South America 24: Day 22

Description

Starting new post after 3 weeks.

Go back to posts covering days 1 to 21

Go to South Maerica 24, Day 29

Day 22: Curacautin

I rode Ruta 5 south from Talca through Los Angeles to Victoria where I took a small road to Curacautin. Ruta 5 is a great road to cover distances in short time with a speed limit of 120 km/h. At some stretches the limit is reduced to 100 km/h but no one seems to lower their speed. Itâ??s a toll road and at regular, but large, intervals you need to get off the highway and go through the â??Manualâ?• payment gates and for a motorcycle the charges are not very expensive, for the 350 km I paid roughly the equivalent of 5 usd. Ruta 181 from Victoria is a scenic road going through a very hilly landscape and as I get closer to Curacautin I see several volcanoes towering over the landscape in the distance. Amazing! And the first scenic moments Iâ??ve had on the trip!

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My progress so far:



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As I walk around this and other towns I canâ??t help but notice streets and areas with the name â??Oâ??Higginsâ?•. This doesnâ??t sound very Chilean or even Spanish so who was this man? It turns out that he is considered the father of independent Chile. He had Irish and Spanish ancestry and he was instrumental in freeing Chile from Spain in the early 1800s.



Oâ??Higgins

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I walked to the central plaza of the town and found the tourist bureau and had a chat with one of the guys. He told me there are 4 volcanoes in the vicinity of the town and that there are ski lifts at two of them. They have little snow in the town but 12 meters (!) at the volcanoes in the winter. The Llaima is the 2nd biggest volcano in Chile and it last had an eruption in 2009.

I first had thoughts of riding to the Laima volcano which is about 30 kms away from the town but after thinking of the hassle of gearing up I decided to take a taxi to a nearer waterfall, â??Salto del indioâ?•. I got an â??uncleâ?•, as they say in Singapore, to drive me there and wait for me to walk to the waterfall and back and return me to the town. Itâ??s a really nice waterfall and well worth the trip.


SALT
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Day 24: Pucon

Rode on a beautiful local road that led to Ruta 5, along there for a while and then off towards Villarica and Pucon. The two towns are located on the south side of lago Villarica and to the north of Chileâ??s most active volcano, Villarica. Itâ??s holiday season in Chile and this is a big tourist area with queues of cars and very slow going. I was behind a police car with flashing green lights between Villarica and Pucon, very irritating, Not sure why they had the flashing lights on the whole time â?? but I guess to calm the traffic with noone doing any overtakes for the whole stretch. I found my hostal, a big house with many bedrooms sharing two bathrooms. Not ideal. But with a comfortable bed and thatâ??s the most important. An American guy from San Fransisco was staying there and we had a long chat about the state of US politicsâ?¦. He worked as a bartender for a year to save up money for a yearâ??s trip in South America after finishing his degree.



For dinner I walked up the road to a modern restaurant playing loud music and showing various sports on large videoscreens. What is the Chilean typical type of food? Empanadas, of Churasco style beef? No, itâ??s italian! Every other restaurant is Italian and theyâ??re all serving pizza. And the pizza I had was really nice and huge.

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Day 26: San Martin de los Andes

After a good nightâ??s sleep itâ??s time to evaluate the dayâ??s options. Should I stay in Pucon another day and wait for the volcano to be vivisible? Unfortunately, itâ??s cloudy and I canâ??t see anything of it and the weather prognosis is not good for a clear sky, so I decide to ride eastwards and cross into Argentina. After the usual ineffective and annoying packing of my stuff I set off. As I get closer to the border the road goes steeply uphill and suddenly the volcano on the border becomes visible. The sight is absolutely amazing.



Lanin volcano



The border crossing is fairly staight forward with return of Chilean temporary import permit and issuance of new for Argentina. Still takes about an hour. The road on the Chilean side was fantastic but as soon as I get into Argentina the road condition is awful, very bumpy gravel road where it definitively feels like the fillings are going to fall out of the teeth. This lasts for 10km or so and then glorious asphalt all the way to Ruta 40 and then onto to San Martin de los Andes where Iâ??m staying for the night.





I passed a petrol station on Ruta 40 with queues not too long. I have seen youtube videos with km long petrol queues in this area so I thought Iâ??d better fill up while I can. So I joined the que and had some

left over pizza while I was waiting, it took 20 mins to get to the front of the queu and get my fuel. Didnâ??t mind much having a break with some food while waiting. I met a couple on a bike where the guy had spent 5 years going around the world on a Yamaha Tenere 660, he would park his bike for 6 months somewhere and do someting else and return and continue his travels. Thatâ??s one way of traveling but I donâ??t think I could do it that way, especially if the travel to and fro is 35 hours and time difference of 11 hours. Thatâ??s a killer and a recipe for contracting Covid ð??•

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Day 27: Lago Puelo

Ruta 40 from San Martin de los Andes is called the route of the siete lagos (seven lakes), but not only does it pass a bunch of lakes but also goes past a number of mountains through a windy and beautiful road. A pure joy to ride on a motorcycle.









As I was getting closer to Lago Puelo I noticed a number of motorcycles parked by a restaurant, so I slowed down and went back to see what this was about. One guy was outside the restaurant for a smoke and he told me they were on their way to Ushuaia, they were from Santiago and had two weeks of vacation to be used for the return trip. They were going to make it from there in 2 days which is close to 1000 kms per day! Kind of crazy.

It took me a while to find the cabana I had booked for the night since I didnâ??t have internet. I stopped at the YPF petrol station for a drink and used their WiFi to figure out where the place was. Once I got there, there was noone to receive me and I had to wait for some time before the owner

showed up. I wasnâ??t very happy and it didnâ??t help that the cabana was very basic. Well, well, Booking.com isnâ??t always goodâ?¦

Day 28: Futaleufu

Today I really feel like taking a break, I have been riding for 4 days straight, but the place Iâ??m staying at isnâ??t so nice so I decide to carry on south. Much of todayâ??s ride was easy going on a high plateau with straight road allowing me to keep a decent speed for a quick 200kms. The last 50 kms before the Chile border was another bad dirt road, it looked like it was being prepared to be tarmacâ??ed, it was very bumpy, dusty and, in places, with deep gravel giving that unpleasant floating feeling. Of course, if you go on an adventure like this you must be able to take the bad as well as the good, otherwise you might as well not go. Anyway, the unpleasant stretches are the ones you tend to remember, no?




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Border crossings are always tedious and I wonder why they are necessary. Itâ??s always a formality with forms being filled for the bike and passport being stamped. Are Argentina and Chile so different, what are they afraid of? The nordic countries have had no border formalities for as long as I can remember and now the same with the Schengen countries. I canâ??t remember this having caused many problems. And there is some cooperation between most south american countries through the Mercosur agreements and one result of this is that I can get vehicle insurance that covers most countries on the continent on a single policy. Maybe in the future it will happen..

Futaleufu is a beautiful small town surrounded by mountains and only 10 kms from the Argentinian border. Itâ??s being presented as an adventure center with hiking, river rafting and mountain biking. It has a nice square in the middle of town where there was some activity last night â?? being a Saturday. Today I went for a hike in beautiful weather with clear blue skies and temperature in the low 20â??s. Itâ??s the first hiking Iâ??m doing since the Covid infection so I donâ??t want to push it too much but am happy with a 6 km walk.


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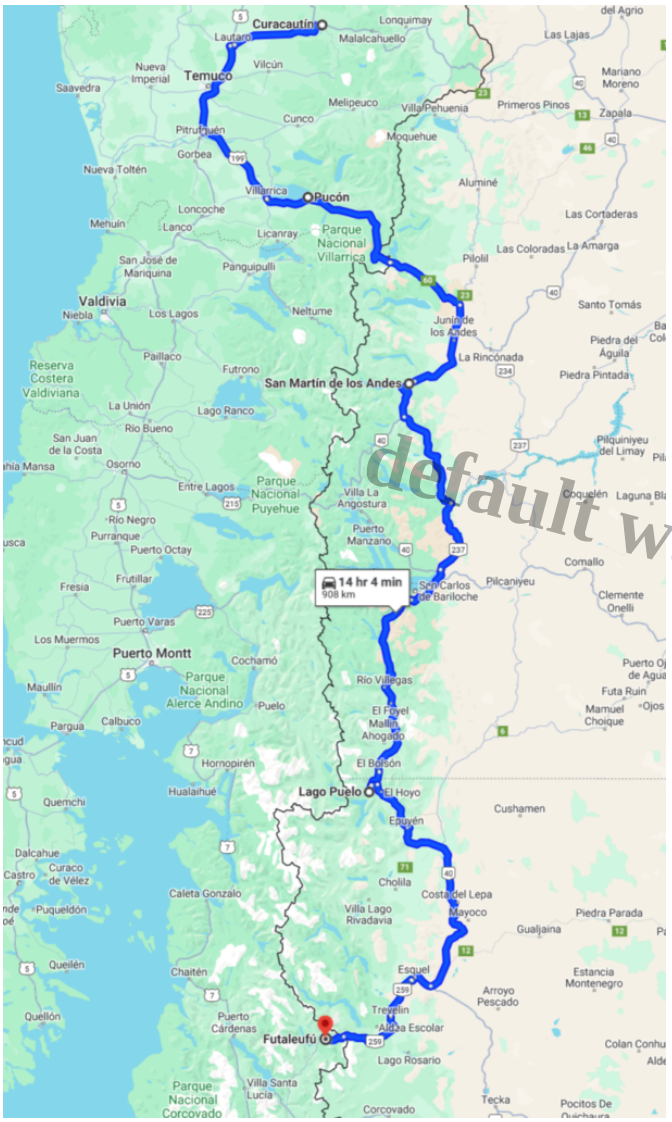
Mirloâ??s hostel



Here in Futaleufu Iâ??m staying in a hostel called Mirloâ??s hostel, it has an outdoor kitchen where I can cook food and make tea whenever I want. There are also people from a lot of different countries and most of them speak good English so weâ??ve been able to communicate well. Itâ??s nice with company and I much prefer it to staying alone as Iâ??ve been doing so far. Only problem is snoring â?? one guy in the shared bedroom snores really bad so I had to sleep with ear plugs. Only

downsideâ?¦

In the afternoon two guys on a BMW GS arrived. Theyâ??re going the same way as me tomorrow so weâ??ll ride together.



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Progress since Curacautin, 900km in 4 days, pretty relaxedâ?¦

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