

# **Hanging with the Penguins at the End of the World: A Proposed Trip to Ushuaia, Argentina**

**David Wimmer**



When I was six years-old, my Kindergarten class took a field trip to the zoo. You know, watching the monkeys swinging from trees, hearing the lions roar, and driving every adult within a mile radius insane...pretty standard stuff, right? Well, for me, it was life-changing, and not for the aforementioned reasons. You see, I was absolutely transfixed by one exhibit, and one exhibit alone. My teacher and chaperones actually lost track of me, and they had to drag/bribe me to leave the ominous and slightly odoriferous cave at which I had spontaneously decided to take up residence. What could possibly have held a Kindergartener's attention longer than an episode of Power Rangers?

Penguins, of course! How could anything so awkwardly adorable even exist? I could've spent hours watching them waddle around their little habitat, bumping and nudging each other clumsily only to dive into the water with the utmost grace. At that moment I decided that my parents absolutely *needed* to acquire a penguin live in my backyard, to which they responded very well, in retrospect, by gently teaching me the reasons why penguins can't live in Oregon backyards, or for that matter, anyone's backyards. Though I was crestfallen, that revelation merely diverted my penguin-crazy energy, and I proceeded to do such things as baffle my teacher by volunteering to talk to my class about penguins, as well as start a collection of all things penguin that would have embarrassed the middle school version of myself.

Fast forward sixteen years or so and now I am a "mature" (what?) senior at Rice. Though I no longer entertain notions of penguin ownership, I do try as best I can to nurture a different goal: speaking Spanish and experiencing Latin American culture. I went on exchange to Costa Rica and absolutely loved it, and most recently I traveled with a Hispanic Studies course to the fascinating country of Cuba, which is more than I ever thought I would accomplish in my lifetime. In a fit of recent procrastination, however, I envisioned an altogether different

revolutionary idea: what if I could combine my love of penguins with my love of exploring Spanish-speaking countries?

Many procrastinated hours later, I had what seemed to me the perfect plan: a trip to Ushuaia, Argentina. Located on the Southern tip of Tierra del Fuego, this little town is the perfect launching pad to see a number of penguin rookeries. Magellan penguins venture up the mainland shores to the national park adjacent to Ushuaia, where tourists can roam amongst them. The most wonderful thing about penguins is that they have no real fear of humans: none of their natural predators are even remotely similar to our bipedal physiology! Thus, while tourists cannot initiate contact with penguins, many will approach (and occasionally nudge or nip at!) humans in their general vicinity. Such an excellent opportunity to interact with penguins is simply not available in the states, and quite rare around the world even then!

My time at the end of the world would last about a week, which would give me enough time to see as many penguins as possible! Additionally, consistent with my goals of speaking as much Spanish as possible, I would try to stay away from the most touristy destinations in Ushuaia. That may be a difficult task, but it would be less difficult in Buenos Aires! While in Argentina, I would be remiss to visit its renowned capital and see a few of the many sites to see there, as well as compare it to both Havana and San José, the two other major Latin American cities with which I'm familiar.

While this trip still seems a bit farfetched to me, it would quite literally be a fulfillment of my childhood dreams. I can think of no better way to both improve my Spanish and have a truly penguin-centric cultural experience in a new country. I'd like to thank the Goliard Board for offering Rice students amazingly unique travel opportunities such as this.

### **Approximate Budget**

Airfare: IAH-USH-EZE-IAH	\$1,900
Lodging: Ushuaia	\$80/night x 7 = \$560
Lodging: Buenos Aires	\$50/night x 5 = \$250
Penguin Tours	\$200
<b>Total</b>	\$2910