

CHILE TOP & BOTTOM TRIP REPORT 2024

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tours 

Day 1 30 Nov To Chile & Arica

We all made the long trip south to Chile, arriving in Santiago on various days and then convening at the airport in good time for our internal flight to the far north and the desert city of Arica. The flight passed along the endless spine of the Andes, a tortuous riven landscape of richly coloured rocks, capped by snow in places.

Arrival was in the late-evening and our transport had us at our coastal hotel soon enough and in time for our pre-arranged evening meal.

Day 2 1 Dec To Putre

The rocky shore was crowded with hundreds of terns and gulls at dawn, with heftier Peruvian pelicans gathering a little further along, all creating a gentle cacophony with the rolling waves. We enjoyed a leisurely breakfast, giving us time for some productive beachcombing before starting our journey east. The road passed along an oasis valley filled with onion and corn production before abruptly rising. We paused at a viewpoint from where the contrast of barren sandy wastes jarred with the green fields. Indeed, these sandy and rocky hills are more or less lifeless and this emptiness continued for a while until the first plants began to appear in the dry gullies followed by the architectural forms of the cactus; *Browningia candelaris*. We stopped in an area that gave access to some large specimens of these distinctive plants, the lower vertical trunk swathed in formidable, densely-packed long spines that yielded to a branched crown of rather gangly spineless stems, which on larger plants became pendant. One plant even had a couple of fresh green fruits developing.

We had lunch and then continued up making a couple of stops for roadside plants with pretty bushes of *Tarasa operculata* ruby mounds of *Cistanthe amaranthoides* and bushy *Solanum chilense* with yellow flowers. Up until now the road had been good but we then started to hit roadworks and the delays became progressively worse. It was frustrating not to be able to stop for the different plants we were seeing but we had to make our way onto Putre, a town nestled at the base of the looming Nevada de Putre.



A plan had been made for an early breakfast and early getaway to avoid the road closure, but it would have been difficult to tell the difference between closure and the long delays. At our first stop we did get to see a mountain viscacha on a rock and the second stop had a few *Lupinus oreophilus* and painted lady butterflies feeding on the white flowers of the abundant *Baccharis alnifolia*. Our forty-five minute drive took three hours instead! Nonetheless we made it to the Belen road, stopping almost straight away for some fruiting *Corryocactus brevistylus* and cacti were one of the mainstays of the flora today. Even while waiting for the green light near Putre we had seen big stands of *Oreocereus versicolor* and these proved to be a common and widespread component to the day. And not just for their woolly stems, as they seemed very popular as nest sites and we found many intricately constructed pigeon(?) nests wedged between the spiny trunks. Invariably below these larger cacti were many spiny 'opuntias' which all too freely came off and stuck to our trousers or boots – painfully at times. They are compensated by having showy yellow or orange flowers and we found; *Cumulopuntia sphaerica*, *C. boliviana*, long-spined *C. boliviana* subsp. *echinacea* and *Tunilla chilensis*. There were fine views out across the complex of hills and valleys, some slopes stretching up to the high peaks beyond, the lower parts clad in puna, the upper with polylepis forest. We got our first close up of the latter by a water tank, with beautiful flaking red bark. It grew alongside the pendant purple bells of *Dunalia spinosa* and on the other side of the tank was plenty more *Lupinus oreophilus*. Hide then found a couple of lovely red *Mutisia hamata* higher on the slope and elsewhere were the wide open yellow flowers of *Tunilla chilensis* with prominent green styles.

We continued to an area of *Polylepis tarapacana* trees where we had lunch and then afterwards made a series of stops, the first for a fine population of large bushy plants of *Lupinus oreophilus* that crowded a stream gully, then for a few *Calceolaria inamoena* and a fine bush of *Chuquiraga spinosa*. Further on and fragrant *Junellia selaginoides* grew near the 'exploding firework' flowers of *Mutisia acuminata* before we stopped for another interesting orange flower; *Caiophora cirsifolia* that tumbled over shrubs dangling its' distinctive wide-open flowers from stems lined with stinging hairs. From near Belen, we began our journey back, making a productive stop beside a stream lined with huge clumps of



Oreocereus varicolor

Cortaderia speciosa and towering giant horsetails; *Equisetum giganteum*. On the dry banks were fine mounds of *Verbena gynobasis* and on the stream margins mats of *Erythranthe* (*Mimulus*) *glabrata* plastered with yellow flowers. That was nearly it for the botany though one flower had eluded us thus far, but not for much longer and after many sinuous bends we saw the lovely tubular red-pink of *Oreocereus varicolor* sprouting from a fine stand of the cactus. Other big plants had collections of big bird nests and there were more flowers of *Cumulopuntia boliviiana* subsp. *echinacea* and *C. sphaerica* before we left.

Enduring one more stop start journey back we made it in good time as softer late afternoon light coloured the hills.

Day 4 3 Dec Parque Nacional Lauca

Now better acclimatised we climbed higher into the mountains for a spectacular landscape day on the altiplano. Winding up through the puna along a pleasant back road via roadsides swathed in golden *Stipa* grasses we then entered a narrower canyon and exiting, the sun was illuminating the green and gold bofedale bogs on one side and rocky slopes populated with the remarkable emerald mounds of *Azorella compacta* on the other. We began by slowly (there as no other speed at 4450 metres) climbing up the slope and enjoying the wonderful organic forms of the *Azorella compacta* sprawled across (and engulfing) rocks with tufts of grass growing within some of the largest very old cushions. Also plentiful were the prostrate golden-green mats of *Pchnophyllum bryoides*. There was a dramatic backdrop of sheer basalt cliffs and dry hills, whilst the top of Volcan Parinacota started to appear as we gained height. After some time exploring the slope for the most impressive specimens we descended and spent some time around a small stream where we found mats of small *Ranunculus* sp., *Werneria aretoides* and pretty yellow *Eudema freisii*. Our next stop was a rocky area which was home to very tolerant and cute mountain viscachas and we had superb views of these sunning themselves on the rocks. A bit further on and a vicuna posed very well on the green bog with the vast landscape beyond and looking closer at the bog we saw many *Gentiana prostrata*. On the opposite side of the road we found the pretty crinkled leaves of *Nototriche pulverulenta* and then following the track to a viewpoint of colourful mountains there was a pretty *N. rugosa* in flower in the bare ground.



The fantastic landscapes continued with a big view of Volcan Parinacota and Volcan Pomerape rising from the plains and we were to enjoy many more stunning panoramas during the day. Turning off on a side road we drove to a rocky bank where there was a superb clump of scarlet *Caiophora rosulata* nestled in the shade. Another excellent specimen was close by and we spent some time in the area, finding more of the same as well as birds such as Andean geese, puna ibis, ground tyrant, whilst a pond further on had gangly-limbed giant coots. Arriving at the tiny village of Parinacota time was spent wandering the empty streets and looking at the well maintained little church. Paths had plenty of aky-blue *Jaborosa* sp. (?), crested ducks had chicks by the lake and there was a very tame mountain viscacha that posed very well for photos. Stopping outside the village for the many very woolly alpacas we also found another flowering *Nototriche rugosa* near the cemetery that was full of colourfully adorned crosses.

An Andean flicker was poised by its nest hole in a cliff as we left, driving on towards Lago Chungara and stopping several times for the superb landscapes, the big snow cones now perfectly lit in the afternoon sun. Birdlife was plentiful down by the lake with both Chilean and Andean flamingos, giant coots, silvery grebes and Andean gulls. On the slopes behind were the multi-stemmed forms of *Polylepis tarapacana*, amongst the world's highest growing trees (we were at 4550 metres). All that was left was to drive back enjoying the landscape as we went and seeing many more vicunas, which somehow found enough to eat in their stark surroundings.

Day 5 4 Dec Guallatire

Given the unpredictable roadwork situation, the decision was made to spend our last night in the north back in Arica, which meant today was cut a little short and we would not go all the way to the salt lake. Instead, setting off at 8.30 am we retraced our steps back up to the heights of the national park and then turned off on a side road that took us across a wide swathe of altiplano, with active snow cone of Volcan Guallatire ever present and Volcan Parinacota peeping over the hills to remind us of its looming presence. Our first stop was near an area of attractive pink cliffs with lots of vicuna grazing on the adjacent bog with others galloping across the landscape and posing on the skyline.



Caiophora rosulata

There were many more vicuna today as well as large herds of their domestic relative; alpaca. We made additional stops for fine views and then some large orange-tinged mounds of *Cumulopuntia boliviiana* subsp. *ignescens* (though sadly none were in flower). Wending our way across the vast landscape we arrived at the little village of Guallatire with the immense volcano rising up steeply beside it with many fumaroles pumping out gases on the upper slope. The quaint little church was being renovated and repainted and in the green valley below the volcano grazed many vicuna and alpaca. We had time to push on a little further to an area of 'badlands' with coloured bands of ash that had been eroded by rivers. This part of the world is very much a textural experience rather than one of blazing colours and our wander around this interesting landscape rather proved this with the peculiar rings of curly golden grasses, big triangular tufts of spikey greyish *Stipa* and *Festuca* grasses backed by the grey and red banded slopes. All the while the massive Volcan Guallatire smoked in the background. Lunch was taken back at the village in a convenient shady place and as we started to eat three Andean condors swept over giving us great views as they chased overhead before gliding away.

Making our way back towards Putre there was a stop for an especially large, sprawling collection of ancient *Azorella compacta* that had completely engulfed the lava bomb it had colonised. More fine views brought us to a halt and then after we had completed our traverse of the vast altiplano we made a stop at the mountain viscacha colony from yesterday, seeing not only more very cute mammals but also relocating the plant of *Nototriche pulverulenta* whose flowers were now open. An unexpected bonus.

It was now time to make our way back and onto Arica and we were in the lap of the traffic gods, but for once it played our way, arriving as the traffic was beginning to move and with a bit of nifty driving I got us to the front of the queue by the time we reached the next stop. Soon we were on our way down and down passing by the architectural forms of *Browningia candelaris* and then onto the dry rugged Atacama hills. In the end we had made good time and arrived in time to enjoy the beach front with great gatherings of elegant terns and a setting sun as the waves rushed onto the rocky shore.



Mountain Viscacha

Day 6 5 Dec To Puerto varas

A long travel day that would catapult us to a different world, whilst staying within the borders of this remarkable country. An early start was needed to get us to the airport for our morning flight south to Santiago where we arrived mid-morning. Changing planes at the airport we completed the second leg of our journey, arriving in the utter contrast of Puerto Montt with greenery and lushness all around. After collecting our rental vehicle we drove the short distance to Puerto Varas, a small town than sits on the shore of the large Lago Llanquihue with the snow-cone of Volcan Osorno in the distance.

Day 7 6 Dec Alerce Costero

Setting off straight after breakfast we drove north and then turned off passing through rolling countryside and then areas of eucalypt and pine plantation before reaching native forests which became denser the further we went. The road eventually climbed up through lush vegetation before reaching the park. While we waited for our guide there was the chance to look at the attractive purple flowers of *Latua pubigera* and the climber *Campsidium valdiviana* with pink tubular flowers. Many different trees grew here too with *Podocarpus nubigena*, *Nothofagus dombeyi* and of course *Fitzroya cupressoides*. Entering the forest we passed through fascinating dense woods with riven trees plastered in a thick coat of crinkled lichens and thick mosses. Huge *Lophosoria quadripinnata* ferns were common, there were stands of bamboo; *Chusquea quila*, boughs laden with the bromeliad *Fascicularia bicolor* and on the tree trunks grew lots of *Philesia magellanica*. The path continued down until we reached the behemoth at the bottom, a colossal *Fitzroya cupressoides* that was deemed to be 3,500 years old. A magnificent tree indeed, with thick, deeply riven spongy bark that still had a vigorous and very much living crown.

What goes down must come up and we made our way slowly back up, photographing whatever took our fancy from filmy ferns to forest scenes. Late lunch was on a convenient bench and then we drove back, stopping first for a fine colony of the vivid *Ourisia coccinea* and then Joan spotted a superb stand of the orchid; *Gavilea odoratissima* with large spikes of golden flowers. Further on we also found *Alstroemeria aurea* (red form) and that rounded off the botany. Driving the last stretch we got some partial views of Volcan Osorno.



Gavilea odoratissima

Chile's complex geography came to bear today as we made the logistically challenging journey from Puerto Varas to Chaiten, using three car ferries. In order to make sure we didn't miss the all-important second and third there was an early departure from the hotel on a crisp morning that saw the first pink light of dawn on the snows of Volcan Osorno. We arrived in good time to Caleta Arena and took the half hour long ferry across the clear strait with soft light bathing the forested hills. Then it was onto Hornopiren passing a floriferous *Crinodendron hookerianum* on the way and arriving beneath the snow-capped Volcan Hornopiren that dominated the town. Our longer second ferry took three and a half hours, chugging along a picturesque fjord with entirely forested hills on either side, the only signs of human activity, the occasional lodge or the numerous rows of the floats used for oyster farming. Impressive snowy ridges appeared and there were views into narrow inlets and smaller fjords. A quick twenty minute drive across a neck of land and we were boarding ferry number three, the final forty minutes across to Caleta Gonzalo.

On the far shore were buildings associated with Douglas Tompkins national park and we had a late lunch in a the shade nearby next to the flaking orangey-brown bark of *Luma apiculata*. From here we drove towards Chaiten not stopping until we had reached the sealed section and had seen a good cluster of orange-peel *Mitraria coccinea* sprawling over a tree stump and among the ubiquitous fronds of *Blechnum chilense*. Indeed, it's fair to say that what this part of Chile lacks in diversity it makes up for in quantity and we were to see spectacular quantities of *Gunnera tinctoria* invariably blended with the aforementioned fern and its larger cousin *Lophosoria quadripinnata*. Other ever-present plants included *Embothrium coccineum*, *Amomyrtus luma* with frothy white, fragrant flowers and *Fuchsia magellanica* with its dangling cerise and purple and these were the last thing we stopped for before reaching our accommodation, nestled among similar lush vegetation.

There was time for a wander to the beach passing through fern-filled shady woods with *Asteranthera ovata*, *Sarmienta scandens* and then as we neared the beach, flowery bushes of *Escallonia macrantha* that proved irresistible to

*Maibuenia poeppigii*

the largest bumble bees any of us had ever seen. From the beach there was a clear view of the pointed peak of Volcan Corcovado.

Day 9 8 Dec Parque Nacional Queulat

To reach this impressive national park, way down in Aysen region we had to depart at 6.30, driving south and stopping just occasionally for some of the fine views of morning light on the impressive mountain ranges, the hills thickly clad in dense forests. A revitalising coffee (and large piece of cake) perked us up and then we completed the journey arriving at the park at 10 am. Straightaway we started our hike to the hanging glacier making our way at botanical speed through the woods, the trunks of the trees swaddled in filmy ferns, mosses and the scrambling stems of *Asteranthera ovata*, *Mitraria coccinea* as well as lots of both *Luzuriaga polyphylla* and *L. radicans* (some with orange fruits) and an understorey of various ferns, bamboo and smaller trees such as *Weimannia trichosperma*. The first part was the steepest but having reached the first lookout it then the path became easier as it followed a ridge. At a second lookout there was a fine arching stem of *Luzuriaga polyphylla* and the orchid; *Codonorchis lessonii*. The lush forests continued with fine specimens of trunk-forming *Blechnum magellanicum* and copious filmy ferns. Eventually, we all made it to the spectacular lookout, with a sheer rock face capped with a blue-ice glacier and two plunging waterfalls. Alas, we heard the ice crashing down as we walked up (and again as we descended) but missed the actual event! Time was spent resting and appreciating the magnificent landscape before our return walk, photographing whatever took our fancy on the way down and arriving for a rather late lunch.

The return drive took us through the fine landscapes with improving afternoon light on the snow-crested ridges and peaks. There was a final botanical stop near a big colony of *Gunnera tinctoria* where big spreading mats of pretty *Calceolaria tenella* were plastered over the banks. Nearby were flowery bushes of *Azara serrata* too all set beside an idyllic stream. From here we drove on directly to the restaurant in Chaiten for a good seafood dinner and there was a superb sunset as we left to complete our day.



Queulat National Park

Day 10 9 Dec Pumalin

A gentler day after yesterday (or so we thought), leaving much later and making our way north, stopping for a view of the lake on the way to our trail head. We set off through now familiar dense forest, making our way up and then down to the base of the first waterfall, seeing the lovely pink flowers of *Philesia magellanica* as we went. The trail then climbed on ladders and an uneven root-strewn path beside the river, with occasional viewpoints. It culminated in a superb waterfall view of a vigorous broad cascade. We followed the same trail back down and then took lunch in a shady shelter.

Not much further along road and we stopped at a shorter (and easier) loop trail that passed through a lovely tract of mature alerce (*Fitzroya cupressoides*) forest with several massive old trees, including one that must have been a thousand-years old. Clinging to the thick spongy cinnamon bark was abundant *Philesia magellanica* and we saw several pristine pink bells dangling from the trunks. Filmy ferns were as plentiful as ever in various forms and the whole ambience of the place was quite magical. Driving back afterwards there were a couple of stops, the first for a fine flowering shrub of *Drimys winteri* and then a good view of distinctive Volcan Corcovado across the bay.

Day 11 10 Dec To Puerto Montt

Having come this far down the Carretera Austral we had to make our way back for part three of our adventure. However, there was time in the morning to stop for a superb reflective view of the forested hills and then a second walk around the alerce trail (Joan had now recovered from her foot tweak). Then it was onto the port for the first ferry, crossing the relatively narrow strait from where we drove on and waited (!) again. There was time for an impromptu lunch finishing just in time to board the second (longer) ferry that chugged once again along the long fjord steadily closing in on the looming bulk of Volcan Hornopiren. Once ashore there was a dash for the next ferry, but we weren't to make it, as a stunning trunk swathed in *Asteranthera ovata* and dripping with crimson flowers brought us to a halt. Alongside this were also a couple of bushes of *Crinodendron hookerianum* with pretty pendant pink lanterns. We made the next ferry and then carried on to the delights of down-at-heel Puerto Montt.



Day 12 11 Dec To Puerto Natales

Making our way through the slow morning traffic we made it to the airport and took the flight south arriving in our third, very different part of Chile. Here the windswept Patagonian steppe beckoned and after lunch and some quick car repairs we made our way first along the coast before turning inland. There was a stop for a good population of *Olsynium biflora* in various colour forms and then another for a roadside slope with an array of lovely plants. These included the scented *Hypochaeris incana*, golden *Senecio kingii* and dense cushions of *Bolax gummifera*, but the star turns were *Calceolaria uniflora* and gorgeous tufts of *Oxalis ennaephylla* in various colour forms.

The road continued across the vastness of Patagonia, passing through battered old woodlands, pasture and marshes before we topped a rise and there were the impressive snow streaked mountains that lined the fjord near Puerto Natales. Our hotel was nestled among poplars and at first glance appeared to be a rustic barn, but inside was tastefully designed and very cosy. The rooms had huge picture windows looking out over farms and fields with a jumble of different hills and a constantly evolving cloud scape beyond.

Day 13 12 Dec Torres del Paine I - the East

Taking in the weather forecast (as much as you can in this ever changing part of the world) it seemed best to head for the generally calmer and sunnier eastern side of the national park. There was a delay because of a car problem but in the end this worked out better for us and soon we were away driving across the huge open spaces with hills of various geologies rising either side, some cliffs marked with condor guano, whilst large tracts of forest led up to barren ridges and flattened peaks. We stopped first at the blue waters of Lago Sarmiento with a big view of the Paine massif beyond. The fragrance of the abundant *Junellia tridens* hit us as soon as we got out of the vehicle and this shrub was a common sight here and at neighbouring turquoise Laguna Amarga. The damper slopes around this lake had lots of pretty *Samolus spathulatus*. Moving on there were more great views with the famed Paine towers in sight before we reached the big cascade of Salto Paine Grande with roaring waters that would eventually make their way via most of the main lakes in the park. In the surrounding heath we found a few exquisite *Chloraea magellanica* known also as the porcelain orchid.

As we drove on, there were a few guanacos, windy slopes with *Calceolaria biflora* and



Oxalis ennaephylla

Viola maculata before we arrived at the deep blue waters of Laguna Azul. A relatively sheltered picnic site gave us a chance for lunch among the *Nothofagus antarctica* and *N. pumilio* woods, with big clumps of *Geum magellanicum* scattered about. Post lunch we took a pleasant walk along the edge of the lake, finding more *Chloraea magellanica*, deep pink *Leucheria purpurea*, tufts of *Saxifraga magellanica*, *Anemone multifida* and many fine views of the Torres del Paine framed between the burned out stems of old trees. A family of upland geese was taking their five chicks out on the lake as we walked back too. The long days meant there was plenty of time for more and we drove back stopping next at a small cascade where *Ourisia rupestris* still had some fiery red flowers, whilst above on the barren crumbling slate were quite a few golden *Alstroemeria patagonica*.

Leaving the park we came across a loose group of a dozen Darwin's rheas before turning off on a little used side route that brought us to grand views of the whole massif as well as to the lake shore where we could see the ancient masses of strombolites. Two big herd of guanacos were seen as we left and to complete the day a condor flew alongside the vehicle as we neared Puerto Natales.

Day 14 13 Dec Torres del Paine II - the West

Setting off a touch earlier we turned off the main road and took the back road towards the national park, stopping first at a viewpoint over the fjord with the scarlet of an *Embothrium coccineum* in the foreground. The road passed through an area of fine landscapes of mountains, lakes and forests and we made various stops along the flowery roadsides. Bushes of *Embothrium coccineum* and *Escallonia rosea* were laden with flowers and little bushes of *Gaultheria mucronata* had heavy crops of cherry-red berries. However, what drew most attention among the heaths were the orchids and we saw so many during the course of the day. First up were *Gavilea araucana* growing with a few *G. supralabellata* and the rather unusual barely-opening flowers of *Chloraea gaudichaudii*. A second location had quite few *Gavilea littoralis* as well as plenty more of the same. There were superb if windy views of the magnificent Cuernos del Paine and Cerro Paine Grande as we got closer to the park, also passing roadsides with plenty of *Calceolaria biflora* and in



Calceolaria uniflora

places rocks encrusted with *C. tenella* too.

Reaching the start of our walk there were drifts of *Gavilea supralabellata* with the turquoise of Lago Pehoe and the sculpted slopes of the mountains beyond. Heading on the trail the orchids became even more abundant with many hundreds of plants and among these we also found some decent *Gavilea gladysiae*. Impressive clumps of *Chloraea magellanica* were also plentiful and this lovely orchid stayed with us all the way up the hill, as we searched for and found a number of beautiful *Calceolaria uniflora*. The track followed a slope and passed areas of slate scree with compact forms of *Phacelia secunda*, trailing masses of *Lathyrus magellanicus* and its heftier cousin the lovely *L. nervosus*. Shrubs such as *Embothrium coccineum*, *Chilotrichum diffusum*, *Gaultheria mucronata* and *Escallonia rosea* were ever present as we climbed enjoying expansive views across the landscape of blue lakes and snowy mountains. The wind was strong in places, but Naoko and I made it higher and passing through a belt of woodland we pushed on towards the viewpoint finding a stunning patch of *Calceolaria uniflora* (with twenty-one flowers) and a fine flowering shrublet of *Perezia recurvata* before reaching the (very) windy overlook. Walking back down there was a herd of guanacos very close to the path including some very young animals.

The wind meant our intended second walk would be ill-advised and instead we drove to Lago Grey, stopping for some excellent views of the now clear massif with huge encrusting glaciers and then we took a pleasant sheltered walk in the mature *Nothofagus pumilio* woodland there. Here we found *Gavilea lutea*, *G. littoralis* and dainty *Codonorchis lessonii* as well as wonderful drifts of *Lathyrus magellanicus*. Austral parakeets were a nice bonus before we endured a very windy walk to the lake shore to view the blue ice bergs.

Out of the wind we drove back stopping now and then for mountain views.

Day 15 14 Dec Torres del Paine III - the centre

A fine sunny day as we drove in to the central area of the park, stopping for some views of the stunning mountain and blue lake assemblages that changed with every turn. Roadwork meant an extended walk, but this was no matter and we made our way up to the impressive waterfalls with accompanying rainbow and then on through superb scenery. In the heaths were bushes of *Adesmia boronoides*,



plenty of orchids with *Chloraea magellanica*, *Gavilea supralabellata* and a few *G. araucana* as well as lots of big-flowered *Lathyrus nervosus*. The latter sometimes grew through the abundant spiny hummocks of *Mulinum spinosum* that looked wonderful in the textured landscape backed by the improbably blue lakes. Rising above all of it was the majestic Cerro Paine Grande, the peaks saddled by an immense glacier and with large cornices clinging to the uppermost summit. We continued past elegantly curved beaches to an overlook where the Cuernos del Paine rose steeply above us, an Andean condor soaring out right on cue to complete a classic scene.

Lunch was beside a lake with the car facing into the wind as we experienced the true Patagonia! After these exertions we spent the rest of the afternoon driving through the park and stopping a various other fine views across turquoise lake to the constant changing light on the massif, enjoying final views of the iconic towers before exiting the park and making our way across the steppe. We stopped for an Darwin's rhea with seven stripy chicks and then a few guanaco, including a young one that could not figure out how the jump the fences yet. A side road took us past farms and wetlands where we saw silvered teal, a flock of twenty black-throated ibises and condors came and went as the sun played across the landscape.

A final dinner (of lamb!) was enjoyed from our picture window restaurant.

Day 16 15 Dec To Santiago

It was time to return to the capital and we left under a brooding Patagonian sky, making our way across the horizon-stretching landscape, past the heaths, shattered woods and rivers, stopping occasionally for bird life with condors very much a feature including the group of eight which were accumulating around a dead lamb. The flight north was clear for most of the way allowing stunning views of the Andes, from the immense southern ice fields and on past the perfect snow cone of Volcan Osorno to the vaunted heights around Santiago.

Day 17 16 Dec Flights home

There were various departures to the UK, Japan and Turkiye.



Chloraea magellanica

A wide-angle landscape photograph of Cerro Paine Grande. The mountain's jagged, dark grey peaks are partially covered in white snow and glaciers. Below the mountain, a vibrant turquoise lake stretches across the middle ground, with small, dark rocky islands. The foreground is filled with low-lying green vegetation and scattered dead, bleached tree trunks. The sky is a deep blue with soft, white clouds.

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Cerro Paine Grande

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