



# Lyndsay

## From Cambridge North to Chile

*“We were attacked by locals with water balloons!”*

298 days, 18 hours, and 40 minutes. From the time I boarded my plane in Canada until I will board my plane here in Chile to head back to my familiar world. But somewhere in those 298 days this country has become so familiar to me now; the places, the people, the language, the food, the streets, my life. When you start out your exchange you never really think of it coming to an end. Being put into a foreign land not knowing anything, to speaking the language and having friends that feel like you've had forever, how can this come to an end? My last month's here have passed by so fast and have been the best months of my exchange. Its heart wrenching to know that I only have one more month left of this life, but I have so many memories and stories that I will be able to carry on with me for forever.

March started off with my second Rotary trip, this time to the North of Chile. The first couple of days we spent up in La Serena and Valle de Elqui which are only about 7 hours north of Santiago. One night we stayed in the Valley at an accommodation with an observatory. I've already seen the amazing stars in Chile but the sky was fully illuminated with no moon, the Milky Way galaxy visible, planet Saturn evident through the telescope, and the mountains of the valley framed the sky as if you were staring straight up into a glorious painting. For the whole trip we travelled by bus and had two nights onboard. After our first night onboard we woke-up to a drastic change of scenery. We stopped in Antofagasta and saw *la mano de Dios* (hand of God), and then straddled the Tropic of Capricorn while we continued on towards San Pedro de Atacama in the Atacama Desert. When we went on a horseback ride in San Pedro I was amazed to see all the mountains and volcanoes in the distance; I didn't expect to see so many volcanoes. During our days spent in San Pedro de Atacama we went to the Salar de Atacama (a salt field) with flamingos, Valle de la Muerte, and Valle de la Luna where it literally looked like you could have been on the moon! The next morning we woke-up at 4:30 am to take a long and bumpy bus ride up to the Geysers del Tatio (4,320 meters above sea level). On our way back down we stopped in a few small villages where we sampled llama meat and were attacked by locals with water balloons! We then travelled to our last city, Arica, which is at the very north of Chile boarding Peru.

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After a day of travelling up 4,500 meters to a volcano we received news of the earthquake that hit Japan and that the coast of Chile was under a tsunami warning – and we were right on the coast! Luckily nothing happened to Chile other than a few big waves although we were ready to evacuate if needed. It's safe to say we clocked-in quite a few kilometres in those 10 days!

March brought the reality of back to school and all the joys of the Chilean school system. I was a little worried of going back into school as I wasn't sure how far I had progressed with my Spanish and hadn't seen many of my school friends over the summer. But the truth is this year has been so much better! I'm able to follow along in class, understand my friends' conversations and hearing the many "Lyndsay, hablas español!!" at the start really made me feel comfortable again. I feel like I talk the most fluent and most comfortably with my school friends. I think it's because I've known them since my first week here and that I've grown to feel as if I've always been in that class. The school days are still long but now being in 4<sup>o</sup> Medio we get to leave a bit earlier as most of my classmates are in Preuniversitario (Pre-university). My poor classmates have to attend school for the regular hours and then go to their Preuniversitarios after for a few hours where they study intensively for the PSU test (Chilean SAT) in November that will determine which university they will attend next year.

I've also been filling in some of my free-time now after school by joining a university field hockey team here in Santiago. By chance, and my host-mom asking if I could practice with them for a few minutes, the coach invited me to join the team! I'm training with the field hockey team from the Universidad Diego Portales. I'm not able to play in the actual games since I'm not registered as a student. But it's been great finally playing a sport again that I love and hanging out with my new group of field hockey friends. I mean, one day for practice we had a kung-fu class – now that was interesting!

In April came another holiday – Pascua/Easter. My family and I left on Good Friday to go to the *campo* with my host-dad's family. Out of all the un-rainy days there are in central-Chile it seemed to just pour down as we were driving. We arrived to a lot of mud and cooler than normal temperatures. We spent our days baking *calzones rotos* (literal translation – torn underwear) which are small fried dough pastries, and three kinds of mouth-watering empanadas! The older cousins and I even went out to a disco one night – I didn't believe my cousin at first when she said there was one out there! It was such a weird feeling having Easter in autumn. When it warmed-up it felt as if it could be warm Thanksgiving Day instead of a crisp spring Easter day. My season senses have been so mixed-up this year.

Lorana! In May I had the most amazing opportunity to travel to Easter Island/Isla de Pascua/Rapa Nui on my final Rotary trip! I fell in love with the island and everything about it. We flew almost 4,000 kilometres into the middle of the Pacific Ocean and we arrived on the small, humid, and magical island of Rapa Nui. The sky was a brilliant blue, the many green covered volcanoes were so vivid, and the air was as clean as could be. We visited many places to look at the Moais (the famous rock statues on the island), learned about the culture and traditions, and even took a horseback ride

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up to the highest point on the island. Up there you could see the tiny island below you, and in the distance, for 360°, was pure ocean. No land in sight for miles! It was such a cool experience to know how far away and secluded you are from everything else that you know in the world. We also experienced some of the most bi-polar weather on the island. One minute it would be sunny with barely a cloud in the sky and then it would be pouring rain on you the next. We experienced the change in weather as we were hiking up to a crater. Of course we weren't expecting the rain, and then suddenly we were poured on. After it had stopped, and we were on our way down again, the rain came harder than before and a river appeared on our path where there wasn't one before! This was one of the funniest memories: A whole bunch of foreign kids having fun in the rain as we were all slipping and sliding in the mud, soaking wet. The whole feel to the trip was so relaxed – a true island vibe. But the best part of it was being with some of the best people ever, the exchange students!

My exchange has been a constant up and down ride the entire year. I've felt so many emotions in such a short period of time and yet I've grown so much from it. From having my highest of highs, to my lowest of lows, exchange and Chile have truly shaped me into the person that I have become today. But it's not only the experiences and life lessons that shape you it's also the amazing people and friends who have come into your life along the way.

My exchange student family - It's so strange to look-back on our very first day-trip together where we were all new "doe-eyed" exchange students in this foreign land called Chile. But now we call this country home. We know how to get around it better than some locals, we now speak the language, we know where to go to *carreter*, we are always there when another exchange student needs help or someone to hangout with, and most importantly we've found a place to call home and a new family from all over the world! I've made some of the best memories during my time here with my exchange friends. Even though we come from so many countries, different walks of life, and are all our individual persons, we have an unbreakable bond as exchange students. I will never forget the incredible people who I have shared my year with, and the most hilarious and special moments we've had together!

Mis amigos chilenos – the people who have gone through my exchange with me from the start to the finish. They've seen me at my worst when I arrived not able to say a word, to now at my hilarious attempt to be as Chilean as I can be! From going on our class trip to the south and Argentina to celebrating everyone's 18<sup>th</sup> birthdays, I am truly going to miss my Chilean friends and class. Some days I feel like I've known them forever, especially my group of close friends that I've made. It seems so surreal that in a month I won't be able to greet them with a kiss every morning, hear about the latest news in their lives, or dance, sing, and laugh like the crazy people that we are! But I know I'll always be a part of my class as their Gringa, la Lyndsay.

With only four weeks left it's hard to imagine how fast my exchange has gone by. I've learned so much and have grown a lot as a person in just these short 10 months. I'm not sure who I'll be when I return back home or if a difference will even been seen by my family. But I've experienced so many things in just a short period of time. My

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exchange has been the best, worst, happiest, loneliest, most exciting, most difficult, most interesting, and life building year of my life. I see beauty in this life and country everyday – I wouldn't trade my exchange for anything!

Thank you to everyone who has made this amazing year happen for me. To my supportive family in Canada, the Rotarians of District 7080, and my Chilean family and friends you have all made a difference in one girl's life.

Un beso,

*Lyndsay*

Chile