

Date: December 22, 2003

Location: Los Angeles, California

Subject: Update #20 – Valparaiso, Viña del Mar & the End of the Adventure...

Dear Friends and Family,

My five months of “study abroad” in Chile have come to an end, and I’ve just arrived back home in Los Angeles... It’s different to be back and I don’t know whether to miss being abroad or to be happy to be home. =)



Anyway, I just wanted to wrap things up nicely and neatly to remember this experience by...

<left> To begin my twentieth and final update, I just wanted to share what has been a useful resource throughout my time in Chile. Although there were times I found it to be less than useful as information inside was out-of-date, in general, the Lonely Planet guide to Chile was helpful in general for planning out trips and getting around once I arrived at my destinations. =) My copy is pretty beat-up, marked up and is available for you to borrow if you ever decide to take a trip down to Chile!

<right> During my last few days in Chile, I decided that I needed to head over to Valparaiso and Viña del Mar on the coast of Chile about an hour and a half from Santiago. Considering that it’s summer now in Santiago, I thought I might enjoy a nice day at the beach before heading back home and eventually... to Philadelphia winter... brrr... =)



I arrived in Valparaiso to overcast skies and spent the morning wandering around the city seeing what there was to see. Compared to Santiago, I thought Valparaiso was really dirty and much of the city that I wandered through smelled like urine.

<left> As one of Chile’s major ports, Valparaiso sees lots of ships carrying merchandise and passengers to and from its docks. I saw the Holland America

Amsterdam in port which was getting ready for a long cruise around Cape Horn, to the Falklands, South Georgia Island, and the Antarctic Peninsula... it’s the same ship I saw in Alaska two years ago on our family cruise!



<left> Valparaiso is a hilly city with lots of different hills where there are different residential districts. I spent some of the day going up and down the hills using the *ascensores* which are like elevators that you up and down the hills. =)

<right> Some of the colorful houses on the hills of Valparaiso reminded me of the colorful little street of *El Caminito* in the La Boca neighborhood of Buenos Aires, Argentina (see Update #10).



<left> Public transportation included these trolleys that roamed the city wherever the power lines went... behind the trolley, you get a glimpse of the mini-buses that serve the local area and up to Viña del Mar.

<right> My first glimpse of Viña del Mar was the *Reloj de Flores* on the road



between Viña and Valpo. It's 5PM in the picture and plenty of



light... One of the changes I'll have to get used to is that it gets dark here in Los Angeles at 4:30PM. For somebody who just got back from summer in the far south where there is daylight till at least 10:30 PM... that's a huge loss of at least 6 hours of daylight per day!!

<left> Castle Wulff on the Viña coastline was a different little sight than what I've been seeing all semester. =)

<right> After spending a good portion of the day wandering around the two cities... (and discovering that there really isn't much to do), I went down to the beach to enjoy the beautiful day. =) Viña has a slight resemblance to Acapulco in Mexico... except the buildings were smaller, the beaches less crowded, and signs posted saying that the water isn't suitable for swimming. =P



<left> It was a nice day and I sat on the beach enjoying the sun and thinking I'll miss summer once again when I head back into freezing Philadelphia winter...

After spending December 18th in the coastal cities of Valpo and Viña, I returned to Santiago for my last two days...



<right> Back at my home in Santiago, Christmas decorations are up as the holidays approach. It's really weird having Christmas in the middle of summer... and I feel really sorry for all the people dressed up as "Santa" in the scorching heat! =D



<left> On the last day of my stay in Santiago, I invited my host family out to eat and also to celebrate my younger brother's birthday. =) It was nice to eat with chopsticks again at this Japanese restaurant where my host family had raw fish for the first time. =P

After having spent five months in Santiago, I feel like I can call it another "home" just as Los Angeles, Mexico City, and Philadelphia have been homes to me in the past two decades on this planet. =)



<left> I'm already starting to miss Santiago and seeing the Andes (though snow-less for the summer) right up against the city... I probably won't miss the smog since Los Angeles probably has its fair share... but I'll miss all the people I met and all the places I've been and all the experiences that'll stay with me through these updates for the next decades to come. =)

Everything having been said and done, I can definitely agree that this has probably been the most amazing semester of my 2.5 years of college and I would recommend that anyone who ever has a chance to go study abroad anywhere should definitely do it! More than academic knowledge and being stuck on campus studying for an entire semester, being abroad gave me the chance to see cultures I would've never seen otherwise, meet people from all over the world, and get a glimpse of the amazing natural wonders that God has put on this earth for us to enjoy! I'm definitely glad that my program required me to go abroad because otherwise, I wouldn't have ever thought about it!

Just want to thank all of you for taking the time to read these updates, keeping me in your prayers, and for writing me every once in a while to let me know that you hadn't forgotten me! =) I can't wait to meet up with each and every one of you and share about my experiences and hear about what's been going on wherever you may have been these past 5 months!

Take care and see you soon!

- Dan