

South American tango

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Surviving a major weather event while cruising through the most dangerous waters in the world may not be for everyone, but it does make for some interesting cocktail party conversation. Throw in a historic earthquake and accompanying tsunami and you've got your basic two week vacation, or at least mine.

My husband and I left in early February for what is known in the travel industry as a "around the horn cruise." After sightseeing in Buenos Aires, Argentina, for a few days, including Evita's balcony and her final resting place at the famous Cementerio Del Norte Cemetery, we set sail. Following a quick one day stop in Montevideo, Uruguay, the ship headed southeast in the Atlantic Ocean towards the Falkland Islands and right into the strongest winds and highest seas almost everyone on board, including the officers and crew, had ever encountered.

It was pretty obvious the first day that we were in some heavy ocean swells, but it wasn't until dinner that night when we were broadsided by a huge wave that everyone in the dining room including me let out a unanimous gasp. During the next day and night, the 719-foot ship was pelted with 50 to 75 mph winds and 35- to 40-foot seas. The natural light in our cabin would go from dim to bright based on the volume of water being splashed on the window and the height of the approaching swells. The pounding of the ship's hull against the assaulting waves



PHOTOS/JOHN BOLGER

Above, Glaciers in Chilean fjords and, at right, lighthouse at the end of the world at Ushuaia, Argentina.

was deafening and lying in bed was like being on a surf board in the Banzai Pipeline.

On the third day, we arrived in Port Stanley in the Falkland Islands, but were unable to get off the ship because of continuing high seas. During one of the



PHOTO/JOHN BOLGER

Seals and giant cormorants on the rocks at Ushuaia, Argentina.



previous rock and roll days, an older woman fell, believe it or not while taking tango lessons, and broke her hip. She was evacuated from the ship in the Falklands in a heroic transfer from ship to pilot boat under extraordinary conditions. She was subsequently flown to Santiago, Chile.

The next day was eerily calm as we made our way to Cape Horn within Chilean territorial waters. Cabo de Hornas, is actually an island at the southern most point of South America adjacent to Tierra del Fuego and just north of Drake Passage, with the continent of Antarctica about 400 hundred miles to the south.

The waters surrounding Cape Horn are perhaps the most hazardous in the world with unpredictable williwaw winds, large waves, strong currents and icebergs. Sailors who have rounded the horn are entitled to wear a gold hoop earring in their left ear. Even cruising on a large vessel can be a challenge, especially

for those with weak stomachs and unsteady equilibrium, but since we had already been through our challenging waters we just enjoyed the unusually calm seas.

The ship worked its way up to the Beagle Channel and called at Ushuaia, Argentina, the southernmost city – fin del mundo, the city at the end of the world. We worked our way through the inland waterways to the Strait of Magellan and the small city of Punta Arenas, Chile, on our way to the Avenue of Glaciers and Amalia Glacier. Cruising through the Chilean Fjords was remote and magical with the snow topped Andes serving as a backdrop for the thousands of small islands totally devoid of human life. In Puerto Montt, Chile, we toured the lake district towns of Puerto Varas and Frutillar, settled by German immigrants in the mid 1800s and serving today as one of Chile's resort regions.



PHOTOS/JOHN BOLGER

Above, a view of Cape Horn from the south, where the world's most hazardous waters are found, and, at right, Santiago, Chile, is nestled in the Andes Mountains.

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We arrived in the port city of Valparaiso, Chile, on Tuesday, Feb. 23, and continued on to the city of Santiago. After experiencing one of the most untouched and isolated regions in the world, the modern and sophisticated city of Santiago, nestled in the Andes, was a surprise and a treat.

We flew out of Santiago on Thursday, Feb. 25, at 10 p.m., about 30 hours before the 8.8 earthquake

and subsequent tsunami hit Chile. Watching the news videos of the damaged passenger terminal at Santiago's international airport, that we walked through only a day before, I wondered about the lady who broke her hip and the waiter who served us our dinner the night before. Luck is random and hard to understand, but for whatever reason luck was on our side this time, returning us safely home with an earring in our left ear and lots of party chatter.

