



# THE SOUTH AMERICA TOUR VIA SF50 CONTINUES (Part 3) PATAGONIA

by Amir and Tamra Hyster

**T**HE PATAGONIA REGION WAS ONE of the main reasons we dreamt of touring South America. With the Andes Mountains as its dividing line between Argentina and Chile, the two countries in the region could not be more different. The Argentine side features arid grasslands and deserts, and in Chile the region includes glacial fjords and rainforest.

In the first two parts of our adventure, we shared how we headed for South America immediately after taking delivery of our SF50 with stops in Belize, through Panama and down the west side of South America to Ecuador to visit the Galapagos Islands, and then to Pisco, Peru. We then headed to Chile, where having contacts in some of the cities helped tremendously. We had stops in Iquique, Calama, Atacama, Ovalle, Santiago and Valdivia, before heading to the Patagonia area.

The ice fields of Patagonia are the second largest non-polar ice fields in the world and our aim was to fly through and land in Puerto Natales, a small town on the Chile side of the ice field and the entrance to the great Torres del Paine National Park.

To ensure we would have full visibility, we waited four days in the beautiful German-influenced town of Puerto Varas, overshadowed by Volcano Osorno on Lake Llanquihue. Each day the weather over the ice fields had winds of 60 knots, gusting many times to over 100 knots with mountain waves, heavy rain and strong windshear.

Our window of opportunity came with a high-pressure system that would possibly last a few days, giving us a flight of spectacular views in clear blue skies and perfect visibility the entire way as we overflew the ice fields. The Vision Jet's huge windows provided a surreal, 360-degree view of the most incredible landscape unfolding around us as we floated over the ice field – a truly indescribable experience. The large granite rock tower of Fitz

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Roy on our left (the Argentinian side of the ice field), then another larger and more spectacular formation, the great Torres Del Paine with the distinct sharp “towers” of the same granite rock surrounded by massive glaciers, lakes and rivers. It took our breath away.

The landscape dropped down to a GPS RNAV RWY28 approach landing at Puerto Natales, just southeast of the mountain range with an 8-knot wind – very unusual for this area. The ground and air services were very helpful and friendly.

The hotels in the town operate only six to eight months of the year, September to April, and most offer full excursions and tours of the nature parks and fjord areas, either by trekking, kayak or bikes. Although we rented a car and could have toured the park unassisted, we took a full-day tour via a small van courtesy of Hotel Remota to see all the highlights and local wildlife. That included the Guanaco Camelids, who jump the fences of private farms that surround the park, eat the crops of alfalfa and are themselves hunted by the local Puma, who don’t usually bother humans as they have plenty to eat, or so we were told.

As the fine weather and low winds continued for a couple of days we jumped in the Jet and took our own visual scenic flight over the Torres Del Paine mountain range, doing many rotations over the towers and valleys of glaciers and rivers. The Jet proved to be as agile and maneuverable as the SR22; we reduced the speed to 120 knots and maintained box altitude between FL120 and FL150. The view was just incredible and certainly right up there as some of the best scenery we have encountered in the world.

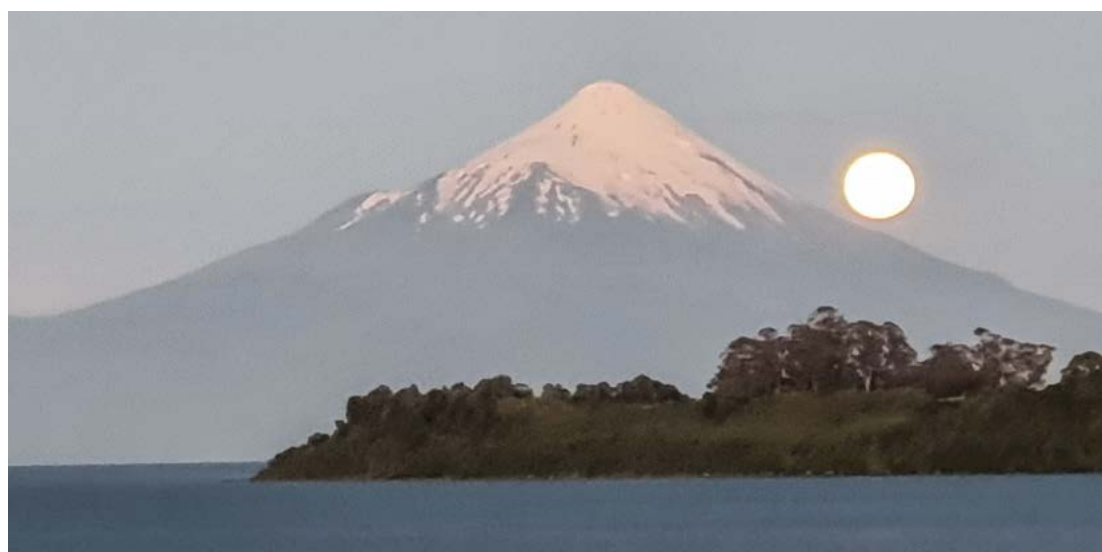
Within an hour of our landing we started to experience the ferocious wind gusts of this region, known to have thrown tourists off cliffs and makes walking paths impossible. After almost a week in southern Patagonia,



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◀ Overflying Torres Del Paine featured breathtaking views of towers of granite rock surrounded by massive glaciers, lakes and rivers.



◀ Waiting on the weather to provide a full visibility flight to the Patagonia region, a stop in German-influenced Puerto Varas, brought beautiful views of Volcano Osorno on Lake Llanquihue.



*Another beautiful view of Torres Del Paine at sunset.*

it was time to move on to Argentina in what was a series of three difficult flights in one day: Puerto Natales to Puerto Arenas, Chile, to clear Chilean customs; continuing on to Ushuaia, Argentina, the most southern commercial airport in the world in order to clear Argentinian customs; and finally on to El Calafate, Argentina.

In favorable weather conditions we took off with 13-knot winds, gusting to 23 knots, which seemed fine until the SID procedural left turn. Just seconds after wheels up at 600 feet, the wind picked up to 70 knots gusting to 100 knots and strong windshear; the Jet continued with great precision. Before we knew it, we were in moderate turbulence all the way to 6,000 feet. Making the sharp turn to avoid the mountains was very bumpy and uncomfortable, but the aircraft

plowed through the harsh conditions like it was nothing.

We had a short flight at FL170 to Puerto Arenas, then back in the air to Ushuaia in the best conditions; amazingly there was no wind on the ground. The approach to Ushuaia and the one we had in the flight plan would be to fly to ROMV and then to the No. 3 ILS RWY25 approach with two simple easy right turns to intercept the localizer for a gentle smooth approach, however as we approached ROMV, ATC changed to the No. 1 ILS RWY25 approach and instructed us to fly in full IMC to the airport VOR and maintain 8,000 feet, turn left passing the airport outbound, descend to 5,000 feet in a fjord, the Beagle Channel, then sharp left teardrop turn inside the mountain valley to intercept the localizer.

This required a very quick and stressful amendment to the approach; flying

in the fjord with no margin for error, descending and avoiding terrain to turn back to runway final. The entire approach with the TAWS (Terrain Awareness System) lighting up the avionics in RED, indicating the mountains surrounding the area, but not visible in the thick cloud. A strong windshear warning is clearly marked on the approach plate, and indeed on short final we encountered it as we broke below the cloud. The airport became visible with a spectacular view over water surrounded by those mountains we just maneuvered through.

Landing in Ushuaia was on our bucket list and to be the first Cirrus SF50 Vision Jet to fly to the most southern commercial airport in the world, or as it officially known as the “End of The Earth.”

The conditions on the ground were very different with light rain and calm

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◀ *The Perito Moreno Glacier is one of the largest emanating from Patagonia's Southern Ice Field covering a total of 100 square miles.*

wind, something that only happens a few days of the year. Ushuaia has two separate runways, which are not connected with a taxiway, and fuel is only available on the main runway. If you land on the other runway, which is often the case as the area is notorious for dangerous winds and crosswind, then you need to file another flight plan

in person with the local EANA office and fly the plane for about 30 seconds over to the main runway to obtain fuel. We cleared Argentinian customs and filed the flight plan as recommended by the EANA personnel in their office, were escorted to the airplane, checked everything, started the engine and communicated to leave as per the flight

plan. Tower denied clearance, as the flight plan path would take us over a bit of Chilean airspace and since we had cleared Argentinian customs and immigration, this was not allowed. We requested the tower to amend the flight plan, they refused because it needs to be done in person at the EANA office. We had to shut down the engine and

▶ *The Hyster's Vision Jet was the first to land at the southernmost commercial airport in the world known as the "End of the Earth."*

(credit: Alfredo A Riveros Photography)



walk back over to the EANA office. After spending a lot of wasted time on bureaucracy, the calm winds had picked up by the time we finally were able to depart. In the air at last, the departure was smooth and took us into magnificent views of the Tierra del Fuego.

## Ushuaia – El Calafate, Argentina

We flew at FL310 north through the very dry, barren and empty landscape on the Argentinian side of the Andes. The El Calafate entry was beautiful; the dry, red landscape had a bright azure glacial blue river snaking through to the runway. Just when the flight was going so smooth, we encountered severe turbulence and needed to brace ourselves through some fine, transparent cloud, more like a wisp of moisture in an otherwise pitch blue sky. Reducing the speed to 150 knots, which is the penetration speed, eased the severity for the turn to final, landing in strong winds of 28 knots gusting to 38 and hot thermals.

When we entered the El Calafate airspace, air traffic control spoke to us

in Spanish; we advised that we didn't speak the language. They relayed the same message in Spanish four more times until finally giving the clearances in English. We were informed to visit the ANAC (air services) office when we landed, as the airport is Spanish speaking only and they are not permitted to speak English. They advised they would need to issue a fine to us stating the notification is in the AIP of the airport. Amir read the English version of the AIP and knew it inside out, letting them know that there was no notation referencing the Spanish language requirement and since it is an ICAO airport they must speak English, they dropped the issue very quickly.

El Calafate is the tourist support town of the Perito Moreno Glacier on the Southern Patagonian Ice Field that has remained the same size for at least two centuries. It is accessible by many balcony viewing platforms that let you view all different levels and facets of this magnificent glacier that is over 3-miles wide at the terminus of the glacier into Argentino Lake. During summer, the ice was breaking and cracking producing spectacular falls and waves. The addictive sound is like a roll of thunder and a gunshot all in one. We took a boat tour and mini hike on the ice glacier; it took a little time to get used to the ice walking spikes. The tour finished with a glass of Scotch whiskey on ice broken right from the glacier – what a fantastic treat in one of the most spectacular parts of the world.

## El Calafate – Bariloche, Argentina

Leaving El Calafate, it was evident right from the start that it was going to be an interesting task. ATC and the tower speak English but are “not allowed” to speak to you in the language because they are not trained enough to do so. So out comes Google translate and the pantomime begins!



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First, ATC was demanding that we hire a Spanish speaking pilot. Amir explained that was not going to happen and they realized he wasn't going to budge, so a kind ATC lady assisted with a quick Spanish lesson of the basic words and full script to cover the flight clearance and taxi to runway for takeoff. With the script written, we requested startup, flight clearance and taxi to runway ... ATC instructed back in Spanish; N16AT responded from the script in very bad Spanish. After a few translate searches and a little "Spanglish," we were on our way in clear blue skies.

During the climb we were heading straight into cold condensation clouds looking like layered corkscrew lenticular cloud formations; we decided it was best to avoid them. Now away from El Calafate and back to speaking English, we called the Commodore ATC but they couldn't understand what we were saying. They asked another aircraft to relay our message, but they also didn't understand. We were trying to communicate that due to weather we required immediate track diversion. We went back to aviation basics and executed avoidance maneuvers and advised the mediator and ATC.

Bariloche ground services is a completely different experience! We were greeted by a Bariloche Council handler with a bus to pick us up and whisk us through security and out of the airport within minutes with smiling, happy faces all trying to assist in English – a free service by the local authorities. After the hours of stressful treatment that we received in El Calafate, this was a relief. We searched for accommodations and found a little gem in the oasis of the beautiful lake area called the Charming Lodge Bariloche with a fantastic restaurant and each room having a sauna, aromatherapy steam room and spa. It is a unique, family owned and operated business where the owner takes great pride in the resort that he built himself.

## ***“BARILOCHE OFFERED SOME OF THE MOST SPECTACULAR VIEWS OVER HUGE LAKES SURROUNDED BY MOUNTAINS ...”***

Bariloche offered some of the most spectacular views over huge lakes surrounded by mountains. We kayaked in crystal clear, deep blue, fresh water. The beaches to these beautiful lakes were dark gray pebbles, not unpleasant to walk on but quite hot in contrast to the very cold water.

We visited Richter Island, where in the 1950s an Austrian Scientist Ronald Richter convinced the government that he could build a fusion power device (Thermotron) for efficient cheap electricity. Financing was provided and the town's infrastructure was built for the Huemul Project. He claimed he succeeded but it was soon discovered to not be true and the island was abandoned and then used for military bombing practice, leaving just the shell of the laboratory.

### **Bariloche – Buenos Aires, Argentina**

After a very short flight, we connected with a couple, Alex and Martine, who had been communicating with us. They were in the midst of planning a "round the world" trip in their beautiful Cirrus SR22. Martine had just received her pilot certificate and was working on her SR22 transition training; Alex has been a pilot for many years and flown in many aircraft.

They have lived in Argentina for many years and invited us to their incredible home, which was once a school. It was actually Alex's primary school that they

purchased and renovated. We were very happy to give them our tips to flying the world in an SR22 without tanks, and as they have been doing a lot of research, we also learned a lot had changed since we took the trip in 2014. What was impossible then seems to be a bit easier now, and with the opening of the path and availability of avgas in Russia with handlers, it makes the crossing back to the U.S. very possible without tanks.

Argentina is a fascinating country with an interesting history. The city of Buenos Aires is modern, full of life and culture with Tango dancing and music buskers in the streets, beautiful cafes, cobblestone roads and grand buildings making it feel like you're walking the streets of Paris. The rich history is still evident with majestic, old mansions now turned into cultural hubs or shops sitting amongst the trendy antique, local craft, art and musical markets.

Whilst slowly moving through the south of Chile and Argentina, COVID-19 had been slight news but had not yet affected any of the regions we visited. However, once we arrived in Argentina, the cases started to rise and the country was looking to implement stay at home orders. It was clear we needed to move on to Brazil, as planned, starting with the Great Iguazu Falls.

***In the next issue, our adventure continues including how we executed the great escape back to the U.S. due to the worldwide COVID crisis. ⊕***

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**AMIR AND TAMRA HYSTER** are active aviation travelers, flying themselves throughout the world and writing about their experiences. The Vision Jet is their fourth Cirrus aircraft, a progressive move from their previous SR22N, SR22TN and SR22T that they previously flew on their world adventures.

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