



John

from Woodstock

to

Argentina

My time in Argentina. Where do I begin? That's part of exchange I suppose, it has no start or end. Even before my residence in a different country, us outbounds spent time with the other exchange students, learning and experiencing the world from our country. I expect it to be more-so after exchange, I will carry around my stories and experiences until long after I have left Argentina, the stories that I am still making.

Living in a foreign country is both the easiest and hardest thing I have ever done. Although, I'm not entirely sure that I can call Argentina a foreign country anymore after six months of life here, but there are certainly parts that are still foreign to me. One of such things is Carnival. Carnival is a parade-like event in Argentina (and other parts of South America) where dancers make their way down a strip with vibrant feathered costumes. This runs from ten at night to six in the morning, which sounds like a long time, but us bystanders have other ways to entertain ourselves. A huge part of the Carnival is spraying your friends and family with a snow-like substance appropriately named *Nieve* or snow in Spanish. For only 100 pesos a can you can completely cover your friends in white foam, wildly popular with the kids. In total I believe that I have seen eleven hours of carnival. Five in Ituzaingo, a small city in Corrientes, with my family on vacation, and six in Capital Corrientes, the capital of Corrientes (great naming system, right?) with a load of other exchange students. We spent the day in Corrientes, walking along the coast and eating some of the roadside cuisine and our night at the Carnival, living up our time away from home.

In the past few months since the last Beavertale I have traveled quite a bit, Corrientes Capital, Ituzaingo, but the best ones so far has definitely been my Patagonia voyage and to Uruguai in Brazil. Patagonia was a rotary sanctioned trip, which means that we were all exchange students on the trip, even our authority figures were Rotex, (rebound exchange students). The first thing you need to know about traveling to Patagonia is the bus. It was a 8000 kilometer or 92 hour trip, all done over the span of 17 days. We stayed in hotels and such for some amount of that time, but really the bus was our home. We ate on the bus, slept on the bus, and got to know each other pretty well in that cramped space. The bus had two levels, one with spacious, comfy armchairs, and one with your average travel bus seats. Every day it was a constant competition to see who got to sit downstairs.

The climate control too was less than perfect. The heater was doing its job but its use was flawed. The back of the bus would fill with heat while the front would become very chilly. The bottom of the bus was, of course, just right. On top of all that the bathroom didn't always work. Needless to say every opportunity to get off the bus was a breathtaking relief, just like the scenery. Every place we went was beautiful in its own spectacular way. Between boating the waters of Ushuaia, the end of the word, to whale watching, to the chocolate of Bariloche. Capping it off with the best excursion of all; the glacier hike. After months of enduring the Argentinian heat, Patagonia was a nice reminder of what it was like to feel cold again. Walking on a giant block of ice made that all the more real, snow falling from the sky and ice crunching under your feet. When we weren't on the bus or tromping through the beautiful landscapes, we stayed in cabins or hotels in groups of five or six. For three days we would go sightseeing in or around the city, buying trinkets and food along the way. Now, while the outdoors were easy on the eyes yes, but in our cabins is where we had fun. We spent our free time playing games, cooking, eating and making easy friendships. In fact, that is the part of Patagonia I miss the most. The constant companionship of like minded people around me wherever I went, making the kinds of memories that last a lifetime.

[Patagonia, Ushuaia – The End Of the World]



The second trip that has really impacted me on this exchange was to Uruguaiiana. Uruguaiiana is not your Sao Paulo or Buenas Aires, it's a small town in Brazil with no movie theater and no shopping mall, but a very nice interact club. My interact club in Resistencia has their own private exchange with the Uruguaiiana club, every year they visit each other's city and stay for around ten days, touring the city and learning a bit of the others language along the way (Now I can say hi in portuguese!). In total eight of us went, my current host parents, three guys, three girls and of course, me. We stayed at the house of a wonderful lady named Cecilia and her husband Julio. They deserve a grand mention for putting up with many rowdy kids day in and day out. Their house was our base of operations, every day the interact kids would arrive at our house, have lunch there or eat out somewhere, and then we would hit the town. Someday we visited museums or the Argentinian consulate, but usually we went out on the town looking for souvenirs or fun things to do. Initially it was awkward when we tried to organize our plans. Hardly any of us spoke portuguese, and vice versa for the Brazilians, except for their exchange student from Mexico. Communicating took a while and the language barrier never fully disappeared, but by the time we left we didn't need language to communicate anymore. While we were busy getting confused by the portuguese, the Brazilians shared with us their music, and tried to teach us to dance the samba. Being particularly bad at dancing in general, I didn't pick it up. The Argentinians however learned how surprisingly fast (although I suppose they dance all the time). Apart from the dancing we shopped and visited the Argentinian consulate, met many more Brazilians and the Mexican exchange student that lived there. Time with her was particularly entertaining, since she brought hot sauces and spicy snacks. South americans don't eat very much spicy food, so they have a low tolerance. Watching their faces turn red was quite the sight.



(Brazil, Uruguaiiana with the local Interact club)

As I know that the new exchange students have been recently chosen, so I have a few things to say for the new outbounds who might be reading this (feel free to read if you aren't an outbound, I'm not picky).

As a boy I participated in the Scouts program, and all those leading up to it (beavers, cubs). One motto was prevalent between them; be prepared. For cubs and scouts at least. Little beaver John hadn't a clue what was going on. He was in it for the snacks. I thought about that motto quite a bit before leaving for Argentina. There's quite a lot to try and prepare for in a year long exchange. There's vaccines to take, friends to make farewells with and mounds of cultural research. But there is so much that you can't prepare for, so much things that you have to learn on the fly or get hammered into your head over time. It can be difficult and it can drive you crazy, but there is a point where it gets easier, when you can speaking improves or just when you understand your life better. It can take time, but it is so rewarding once you reach that place.

One more thing, exchange is hyped up to be a very momentus thing, which in all rights it is. However, it will not always feel momentus. What did I do yesterday? Nothing. The day before too. It takes a while to realize that it isn't an everyday adventure. Were live in another country for a year. We're not adventurers, we're not questing for the holy grail, we're living. And sometimes life is boring af. But that also means that a lot of the times you have to make your life into the way you want it to be. Find new interests and hobbies and get out of your comfort zone. That's the best way to enjoy exchange.

John