater they performed was very entertaining. Also we were lucky and saw the giant otters yet again we certainly were luck in that we had four sightings.

Monday 13 October

Well today we are off down the creek and then the Napo back to Coca for our flight to Quito. As usual the plan was late but a quick flight and we are in Quito. Lunch at Octava de Corpus it was a lovely meal set amongst some interesting paintings, china and sculptures. Then off to the Villa Colonna to collect our luggage. Rudy was not home when we got there but rushed back from ever he was to see us off. This was a great place to stay even though we got charged for storing our luggage. It is now raining and the museum we were to go to was closed. Our guide wanted to take us to the shops but we said no thanks and went to the airport instead. Yet again our plane was late and there was some interesting theater they were looking for a small number of passengers who were taken out the back were they identified their luggage which was then opened and search. This take off from Quito was an interesting one the climb out is fairly steep but this time it felt like we were clawing our way into the air but we made had a bit of turbulence as an aftermath of the afternoon storm. Arrived in Lima and after we got off the plane seem to travel miles before we got to the terminal and off course they are yet again doing work at this airport just like they were when we were there 10 years ago. Off to our hotel which overlooked the ocean unfortunately it was a short stay as we had to be up early the next morning for our flight to Cuzco.

Tuesday 14 October

Up at 5 am and off to the airport Lima remains an unattractive city all though I must admit they have cleaned it up compared to last time. Cuzco has changed the city square has none of the small stall holders like when we were there last time and it was full of tourists which I can hear you saying that the main contributor to the country economy as they say you should never go back. Taken to our hotel where we had coca tea although altitude was not a problem at this time. Then we were off to the sacred valley saw the ruins of Písaq and then went to the Moray archaeological site. There are four round galleries the largest is 45 meters deep and the average height of each terrace is 1.80 meters This was an incredible site it is thought to have been an important agricultural experimentation centre during the Inca period like an outdoor laboratory where the Incas used their skills of architecture, engineering, scientist and philosopher to study the effects of the sun, moon and water on crop production. Archeologists are still learning from this site and no doubt further history about the Incas will be discovered. We then went to Maras the ancient salt pans once again the way this site has been constructed to allow for the harvesting of salt shows skills of the Incas was pretty incredible. The water comes out of the mountain range and is directed around the pans by small channels which are opened and closed to allow for the production of salt. Lunch was most enjoyable and reflected the tastes of Peruvian people. The museum in Cuzco had a very interesting display of pre Inca and Inca art. Our hotel the Libertador was certainly much more up market than where we stayed last time.

Wednesday 15 October

Up and off to the railway station to catch the Orient Express Andean Explorer. A small hiccup my ticket was in my old name and of course they need to see your passport but it was ok and we went on board. It was certainly a well appointed train and the armchairs were very comfortable. There were other Australians on the train and opposite us was a couple from Sydney originally from the UK. So we caught up on the news from home. The observation car was a photographer's delight and there was certainly plenty to shoot. We climbed up out of Cuzco and along the valley which are farmed by the local people and up into the barren countryside of the Andes until we reached La Raya the highest point of the trip. We went though sun shine rain and there was even fresh snow on the high peaks. It was raining when we stopped and bitterly cold which was a pity as all the locals were there with their wares took some photos then back on the train. Food was excellent. The train then climbs down from the mountains and you then cross prairie like country flat and treeless Also saw these small blue colored buildings that looked like loaves we later found out that that was what they were and it was a government initiative. Also saw some grave yards with many of the head stones painted blue. We also had some entertainment from some musicians and dancers which of course was pan flutes and Peruvian

music. We then arrive at the city of Juliaca what a sight along side the train line were all these small stores which sold absolutely everything from small items like screws to household goods the stall were literally inches away from the wheels of the train. We then pulled into the train station where we stopped and then another interesting sight the railway line is locked up at either end of the station and apparently once the train goes though the people move right back on to the train tracks. We arrived in Puno on dusk and off to our hotel on the Island. A bit of a disappointment we were shown in a lovely suite but unfortunately there was only a double bed so we were moved and while the room was fine was not as nice as the first one. The hotel was fine but I felt it was very commercial and lacked the welcoming environment of other places that we had stayed in. Our room overlooked the lake and we got to see the moon rising over the water which was a beautiful site. We found out towards the end of our trip that after we had completed the train trip the railway line and the road was closed because of disruption by the local land owners so people had to fly to Puno. I am glad that it did not happen to us as the train trip except for our trip to the village was the highlight of this part of our trip.

Thursday 16 October

Today we are on a small boat with just our guide and the boats crew off to the Uros the floating Islands. What can one say the way these are a wonder in the way they are made and how these people live there. Alison and I were dressed in local skirt, vest and hat was a funny sight. We learnt how they construct and maintain the Islands. Unfortunately I felt it was very commercial and there was a push for you to buy some of the craft items. We had a ride on a traditional style boat which allowed for some good photos of the villages. We then sailed though the reeds into clear water and went to Llachan Island. The wharf was a bite of a challenge rough stones which were very uneven and made walking a challenge. We went to a kindergarten where these delightful child were being taught by a local young man. They were a healthy looking group although they were a bit grubby. They were having lunch as we left the mothers take it in turns and it was omelet and rice look and smelt good. This Island is mainly raising beef cattle. You could see the original terraces created by the Incas. Then we sailed across to Taquile Island the last half an hour on the water was interesting as the sea was rather rough we tied up at a wharf but had to cross to other boats to get too the wharf steps. The crew of all the boats was great and felt quite safe. Then we stated our walk up hill not really steep but we are already at a reasonably high altitude so is was slow as you go passed one lady who did not look well was having a noise bleed and another young women had collapsed. We knew that we were at altitude but managed. Lunch was soup and a delicious omelet. Back to our boat only had to cross one to get to ours and the sea was calmer the back to the hotel was an enjoyable day.

Friday 17 October

Well what a day we went to Sillustani to see the great temple of Pukara the oldest ceremonial site of the Altiplano Inca and pre Inca. Once again this site showed the skills of these people in that time with terraced hill side's fields at the lake level set out in such away that the water provides a means to support growth. The burial sites or towers were both round but pre Inca rough while the Inca used the traditional square blocks. Here we also saw the result of volcanic eruption with a lake an in the middle is an island the day was perfect for photos so have some great shots. We stopped and went inside a traditional house were there was a young woman and her two children the whole house and yard was emulate. The grandmother was buried in side the walls of this small compound. She has a fuel stove in which she burns animal dung and also we saw the food that she uses for their meals includes potatoes several types and grains she also had a shaped stone were she husked her grain. We saw the church of the Immaculate Conception which has a painting of the last supper it was hard to see the outline of Mary in this particular painting. For me the end of the day was unreal we drove to the geological formations of Tinajani the energy levels in this area were so high just standing among theses rock formation you could feel the energy radiating out. Touching the rocks increased the energy level Carol it was like the intensity you get with reiki. There was a local man there who came for a chat was under the influence of probably alcohol but he was interesting to talk to he informed us he was the guardian of this valley.

Saturday 18 October

This is our last day in Peru. Drove south from Puno along Lake Titicaca with our first stop at the phallic temple Inca Uyo. We then drove through a local village area where we saw the people plough the fields mostly using oxen or bullocks and wooden ploughs we did see the odd tractor. This area was a hive of activity as it was obviously the time to plant their crops, The other fascinating thing was the presence of graves in the fields and close to the houses a traditional custom. We had tea at a local house our guide new the young couple and this was where we were to see a carved rock face. We also went to another geological site just off the main highway known as the doorway of Amaru Muru which some claim is the doorway to other dimensions of the universe. The intensity of the energy levels here was very low nothing like the previous day I wonder if it was because it was so close to civilization??? Visited another church where a funeral procession was underway including a band playing and they were carrying the coffin to the cemetery. An old lady in the village had died. We could see the snow covered mountains of Bolivia in fact we were very close to the border. We stopped and went down to the lake to feel the water temperature unfortunately our driver got stuck in the sand. Was heaps of fun had to use the cars mats to get us out as there was no bush or scrub around that you could use. We got stopped by the police just out of Puno who gave our driver a hard time it was the only time that I felt apprehensive as this policeman was not a nice person he asked who we were but it was the look he kept giving us was really quiet scary. The roads in Peru are not the greatest and I think that the paved roads are rougher than the dirt ones.

Sunday 19 October

Up early and left Puno for a short drive to Juliaca to the airport and catch our plane to Lima. This city was even worse seen from the car and according to our guide it is not a nice place especially after dark. Went for a tour and saw colonial mansions and the colonial Pedro de Osma where we saw an incredible display of Peruvian art was overwhelming but very interesting. We had lunch at the Museum Larco and then went through this private collection of pre Columbian art which was huge there were cases and cases of artifacts in the storage room as well as those on display you came away feeling quite stunned imagining the production of these items in the past without today's modern machines. The main feature was the Mochica ceramics and the other highlight was a room full of figures depicting the sexual acts etc etc. Dinner at night was at the Huaca Pucllana which has an archeological site that is a 1500 year old obelisk pyramid built by the original inhabitants of Lima. Lima is a lot cleaner but I still am not attracted to this city.

Monday 20 October

Up at 4am to catch our flight to Santiago I have really got used to these early morning risers and have the packing of the suitcases down to a fine art. This was not a good morning with the airlines Lan hit me for excess luggage even though we were catching an international flight I was pretty annoyed but what can you do!!!! Arrived back in Santiago to a lovely clear well reasonably so sunny day and off to lunch at Akarana and yet again beautiful meal with excellent service. Down town to the Plaza de Armas the presidents palace which we could not go into as there was a foreign visitor and scrutiny tight. Walked through shopping malls mainly so I could buy a memory card. Then up to Santa Lucia Hill which enabled us to look out over Santiago. We went to a different restaurant than planned but was most enjoyable.

Tuesday 21 October

Yes we are up early 4am to catch our flight to Calama and this was the start of a totally different adventure. Dry barren but fascinating and we saw our first Vinacu an animal like lama/alpaca. Then we drove off the main road down to narrow road where the geographical structure was breath taking. Then on to San Pedro and Awasi. We were welcomed by the manager and given a tour of this resort and what a resort had a distinct desert flavor with lovely outdoor areas including an open fire place. Had a lovely breakfast which we enjoyed. Our accommodation was an adobe which was built from natural local material including a grass roof. Was lovely and cool during the day and warm at night because as you would imagine it gets fairly cool at night time. Also a small pool which while the water temperature were not all that warm I had a swim just so I could

say I had been in a pool in the desert at altitude. Went for a walk around San Pedro typical of many of the towns we have already seen not much on the outside but inside it is a different story. Lots of places to eat and buy things we only did a bit of shopping. After an afternoon nap we head out for the Moon Valley along the way we walk down a steep slope to the bottom of the valley and then we set out on a 2 hour hike along a canyon floor where it was flat great but we had a couple of challenges to get down to the next level but we made it. The effect of the wind and erosion has created a fascinating landscape you could hear the rocks talking as the heat of the day diminishes. We then watch the sunset back at the Moon Valley. While the walk was a challenge it was also exhilarating especially after we had completed it. Only problem was that I got sunburn in a couple of interesting spots though my trousers. Lovely outdoor shower so had my shower under the stars in a cool temperature our room had a tiny private courtyard where the shower was. Then off for a drink before dinner in front of the fire this was heaven and yes the stars were close just like here in the outback. Then we had a lovely dinner and off to bed for a much needed rest. We met some nice people and spent some time with them.

Wednesday 22 October

We got to sleep in a strange feeling did not get up to 8.30am lovely breakfast then off to Toconao which is famous for its buildings of laminar volcanic stone we visited its church. We then cross a creek which is the only running fresh water in this area. Then we set off for the Atacama salt lake across some barren and desolate country. Safety was a high priority and our driver/guide was in radio contact with Awasi on a regular base and we always had stacks of drinking water. We arrive at the salt pans which we walk through. The salt pans are the result of the evaporation of salty ground water it is rough site until we come to a lake which has flamingoes on them. And here the camera just keep clicking I have some of the best reflection photos I have even taken. After our usual afternoon nap we head north for a few kilometers where we walk up a hill to an old Inca temple a highway resting place here the Inca would plant crops and this would enable the messengers who moved throughout the empire to get food and of course the most precious thing of all fresh water. We then go to the San Isidro church Spanish influence which is a small low building with a bell tower that is still cared for by the descendants of the family that built it. We then stopped on the way back at Quitar Pukara an Atacama fortress that dates back to 9,000/8500 BC. Here you can see streets, houses, communal areas and you can feel see and hear the people who lived there before they were defeated by the Spanish. The site has a commanding view of the Andes and surrounding country side and as the Incas had the high ground you have to stop and think how they were defeated. We then walk a short distance where we see the head of a man and a woman carved into the rock face and as we progress up this canyon where there is a tunnel that goes through the mountain and a natural steep pathway up the mountain.

Thursday 23 October

Today we left San Pedro and headed east towards Bolivia and Argentina. We climb up the Jama Pass 13800ft where we get even better views of the Licancabur Volcano 19400ft. This barren landscape is awesome and ever overwhelming. We stop at a pond that has ice on the shallow parts of it and we start to see birds and other wild life. We then arrive at the Pakana Monks rocky formation and once again the wind and erosion has created a number of shapes and we have fun identifying animals and birds in these formations. We then head out on the sand and drive to Tara lake where we see more birds alpaca and llamas and a variety of low scrub, vegetation and ground cover. We were at 4600 metres and we knew it, our driver/guide now produces a superb lunch including a bottle of Chilean red wine. What a place to have a picnic there is just the three of us and the landscape. I manage to capture a salt storm on my camera. The drive back to Awasi allowed for another look at this incredible landscape.

Friday 24 October

Our last day at Awasi and we went to some hot springs a short drive from San Pedro. We had our own pool which had a small waterfall so you could have a splash as well as being in the warm water. Pool was only a couple of feet deep and the water was crystal clear the floor was all stones. After a while you got used to the

temperature so stand up or get out get cool and go back in. We had a snack drinks cheese and salmon lovely. The road we drove down to get to the springs was a bit like a goat track very narrow a car width and only a stone fence between us and the drop. Back to Awasi for a shower, lunch and then it was time to leave for the airport. This was a truly wonderful experience to be in such a desolate and barren place and yet there was great beauty in the landscape. On the flight was mainly cloudy but as we got closer to Santiago clouds went and you could see the snow covered peaks of the Andes. This was the first flight that arrived on time.

Saturday 25 October

Well we woke to an overcast day and low temperatures. Walked to the Plaza de Aemas it was very quiet and back to the hotel. Evening meal in a restaurant next door to the Hotel Orly. As this was the night before the election it was very quiet and not many people about.

Sunday 26 October

Up at 4.30am to catch our flight to Puerto Mott. We visited the Petrohue falls and the drove on through the national park to hotel Petrohue. Our hotel was located on the shores of Lake Todos los Santos and was a lot like a swiss chalet except it was multi storied. Our room was on the fourth floor and overlooked the lake. The day had started out cloudy but as the morning progressed it turnrd into a lovely clear sunny day. The snow capped mountain behind the hotel was a photographer's delight and yes the finger kept pushing the button so I have lots of shots to edit. After lunch we went for a three hour walk up towards the mountain then across dry river beds that have been carved out of the landscape by the melting snow and rain, through some trees and shrubs back to the lake and then back to hotel enjoyed it. The sunset on the snow covered mountains was pretty and took lots of shots. By this time it was fairly chilly and the temperature was dropping quiet rapidly.

Monday 27 October

Another lovely day it's a bit nippy but not cold. We climb aboard a catamaran and across the lake to Penulla going pass three volcanoes Osorno, Puntagudo and Tronador. Lunch was in a restaurant that looked out at the mountains and yes we had a lovely meal. Walked up to waterfall that they use to generate their electricity then back to the boat and trip back to Petrohue. We head off to Puerto Varas. Hotel on the side of the hill and our room looks out over the lake. Dinner was at Club de Yates another lovely meal on the lake edge. It is rather cool by this time but not too bad.

Tuesday 28 October

We drove down to the port and board a ferry to cross to Chiloe Island. We saw sea lions, dolphins and lots of different types of birds. We drove south to the fishing village of Dalcahue where we see traditional style houses which are so small and fishing boats. Then on to Castro which is the Island capital were we see the traditional palafits (houses built on stilts along the shore). Here we see a church built of wood and this was something else, even the round columns were made of wood. We walk through the town and go to the markets which are quit colorful. We drive back to Puerto Varas along the east coast pass several fishing villages and see lots of trees and flowers. The day was spoilt as we came across an accident between a truck and a min van and it did not look good makes you stop and think. We have done some many kilometers on this trip. The other scary part was the fuel leaking out of the truck and no fire engine.

Dinner tonight was appalling to the point it was almost uneatable. For a hotel that is well appointed and has great views the food left much to be desired I guess it could have been because we had a set menu but most places we ate we had set menus and the food was great.

Wednesday 29 October

You guessed it up early yet again and off to the airport to fly to Punta Arenas. We are now experiencing cooler weather but after all this is Patagonia and we are way down south. We leave the airport and the

Magellan Straits and head out into the pampas steppes which are flat and barren looking. We pass mobs of sheep and cattle and there is much excitement when we see our first lot of wild life which is a native ostrich called a nandu and look a lot like our emu. Also we see eagles and flamingos. We arrive at Puerto Natales and get petrol then head out towards the National Park Torres del Paine. We next stop at the Mildon caves where archeologists found evidence of an herbivore animal that lived 12,000 years ago. As we continue to drive south we get our first glimpse of the Paine massif. Here we see large numbers of guanaco like lama/alpaca, condors, swans flamingoes and geese. It is a beautiful day mild and sunny. We cross a very narrow bridge on our way to Hosteria Las Torres and while we can see our accommodation because of the winding road it takes some time to get there.

Thursday 30 October

We drove through the national park stopped at a waterfall and the wind was blowing at 80 to 100 kilometers we both nearly got blown away so did not walk to the falls. Arrived at Greys Lake and the weather is not looking good the winds are strong and we are having rain. We had a great lunch and then the good news we are going up the lake to see the glacier. So we drive to where we will get the boat a few minutes walk include a suspension bridge which I cross and do not think about what I am doing. We put on life jackets get into a zodiac and go out to the grey 11 which is a little boat and we head off. All we see all the way up is water over the front windows for me it was a scary trip. We eventually arrive at the Grey Glacier and like all glaciers it is spectacular. Take lots of photos and then we have a drink with the ice coming from the glacier I think they gave us this to steady the nerves. The trip back was great could see all the way and on this trip you realize how many icebergs we navigated passed on the way on. The glacier is over 10,000 years old and there has been a major change to it with land exposed that was previously covered in ice of course that starts the debate about the green house effect. After the previous trips in zodiac and all the rules you follow like how you grip hands and one person gets off at a time etc this trip was a real eye opener with people practically walking over the top of you I got sick of the behavior and elbowed my way off and back to the dock that was also moving about a fair bit due to the weather. We were luck no rain until we got back to our vehicle back to our hotel.

Friday 31 October

Well we woke up to a grey overcast day and rain. We drove through the national park but between the rain and the clouds could not see very much. We drove down to a lake and had a bit of challenge in getting back up a small hill. We are driving along and a large bus is across the road they obviously decided that the track was too slippery and he tried to turn around and got stuck. We stayed for awhile while they tried to get them out with no luck so we left there was help on the way. As we drove out of the park we had snow and there was fresh snow on the mountains the guide could not believe the weather we were experiencing. Arrived back in Puerto Natales and spent the afternoon watching TV and the weather out of our hotel window it was just too miserable to go out.

Saturday 1 November.

We drove south to Punta Arenas through snow and rain. Went out to Otway Sound hoping to see penguins but non there. Did a tour of Punta Arenas and if the weather had been better would have been a great experience. It was bitterly cold raining and windy. Had a good flight back to Santiago.

Sunday 2 November

We took the subway from our hotel downtown and wandered around the city saw markets and as it was such a nice day there were a lot of people about. We went and saw the San Francisco church which has been restored. Caught the subway back and the rains have tyres just like the had in France all those years ago and guess what the carriages are imported from France. The subway was so clean no smells and no graffiti. We had dinner at the Casa Real which is at the top of Cerro San Cristobal and all the city was laid out below us

also had a great view of the snow capped mountains surrounding Santiago. It was a lovely evening and a great meal

Monday 3 November

Off to the Colchagua Valley to visit a couple of wineries. The first one was a family owned business and one of the oldest wineries in the valley the second was an organic one. Both very interesting and it allowed us to see the farming side of Chile. We also went to a private museum which covered the pre Inca and Inca period while we had seen some of the items before it rounded off our trip.

Tuesday 4 November

Well we are off to the airport for our long trip home and it was a long one. Flight out of Santiago on time but was get to Buenos Aires and we will not be leaving at midnight as scheduled initially a short delay but did not leave until 2.30am. The flight from Santiago was spectacular we flew over the snow covered Andes and the over the pampas. Thank god we were in the Condor lounge as it was comfortable and we could watch English speaking TV. Got talking to a range of people including to young men from Manchester an Australian who brought us up to speed on the financial crisis back home. We also watched the USA presidential election. We then go to board our plane and our hand luggage gets searched and we get the pat down routine all a bit much. We take off have dinner then I crash and slept reasonably well until we are close to Auckland. We arrive in NZ at the time we should have been arriving in Sydney so we no we have missed our flight home. Get to Sydney and the usual wait for our luggage and then we are out and heading for the domestic terminal. Qantas were great a our luggage would have been over weight which was no problem we were rebooked on a flight which was in the evening and we did not have to buy another ticket it appears that this is a regular occurrence for Aerolineas Argentinas to be late. So we finally arrive back in Coffs Harbor about 9pm after a wonderful trip. Now all I have to do is edit the photos.

Martin our travel agent in New York and Inkas tours arranged a great holiday for us and the way we did it with most of our meals pre paid and having our own guide and driver is the way to go. Our guides and drivers were all great and the guides were very knowledgeable off there countries and the guides spoke good English. Both guides and drives were all very proud off their countries. It was also great when we had the same guide all the time like we did in Santiago.