

Ushuaia & Buenos Aires



It all got underway in Buenos Aires with a dynamite dinner and tango show. This sensuous, sexy dance is to Buenos Aires what flamenco is to Madrid. Maybe even more. There are dance halls where locals show off their moves, street dancers who stop pedestrian traffic, as well as the glitzy shows. It's enticing, spell binding.

But we came to ski, not dance. Ushuaia, a port city surrounded by snowy peaks with Argentina a population of 55,000, is at the bottom of the country, 3,000 kilometers from Buenos Aires in the Tierra del Fuego province and some 1,100 kilometers from Antarctica. The ski week got off to a lively start with the city's welcome ceremony. Through the streets, we followed local children carrying the flags of the countries represented to a hall and museum where the mayor and other officials greeted us.

The museum is Ushuaia's former jail and military prison. In the late 19th century, Argentina wanted to colonize this distant post and decided to establish a prison there for "second offenders." The convicts were put to work building the prison which was not completed until 1920. It was closed in 1947.

The museum exhibits shed light on prison life. In the same building is the Maritime Museum with displays on Antarctica expeditions.

Next day off to the slopes at the nearby resort, **Cerro Castor, a lovely ski area** with lots of wide open cruising runs and pleasant woodsy and stone lodges. We were most impressed with the organization and attentiveness at the rental facility. Only a few participants brought their own skis and boots. At Cerro Castor, in addition to distributing skis and boots in record time, the staff even helped us on and off with our boots.

The weather in Ushuaia tends to be gray. It is said it either rains or snows almost every day. It had been drizzling in the city the day before our giant slalom competition but it was snow on the slopes so we had excellent racing conditions. And, because we were such a small number, we each had the opportunity to ski the course twice, with the best time counting in the final results.

That afternoon we attended a round table discussion with ex-combatants, **several former soldiers wearing tan leather jackets loaded with medals, from the Malvinas (Falkland Islands).** They explained their con-





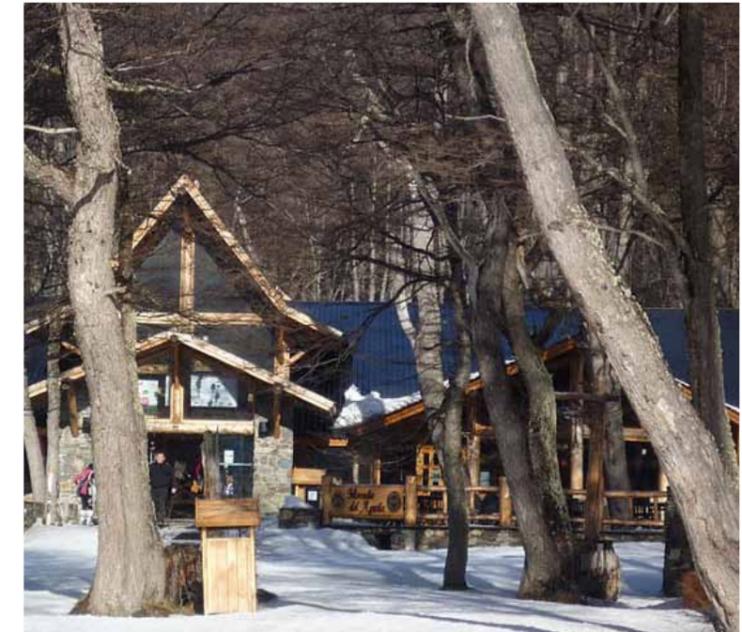
viction that the Malvinas belong to Argentina, not Great Britain, and related how they have been ignored by the Argentinean government, presumably since they lost the war. And, they let us know they'd be ready to fight again to reclaim the islands now inhabited by British citizens.

There was time for more than skiing during our week at the end of the world.

We had a bus tour and walk through the **National Park in Tierra del Fuego**, a vast area of forests, peat bogs, and water. The guide told us about the early inhabitants in this area, the Yamana, who went naked in this frigid environment and had constant fires to keep them warm, even in their boats, hence the origin of the name Tierra del Fuego (land of fire) as it was called by European explorers.

We took a ride on the “**End of the World Train**,” an old steam train that, some 100 years ago, brought prisoners to the area to cut trees to supply wood for heating and building purposes for the prison in Ushuaia. Fields of tree stumps still abound in the area. In this climate it takes ages for trees to regenerate.

And, we took a boat ride in the Beagle Channel, the body of water which connects Ushuaia to the Atlantic Ocean. We stopped off shore of an island where hundreds of sea lions lounged on the rocks. Hanging out behind them were flocks of Imperial Argentina11 Cormorants, large regal black birds with long necks and white bellies which can dive to a depth of 80 meters. The sea lions, a noisy, stinky lot, live in harems, we learned. A great photo opp.



Nation's night is a tradition at SCIJ meets. Participants bring refreshments (liquid and solid) from their respective countries to share. It's a feast: Italian pasta, Russian caviar, French foie gras, Swiss cheese, Finish reindeer sausage, Swedish salmon, Belgian chocolate, etc. – all washed down with an incredible variety of international alcoholic beverages.

SCIJ members are a tough lot. Party until the wee hours, but fit for the slopes early the next morning. **The cross-country race** demands extra stamina. It's always fun. An après-race tradition is Dutch pea soup made by the team from Holland. Unfortunately the ingredients did not make it through Argentinean customs, but this did not stop the innovative Dutch who used local produce to concoct a tasty soup.

After the race we participated in a variety of snow activities: snow mobiling, dog sledding and snow shoeing. We followed a leader on the snow mobiles, but I was anxious to race across the snow on my own in the vehicle for even more thrills. Sledding was super. I love the dogs and am always amazed at their speed and power.





As everyone knows, **Argentina is beef country**. We had our share of bovine flesh as well as some lamb. The assado is a staple: a variety of cuts and sometimes sausage grilled and served on the “parilla,” a small grill. Very tasty, especially with chimichurri, the spicy Argentine sauce made from parsley, olive oil, garlic, vinegar and hot pepper flakes. There are numerous versions with additional flavorings such as paprika, cumin, cilantro...

Then there are the wines. **We savored many a glass of the famous red wine, Malbec**, but also discovered some delectable whites (Chardonnay and Sauvignon Blanc). The beer is also good. You can find it in three colors: blonde, red and black.

After the ski week, I returned to Buenos Aires and from there my friend Isabel and I continued to **Iguazu Falls**.

Text: Leah Larkin





