

60 LATIN-AMERICAN PARAGRAPHS

Text and photos by João Vicente Ganzarolli de Oliveira

Senior Professor of the Tércio Pacitti Institut
of the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro, Brazil

The next Augustan age will dawn on the other side of the Atlantic. There will, perhaps, be a Thucydides at Boston, a Xenophon at New York, and, in time, a Virgil at Mexico, and a Newton at Peru. At last, some curious traveller from Lima will visit England and give a description of the ruins of St Paul's, like the editions of Balbec and Palmyra.

Horace Walpole

1 As the British historian Edwin Williamson states in the very first lines of his second to none *Penguin History of Latin America*, “The history of Latin America has fascinated observers as much as it has mystified them. There is something alien about the continent, an exotism that derives perhaps from it having once been perceived as a ‘new world’, although there survive monuments and relics of ancient societies whose cultures remain poorly understood by us even today.”.



Somewhere in Latin America

2 Absent from the usual tourist circuits, the Mission San Ignacio de Arareko “was established in the 18th century by Jesuit missionaries seeking to spread their faith among the region's indigenous communities. As a result, this mission served as both a place of worship and a settlement, playing a pivotal role in shaping the local way of life. Throughout the centuries, the mission has stood the test of time and witnessed the ups and downs of historical events, from the Mexican War of Independence to the Revolution. Today, its architectural splendor stands as a testament to its resilience and becomes a captivating destination for both history buffs and the spiritually inclined.” (Equipo Creel Sierra Tarahumara. “La Misión de San Ignacio de Arareko en Creel, Chihuahua”, in <https://www.creelsierratarahumara.com/post/la-misión-de-san-ignacio-de-arareko-en-creel-chihuahua>).



Mission de San Ignacio de Arareco, Chihuahua, in northern Mexico

3 The construction of the San Juan Chamula church dates back to 1843. Not far from San Cristóbal de las Casas, the cultural capital of the southern Mexican state of Chiapas, the tiny city of San Juan Chamula is a typical example of the fusion between Iberian and pre-Columbian culture, notably Mayan. Almost all of its 80.000 inhabitants are Indigenous and speak languages of Mayan origin, mainly the Tzotzil.



San Juan Chamula

4 The oldest signs of human presence in the Mexican archaeological site of Tula date back to around 400 BCE.



Tula, in Central Mexico

5 When, why and what exactly for were carved the world-renowned Atlantean statues from Tula are still questions without precise answers. Nobody knows such things for sure. Notwithstanding, they should not be older than circa A.D. 750m, period during which the Tolteca Empire itself was carved up.



Tula, in Central Mexico

6 What is this African girl thinking while contemplating these giants made of limestone, sandstone, and volcanic rock? The precise purpose they served in the Toltec society is unknown, as we have seen in our previous paragraph.



Tula, in Central Mexico

7 Anyway, there is no doubt whatsoever as to the fact these monumental figures were very important for that pre-Columbian culture, since their process of carving must have been very time-consuming.



Tula, in Central Mexico

8 Do those Atlantean figures really represent Toltec warriors, as the official archaeology uses to claim? In any case, “Though the most famous Atlantean figures reside in Tula, the Olmecs were the first to use Atlantean figures on a relief discovered in Potrero Nuevo. Mayan sculptors also created ‘Atlantean’ figures in Chichen Itza. Furthermore, the Aztecs also created warrior statues strongly inspired by these Atlantean figures in Tula.” (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Atlantean_figures#Dating).



Tula, in Central Mexico

9 Devastated by the earthquake of 1773, the old Baroque churches of Antigua, in Guatemala, did not lose neither their architectural magnificence neither their religious symbolism of linking our world to Heaven.



Antigua, Guatemala

10 For many people, Guatemala is the most interesting country in Central America; for everyone, however, Antigua is seen as the most representative city of colonial Guatemala.



Antigua, Guatemala

11 Abandoned by its inhabitants circa one thousand years ago and being one of the most representative sites of the Maya civilization, Copán is an archaeological site that lies in western Honduras, close to the Guatemalan border. This ancient Maya city “mirrors the beauty of the physical landscapes in which it flourished – a fertile, well-watered mountain valley in western Honduras at an elevation of 600 meters (1,970 feet) above mean sea level.” (<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Copán>).



Copán, in Honduras

12 Amazonia “represents over half of the total area of remaining rainforests on Earth, and comprises the largest and most biodiverse tract of tropical rainforest in the world, with an estimated 390 billion individual trees in about 16,000 species.” (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Amazon_rainforest).



Brazilian Amazonia

13 Built in Art Nouveau style on the banks of the Rio Negro, which is the largest left-bank tributary of the Amazon River, the Mercado Adolpho Lisboa is the most famous market of Manaus, which happens to be the biggest city in whole Amazonia.



Mercado Adolpho Lisboa, in Manaus

14 This photo was taken in 1999, but the situation hasn't changed: the waterfront of the modern city of Manaus continues to serve as a garbage dump.



Manaus, capital of the Brazilian state of Amazonas

15 Located on the border between the northern Argentine and southern Brazil, the Iguazu Falls (in Portuguese, *Cataratas do Iguazú*) are a series of waterfalls on the Iguazu River that, together, make up the largest waterfall system in the whole world.



Iguazu Waterfalls

16 These ruins are what remains of *São Miguel das Missões* (Portuguese for “St. Michael of the Missions”), also known as *São Miguel Arcanjo*, and by its former Spanish name *Misión de San Miguel Arcángel*, nowadays a UNESCO World Heritage Site located in southern Brazil. The Jesuits started to erect the Mission in 1687, in accordance with a plan regarded as advanced, considering the place and the epoch. Anyway, “a flourishing civilisation arose there, economically prosperous and prolific in cultural and artistic expressions, where European and indigenous elements were mixed, always, however, with a strong European and Christian orientation. But as soon as it reached its apogee, with the construction of its church between 1735 and 1750, its decline began. Caught up in the political and territorial disputes between Portugal and Spain and the controversies surrounding Jesuit activity, it was one of the centres of the Guaraní War and was burned down and depopulated in 1756. Restored and partially repopulated, it survived a few more years under a new administration after the Jesuits were expelled, and their Order suppressed, but it was already in decline. At the beginning of the 19th century, it was looted, and its last inhabitants dispersed, making its ruin inexorable and falling into complete abandonment. The restoration of the structures began in 1925, and since then the site has been increasingly valued, undergoing several restoration interventions and being the subject of several projects to promote its material and immaterial legacy. Its church has become one of the best-known images in Rio Grande do Sul, and the complex is a major tourist attraction. It is also the main centre of the city where it is located, which was formed as a result of its construction and is closely linked to it on many levels. Indigenous Guaraní communities in the surrounding area hold the site as sacred and as part of their collective memory and identity. Because of its important historical, architectural and cultural value, the site was listed by the National Institute of Historic and Artistic Heritage (IPHAN) in 1938, was declared a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1983, along with the ruins of San Ignacio Miní, Nuestra Señora de Santa Ana, Nuestra Señora de Loreto and Santa María La Mayor, located in Argentinian territory, and in 2015 was granted Brazilian Cultural Heritage status by IPHAN for its associations with Guaraní history and spirituality.”. (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ruins_of_São_Miguel_das_Missões).



São Miguel das Missões

17 The year is 1995 and the place is Ancud, a southern Chilean city located in the northernmost part of the Chiloé Archipelago, “known within Chile for its distinctive folklore, mythology, potatoes, cuisine and unique architecture. The culture of Chiloé is the result of mixing of Huilliche, Spanish and Chono influences in centuries of isolation without much contact with the rest of Chile or the Western World. Its cool temperate climate, abundance of sea resources and large and lush forests have also played a major role in shaping life in the islands.” (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chiloé_Archipelago).



Ancud, in Chile, the northernmost door of the island and province of Chiloé

18 Circa 130 years old, 40 metres long, 15 metres wide and with a tower that stretches 25 metres high, the Church of Nercón (*Iglesia Nuestra Señora de Gracia de Nercón*) is situated about 4 kilometres from Castro, the capital of Chiloé. On the year 2000, UNESCO declared it, together with fifteen other Churches of Chiloé, a World Heritage Site.



Iglesia Nuestra Señora de Gracia de Nercón

19 “Through the front door, you have access to the sea (...). Through the back door, you reach the countryside (...). The same family combines boats and carts, fishing grounds and vegetable gardens, rowing and horseback riding, and knows the language of the sea and the forest (...). Everything is harmoniously synthesized in the maritime-country home.” (Rodolfo Urbina Burgos. “Los pueblos de Chiloé”, in *Chiloé a 500 años. Texto consultivo para la educación media chilena*).



Ancud

20 Who painted these petroglyphs? What do they mean? How old are they Nobody knows for sure.



Petroglyphs of Los Andes, not far from Santiago de Chile

21 Who painted these petroglyphs? What do they mean? How old are they Nobody knows for sure.



Petroglyphs of Los Andes, not far from Santiago de Chile; the year is 2000

22 Being one of the most active volcanoes of Chile and located 750 km south of Santiago, the Villarrica Volcano is also one of the most beautiful volcanos in all of South America.



Villarrica Volcano

23 Just as art imitates nature imitates art, sometimes nature seems to imitate art, and there are occasions when nature even imitates nature itself: that is the case of this Patagonian iceberg, with one of its parts similar to the base of a tree that had its trunk ripped out by a saw. At least that's what he looked like the day I saw him, in January 2005.



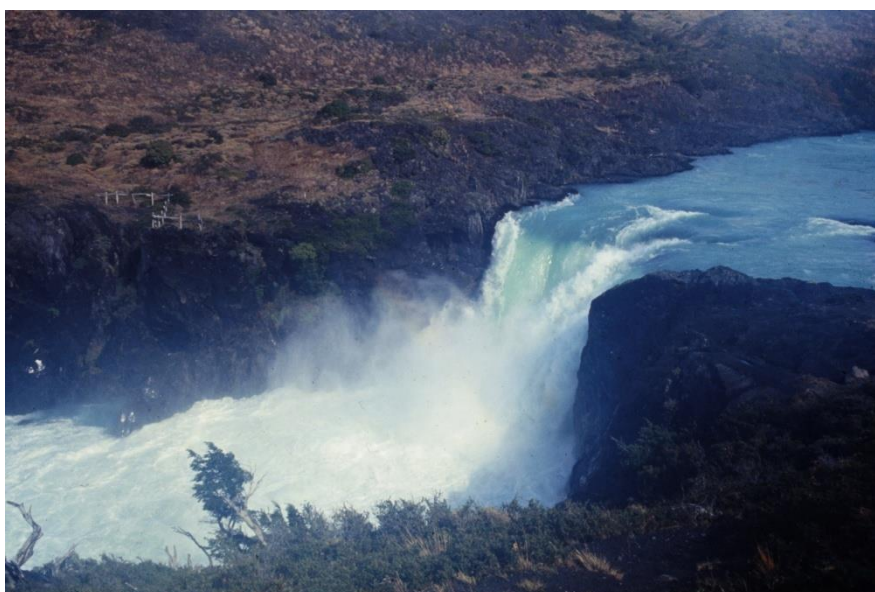
Laguna San Rafael, in Chilean Patagonia

24 Still in Chilean Patagonia lies the National Park of *Torres del Paine*, where lakes, rivers, waterfalls and glaciers are the protagonists.



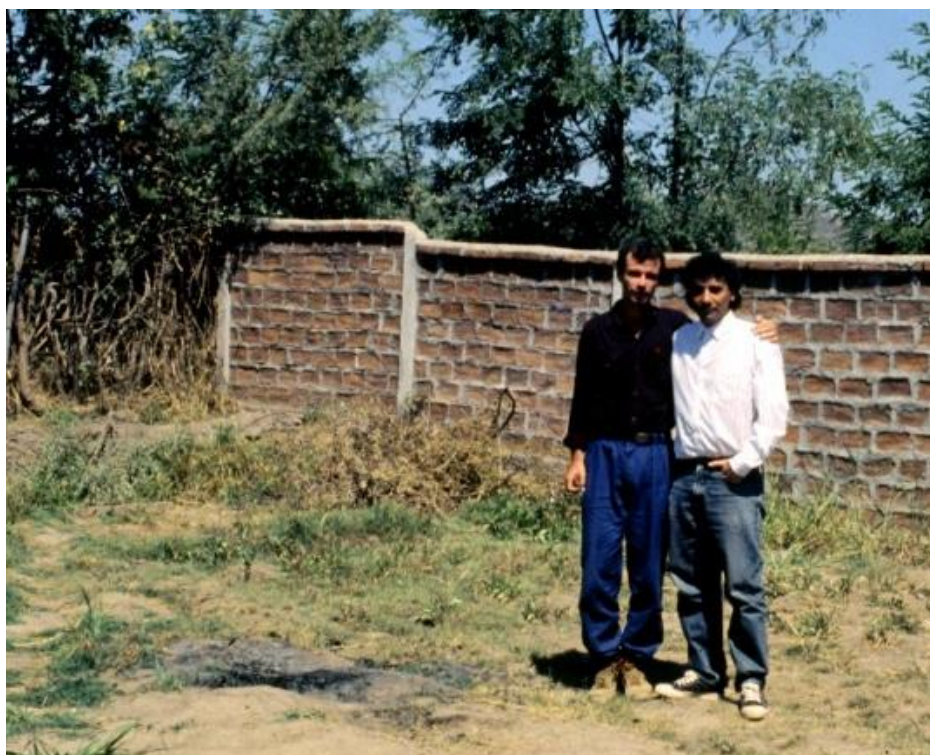
Torres del Paine

25 Covering an area of approximately 242,000 hectares and including the Paine mountain range, the park was founded in the 1950s, and 28 years later, it was declared Biosphere Reserve by UNESCO.



Torres del Paine

26 Here we are, with the Author (left) and the Chilean poet Manuel Vásquez, in Los Andes, his hometown.



Los Andes (1995)

27 Founded in the year 1791 as Santa Rosa de Los Andes, Los Andes is a small Chilean town in the neighbourhood of Santiago, the capital of the country.



Manuel Vásquez and his family, at home

28 Located in the southeastern Pacific Ocean, at the southeasternmost point of the Polynesian Triangle in Oceania and called *Rapa Nui* by its original inhabitants, Easter Island (in Spanish, *Isla de Pascua*) politically belongs to Chile, although it is part of the Polynesian Archipelago.



Easter Island

29 Famous worldwide for its nearly 1,000 gigantic statues, the so-called *moai*, Easter Island is, since 1995, a World Heritage Site.



Easter Island

30 When were the *moai* carved? Between 1100 and 1500 A.D., as most archaeologists maintain, or many millennia earlier, as Scottish author Graham Hancock (1950) suggests?



Easter Island

31 This is Don Ramiro Estévez, parish priest of Easter Island at the time I was there (1995) and whom I had the honor and the pleasure of meeting personally. In the year 2000, I was informed of his death and wrote an article in his honor. One of his main projects ins Eastter Island was to “give Rapa Nui people a sense of faith based on their own cultural background”. (cf. J.V.G.O. “Don Ramiro Estévez: *in memoriam*”, in *Rapa Nui Journal – The International Journal of the Easter Island Foundation*, vol. 14, n° 4), Los Osos, EUA, December 2000).



Don Ramiro Estévez, in 1995

32 Circa 11,000 square kilometres make of the *Salar de Uyuni* the largest salt flat (dry lake bed) in the world.



The Salar de Uyuni, aka “Salar de Tunupa”

33 Not far from the crest of the Andes Mountains, at an elevation of 3,656 m above sea level, the *Salar de Uyuni* lies in southwestern Bolivia.



The Salar de Uyuni, aka “Salar de Tunupa”

34 The Salar “was formed as a result of transformations between several prehistoric lakes that existed around forty thousand years ago but had all evaporated over time. It is now covered by a few meters of salt crust, which has an extraordinary flatness with the average elevation variations within one meter over the entire area of the Salar.” (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Salar_de_Uyuni).



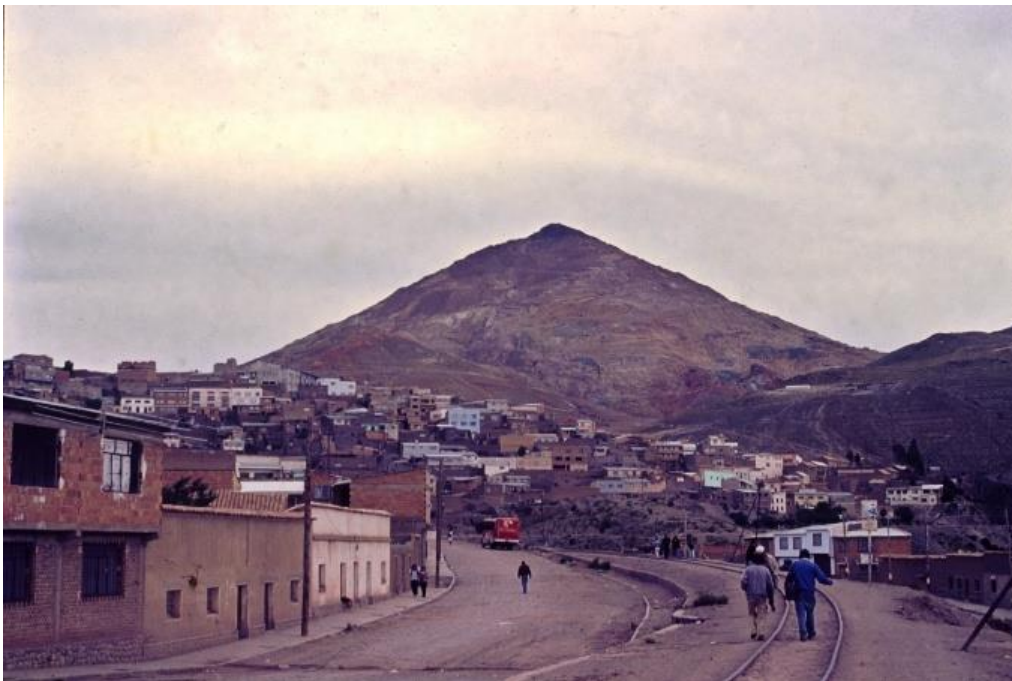
The Salar de Uyuni, aka “Salar de Tunupa”

35 *Salar*, as already indicated, is the Spanish word for salt flat”. *Uyuni* stems from the an Aymara word that means enclosure.



The Salar de Uyuni, aka “Salar de Tunupa”

36 Also a World Heritage Site, “with its rich mining past and its current mining misery” (Ben Box et alii. *South American Handbook*), and standing at 4,070 me, Potosi is the highest city of its size on Earth.



Potosi, in southwestern Bolivia

37 The Mission of Jesús de Tavarangue was founded by the Jesuits in 1685 what is now Alto Paraná, a Paraguayan province located in the south-easternmost part of the country. Its construction was not completed in 1767, the year in which the Jesuit Order was expelled from Spanish America. The suppression of the Society of Jesus was “the removal of all members of the Jesuits from most of Western Europe and their respective colonies beginning in 1759 along with the abolition of the order by the Holy See in 1773; the papacy acceded to anti-Jesuit demands without much resistance. The Jesuits were serially expelled from the Portuguese Empire (1759), France (1764), the Kingdom of Naples and Kingdom of Sicily, Malta, Duchy of Parma and Piacenza, the Spanish Empire (1767) and Austria and Hungary (1782). Historians identify multiple factors causing the suppression. The Jesuits, who were not above getting involved in politics, were distrusted for their closeness to the pope and his power in independent nations’ religious and political affairs. In France, it was a combination of many influences, from Jansenism to free-thought, to the then-prevailing impatience with the Ancien Régime. Monarchies attempting to centralise and secularise political power viewed the Jesuits as supranational, too strongly allied to the papacy, and too autonomous from the monarchs in whose territory they operated.” (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Suppression_of_the_Society_of_Jesus).



Jesús de Tavarangue, in Paraguai

38 How old is Machu Picchu, undoubtedly the the most famous archaeological site of Latin America? No more than 600 years old, as mainstream archaeology says, or much more than that, as Scottish author Graham Hancock suggests? As we can see, the same kind of doubts concerning Easter Island’s *moai* is food for debate here.



Machu Picchu

39 Originated in central Peru, the Chavín culture (c. 900 BC to c. 100 AD) played a founding role in pre-Columbian South America similar to that of the Olmecs in pre-Columbian Mexico. As the renowned Peruvian archaeologist Julio Tello (1880-1947) once asserted, Chavín is the mother culture of Andean civilization, just as Olmec is the “mother culture of Central America”.



Ruins of Chavín de Huántar, in central Peru

40 Having lasted only a century (from 1438 to 1533) and centered in the Andean mountains, the Inca Empire was the largest of all the Pre-columbian empires that emerged thrived and fell in pre-Columbian America.



Somewhere in the Inca Empire

41 Situated in southern Peru and founded in the second half of the 16th century, Arequipa is a true jewel of the Spanish colonial architecture. Among its many cultural attractions, the Monastery of Santa Catalina de Siena is a must-see place, constituting "a true and small city, characterized by its multitude of streets, somewhat tortuous, broken and narrow." (Máximo Neira Avendaño & Guillermo Galdós Rodríguez. *Historia general de Arequipa*).



Monastery of Santa Catalina de Siena, in Arequipa, Peru

42 At least 500 years old and located in the colonial area of Cusco, the capital of the Inca Empire, the twelve-angled stone fits perfectly into the adjacent wall and represents an extraordinary achievement in terms of masonry.



The twelve-angled stone

43 The year is 2000, the background scenery is Cusco's Plaza de Armas and the the lady is the New Zealander Wendy Brown, fonder of *Inti Huahuacuna* (= "House of the Children of the Sun), an institution whose purpose is to care for abandoned Peruvian children.



Ms Wendy Brown, in Cusco, Peru

44 The initiative began in 1993, when Wendy, who worked as a journalist, discovered her main calling: caring for children in need.



Inti Huahuacuna

45 Built on the northern coastline of Peru, Chan Chan is the largest adobe city in the world and was the capital of the Pre-Inca kingdom of Chimú, which existed from 900 to 1470 A. D.



Chan Chan

46 Founded in the year 1573 by Jerónimo Luis de Cabrera, a Spanish conquistador, Córdoba was named after the Spanish city of Córdoba, a name whose etymology leads us to Old Iberian. The Argentinian Córdoba is among the earliest ones of Spanish colonial capitals of the region of present-day Argentina. Only in the 19th century did Buenos Aires (initially called *Ciudad de Nuestra Señora Santa María del Buen Ayre*) acquire the status of federal capital.



Córdoba, Argentina

47 Having had its construction started in 1582 and been officially consecrated in 1706, the Cathedral of Córdoba is dedicated to Our Lady of the Assumption (in Spanish, *Nuestra Señora de la Asunción*). Being the oldest intact church in continuous service in whole Argentina, the Cathedral of Córdoba. Because of its mixture of colonial beauty and historical importance, this church has been declared Humanity's Cultural Heritage by UNESCO.



Córdoba's cathedral, in Argentina

48 A true geological wonder, full of impressive landscapes, “Salta is a province of Argentina, located in the northwest of the country. Neighboring provinces are from the east clockwise Formosa, Chaco, Santiago del Estero, Tucumán and Catamarca. It also surrounds Jujuy. To the north it borders Bolivia and Paraguay and to the west lies Chile” (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Salta_Province).



Salta, Argentina

49 Before the Spanish conquest, which took place in the 16th century, a vast number of indigenous peoples (i.e. the so-called “Diaguitas” and “Calchaquíes”) lived in the 155,48 km² that make up the area of Salta, the sixth largest Argentinian province.



Salta, Argentina

50 Designated by UNESCO as World Heritage Site in 1984, the Jesuit mission of San Ignacio Miní is one among many other missions founded by the followers of St Ignatius of Loyola (1491-1556) in what is now Argentina between the beginning of the 17th century and the end of the 18th century.



San Ignacio Miní, in northern Argentina

51 San Ignacio Miní is one of the so-called Jesuit missions among the Guaraní, who can be defined as an Indigenous group culturally-related to the Tupi. It is believed that, coming from the North, they first settled in Amazonia.



San Ignacio Miní, in northern Argentina

52 Ruins like these have the ability to evoke the past, allowing us, in a way, to see the world through the eyes of those who built them.



San Ignacio Mini, in northern Argentina

53 Indeed, as the German philosopher Arthur Schopenhauer once said, “the true artist is the one who makes the world for us like his eyes” (*Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung*, III, 37).



San Ignacio Mini, in northern Argentina

54 Built and founded around the middle of last century, the Cathedral of Our Lady of Nahuel Huapi (Spanish: *Catedral de Nuestra Señora del Nahuel Huapi*) is an architectonic pearl of the neogothic style, in which the predominantly vertical lines of the building seem to visually echo the Andean mountains that surround it.



Catedral de Nuestra Señora del Nahuel Huapi

55 Located in western Argentina, the province of Mendoza covers an area of 148,827 km² and is known worldwide for its excellent wine and the breathtaking beauty of its Andean landscapes.



Mendoza

56 Here we are in Argentinian Patagonia, face to face with its innumerable penguins.



Somewhere in the extreme south of South America

57 Having arrived in what is now Alaska from Mongolian Asia around 40,000 years ago, the first inhabitants of the Americas slowly spread across this triple continent. In the southernmost tip of South America, for example, humans arrived no more than ten millennia ago. This is the case with the *Cueva de las Manos* (Spanish for “Cave of the Hands”), which has been declared a World Heritage Site by UNESCO.



Cueva de las Manos, in Argentinian Patagonia

58 Just 163 kilometres away from the *Cueva de las Manos* and also located in southwest Argentina, more precisely in the Patagonian Santa Cruz Province, the Perito Moreno Glacier is, together with 48 other glaciers, in fed by the Southern Patagonian Ice Field, which happens to be the world's third largest reserve of fresh water.



Perito Moreno Glacier

59 Contrary to the rule that applies to most of the Earth's surface in our geological era, the Perito Moreno Glacier is not retreating; in fact, it has been growing!



Perito Moreno Glacier

60 Named after *patagón* – name given by the first Europeans who set foot in this part of the world to describe the race of supposed giants who already lived there –, Patagonia is an enormous and cold geographical region in conical form, made of parts of what is now Chile and Argentina and whose apex points to Antarctica.



Somewhere in Patagonia