

El Norte Grande

Description

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[Back to going north in Chile]

El norte grande is the northern most area of Chile and includes cities such as Antofagasta and San Pedro de Atacama. Itâ??s a large area, with few people, and dominated by the Atacama desert.

As I was riding I passed the 1000 km mark from Santiago and later saw a sign saying the distance to Iquique was another 1000 km, and thatâ??s not the northernmost town in Chile! Itâ??s really a crazy long and narrow country!

The hotel had no rooms for a third night so I decided to leave Taltal after two nights. There was no food at the hotel so I went looking, but on a sunday morning I couldnâ??t find anything open apart from the neighboring supermarket where I went to buy stuff that would constitute breakfast. The typical chilean round bun, butter and 3 slices of salami would have to do.

I then set off along Ruta 1 which runs along the coast with fantastic views of the shore line and dramatic waves, almost like hwy 1 in California. After 55 km I turn on to b-710 which looks like a newly constructed road that goes upwards in switch backs and reaches more than 2000 meters in altitude. The area around the road is truly desert and the driest place on earth.

Why is it so dry? Youâ??d think being so close to the pacific would give plenty of rain, so whatâ??s going on? The coastal range mountains are quite tall and blocks rain from the west while the Andes blocks rain from the east. Furthermore, the pacific close to Chile has quite cold water and does not produce much rain in the first place.


PERU
SOUTH AMERICA
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BOLIVIA
ATACAMA DESERT
ARGENTINA
CHILE
PACIFIC OCEAN

After 120 km the b-210 road meets Ruta 5, but instead of going north to Antofagasta I turned south to see one of the highlights of the trip. After 20 km I could see a magnificent and tall sculpture in the desert.



Mano del desierto

Iâ??ve seen this on the cover of guide books and now I was finally able to see it for myself! The sculpture, which is 11m tall, was completed in 1992 by Mario Irrazabal and references the human rights violations by the Pinochet regime. I guess the big hand of the government was always able to get you?



Antofagasta

After spending some time admiring the monument I rode the dirt road back to Ruta 5 and turned north to reach Antofagasta. At about the turnoff from Ruta 5 you ride through a terrible looking, huge, industrial area that looks like it could have been a set in the mad max movies. After turning off Ruta 5 I was soon in Antofagasta and found the Wyndham hotel I had looked up. Itâ??s the most posh hotel of the trip so far!

Antofagasta is a town dominated by people working in or for the mining industry. The industrial area I rode through yesterday is mainly to do with enrichment of copper and lithium ore.



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I walked in to a movistar shop to see if I could unblock my phone and was told I was no 12 in line. I didnâ??t want to wait that long so I started walking out when I was asked by the shop manager if he could help me. Then he spent the next hour and a half getting my phone fixed up! He was very patient and wouldnâ??t give up but in the end couldnâ??t fix it. He did send me an email with links and I was later able to submit the application to register the imei of the phone. I did get two 40 GB Sim cards and one of them is already working in my GPS navigation phone.

People here are amazingly nice, willing to help, and donâ??t get upset. Itâ??s the same in traffic, drivers are very courteous and non aggressive.

Back to Antofagastaâ?¦ Itâ??s got a long beach promenade and a lagoon for people daring to enter the water.


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The day temperature stays at 23C and often with quite a breeze making you feel cool. So better be careful and put a lot of sunscreen on.

After three nights I decided it was time to leave and go to San Pedro de Atacama, a distance of 300km. First getting out of Antofagasta, then onto Ruta 5, 25, and 23.

While on Ruta 5 the road was blocked by an enormous metal scoop traveling at 60kph on a big truck. It was so big that it covered two lanes plus the shoulder! After some time there was a long queue of cars behind. I couldnâ??t get past until a road toll Plaza. I have no idea how they would get the humongous scoop past the Plaza.

Ruta 25 was a brand new dual carriage road with pristine asphalt. The fence at the side of the road was not even finished.

I arrived at San Pedro de Atacama and started looking for a petrol station, there had been none to be seen from the road for the entire stretch and the fuel warning light had come on. It took some time before I finally found it and could breath a sigh of relief.ð??

I met some bikers at the petrol kiosk and they recommended me a place to stay, hostal Terracota which I eventually found, they had a room and I went about installing myself therein.

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San Pedro de Atacama

After the nice tarmac roads to get here, it was strange to see all dirt roads of the town, a bit like stepping back on time. The town is in an oasis with lots of greenery a welcome change from the brown of the desert! There are also a lot of tourists.





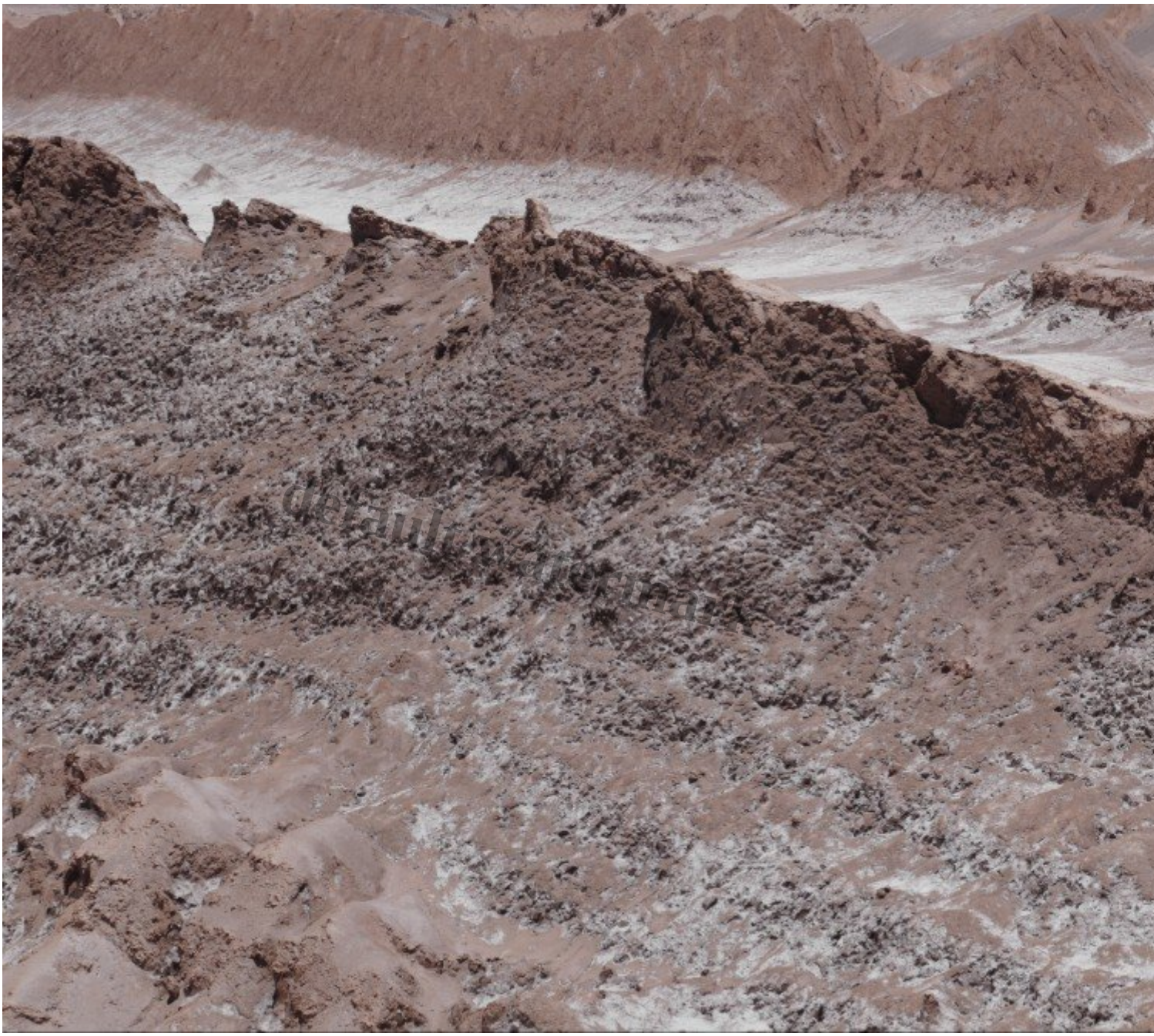




The town is at a height of 2400m above sea level which I find quite noticeable. Waking up at night, a bit breathless when walking fast. Hopefully, this will not last since Iâ??m thinking of joining a tour into Bolivia and the Uyuni salt flats which will go to 4400m.

Valle de la luna is a nearby attraction and I rode to see what it was about. Itâ??s 15 km from the town and as the name suggests itâ??s a valley looking like it could be on the moon. I walked a trail of about an hour in the scorching heat and the rock formations really looked like a moon landscape.


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The heat is so dry, 10% humidity, so the sweat dries immediately and I felt exhausted after the hike.

I met a Singaporean(!) guy at the same hostal and he told me about the trip to Bolivia he had just returned from. It sounded interesting and since I donâ??t have the ownership papers for the bike Iâ??m not allowed to leave the country with it, so I signed up for the 4 day tour with a local travel company. So after thee nights I checked ut of the hostal and joined the tour at 6am.

Follow along on the exciting trip to Bolivia

Category

1. Uncategorized

Date Created
25/01/2025
Author
admin

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