

Date: November 17, 2003
Location: Valdivia, Chile
Subject: Update #13 – Region X – Bouncing by Bus in the Wet, Windy & Wild!

Dear Friends and Family,

As I look back on my past updates and this past semester, I find it hard to believe how quickly this time has gone by and just how quickly time passes in general. Anyway, I hope you are doing well wherever you may be and that this update will give you a welcome break from whatever you may be up to. =)

So, after three weeks of being a hostage in Santiago to my schoolwork (see Update #12), I managed to escape for a brief weekend before having to return to Santiago to finish up the last 50 pages or so of final papers that will finish my semester abroad exactly 10 days from today on November 27th.

This update begins with a random, yet relevant, image that is related to my adventures.

<below> I was once told that my updates make my study abroad seem like “NIKO everyday”. =) Well, here’s part of my packing list that seems reminiscent of my past NIKOs! (What is NIKO, you ask? E-mail me to find out!) =)



Anyway, these tools didn’t end up being used too frequently this trip... Latin American cities are “lettered cities” that were created on paper before being laid down so they are pretty ordered and in neat grids (where possible). I used my compass once when

my bus dropped me off in the wrong part of town and I figured out where I was by the direction of the street... and I used my knife to cut bread to make sandwiches. =)

<right> As you might’ve guessed from the title of Update #13, I pretty much traveled by bus through about 4-5 regions of Chile to experience Region X. The green trail denotes the approximate path that I took to get to my destinations which included: Isla Chiloe (Ancud, Castro, Chonchi, Huillinco, Cucao & Parque Nacional Chiloe), Puerto Montt, Puerto Varas, Petrohue, Valdivia, & Niebla. I think I must’ve spent at least 40 hours in buses over the past weekend... Yikes! I definitely know that approximately half of my costs were due to transportation.



<below> Here’s a close-up map of Region X to give you an

idea of why I spent 40 hours in transportation. And it really wasn't *that* bad since approximately 24 of those hours were spent traveling through the night between Santiago and Region X. =)



Anyway, I left Santiago on a Thursday night bus to Puerto Montt. On Friday morning, I arrived and immediately switched buses to go down to Castro on the Island of Chiloe.

<below> To get from the mainland over to the island, there were constant ferries that would transport people and vehicles between the two points. Our bus just drove right up and half an hour later, we arrived on Chiloe. =)



I finally arrived in Castro around 3PM on Friday. At this point, it was only wet and hadn't quite gotten wild and windy yet. =)



<left> Looking back on my past updates, I don't seem to have explained much about where I've been staying and such. =)

As this was my first "solo" experience, I just needed a single bed for myself. After going from hostel to hostel, I finally found a place that let me stay for 2,500 pesos per night for two nights. The place was called "Hostel La Mejor Vista" and it definitely had great views of *the Fiordo de Castro*. =) It was definitely one of the better deals I've had in my travel experiences down here as the most I've paid was 6,000 pesos per night for 3 nights while in San

Pedro de Atacama (see Update #6) which is more than twice as much! I had less luck in Puerto Varas where I spent my 3rd and last night and had to cough up 4,000 pesos!

Other than the sandwiches I had on Saturday (that I made using my knife to cut the bread!), I had a lot of fish and seafood as I was on an island and in the Lakes District for most of my travels.

<right> On Friday night in Castro, I found dinner for 1,800 pesos (less than US\$3)... Seafood soup that had clams and mussels came first... I don't know why I don't seem to learn that mussels make me sick! I got deathly ill several years ago after eating



lots of mussels in Mexico... and several weeks/months ago, I got sick after eating the mussels in the Peruvian *ceviche* I had (reference in Update #6). So, as expected, I ate the mussels and felt queasy later that evening. It was only 1-2 pieces though so it was a very mild uneasiness that left quickly.



Chile is the 2nd worldwide producer, merluza (twice!), and congrio. =)

<right> On the subject of food, I've discovered that I like to find out what the regional dishes are and try them (like the llama while up north in Update #6). =) So I found out that a local Chilote dish is the *curanto*... Apparently, the *curanto* is supposed to have mussels but by this time I got smart and asked to

<left> Part II was a yummy combination of merluza fish, potato and salad. Mmm, over the 4 days I was down south, I had salmon (of which



substitute more clams in place of the mussels. =) Anyway, the dish arrives, and it's stacked nearly 7-8 inches high on a giant plate!

<left> The aftermath of my attempt to conquer the *curanto*. I had to ask for a second plate because the food was stacked so precariously high! =)

So, I've become very frugal while down here in Santiago and am wondering how the "reverse culture shock" of returning to high US prices will affect me. =P

Having gotten food & board off the table, I spent the first afternoon in Castro checking out the sights.

<right> Castro is the capital of the island region of Chiloe. Anyway, it's known for its *palafitos* which are houses built over the water on a bunch of sticks. =)

Unfortunately, the tide was low and the weather overcast so my pictures are nothing like the postcard pictures of this place... =)



Another thing I noticed is how much difference that light makes in livening up pictures. Well, not just pictures, but the actual places themselves! =P



The next series of pictures are just a few examples of the contrast!

<far left> Iglesia San Francisco de Castro on rainy, overcast Friday.

<left> On Saturday during the non-rainy moments when the sun peeked through the clouds to light up the world for a short while.

<right> The road to Petrohue from Puerto Varas on overcast Monday morning.



<far right> Later that day on the drive back when the sun came out.



<far left> The wet, wild & windy Lago Llanquihue on Sunday evening.

<left> Monday afternoon when the sun came up and lit up the lake.

Sunday evening definitely was wet and miserable making it impossible to do or see anything. I still went out to try and take pictures though. =) I'd never seen such crazy crashing waves on a lake before and the rain was definitely coming in nearly horizontally and at high velocity. I hope the far south stays dry even if it ends up being mad windy... My clothes can deal with the wind... but the wet? That's a different, more miserable problem. =)

Anyway, reflecting on the severe contrasts between being in the light and being in the dark... just made me think about all the people in the world who remain in the dark and live life without an eternal hope in Christ when the light has been revealed to brighten up their lives. But then, when you're in darkness, being exposed to light is painful to the eyes and makes you squint and hide under the covers. It takes time to adjust to the light and be able to see. If that's the case, I figure I need to be more persistent or start with a "softer" light? =) What do you think?

I probably should have split this update in two considering the volume of pictures that I took over the weekend and that I want to share so many of them! (Traveling solo not only gave me freedom to do whatever I wanted whenever I wanted, it also gave me the freedom to take 238 photos over 4 days! =P)

From Castro, I found a tour that took me through Chonchi, Huillinco and Cucao to get Parque Nacional Chiloe all day Saturday.



Although it rained throughout the day, every time we were walking around outside, the rain stopped and only resumed when we were indoors (having lunch, for example.) God is good! =)

<left> The park was full of greenness and yellowness and redness and blueness and other colors as flowers,

lakes, oceans and other natural sights filled my eyes as I hiked around most of the day. =)

<right> After a 1.5 km hike from the entrance of the park towards the ocean, we arrived at the sand dunes that marked the beginning of beach and ocean. The winds here were intense and the waves



and noise were incredible. I

would share a picture with my hair flying every which way to show the wind... but since my hair doesn't do any of that, I won't. =P

<left> I love the ocean. I don't know why. =) The wind left a film of ocean that stretched across the beach and reflected the clouds. Pretty. =)



Traveling solo has its benefits and its downsides. One of the benefits is that you get to meet new people... Well, you do when you travel with a group, but more so when you travel solo. =)

<right> The French group and I ended up spending the whole day on the PN Chiloe tour. Too bad only two of them spoke anything resembling Spanish or English (one actually spoke Spanish quite well as



she had studied in Spain) so I spent most of this tour conversing with our guide.



<left> As the tour wound to an end, a rainbow stretched across the sky reminding me of God's eternal covenant with Noah in Genesis 9. God said, "I have placed my rainbow in the clouds. It is my permanent promise to you and to all the earth. When I send clouds over the earth, the rainbow will be seen in the clouds, and I will remember my covenant with you and with everything that lives. Never again will there be a flood that will destroy all life." (Genesis 9:13-15 NLT) And even though it rains for more

than 200 days out of the year around here, there aren't many problems with flooding as the earth quickly absorbs the rain and nourishes the thriving vegetation on the island! =)

From Castro, I headed over to Ancud where I arrived around 9AM on Sunday morning. It rained non-stop all day and the town appeared deserted as nobody ventured outside. I was hoping to find a church and spend the morning with God and other Christians and found a cab that took me by two local churches, but neither of them opened during the time I spent waiting in the pouring rain. I don't know how many churches have their service times posted outside, but I think they should. That way, visiting Christians (like me!) or even anyone who just happens to be walking by can know when they should come by! =) It's alright though, I spent about 5 hours sitting in the restaurant where I tried the *curanto* reading the Word and spending time with my best friend Jesus! =)

Now as for why I spent most of the day in the restaurant... One of my goals for when I arrived in Chile was and still is to see penguins. I have not yet accomplished this task. On an island right off the northwestern tip of Chiloe is a penguin colony that is approximately one hour by car from Ancud. I had hoped to get to the colony on my own but the buses weren't running and I didn't want to try to bike my way over in the pouring rain. Anyway, I found a poster by the closed national tourism office stating that tours to the penguin colony left at 3:30PM... I called the number, asked the guy how many people needed to show up for the tour to go and told him that I was alone. He said two people and guaranteed me that there would be others because I needed to change my bus ticket. So after changing my ticket and waiting around till 3:30PM, nobody else shows up because of the pouring rain and the tour gets cancelled. So after the penguin tour got cancelled, I made my way over to wet, wild & windy Puerto Varas where I spent my third night. So close, yet so far. I will see penguins before I return to the States though! =)



<right> On Monday morning, I waited about an hour for a public minibus that took me to waterfalls and rushing rapids. Some classmates I met on the bus back from Ancud had told me that they were incredible and that it wasn't too difficult

to get there. When I arrived at the *Saltos de Petrohue* (an hour from Puerto Varas) the sky was overcast. Although amazing by themselves, the postcard pictures feature the nearby *Volcán Osorno* in the background. Too bad the clouds covered up the volcano. =(

Since I used public transportation to arrive at the *Saltos*, I arrived alone and discovered that there were only two other people at the *Saltos*. We enjoyed the beautiful sights and sounds to ourselves. As we were getting about ready to leave, a bunch of tour buses pulled in and unloaded about 200 foreigners. =)



<left> The three of us (Patrik, Ixone and I) quickly got out of there to head up another 6km to Petrohue and *Lago Todos Los Santos* in their rental car. As I said before, one benefit to traveling solo is meeting

other people (especially with a car! =P). The two of them were from Spain and traveling through Chile for about three weeks.

<right> Since they had a car, we were able to stop wherever we wanted to view the sights and take pictures. We found a nice natural place by the *Rio Petrohue* to take more pictures. =)



After lunch,

we went our separate ways as I needed to catch my bus to Valdivia before heading back to Santiago on the red-eye bus. =)



<left> *Volcán Osorno* across *Lago Llanquihue*. Right before I left, I went back to the

lakeside to see if the volcano was visible. It was! So I took a bunch of pictures, of course. =)

<right> I asked to have someone take a picture of me standing on the rocky pier with the lake and volcano in the background. I think it came out pretty well. =D





<left> Even though I didn't get to see penguins, I got to see some more *lobos* (refer to Update #8) in Valdivia. =) The boat in the background was from Valparaiso... Even though it's only about an hour from Santiago... I've yet to visit. I think I'll get a chance to go in my last few days in December before I head back to Mexico before coming back to the States. =)

There wasn't much to do in Valdivia so I took a taxi *colectivo* (refer to Update #10) to Niebla on the Pacific coast.



<right> The coastal fortress in the background was closed but I did manage to find my way onto the beach and tide pools on the shore. Niebla is where the rivers from Valdivia flow into the ocean.



<left> To conclude my adventure through Region X, I wanted to watch the sunset into the Pacific... but from my vantage point, the sun would've set behind an island across the water and I wouldn't have had enough time to get back to my bus leaving for Santiago. So after watching the sun descend for about 45 minutes, I headed back to Valdivia, had my last dinner of merluza, and waited for my 10 hour bus back to Santiago. =)

Well, it seems that this update will probably be one of the longest ones yet. =) I'm only anticipating having to write 3 or 4 more as my study abroad experience in Chile comes to an end.

Back in Santiago, I'll need to finish up my final papers before I head off on my last series of journeys before my return home.

Looking forward to the beginning of my next 20 years and everything God has in store for me for this next step of my life. =)

Hope everything is going well wherever you are and to hear from you soon!

- Dan