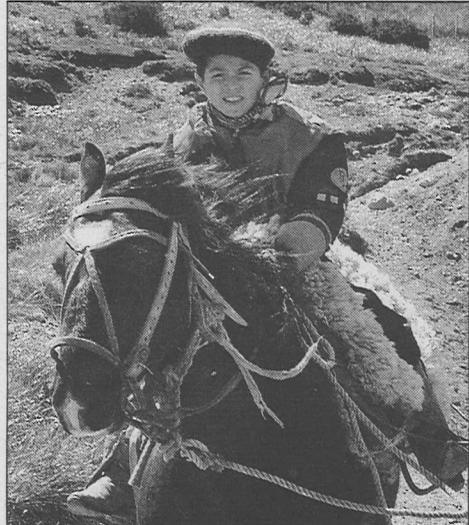


A Hot Trot Through Tierra del Fuego

By Pilar Irribarria • Translated by Carolina Wilson



Gaucho fuegino

Tierra del Fuego is mysterious and fascinating island, full of legends and scenery that will capture your imagination. It is shared by Chile and Argentina. The eastern, or Argentine part, is visited by thousands of tourists who arrive to Ushuaia from every corner of the world. But what about the Chilean side? The western part of the island boasts pampas to forest, mountains and glaciers, and possibly the most pristine natural reserve in Patagonia.

Porvenir, the Fuegian capital on the Chilean side, is a good place to begin your adventure. You can rent a pick-up truck or jeep in Punta Arenas, contract a transport company with a driver-guide, or start out on bicycle. However you decide to go, Porvenir is the last place where you can buy food or gas, take out money from the bank, or find any information you may need.

There are hotels and restaurants in Porvenir. You can also visit the Ferdinand do Cordero Rusque Museum, with a photographic and archeological exhibit on the Ona and Yaghan tribes, the original inhabitants of the region. You'll find information on the discovery of gold and mining; a collection of beautiful altar pieces, and a section of natural history, archeology, and ethnography. There is also a great panoramic view of Delfines from a boat in the Bahia de Chilote.

Once you're heading south on the international road, you might experience the Gold Circuit, in the Cordón de Baquedano, with a spectacular view of the Strait of Magellan. You'll visit an area where artisanal miners mined gold. You can talk to them about the history and lifestyle, and try mining for gold nuggets using the same techniques of 100 years ago.

Continuing your adventure toward Ona in at kilometer 100, you'll come across historical milestones, testimony to the past, when the enormous Sociedad Explotadora de Tierra del Fuego left its mark on the region. In the sector called Bahía Inutil (Useless Bay), you'll see the remains Puerto Nuevo, a lamb processing plant, which separated meat from fat (used for soap and cooking), on former-estancia Caleta Josefina. Today you can see the remains of the installations and several machines. Caleta Josefina was the first estancia founded by the Sociedad in 1883. Some buildings are still standing, and you can visit the Cementerio de Ona in, which was declared a National Monument in 1976. Yet even today, if you travel across the pampas in summer, you'll see groups of shearers, "comparsas," who go from estancia to estancia shearing thousands of sheep.

A stop along the road...

Cameron is a good place to stop, have a bite to eat, or simply contemplate daily life in Tierra del Fuego. It consists of the town hall, police, school and guest house. Cameron arose from the shell of an old estancia founded in 1904 by the Sociedad, and it was baptized with the name of one of the managers. Its buildings demonstrate typical architecture, rich in detail, brought to the area by the English.

From Cameron, you'll have to decide between two routes. The coastal route passes sawmills at Puerto Yartón, Río Condor (famous for its fishing) and Puerto Arturo, with good places for camping. Or you can head south on the road which passes Lago Blanco, a route which goes inland and passes various *secciones* and *pueblos* of the old estancia. Along the way you will see the huge dredges (aurifera) brought from England in 1904, which functioned until 1910. You'll also pass remnants of old estancias in Section Russin and Section Río Grande, and current-day estancias, including Enamonte, Vicuña, Río Chico, Las Flores, and so on.

From the pampas to the forests and mountains...

Lenga forests and beaver habitat begin south of Pampa Guanaco. This area is a fisherman's paradise, with Río Rasmussen and Río Grande, as well as beautiful Lago Blanco.

If you want to continue to the end of the road, you'll need to go back to the main route and head to Lago Fagnano. Along the way you'll marvel at the mountainous scenery, and you can visit Lagos Deseado y Despreciado. At Lago Fagnano you'll see the road project to connect Estancias Yendegaia with Puerto Williams, one of the least explored trails in Chile. The project is a challenging one, and expected to take a few more years, crossing Cordillera Darwin along the way.

For now, it is a real gift to be able to experience the magical scenery of Fagnano. If you are up for more adventure, you can continue on horseback, or five more days of trekking, to arrive at Estancia Yendegaia.

Did you know?

Isla Navarino by boat from Ushuaia

It is possible to cross from Argentina to Chile and vice versa between Ushuaia and Isla Navarino. You can't fly that way, but you can take a boat-van transfer to get to Puerto Williams, the military town on Isla Navarino.

Due to complex international paperwork, Ushuaia Boating is the only company offering this service regularly. They schedule two trips daily (9 a.m. and 5 p.m.) and need a minimum of three travelers to make the crossing. Set up your reservation with them by email at reservas@ushuaiaboating.com. They'll need full name, nationality, birth date and passport number for each traveler. Cost is USD \$130 one way, \$240 round trip. This includes the 45-minute boat ride to Puerto Navarino across the Beagle Channel, shepherding you through Chilean customs, and transportation to Puerto Williams, from which you can see the Dientes Mountains, an end-of-the-earth trekking and hiking destination.

The Ushuaia Boating office is located at 190 Godoy (tel: 02901-436153). In Puerto Williams, the contact person can be found at Hostal Coiron.

Day Trippin' at the End of the Earth

By C.J. Wilson

Choose from several day hikes in and around Ushuaia that follow the coast, climb above the treeline, get close to glaciers, or picnic beside small mountain lakes. Whatever direction you go, you'll discover the raw beauty of Tierra del Fuego all around you. Here are a few suggestions to get you started, each with a café at the end to warm you up before you head back to town. For more hikes, as well as trekking information, visit the tourist information office and ask about their Senderos Antiguos and other hikes.

1. For a warm-up, head to Glaciar Martial, a local ski area situated above town and below the glacier of the same name. Take a taxi to the ski center, and hike up the ski trails until they open up at the basin below the glacier. Follow the trails as far uphill as you wish, or take a side trail to an overlook. Before you head back to town, don't miss the Casa de Té, just off the parking lot. (For a longer day, hike up to the ski area from town. Pick up a map with directions at the tourist office).

2. To get to the half-day hike at Laguna Esmeralda, take a mini-bus or taxi to Refugio Altos del Valle, about 20 km along Route 3. Follow the main path, through forest and fields, eventually passing through a boggy area. Scramble up the river valley toward the crest which contains the blue-green Laguna Esmeralda. Return the way you came. Arrange transportation to return to town, before you head out unless you go a time when there is a regular mini-bus shuttle.

3. In Parque Nacional Tierra del Fuego, tell your driver you want to do the Costera Trail, and he'll drop you off at the closest point. Pick up a trail map when you enter the Park (you'll need to register and pay the entrance fee). This trail, about 8 km, traverses lenga forest, never far from the coast of the Beagle Channel, with its upland geese, ibis and grebes. Watch and listen for the magellanic woodpecker too. When the trail ends at the road, continue on for another km or so to the coffee shop next to the campground and warm up next to the fireplace with a hot cuppa, while you wait for the mini-bus back to town.

4. The strenuous Cerro Guanaco hike, also in the Park, begins at the aforementioned café and campground, and follows the shore of Lago Roca (same trail as Hito XXIV), before turning northeast, steeply climbing through the forest to a lookout that overlooks the Beagle Channel. Continue upward, along a boggy trail until it opens up. As you look across the large bog, you'll see where the trail continues. You'll have ridgeside views of the Beagle Channel's islets and the surrounding mountains. Return along the same path, ending back at the café where the mini-buses pick up.

Note: If you plan to return to the park a second day, tell the staff at the entrance station, and you can get a stamp to re-enter the next day on the same ticket.

Backpacking Recipes a la Mode

Bored with 5-minute rice dinners and dried pasta meals? Looking for an alternative lunch? Ready for a healthy, light-weight breakfast suggestion? Is there something that will help you survive cold Patagonian nights in a tent? Yes, yes, yes! Here are a few recipes to spice up your trip.

Bill's Trekkers Breaky

For a 'W' breakfast for two you'll need...

- 1 box of instant oatmeal (Quaker, Avena Instantánea)
- 1 can of Svelty powdered milk. (Don't go for the cheaper brand. Your breakfast will taste so much better if you just go for Svelty.)
- 1 bag of brown sugar, which you can find at the pharmacy.

Toss oatmeal in a resealable Ziploc bag and add powdered milk and sugar to taste. In the morning all you have to do is put your cup into the Ziploc bag, add some boiling water, and you're ready to go for another day. For some variation, take a bag of jam or some dried fruit to flavor up your oats.

Wrap It Up

For this alternative lunch or cold dinner for two, you'll need...

- 1 pack of integral tortillas, which you can find at Vergel on Blanco Encalada
- 250 grams of cream cheese
- Aji Pebre (some spicy goodness that you can find the small bottles, next to the ketchup)
- 1 pack of Serrano ham
- A handful of white raisins (*pasas blancas*)
- A handful of fresh cilantro

Mix the cream cheese with some Aji Pebre to taste and spread it on the tortillas. Divide the Serrano ham onto each tortilla, sprinkle on some chopped-up raisins, finish it all off with cilantro, and wrap these bad boys up. Provecho!

Candola

If you're in your tent with all your layers on and still freezing your toes off, consider walking up to the refugio and buying a box of wine. For this typical Chilean recipe you'll need...

- A box of wine
- Sugar
- The skin of half an orange
- A couple of sticks of cinnamon
- And... to get out of that cozy sleeping bag to put up your stove

Mix all the ingredients in a pot, add sugar to taste, and heat until you can just drink it, but the alcohol is still in there. Sleep tight!