



# Lyndsay

## From Cambridge North to Chile

*"I have never seen a more beautiful and breathtaking place in my life!"*

¿Donde se fue el tiempo? Here I am, already six months through my Exchange and I still cannot fathom how fast the time just seems to fly by. Some days it seems as if I have just arrived, still discovering new things and new words. But yet at other instances, it seems as if I've lived here forever, seeing this country as my own and feeling a part of the Chilean culture. These past six months have taught me many things and have opened my eyes up to new ideas, opportunities, and ways of life. Every day is still an adventure and there's always something new to discover and learn, I'm just taking things day by day and enjoying them while I'm still here!

At the start of December I ended my school year here early to go with Rotary to the "end of the world" otherwise known as Patagonia. I had travelled to a part of Patagonia in Argentina with my class but this was much more different and spectacular! About 50 excited and energy-filled exchange students flew to Punta Arenas (known as the world's most Southern city), as we started on our "fully-epic" trip! We spent the first day in Punta Arenas, kissed the toe of the Indian statue to bring good luck and to return to Punta Arenas, and then headed to a penguin sanctuary. Seeing these tiny creatures was one of many highlights of the trip. Coming from Canada you never think that you'll have the chance to see these adorable birds in the wild! We also spent four days in Torres del Paine National Park. All I have to say is – WOW! The well-known granite spires were breathtaking surrounded by blue-green glacial lakes and rocky green mountains covered with Patagonian flowers. From bearing the cold and swimming in a glacial-water river, taking an 8 hour boat ride, seeing glaciers, horseback riding in the open Patagonian terrain, and the many memories and near-sleepless nights, this trip was truly amazing! I can say for sure that I have never seen a more beautiful and breathtaking place in my life! The Chilean Patagonia is truly a magical and inspiring landscape!

Sun, shorts, and the beach... this was my Christmas. In Chile they celebrate Christmas on the 24<sup>th</sup>. My host-family is a little different as we didn't get together with family for the holiday although my older host-brother did come home from university

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in Argentina. On the day of the 24<sup>th</sup> it was a relaxed day at home and we started to eat our Christmas dinner around 10:30 pm, which was not quite the feast as you would have in Canada. At midnight everyone ripped open their presents as we said our “Feliz Navidad’s”. On the 25<sup>th</sup> my family and I headed to a small town near the coast where I met one of my uncles. After we had lunch together, we headed to the beach, Viña del Mar. Never would I have ever imagined that I would be putting my bare feet into the Pacific Ocean on Christmas day!

The day after Christmas presented another change; this was a change in host-families! I now live in a new *comuna* called Recoleta which is right beside Cerro San Cristobal and about an hour on public transit from my first house. Living in this new house and neighbourhood I feel like I really am in Chile. The architecture and buildings of this area are much older but I find them so much more beautiful with more culture, character and history behind them. My Mama and Papa are really nice and kind-hearted people and they made me feel welcomed in the home right away. They even spent one night teaching me the *cueca*, the national dance of Chile, which my host-Papa and I proudly showed off at our next family gathering! I also now have a host-brother and a grandmother who lives in the house but in her own wing. Even though I am far from my school and school friends I think I will enjoy living with this family until the end of my exchange.

After a few days with my new family it was New Years Eve. I went with my family to a beach called *Las Cruces* where I met a lot of uncles, aunts, and cousins! After watching the sunset over the Pacific for the last time in the year 2010 we started to get our night started! My host-Papa had cooked up a delicious *asado* and the whole family sat down for a meal at around 10 pm. After dinner the dancing started – music was blaring, anticipation was building, everyone was dancing, then... cinco, cuatro, tres, dos, uno... FELIZ AÑO NUEVO! At midnight everyone went around to each family member giving them a kiss, hug, and a “feliz año nuevo” as we watched the fireworks go off in the nearby port city of San Antonio. Here in Chile they have some traditions for the New Year. One is to wear yellow underwear to bring good luck, and another is to eat 12 grapes - each grape representing every month of the year. After all of the hugs were done, on we went with the dancing, and we sure danced the night away! On the first day of the new year I headed out with one of my uncles, cousin, and brother to the “secret point.” This was where I swam in the Pacific Ocean for the first time ever along with attempting to surf! The day was total bliss, sitting on a secluded beach, hearing the Pacific waves crash, breathing in fresh ocean air on January 1<sup>st</sup> in Chile... this is my life!

This “summer” I’ve had a few opportunities to travel a little bit, especially to the coast. In the middle of January I had a great visit from my Canadian big brother! After a couple of days sightseeing in Santiago and getting him accustomed to a new country we headed to Viña del Mar for two nights along with a day trip to Valparaíso. After exploring the central coast we jumped on a bus to go 7 hours north up to another coast

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city, La Serena. After having a mishap of getting off in the wrong city, walking around while there were no street names on the streets, we managed to get ourselves to the right city! One day we went on a day trip a couple more hours away to a place called Isla Dama. Here we were able to take a boat out to see this pristine white sand island with aqua waters along with seeing penguins, sea lions, and dolphins! The next night we went to an observatory as the north of Chile is well-known for having some of the clearest skies in the world. As soon as we stepped out of our van and looked up I was in shock, there were so many stars and I have never seen them so bright before! I learned a lot from this trip as I had to plan and book everything by myself along with having to do all the translating and talking. It was really nice having my brother come to visit, but it also seemed a little weird. For him it was just a vacation, while for me this was my life. Mixing my Chilean life and someone from my Canadian life was a weird feeling, but it was fun to show off my new country!

As well, I had the opportunity to spend 4 nights in Valparaíso with my exchange friend, her Canadian mom, and her mom's friend as we had a girls' trip to the coast. We had fun exploring some back alleys with beautiful graffiti-esque murals, eating delicious seafood and taking in some sun on the beaches nearby. After those days I hopped on a bus and joined my host-family at another beach a few hours away. After having a relaxing summer day with family we then headed to *el campo* (the country) where my host-Papa is from. There I had an eye-opening view of another different way of life. My host-Papas parents live on the same plot of land as two of my aunts and their families. There were chickens walking around freely, sheep, grape vines, loud children, people talking with such heavy accents I could barely understand, and delicious home cooked meals! We spent the weekend there and attended a wedding on the Saturday. Unfortunately I didn't have the experience of witnessing the actual wedding ceremony but I sure did enjoy the dancing as the cousins and I danced until 4 am!

If there's something that would define Chile it would be music and dancing. These two things are in the hearts and souls of every Chilean. There's always music playing, in my house, on the street, in the public buses and I just don't know how I will be able to go home and not have the familiar sounds of my now much beloved Spanish music. I find myself dancing all the time or humming along to the beats of my favourite Spanish songs. I've truly learned to embrace dancing into my life whether it's at family get-togethers or a night out at a discotheque with my friends – it's the new Latina in me!

With every passing month here it's hard to face the fact that I will have to return back to Canada at some point. Everything here feels so normal now. I'm no longer noticing things that stand out, now I'm embracing the things that make this country so unique and I love it! I no longer feel as if I am *the gringa* who doesn't know how to get places, can't speak the language, use slang words, or is afraid or self-conscious when constantly being stared or whistled at in public. I see myself as more Chilean now, and even get a little frustrated when store vendors assume I don't know how to speak

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Spanish or that I'm a tourist – I actually enjoy helping the poor lost-looking tourists here! Even though at times life can still be quite hard and lonely there are always the moments and memories that I think to myself how much I love Chile!

As for now I'm going try and make the most out of my last two weeks of summer vacation and then it's back into school, which honestly I am looking forward to as I get to see all my Chilean friends again! Thank you Rotary District 7080 and my host-club of Cambridge North for this opportunity to be living this life that I am now!

Besitos desde el otro lado de del ecuador

*Lyndsay*

Chile