

CONTINUING THE TOUR THROUGH SOUTH AMERICA IN OUR SF50 (PART 2)

by Amir and Tamra Hyster



The lakes of the salt flats in the Atacama Desert showcased their vibrant blue color against the stark white salt formations.



▲ *A lagoon between the inactive volcanoes of Miscanti and Minques sitting at an altitude of over 14,000 feet.*

HOW MANY TIMES DO PILOTS look at a photo of a beautiful place and think, “Wow, I would love to fly there!” One of those places for us was South America, and the Vision Jet (SF50) opened up a new world of opportunities to accomplish our dreams.

In Part 1 of our story, we shared that we started our South America adventure right after taking delivery of our new Vision Jet and how it was the “superstar” at all of our stops in Belize, down the west side of the South American coast via Panama, to Ecuador to visit the Galapagos Islands, and then on to Pisco, Peru. We continue with our journey as we head to Chile.

Pisco, Peru – Calama, Chile

We entered the Chilean airspace by landing and clearing customs and immigration in Arica, then continued along

the coastline into Iquique (pronounced E-KeKa), flying level with the deep-red, dry mountains towering above our left wing, past the city with beaches full of people.

The airport, which was located on a flat peninsula, had no parking for general aviation and through Roberto Dabed, our fantastic contact in Chile, we were kindly invited by the Iquique Aero Club’s President Marcelo Zamorano to use their parking area.

The town is mostly a tourist destination for local people to spend the summer on the beach. We had pre-booked an apartment for two days as it advertised a much-needed washing machine; however, there wasn’t one located in the apartment. No one spoke English who could answer our questions; at the complex when we inquired about the air conditioning, they pointed to a fan and the window. After calling the



▲ Amir and Tamra looking over a breathtaking view of "Death Valley" in the Atacama Desert.

► Driving on a long salt-encrusted road running through the salt pans of the Atacama Desert.



manager, a heated exchange ensued and the rate for one night dropped to \$70 cash and they threw in security parking! Our new friend, Marcelo, again helped us and somehow arranged a room for us at the "fully booked" Hilton for the remainder of our four-day stay. During our trip, Chile and Bolivia were going through some turmoil with organised rioting groups being driven into towns to attack the commercial shops, hotels and businesses. We also saw this when we left Pisco, Peru – the road outside a liquefied gas plant was lined up with vans and cars full of protesters. Riot police were blocking the plant entrance and the gas tanker trucks delivering or picking up LPG were blocked from operations.

In Iquique, the shops, banks, restaurants and even the historic Dreams Casino were heavily boarded up as all the windows had been smashed. The beautiful buildings had been vandalised and graffiti was written everywhere.

The conservative government in position for the past 30 years had brought prosperity and balance to the economy, evident by the coffee shops and restaurants buzzing with locals and tourists. This small minority group vandalising businesses and historic monuments are hurting tourism and trade.

We visited the mining town of Humberstone, a UNESCO World Heritage Site in the Atacama desert region. Once the world's largest producers of Saltpetre

(nitrate for fertilizer) operating between 1870 to 1960, was now a ghost town with a museum.

We invited Marcelo to join us on our next flight to Calama, a copper mining town only about 40 minutes away, which he politely refused citing he needed to work. However, the next morning as he drove us to the airport, he surprised us by joining after all. How many chances do you get an opportunity to fly in the Vision Jet?! After showing us how to file domestic flight plans in Chile and clear the tax-free zone of Iquique, we were in the air with Marcelo sitting right seat and relaying communications in Spanish to ATC.

We flew over very dry, red mountains and flat desert land. The Atacama

region is the driest, nonpolar desert in the world and feels similar to flying the Saudi Arabian desert. The snow-covered Andes mountains of Chile were on our left with a few large thunderstorms in the distance. The terrain was covered in clouds and we were in full IMC as we drew closer to Calama, except for a few mountains popping their tops out of the flat cloud cover as we flew at FL170, the area LSA was 22,300 feet.

The RNAV Y approach via MALPO to runway 28 needed to be executed using a steep approach due to the high terrain around us from 13,000 feet through thick clouds and very hot and gusty air to final; landing in the altitude of a little over 7,500 feet.

Marcelo returned back to Iquique with a driver (that took 5 hours!) and we rented a car and drove 60 miles to San Pedro, Atacama, a part of the nature reserve, Los Flamencos. We stayed at

the Naturalis Hotel, located just outside of the main town; it was a new, small, chalet-style, luxury boutique hotel in very peaceful surroundings.

The region has many attractions and we started with Valle de la Luna National Park, highlighting various sand and stone formations carved by wind and water with an impressive range of colours and texture looking like the surface of the moon.

The next day it was on to the Salt Lakes via a 25-mile, corrugated road. A huge thunderstorm came out of nowhere; the volume of rain created flash floods and new rivers that started taking part of the road away. We continued on as other vehicles and tourist vans were remaining to travel through.

The lakes are a small section of many miles of salt flats and a very deep and a beautiful blue against the stark white salt formations. The area was surrounded by ancient lava deposits

that were eroding to form an interesting landscape.

After a swim/float, we headed back on the road but were stopped by another vehicle telling us that the road had washed away and we needed to turn around and go via the town of Peine, a detour of an additional 160 miles on harsh hot gravel roads that went deep into the desert. We had enough fuel, but no water and saw shredded tires left from other cars all along the road. We really had no choice but to carry on.

We were in a group with three other vehicles, in a surreal setting like from a Mad Max movie, and out of cellphone data range with no maps guiding us for many miles. We were driving fast to avoid running out of daylight hours, through the commercial salt mines on dusty roads. It was fascinating terrain that we would have missed if not for the detour. There were very few road signs, but every now and then the maps



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guidance would come alive. We went through a section of road that was under water and mud, the first car hammered through, the second car also, but barely. They both kindly waited for us. We reversed to get some speed and floored it into the water which stopped us to a crawl, our car slid sideways, then the tires gained a little traction and eventually slowly drove out of the water. The whole detour took us over two-and-a-half hours.

Our next trip was a two-hour drive up a volcanic complex of lava domes to the base of the inactive Miscanti and Minques volcanoes, to see the two neighbouring lakes. It was at an altitude of over 14,000 feet – the highest we had been without wings. The vegetation changed from dry desert to lush grasses and small fine leaf bush flora. We had a special wildlife encounter with a Vicuna, a small camelid species

similar to a Llama and unique to this area, just meters from the roadside grazing on the grasses.

We took a short walk outside the car to take in the spectacular view over the lagoons and a couple of motorbike riders pulled up next to us, one of them was looking very gray and squatted down trying to get his breath. Amir had taken hypoxia instruction with the Vision Jet training and assisted them.

On our last day in this beautiful landscape we visited the surreal and spectacular “Death Valley” with its stunning, changing colours, ruggedness and breathtaking view. The town of San Pedro was very surprising; the streets were compacted red clay and all the houses, hostels and shops were behind mud brick-rendered walls. The inside of the shops looked nothing like the outside – it was modern and artsy. The restaurants were trendy, and their food was excellent,

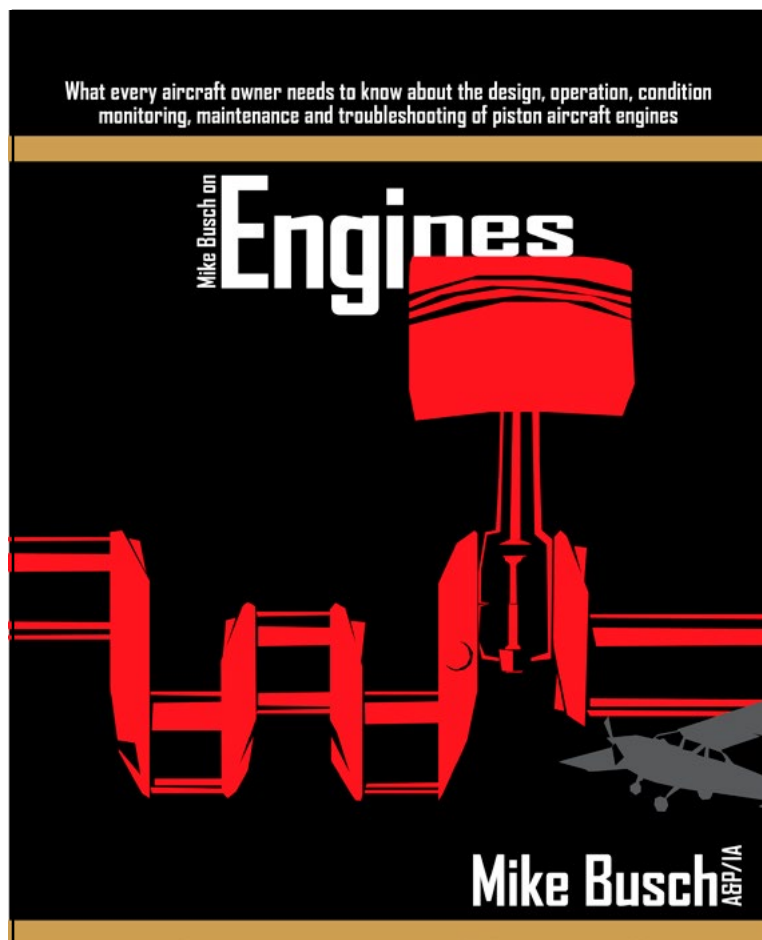
gourmet-quality. The best way to explain the town is “Wild West meets hipster.” Wild dogs roamed the town freely and there were many buskers playing interesting music; it was really one of the most fun towns we have experienced.

Calama – Ovalle, Chile

Here is where our original plans for our trip changed, all due to those contacts and leads that we collected along the way; one thing leads to another and we were invited to discover places that normally we would not think of visiting. Communicating with Roberto Dabed through the COPA website, he invited us to come to his hometown and land at a small, general aviation airport (SCOV).

Our flight at FL310 took us heading south over the mountains of Atacama where we stayed, between the mountain range and the coast. The minimum safe altitude of 25,500 feet was the second highest in

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A HANDLER CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE

by Amir and Tamra Hyster

INTERNATIONAL FLIGHTS ARE CHALLENGING; but with the services of a handler, the experience can change entirely – providing a personal service from the moment you land to the moment you depart the country.

A good handler can assist with:

- ▶ Permits to enter your various stops, and clearances to overfly countries on the flightpath
- ▶ Completion of required documentation, including general customs declarations and a variety of authorization and health forms
- ▶ Assistance with fuel (although not necessarily provided by a handler), parking or slot arrangement, security, airport access, immigration and customs
- ▶ Suggestions and discounts on accommodation, car rental and shuttle services
- ▶ Departure procedures, weather and flight planning on departure

How do you find a good handler, and how much should the service cost?

The search for a handler is not straightforward; however, there are a few starting points. Companies that manage flight services such as Universal, WFS (World Fuel Services), etc., can be costly and worth the value for an airline, large jets and sometimes for Vision Jet or SR22 owners. We prefer to use a combination of all-inclusive professional services and self-fly arranging as much as possible, using our skills with smaller niche handlers that specialize in certain countries or even specific airports.

When using a professional service, ask for a fully itemized quote for each airport, that way you understand all the charges the airport imposes and the charges for handling and permits. We found very quickly that most handling services arranged through professional services which included permits and other fees were in the vicinity of \$750 to \$3,000 USD per

Our DGAC handlers at the airport in Arica, Chile.



flight. With the smaller handlers, the cost can be reduced by more than half.

We used Mike Grey of White Rose Aviation for flight permits when we travelled in our SR22T from Greece through the Middle East and Asia in 2014 at an average cost of \$1,800 for each stop. For obvious reasons, there are some places in the world that you just don't cut corners. Through Europe, the U.S. and South America, we organized our own handling services. Look at several international entry point airports at a destination. Sometimes the same services operate each airport or there are different single operators at each airport. Talk to all at each destination and start "negotiating" with them. On average, we paid handler fees between \$500 and \$900 USD per stop, so there are many cost savings to be made with a little work.

To find a self-handler, check the destination airport website and your flight planning software, although you may find that these can be out of date or have limited information. We find the most accurate information is through the World Fuel application, or by reaching out to pilot friends and joining social media groups to link up with other pilots who either live where you are going, or have travelled there.

From making many phone calls, sending emails and having group sessions with new contacts, we now have a comprehensive list of handlers and can make recommendations for many locations. The best contacts have become great friends. Being a part of the Cirrus community, we have made connections through owners and operators and received leads from hard-working Cirrus Customer Service and Sales personnel.

Once a handler has been engaged, be sure to call customs and immigration to double-check the requirements and ask if they will come out to your aircraft on arrival at the handler's location, or is there a need to stop at their offices before parking. Usually, upon landing, you will see them waiting on the tarmac for you, or ground services will guide you to their position.

Costs involved with airport services vary, so be sure to understand that once the handler has outlined his charges, the airport will also

have service costs – aeronautical fee/services, airport, dispatch, arrival, ramp and overtime fees. These costs can really add up. Asking your handler for a fixed fee can avoid nasty surprises. Some larger city destinations have arrangements only via handlers on slot allotments; sometimes access to aircraft can only be obtained through handlers. We try to avoid the major airports and concentrate on smaller international airports for entry purposes.

When to start engaging with the handler will depend on the permits required to enter a country and how long it takes to get the authorizations, as well as the overfly permits. Expect country overfly permit costs to be around \$75 USD, and landing permits about \$125 - \$150 USD. Some countries can approve entry on the day, and others might approve entry with a specified time slot.

Document requirements to enter airspace can vary with each country, but be ready to supply the following:

- ▶ Certificate of Registration of Aircraft
- ▶ Certificate of Airworthiness
- ▶ Pilot in Command license and medical certificate
- ▶ Insurance policy certificate
- ▶ General Declaration form
- ▶ Air Crew Card (essential)

A good practice is to keep this information ready in templates to use for each destination.

Any preparation is better than none at all, and sometimes the cost to engage a handler can far outweigh the headache of doing it yourself and flying by the seat of your pants (pardon the pun). We have heard many stories of pilots attempting to cut costs and spending hours on the ground in confusion and frustration only to be charged more than what it would have cost through a handler that knows all the tricks of the trade.

Happy negotiating! ☺

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the world, and the weather was looking a little nasty with thunderstorms building up around us and additional cloud cover sitting on the mountains below all the way to the Pacific Ocean. We decided we should consider the alternate airport, Coquimbo (SCSE).

We diverted right of track by 150 nm to avoid the thunderstorms and as we came closer to the top of the descent, a hole appeared over the entry to where we thought the airport was situated. However, the airport was actually over some mountains and being a small, general aviation airport, it had no ILS and no tower. Radar services terminated and we were left to descend at our discretion over mountains to find the airport. We continued over the smaller mountain range and into a valley over a spectacular lake, but still the airport was not in sight. The GPS indicated it was right in front of us, slightly to the right and we were running out of valley. To slow down and give us more time, we throttled back with the wheels down and flaps open on the first stage and we finally spotted it on a plateau surrounded by another lower valley of vineyards. It had the look and feel of approaching an aircraft carrier deck, a most unusual feeling, not difficult just bizarre.

The next to land on the strip was Roberto in his SR22, coming back from an air show. It was our first personal meeting after constant contact with him during our planning to visit Chile. He is very passionate about his country and had assisted us with great contacts, recommendations, clearance and parking arrangements throughout Chile and South America. He does a lot for general aviation in Ovalle, being president of the Ovalle Aero Club and creating the facilities to generally promote more aviation in the region.

He kindly took us to meet his family and we stayed at his family estate, an incredible farm of custard apples and beautiful horses trained for the Chili rodeo, of which his family are champions.

Ovalle – Santiago, Chile

After an interview with the Chilean news station about our journey and the Vision Jet, we took off visual, being a non-ATC airport, and climbed while Roberto, who was in the right seat, contacted Santiago control to activate the IFR plan. The path took us on a heading straight to the highest mountain range covered in snow; it was a little unnerving, but we were soon turning right for the short, picturesque flight.

On the ground we worked through the usual operation – find the “follow me” car, park and cover the aircraft, find transportation across the airport tarmac and giving way to 787 commercial jets. As we arrived at the terminal, we found the rental car booths, negotiated a deal, caught a bus to the rental car, marked every section of the vehicle with damage (mandatory practice tip),



▲ Amir getting interviewed by a Chilean news station. The Vision Jet got a lot of attention throughout South America.

and drove to the other side of the airport to the most luxurious FBO we had ever seen. Aviasur has facilities to accommodate all types of jets and high-end GA airplanes. Roberto had called a few friends and pulled some

strings to secure us free parking at this FBO. We also needed to have a mechanic complete a Service Bulletin issued by Cirrus; they are a Cessna agent, but kindly assisted with the small, quick job.

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Santiago – Valdivia, Chile

Our path took us down to the colder regions of southern Chile. A few delays on the ground due to weather conditions and eventually we had a clear view from our 31,000 feet position to see both the coast of Chile and the mountains clear to Argentina. Traveling along the southern volcanic zone, we could see the line of both active and nonactive volcanoes, some with glaciers and others with the last remaining snow of the summer. Each had large lakes around them, forming picture-perfect reflections.

Valdivia has a very European feel, located on the meeting point of three very large rivers, it is bustling with life as we were there during busy school holidays so it was a struggle to find accommodations and rental cars. We stayed at the Dreams Hotel/Casino booked with assistance from Marcelo and rental car help from Roberto.

We stayed in Pucon, a lake town under active Volcano Villarica, which last erupted in 2015. A few more hours drive took us to Puerto Varas where we snapped some exciting photos of the moonrise on Volcano Osorno. The day before, we had hiked to the top to sit and listen to the glacial ice melting and cracking in the summer sun then drove down to watch rafting on the cascade rapids from the flowing water.

We were hosted by Antonio and his family at their lake house property in Lake Ranco, one of the most picturesque lake areas we have seen. The whole area around Valdivia is definitely worth a visit and it is a great warmup before heading further south to the Patagonia region.

In the next issue, we'll share our experience at the ice fields of Patagonia, one of the main reasons we wanted to visit South America. ⊕

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.

Visit their website for more stories and information: www.VisionJetTravel.com

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