

## My South America Grand Tour Wrap-Up

Tom Schacht

This trip was a real tour-de-force, in that during the cruise, we encountered a vast array of different environments (from Tropic of Cancer to Antarctic Circle, through the driest desert in the world and one of the wettest rain forests, tropical sun to snowstorms and icebergs—and one of the stormiest capes on the planet). We traveled five oceans, gulfs, and seas (Caribbean, Gulf of Mexico, Pacific, Atlantic, and Southern Oceans), and explored a variety of lifestyles from aboriginal Indians in the Amazon, Inca, Caribbean Island, South American large cities embracing two distinct civilizations: one the result of the hostile Spanish Inquisition and the other the slow infiltration of Portuguese settlers along the Brazilian coast. We even crossed the equator four (4) times—I received two “Equator Certificates”—as member of “Neptune’s Court and fit to go...” One in the Pacific, and one in the Atlantic a month later. We had a proper pollywog initiation ceremony on-board for the south-bound crossing—during which the first rain storm of the voyage occurred. Yes, we saw all sorts of things and places, and at least enough to keep me thinking for a while...and wishing there was more time at a number of places along the way to see more, and absorb more while I was there. We also had a wide variety of expert lecturers on board, who provided both formal and informal insight into much of what we were experiencing. The following map provides a rough guide to our voyage, although we deviated from that in both planned and unplanned ways...due to passenger health issues, weather, and ice avoidance. Overall it was an exciting, wonderful, and eye-opening experience, and it will take me a while to fathom all of it...and the 4000 pictures and some 12 hours of HD video!!



In summary, I left Seattle on Jan 3 (just after the power came back on)---and returned March 13, in the middle of spring blossom-budding. The cruise on HAL’s ms Prinsendam started and ended in Ft Lauderdale, and lasted 66 days traveling over 17,000+ nm, visiting some 27 ports, a week cruising Antarctica and another week on the Amazon River all the way up to Manaus.

Readers of last month's Barnacle may recall our meeting the "perfect wave" off Cape Horn, in going from Ushuaia to Palmer Station (actually within a hurricane)—where we had to turn back to Ushuaia for re-provisioning the ship, replacing stuff that had gotten broken, and getting injured people ashore. But we got to Palmer Station on to Deception Island, Elephant Island, and back through the Falkland Islands (visiting a penguin rookery—what fun—in a peat bog), and then on to Buenos Aires and Rio for Carnaval. Actually Carnaval sort of hindered sightseeing, as everything was either booked up or closed down for the celebration in most all the Brazilian cities we visited, until Ash Wednesday had passed. The Amazon also was sort of a let down—except as to its sheer vastness, as it is simply many thousands of square miles of tree-lined swamp along a very wide river, as the water level goes up and down some 30 feet per year, and the water is dead-brown with all the run-off, extending hundreds of miles into the Atlantic. What original rain forest is left is being cordoned off-limits to non-Indians, to preserve it, and both these and animals are far out of sight, except for kids in canoes showing off their Anaconda snakes and three-toed sloths (for a buck a picture). All the houses are on stilts...to stay above the winter floods down from the Andes. Manaus is interesting, especially the opera house, which is patterned after Palais Garnier in Paris—and they were rehearsing 'Phantom' while we were inside, watching. We hit Devil's Island—off French Guiana-- on a blustery day—actually the landing is on a neighboring island a few hundred yards away, as Devil's Island is still too inaccessible...then on to St. Lucia and its verdant tropical gardens and sulfur-venting volcanoes, and Grand Turk—with a roaring last-night party at Margaretville, in their new cruise center. Ft. Lauderdale was a fiasco, as too-few dock porters were trying to cope with 5000+ bags from 650 passengers...and then load up for the next cruise—which was to northern Africa and the Mediterranean—another 55 days (that would have been nice, but I wanted to get home...). All the way around, from Peru until Brazil, I managed to do some sampling of Peruvian, Chilean, Argentine, and Uruguay wines, Pisco distilled wine, and other local delicacies!! Yum. As they consume most of what they grow, very little of their wine makes it to the US market. Most exports are to Britain and other parts of Europe.

The coastal canals of Puerto Limon CR were interesting, as—of course—the Panama Canal and the dry coastal deserts of the Incas in Ecuador and Peru, and the valleys, mountains, and fjords of Chile. Many west-coast ports hadn't seen a cruise ship in a while, so turned out en-mass, with brass bands and native dancers to greet us in-port. We met less traffic in the canal than last spring, but—both in the canal and at Buenos Aires' Rio del Plata, the channel navigation clearance is a little un-nerving when ships pass each other at hand-shaking distance!! I also discovered that cruising on this scale exposes your ship to all the various hazards that small-boat cruising can...over-ridden dock lines where you have to get the bulk-carrier sharing a bollard to loosen its lines so you can get yours off (or cut it), other cruise ships over-riding your-ship's anchor rode, so they have to move so you can get your hook off the bottom, clogged engine-cooling water strainers—jugged up with gobs of 'shrimps'—in Chile, of course--our big wave and storm, limited fresh water while in the Amazon due to its high mud content preventing use of the evaporators, a fouled anchor in Puerto Montt that we had to sail off the bottom, and a fouled propeller which caught some swamp foliage floating down the Amazon river...which stopped us mid-river until they could clear it. All in all, it was an amazing voyage, and well worth doing, if time allows.

Question: Why don't polar bears eat penguins?

Answer: Polar bears live near the North Pole; penguins at the South Pole



Gentoo penguins jumping off an iceberg near Antarctic Strait.

There also are (per our geo expert) only two kinds of penguins...white ones and black ones...the white ones are coming toward you; the black ones are going the other way!!!

There aren't any land mammals on Antarctica...they are all marine—seals, Orcas, humpbacks, sea-lions etc. The only things living (naturally) on Antarctica (and much of southern Patagonia) are birds...and they also rely on the sea for food and survival—and spend much of their time in it. The greatest percentage of marine life—both species and numbers—are at the poles. The greatest percentage of land life is near the equator, in the rain forests—and most of the fresh water on the planet is contained within the Antarctic ice cap...and the Amazon River basin, all of which were included on our trip. (The saga continues...Next month, its back to Alaska; then off to Scandinavia, the Baltic, Iceland, and Greenland--hopefully--next year on the same ship!!)