

An Argentinian Adventure

One of my favorite questions to ask people is, “if you could go anywhere in the world for two weeks, where would you go?”. Most people say Australia or somewhere in Europe (Germany, Great Britain, and Italy are popular). I have yet to hear “Argentina” as a response, but that has been my dream since the moment I stepped foot back on US soil following my post-graduation trip to Peru, Chile, and Ecuador in the summer of 2017. So why the interest in all of these South American countries?

I lived life in my comfort zone until my junior year of undergrad. I studied a lot, worked hard in athletics, and really only traveled to visit family. I focused on my one long term goal: admission to veterinary school. Then, one day sophomore year, I heard about the Texas A&M Biomedical Sciences semester study abroad program in Costa Rica. After being lucky enough to receive some scholarship money, I decided to go. Leaving to spend four months in another country seemed like a crazy idea at the time, but I enjoyed every second and wanted to stay longer. It was my first time out of the country, and I fell in love with the culture and attitude; people there always find a way to see the positive side. Learning Spanish as I was there helped me connect to the locals more than I could have ever imagined. The families I stayed with and the people I met taught me to be laid back, worry less, enjoy the little things, and appreciate life as it comes.

When I got back to the US, I knew I wanted to return to Latin America soon. I had the travel bug. Study abroad was fun, but I realized I wanted something less structured. Soon, two friends and I were planning a six-week graduation trip to Peru, Chile, and Ecuador. I desperately wanted to add Argentina to that list, but we simply didn't have enough time. I loved this trip because we got to compare cultures across countries, and we didn't have a concrete schedule. I got better at Spanish, and we met a lot of great people along the way. I missed staying with local families, however, because this is where I learned about the culture the most in Costa Rica.

This brings me to today. I still have wanderlust and am still in love with Latin America. I did get into veterinary school, and now I only have one summer break left, which presents a problem. Right now, I have no money but lots of time; after graduation, I will be making money, but I will have little time off for grand adventures. Despite this predicament and currently living off of graduate loans, I've decided that I should make the most of my last summer and take my dream trip. I want to live like an Argentinian; learn their customs, explore their country, and leave fluent in their language. To help with all of this and to decrease costs, I will be spending the majority of my trip working and staying with local families (through workaway.info). In exchange for 20-25 hours of work a week, I will receive free lodging and some food. My goal is to find host families whom do not speak English. I will get to see how these people make a living, meet their relatives and pets, and help cook authentic meals.

In a nutshell, I want to make this trip for three main reasons. First, I want to gain new experiences that are unique to Argentina. From hiking the Patagonian mountains (in my first real, non-Texas winter), to working at a winery in Mendoza, to being splashed with the water from Iguazú falls; I'm so eager to go that I wish I could leave tomorrow. Second, I want to be fluent in Spanish. I have a good basis, but I'm not yet fluent. There is a huge need for bilingual veterinarians in Texas and becoming fluent will allow me to increase the number of patients I am able to help. Last but not least, I am looking forward to the adventures, moments, and stories that I cannot plan for or predict; things that make a trip spontaneous and unforgettable. I always learn more than I could ever expect from an international trip, and I don't expect this to be any different.

Tentative Itinerary

I have not officially booked anything yet; dates and mode of transportation may change based on prices. I have a general idea of things I want to do, but I also plan on asking the locals what they recommend because from my experience, that is how you find the most unique spots and activities.

Patagonia (May 8-18)

 →  Punta Arenas  →  Puerto Natales  →  El Calafate  →  El Chaltén

I will begin my trip by flying from Dallas to the bottom of the world and spending about a week and a half hiking in Patagonia(!!!!). As you'll learn from my application, hiking is one of my all-time favorite activities. I don't plan on spending much time in Punta Arenas, but it is a good travel hub for this region. From Puerto Natales, I'll go to Torres del Paine National Park. In El Calafate, I'll hike the Perito Moreno Glacier in the southern part of Los Glaciers National Park. El Chaltén is probably where I'll spend most of my time because of the large number of day hikes that begin right from town. These include Laguna Torre, Laguna de Los Tres, and Piedra de Fraile. From El Chaltén, I'll bus back to Punta Arenas.

Bariloche (May 18-June 8)

 →  Punta Arenas  →  Puerto Montt  →  San Carlos de Bariloche

Bariloche is where I'll do my first Workaway. In this region, I would like to spend some time in both El Bolsón and Bariloche. El Bolsón is known for its laid-back atmosphere and gorgeous hikes. The family I would like to stay with here is looking for cultural exchange and help on their organic farm. In Bariloche, I would like to help in a hostel for a week because I will get to meet people from all over the world. During my free time, there will be a lot to explore and do in the mountains, such as paragliding and horseback riding. Bariloche is also known as Argentina's chocolate capital, so I will be sure to test that reputation while I am there.

Mendoza (June 8-29)

 →  Mendoza

I've found two Workaways that I am most interested in doing around Mendoza. One is in San Rafael, which is a couple hours south of the city; I would like to stay here for two weeks. This family grows fruit, raises chickens, and makes wine and juice from their produce. I will be assisting with these tasks as well as helping maintain the property. The other one is in Maipú with a family that runs a bike rental and wine tour company. Here, I will help translate, book tours, and answer questions people have about the region. During my free time, there will be plenty of other things to do, such as exploring Mendoza city, seeing Cañón del Atuel, more hiking in the Andes and, of course, touring some of the nearby wineries.

Buenos Aires (June 29-July 5)

 →  Buenos Aires

Although I typically enjoy outdoor activities and small towns more, a trip to Argentina would not be complete without a few days in the capital city. Here, I'll stay in a hostel and take in the sights and sounds of neighborhoods such as Palermo and San Telmo. I'll learn about Argentinian

history in Plaza del Mayo in downtown. One of my favorite city activities is to explore local markets, where I will get to utilize my Spanish to bargain for handmade crafts and buy delicious produce. I'll be sure to have steak and wine at least once because that is a must in Buenos Aires; I may even go out of my comfort zone and take a tango lesson because how often does that opportunity come up?

Iguazú Falls (July 5-10)

✈️ ➡️ Puerto Iguazú ✈️ ➡️ Buenos Aires ✈️ ➡️ Dallas

The obvious attraction of Puerto Iguazú is Iguazú falls, but that is just one thing to do here. There is a lot of hiking to be done in the jungle of Parque Nacional Iguazú. The rainy, humid climate here will be a stark contrast to the Patagonia hiking early in my trip. If I'm lucky, I'll get to see wildlife such as monkeys and coatis. From Iguazú, I'll fly back to Buenos Aires and catch a flight home.

Projected Finances

Transportation	\$1,400 (flights); \$150 (buses); \$100 (public transportation)
Food	\$500, mostly in Patagonia, Buenos Aires, and Iguazu
Hostels	\$250, mostly in Patagonia, Buenos Aires, and Iguazu
Park Entrance Fees	\$200
Tours/Miscellaneous Activities	\$200
Winter Hiking Clothes	\$500
Workaway Account	\$38
Travel Insurance	\$70
Emergencies	\$200
Totals	~\$3,600 Savings (part-time job during vet school): \$1,200 Remaining: \$2,400

Life is so much more fun with spontaneity and adventure. I was thrilled when I found out about the Globetrotter Grant because that money would help me tremendously. Although working will decrease the cost of my trip, there are still quite a few expenses. With this money, I will be able to do additional tours, visit additional national parks, and try more unique foods. Thank you for establishing this grant and taking the time to read and consider my application.



My host mom and me on Costa Rican Independence Day



After my hike to the top of Machu Picchu Mountain



My second host family in Costa Rica



Learning about the grass islands on Lake Titicaca in Peru