

RAPA NUI...Easter Island... copyright Geof Prigge
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What a depressing history this place has...for over a thousand years the inhabitants of Rapa Nui toiled laboriously to carve giant moias in reverence to their ancestors, only to be destroyed by the very clans who spent years in some instances carving them out of the volcanic basalt. Each clan in desperate attempts to attain the dwindling food and wood supplies of the island, destroyed each others statues as a demoralising method to drive their opponents to despair.

Then in 1722 the Dutch navigator van Roggeveen arrived on Easter Sunday and his men, on coming ashore, opened fire on what had by then become a peaceful race of people surviving happily in the south pacific sunshine. Many were injured and over a dozen killed in what appeared to be retaliation for the simple act of one native being inquisitive and wanting to touch the tunics of the visitors.

Over the next hundred and forty years things worsened. In an attempt to supply Peru with slave labour, opportunistic ship owners arrived in their poorly equipped vessels and forcibly took away the inhabitants to Peru to work in shocking conditions digging for guano, which had accumulated over the years as mineral rich droppings from seabirds on the Chincha Islands, and which had become Peru's most lucrative export. Inhabitants of Easter Island were not the only race of people taken away. Inhabitants of many Pacific islands fell victim to these slave raids.

On one ship 439 of the 470 people were thrown overboard due either to death or being so close to death that they were not considered worth feeding. Most who made it to Peru died of disease in deplorable working conditions, and it wasn't until the intervention of Monsieur Edmond de Lesseps who secured the release of the remaining living islanders and who assisted in their repatriation. However this was not the end of their unfortunate internment. Their return to Rapa Nui was yet another horrifying journey. Of the 1407 Easter Islanders who had been taken to Peru by force or deceit, all but 100 died there as a result of the conditions, and 85 of these died on the journey back. The fifteen who made it home were infected with smallpox leading to the deaths of a thousand more.

Surprisingly, the remainder of the population then in the mid 1800's (1862 in fact), survived although many were decimated by the last of the Peruvian slave raids in the next two years reducing the population from 4000 to 1700. It was during this period that the last of those able to interpret the unique *rongo rongo* script perished. Amongst them were the island's king, Kai Makoi, his son Mayrata and other members of the royal family, chiefs and priests. A most unique written script in which every alternate line was reversed, forcing the reader to turn the text upside down to continue reading. Known as the boustrophedon form, all attempts to decipher it over the ensuing years have failed.

This though was not the end of the problems for the Easter Islanders. Additional explorers, whalers, adventurers, missionaries, scientists and finally tourists have all done their best to take something from either the island itself or the islanders.

On December 19 1886, one of the worst events occurred, the arrival of the USS Mohican. Paymaster William J Thomson and the ship's surgeon Dr G H Cooke carried out more desecration and vandalism, theft of sacred items and destruction of tombs than all who had preceded them. Two years after this visit, Chile annexed the island, and although it did little good and an exceptional amount of harm, at least it stopped such vandals from doing further harm. During the first seventy years of colonial ownership, Chile proved to the rest of the world, that it had no experience whatsoever in colonising. The government and its lessees were guilty of neglect and cruelty toward the islanders. No respect was shown toward their ceremonial ways and in fact the ceremonial buildings at Orongo were dismantled and the ancient stones used in the construction of 'more useful' buildings elsewhere.

In 1928 revolutions shook Chile and the government did what had previously been suggested. They used the island for convicts, sending dissident politicians there to be as far away from the mainland as possible.

By 1937, Chile was ready to get rid of ownership of Easter Island altogether, and offered it to England, Germany, The United States, and Japan. Fortunately, although Japan was the only one to show interest, negotiations eventually broke down. Had Japan acquired the island, WWII could well have had a different outcome.

The Chilean government was still trying to rid itself of the island and continued to carry out floggings and head shaving for minor infractions. The fence which contained the people of Easter Island within the confines of Hanga Roa, was heightened and barbed wire positioned all around the town. In 1956 however, a change started. The Chilean government allowed a few select children to move to the mainland so as to get a good education. One of them, Alfonso Rapu, returned to the island in 1963 as a teacher and mayor. He was charismatic and intelligent, and encouraged the people to take no more of the unjust ways of the Chilean government. Together with Tahitian born Francis Maziere, they forced change.

The Chilean authorities began to realise that world-wide attention was being drawn to the plight of the islanders, and if it didn't want the people to apply to the US or France for protection or worse still to declare independence, it had better do something. In 1966 it passed a law making the island part of the city of Valparaiso, and in June of the same year the inhabitants of Rapa Nui became citizens of Chile.

In 1967 the first tourist expeditions started led by Hanns Ebensten whose vision was to allow people not just to come briefly and leave, but to stay longer and learn properly about what the island had to offer.

In 1988 a team of German scientists arrived, but their efforts of copying the statues by applying silicon rubber and epoxy resin damaged some moais considerably and then a few years later the Japanese came and filmed the resurrection of some of the fallen statues to promote their Tadano Crane company whose big yellow crane remained a part of the landscape for two years. Their contact with the locals was very strained at times, due mainly to their arrogant approach to everything they did.

1993 saw the invasion of Hollywood and although many islanders benefited from the increase in employment possibilities, the result of the film *Rapa Nui* being filmed there was not all positive. Damage was again done to archaeological remains, and the film crew were often unpleasant in their dealings with the locals. At least they cleaned up when they left, and many islanders have a better standard of living due to the film having been made there.

An idea recently suggested to the island's mayor Pedro Edmuds Paoa was to finally turn the tide on the suffering of the many forms of misfortune experienced over the centuries. I put forward the following suggestion to council...

Upon arrival, every visitor would be given a sapling to plant at a designated area on the island. They'd dig a small hole, plant the tree, and the council garden staff would water it along with all the others that people were continually planting, to keep it alive. Ten years down the track, the People's Park would be a strong reminder of a positive impact that visitors have had, rather than the negative impact so common on the island over the centuries. Obviously consultation with a forestry expert to ascertain most suitable species would be essential prior to embarking on this plan.

The 21st century could therefore be an ongoing tree planting period...ongoing ad infinitum in fact, encouraging migrating birds, giving shade to anyone stopping to rest and improving the aesthetic quality of the island, and perhaps sometime in the future returning it to its former tree-covered glory.

I put the suggestion forward sincerely hoping that if implemented, islanders would at last be true masters of their own destiny, without the intrusion of parasites coming for nothing else than their own gain.

It remains to be seen that if in the 21st century, islanders will at last be those masters of their own destiny.

CHILE...SURPRISES AT EVERY TURN...Copyright by Geof Prigge
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Pre-historic cacti, seaweed along the rocks, seagulls larger than life, surging swell, fine white sandy beaches...this is Isla Damas on Chile's coast in the Coquimbo region.

This wonderful sanctuary off the mid Chilean coast is one of three islands known locally as Tres Islas...Isla Choros, Isla Damas and Isla Gaviota, and the area is home not only to a vast array of cacti, some with spectacular and delicate flowers, but also to sea-lions, cormorants, bottle-nosed dolphins and Humboldt penguins. For 5000 pesos (about \$AU13) you can go by fishing boat to all three islands and spot an amazing variety of these and more.

There's no human habitation apart from the odd camper to disturb the tranquillity...and remote, that's not the word for it. The closest city of La Serena is 123km away and the final 45 kilometres is a rough winding dirt road.

The village that you reach before embarking on the fishing boats that take you out to the islands has no mobile phone service, no internet and no paved roads. It is however a delightfully dusty fishing village called Punta De Choros on the southern extremity of the Atacama Desert. There's an array of cabanas to choose from, and some even offer hot water. The pick is Las Ananucas Amarilis owned by Juan and Sylvia...tel: 09-447 5200.

There are a couple of shops for provisions, but there's not a lot on offer, except the beautiful peace and quiet.

Offshore, the underwater visibility is crystal clear. You can witness sea lions and dolphins performing antics above and below the surface. Just lean out over the side of the boat and you can behold all sorts of surprises, the antics of the dolphins being the favourite for most visitors.

Chile offers this sort of experience regularly, the tranquillity of nature that is. The country is long and narrow, but varied in the extreme. From warm sub-tropical beaches to inland deserts, spectacular mountains and glaciers at the bottom of the world, Chile offers the visitor a different adventure at every turn.

To give a few examples, consider this. The island of Isla Magdalena is a short boat trip from Punta Arenas. The town itself is fascinating in that it attracts all sorts of people. It's quite an eclectic bunch of folk who congregate down here from adventure freaks and research scientists, to trekkers and wilderness aficionados to general tourists, cruise ship junkies and mountain bikers.

Accommodation is varied as always but Hospedaje Gloria at 1174 Mejicana Tel: 227678 and email: yoya_h@hotmail.com at 6000 pesos per person, is a better deal than many around town. 9000 pesos though gets you a bit more value, the best in this range being La Estancia at 765 O'Higgins Ave. right in the heart of town Tel: 056-61 249130. Email: carmenalecl@yahoo.com

Apart from a visit to the island where it's possible to meet a few thousand Humboldt penguins in an afternoon, you can also choose almost any adventure you can think of, and go and do it. This is the southern-most inhabited area in the world, and the departure point for Antarctic expeditions. So it's a hub for south-

bound expeditions of all sorts. As well, it's only a few hours drive from Punta Arenas and Puerto Natales, the departure point for trekking into the Patagonian Mountains. There's very little accommodation available inside the park, so most people choose to stay in Puerto Natales at either or both ends of a trip into the park itself. One of the friendliest is Sutherland Residencial Lodging at Barros Arana 155. Tel: 410359. The owner Margarita is lovely. She suggested dinner at the Restaurant Espanol around the corner on Avenue Magdalena and the meal we had was superb, a steak that was cooked to perfection. The owner told us that the cows eat only grass and breathe the best air in the world. No chemicals are used during their life.

The park itself is 100km away. Once there you should spend several days either trekking or simply walking whenever you can. There are waterfalls, snow-capped mountains, spectacular scenery and glaciers galore. The three hour boat journey to and from the glacier we visited was spectacular at every turn. The highlight was the fantastic blues of the glacier itself. We were all treated to scotch on the rocks and whisky sours with 5 million year old ice. The ice looked so clear and perfect...and after 4 of them we were all quite merry as we chugged away across the lake.

From Punta Arenas we flew north, our next stop being Petrohue. We stayed in a hostel that was pretty rough...a sort of annexe to the main house which was the residence for the camping ground. At 18000 pesos a night for a double with ensuite, it was certainly not cheap. The location however was great.

After settling in, we went back across to the other side of the waterway to see what was happening with tours etc, and as luck would have it, a boat trip around the lake and to the nearby island was leaving within minutes, so we joined in and went. It was well worth it. This lake with the imposing volcanoes is quite dramatic. It's very special to see a snow-capped volcano rising out of a lake. The boat trip took half an hour and we had a great guide by the name of Christian Ruz Parga, who told us that the park is one of the oldest in the country, being gazetted in 1926. It's 250,000ha in size, and there are 3 volcanoes here, one extinct at 2460m, another whose last activity was in 1830, and finally one at 2015m which erupted in quite spectacular fashion in 1961. The highest mountain in the area is 3500m and has 7 glaciers, 4 on the Argentinean side and 3 here. The colour of the lake is due to the minerals from these glaciers as they melt. Salmon and trout are the prominent species.

After 30 mins we arrived at the island, pulled into the private wharf and walked throughout the island for about an hour. Purchased by a Swiss family in 1906, they truly found paradise. Thousand year old trees, beautiful beaches and an inland lake make a perfect setting. The original circular house still stands. The plan was to have it rotating, but the cost was too high to do so. They do however have a hydro-electric system where the fall of the water from the underground spring after it rises, is used to supply electricity for the homestead. It was all quite impressive.

After our tour and more information from Christian on the flora and fauna of the island, we headed back and boarded the boat. The wind had come up and a few white horses made the scene even more dramatic. Our night at the rustic hostel was great with the moon shining upon the lake waters and shadows of volcanoes changing by the minute.

We left late the next morning and ventured to Peulla, staying in the upstairs loft in the home of the Martinez family. Each day we were able to find new and interesting places to stay and people to share a meal with. This family was not too well off and jumped at the opportunity of having paying guests. Senora Martinez cooked a delicious meal for us and the children enjoyed practising their English. We used this as a base for our horse-riding adventures, but found time for swims and walks to waterfalls and simply relaxing too.

Next on our itinerary was Ensenada, one of the most beautiful places imaginable. The scenery was like this...to the west it was all lake, as far as the eye could see and big enough to create the illusion that it's the sea. The setting sun turns whatever clouds are on the horizon to liquid gold. To the south east is the volcano called Volcan Osorno, with snow all year round. The forests are everywhere, with just the small spread-out village along the shores of the lake. Over a dozen lakes and lagoons of various sizes are sprinkled amongst the forests and are mostly linked by roads except for the inaccessible ones that you can only get to by 4WD or horse. All of them are within an afternoon's drive or boat ride. The blues of the lakes, fjords and the sky are amazing. Near to where we stayed was also a green lagoon known as *Laguna Verde*. Its deep emerald colour was beautiful. There were lots of rafting possibilities with grade 3 and 4 drops, but the most impressive thing of all was that you could ski within a thirty minute drive from the main lake and watch people sailing as you carved turns on the hillside of a volcano that last erupted in 1961, thus making it far from extinct. It's active and ready to go off whenever mother nature feels like it. From skiing and mountain-climbing to white-water rafting, horse riding and windsurfing, to mountain-biking, kite-surfing and sailing, there is all this and lots more to do there...and much of it all year round! It's an extremely impressive environment.

We stayed at Hospedaje La Arena with the Luckeheide family and the email address is nic_luck@hotmail.com

This is the area in which Douglas Tompkins of Esprit fame has called home. He uses a nearby village (Ralun) as a base to fight the Chilean government on environmental issues. Some years ago he sold off 75% of his company specifically to buy 275,000ha of rainforest in the Valley of the Rio Gonzalo and has plans to protect the area ad infinitum.

Our next stop was Chonchi and we stayed at the Hospedaje Esmeralda on the waterfront, which at low tide was a bit drab. High tide always improves things and it was no exception in Chonchi. We had what was known as the Fisherman's Room and it was a bit like being aboard an old sailing ship. The cost was 12000 pesos a night for the room. Tel (65) 671328 and email is:

carlosgrady@hotmail.com The Canadian owner of the place, Carl Grady, is quite eccentric and has lots of stories to share. The town was very sleepy until 15 years ago when the salmon industry kicked in. Until then most of the townsfolk didn't even own a pair of shoes, but now, they are quite affluent in a Chilean sort of way. The church was the brightest building in town being several shades of blue, but inside, the majority of the roof was supported by rough tree trunks as a temporary measure to ensure it stays standing. Many of the other buildings are still of timber construction and a bit rough around the edges.

There was still plenty more in our two month holiday in and around Chile. Next stop was Cucao, a delightful little coastal village on the Lago Cucao where the River Cole Cole enters. The best accommodation was a new hostel...the Parador Darwin, which is owned and operated by a German woman by the name of Susi from Freiburg and her Chilean husband Rolando, an artist and photographer. Their place is fantastic. Situated a few metres past the new bridge, they offer large private rooms with shared bath in a delightful garden setting. Her restaurant at the garden entrance serves beautiful goulash and home-made cakes. We discovered this hostel after hearing melodic jazz music coming from the place on our return from a walk through the national park (Parque Nacional Chiloe) and along the beach. Her website is www.cucao.cl and tel: 0056-97999923 and 98840702. The National Park camping area is far better than most we'd seen in Chile in that each site offers privacy with trees everywhere.

Our final stop in this section of the trip before returning to Santiago and venturing on to Rapa Nui (Easter Island) was Pisco Elqui, (renamed after the alcoholic beverage they produce here). Our accommodation was more up-market than usual at the El Tesoro de Elqui for 28000 pesos a night including breakfast, more than double the normal rate we'd been paying, but there was a pool there and the whole place is built in an impressive oasis. Their email address is: info@tesoro-elqui.cl and website: www.tesoro-elqui.cl tel: (56) 51-451069. The sunsets through the hills were magic every day. Long shadows blanketed the town as each night arrived. We'd come because it was a UFO spotting area. Whether any had been seen over the years or it was the effect of the local Pisco is anyone's guess, but this remote Chilean town was the perfect conclusion to our holiday before heading back to the capital and across the Pacific.