

Stuart



From Kitchener to Chile

Many new adventures and an old friendship revisited

Normally I spend my summers doing a mixture of things, sometimes travelling like my trip to Sweden with CISV last year, or at camp Wanapitei on canoe trips in northern Ontario and Quebec, and other times working, but usually a mixture of those three things. So let's just say I'm used to spending my summers in different places. But never have I spent the summer seeing as many new things as I have this one.

Where my last Beavertale ended, I was nearing the end of school, and the Patagonia trip. Now, I am nearing the return to school, and the North Trip. And boy is there a lot in between.

After Easter Island, Patagonia is probably the most popular part of Chile for tourists. After spending 4 months in Chilean school, in a Chilean family and in a very Chilean town (I'm usually the only blond haired blue eyed person on the whole street when I go downtown) all the other exchange students and myself on the trip were suddenly tourists again. However that did not stop us from having an incredible time in one of the most beautiful places in the world. We flew to Punta Arenas, literally the end of the world, and after a long bus ride we started trekking in the shadow of the Patagonian mountain range. Unfortunately my backpack with all my gear decided to stay in Santiago, and didn't arrive until day

3. Over the course of 7 days, we saw the Torres del Paine, which is an incredible sight of three rock pillars jutting up from a turquoise lagoon all on top of a mountain. We trekked to new “refuges”, swam in a lake of glacial runoff, saw an avalanche and a glacier and all managed to catch the boat back to Punta Arenas for one last day of sightseeing before going our separate ways and falling back into our Chilean lifestyles. Not only did I get to travel to the end of the world, and hike Chilean Patagonia, I made some great friends with the other exchange students.

The school year came to a close, the weather became hotter and hotter and my Spanish became better and better. And with the beginning of summer in the Southern Hemisphere it signifies the beginning of the Christmas season. For a Canadian, you find it hard to really get into the spirit when it's 35 degrees every day and not only is there no snow, there's no rain either. But either way, the decorations go up, and the Christmas lights glimmer off the swimming pool, not the snow banks. The Christmas I spent with my host family this year is a Christmas I will cherish, and certainly not group with the other Christmas's that I spent in Canada. And what's more, After opening our gifts, my family snuck up behind me and showered me with white Styrofoam balls, that were supposed to be snow. Turns out I got a white Christmas after all, even while my family and friends in Canada didn't.

A week or two after Christmas was over, and the visits with host cousins, aunts, uncles and family were over, I got to see someone who I honestly never thought I'd see once he left my house, and Canada. Cristobal, my old Chilean brother who lived for 6 months in my house on his exchange. I was invited to his house in Talagante, about 30 minutes outside of Santiago. It was incredible to see him again and we even got to make a surprise Skype call to my family, so that they could catch up with him as well. While I was at his house, we played road hockey and soccer with his friends, and went to Santiago to meet up with other exchange students. It was a truly Canadian-Chilean experience.

At the beginning of February, my host family went on holiday to the north. We went to a place on the coast called Bahia Inglesa, a small town with beautiful, unoccupied beaches on one side, and the Atacama Desert on the other. We spent 10 days swimming in the ocean, exploring the desert, and eating the delicious seafood of the coast of Chile. During those 10 days, I got the opportunity to get to

know the city of Antofagasta, the biggest city north of Santiago. My host brother Celso was finishing University there and I took a bus up to see him. He showed me his city and we got to spend a weekend enjoying the north. 3 days later we took a bus back to Bahia Inglesa, enjoyed the last part of our vacation and the whole family headed back to Rancagua. This was the first taste of the North of Chile for me, luckily for me I will be back soon to the endless desert, long beaches and endless sun on the 26th of February for the Rotary North Trip.

Immediately after arriving home from vacation with my family, the topic of changing families came up. The change was planned for the 30th of January, but little communication had been made between families. This lack of communication turned out to make the change more difficult than it should have been, because I ended up with less than 24 hours notice to pack my things, say a difficult goodbye to my host family, and leave the house, and the room that had been my home for the first half of my exchange.

I am now living with my second host family in Los Mirandas, a suburb just outside my city, about 30 minutes from my school. My host parents are Magaly and Christian, and my brothers and sisters are Lucas and Paula. My second host family has welcomed me in every way possible to their house, and I am already beginning to settle in. Plus, a bonus about this family is that they're family vacations in the South, and they told me that only after a couple days at their house, we would be taking a vacation to the South with them and I would get to know both the north and the south during summer vacations.

I am currently writing this from the cabin that my family owns in Malalhue, next to a cabin full of other relatives, and close neighbours across the road. We have visited a town called Panguipulli with an incredible lake to swim in, which has reminded me of how much I miss swimming in fresh water lakes. We have gone fishing on the coast, ridden horses, played countless Pichangas (pick up soccer games) and have spent every night with family and friends around the barbeque late into the night.

We plan on being here until the 19th of February, when hopefully I will go to Cristobal's cottage on the coast for a couple of days, until the time when I will have

to go home to the Maulen's (my host families last name) house to prepare for the North trip with Rotary that will take me until the beginning of school.

As I said before, there was a lot in between the end and beginning of school, and so far, I've managed to spend the best summer of my life thoroughly getting to know this country I now call my home.

Stuart