



Lyndsay

From Cambridge North to Chile

“...and the fun of communicating in Spanglish began”

Chile, my new home. A land rich of diversity, culture, geography, liveliness, and a true sense of unity. My first three months living in this great country have truly been a whirlwind of adventure and a lot of learning. Arriving on a cool mid-August day nearing the end of the Chilean winter, I had little idea of what my life was about to become. So far my time here has been challenging, difficult, frustrating and yet so satisfying and enjoyable at the same time! I have experienced things I would have never thought I would, and have already learned so much about the language, the culture, and myself. The little quirks of Chile make me smile every day, and it's amazing how you can adopt a country as your own and in return the people adopt you as well. My time here has been short but already I have had many adventures and stories that I will remember for a long time.

Here in Chile I am living in the capital, Santiago, with a population of almost 6 million people. Coming from a small village in Canada I have slowly started to turn into a city girl! There is a fairly good public transit system here and I am the fondest of the metro that covers the entire underground of the city. It is generally safe and easy to take, even for a *gringa* like me! The city is so unique with its many different *comunas* to live in, the different traditions and aspects that set them apart and make them unique. The best part about living in Santiago is that there seems to always be a view of the great Andes Mountain range. They seem to peak-out everywhere and after a rainy night the smog has cleared and the snow-capped wonders are so bright and majestic. I can't help but constantly admire these wondrous formations; they make you feel so small and yet so grateful to be living amidst them.

After a few days of running around the city to get proper papers in place I started school right away. Going into my new school I was not nervous at all, something that would have been a nightmare to me in Canada. I had already been known to some of my classmates and teachers and had talked to a few of them prior to me joining the class. Here I am in 3° Medio (grade 11) in a very small Adventist school with grades Pre-Kinder to 4° Medio. Right away I was welcomed into the class with *besos* (kisses,

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typical Chilean greeting) from everyone and the fun of communicating in Spanglish began! Since my school is a lot smaller than most Chilean schools my class is a very tight-knit group, and I have been able to find my place in the class with a great group of fun-loving and friendly amigos. I am no longer the *gringa* or exchange student, I am just another student in the class, the same as everyone else! Schools here also have a lot of spirit, especially for the anniversary of the school. During the anniversary the school is split into Alianzas in which you compete against the others in different competitions and games. There was so much liveliness, cheering, laughter, and smiles all around for the two days of my schools Alianzas. School has become the most helpful tool for learning Spanish because I am constantly surrounded by it day in and day out. I also have supportive friends and teachers who pressure me to learn as fast as I can so that I will be able to communicate as if I were Chilena!

My Spanish has slowly but surely been improving. Coming with no knowledge of Spanish at all I am surprised and proud of how far I have progressed. Although they don't quite speak Spanish here, instead it's "Chileno." Chileans have a tendency to speak at rapid speeds with a lot of slang, along with dropping sounds and letters when they talk. But this also gives an extra challenge to my exchange as I try to pick-up the slang so that I can become Chilean and communicate the same as my friends do! I have also started to notice my English slowly getting worse as I am becoming more accustomed to my new language along with my R's starting to roll off my tongue more naturally. It's truly incredible at how at the beginning the impossible task of speaking Spanish is starting to become a reality for me now.

The last few months here in Chile the country has accomplished quite a few milestones. Starting in September, Chile celebrated its Bicentennial Anniversary, 200 years of Independence and great traditions! I headed down south with my family on a 12 hour drive to Temuco where we met-up with some old friends and celebrated the Chilean way. Food is of high importance here and there is never a lack of it. My celebration consisted of delicious empanadas, bread, desserts, typical Chilean dishes, and of course the much beloved Chilean barbeque – the asado! My school also had a celebration for the Bicentennial and each class had to perform a traditional Chilean dance. I dressed up along with the rest of my class and danced in front of the entire school and the parents, again one of those things that would terrify me back home but here it seemed so normal and I had so much fun! In October the whole country came together to watch the rescue of the 33 trapped miners. It was truly amazing to see the spirit and unity throughout the entire process, and when the first miner surfaced I don't know if there was one person who hasn't happy and excited to see their country pull through and do the unimaginable!

My Rotary district here is quite large with over 40 exchange students in it from all around the world. My first introduction to Rotary down here was when I had to represent District 7080 and Canada along with a fellow Canadian exchange student as District 7080 in Canada had donated an ambulance here in Chile. It was a day of lots of smiles for photos and feeling quite proud of my District back home for being so proactive and charitable. I also had the opportunity to travel to ocean cities such as

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Valparaíso, Viña del Mar, and San Antonio on a Rotary weekend with the entire district. It's truly great to have such a diverse group of exchange students and you always know that someone will be willing to go somewhere, explore, or hangout when given the chance!

When given the ability to travel or see a new part of the country I always jump at the opportunity. My opportunity came when my class took their school trip to Bariloche in a part of Patagonia in Argentina. We also visited the south of Chile including places such as Puerto Varas and Puerto Montt. This was such an amazing experience. Not only were the vistas breathtaking, almost unimaginable and the lakes were so blue and clear. We had the most perfect weather. The opportunity to spend six days with my classmates speaking in Spanish and creating memories was a once in a lifetime opportunity! It was so interesting to travel to Argentina, hear the different accent, see the Swiss influence and get another stamp in my passport. The Chilean part of our trip was also incredible in the Los Lagos (lake) region. In Puerto Varas there are two active volcanoes sitting pretty across the lake just waiting for their moment to erupt, my first sight of a volcano ever! The week truly helped me to integrate more into my life here in Chile and has greatly improved my Spanish and my relationships with friends and teachers.

The culture and the people here are so refreshing and different. There is never a dull moment wherever you are. The culture and traditions thrive strongly here as Chileans are proud of their heritage. Although I have only been here for a few months, time has flown by. As another month passes I am constantly looking forward to the "what next" as my adventure continues here in Chile!

There are sometimes no words in either English or Spanish to express how thankful I am to have this opportunity and amazing experience. Thank you Rotary District 7080 and everyone else who has supported me in my desire to have this great opportunity and live 11 great months in a country that I can now consider home!

Disfruta la vida

Lyndsay

Chile