

## A “brief” introduction to Puerto Varas

Having been born and raised in Puerto Varas (actually, my old house is less than 100 meters away from the place where the conference will take place), it is an enormous honor for me to have the pleasure of introducing my wonderful hometown to the ICMC community.

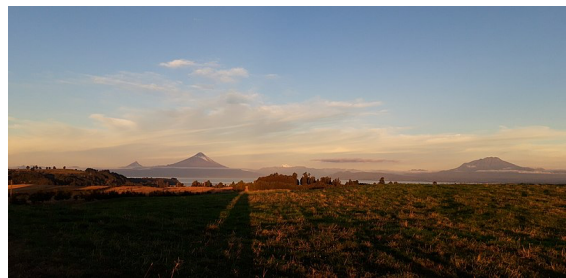
Puerto Varas is a small city of about 50,000 inhabitants located on the shores of Llanquihue Lake, at the northern gateway to Chilean Patagonia. On the other side of the lake, you can see the Andes and especially the four volcanoes that crown the area: Osorno, Puntagudo, Calbuco and Tronador. Puerto Varas is famous for its scenic location and natural surroundings, which is why it has become a tourist hotspot, having more than doubled its population in the last 30 years due to internal migration.



The city was founded by German settlers who colonized the areas around the Llanquihue Lake in the 1850s and, in fact, a local variety of German (the so-called Launa-Deutsch or Lagunen-Deutsch) used to be the main language until well into the early part of the 20th century. Therefore, the influence of the German settlers can still be felt in the city, its culture, gastronomy, architecture, etc. and our local language can still be heard in clubs, churches, schools, etc. But if you want to practice your Spanish don't worry: it is undoubtedly the dominant language in the area nowadays.

## Weather

If you have any preconceived ideas about the warm South American climate, you can basically forget them (in general, if you visit the area, you should drop most preconceived ideas you may have about South America). The climate of Puerto Varas is comparable to that of Seattle or Vancouver in North America or Ireland/Scotland in Europe. It is somewhat closer to the Equator



than its European "counterparts" (it is actually at the latitude of Barcelona), but due to the cold Humboldt current, its climate is much more moderate, and the temperature hardly goes above 25°C even during high summer. And it rains... it rains a lot. As usual at this latitude, the westerlies dominate, carrying wet clouds from the ocean that hit the Andes mountains (which so far south are not really that high) and all that water falls on the green Chilean Patagonia (the much larger Argentinian Patagonia, on the other side of the Andes, in turn, is a cold arid place). The conference will take place in early April, which is like early October in the northern hemisphere, so you should be expecting temperatures ranging from 0°C to 10°C the min and 12°C to 20°C the max. So, just regular clothes will cut the deal.

## **Transportation**

If you arrive in Chile by plane, you will most likely arrive at Santiago International Airport (SCL). From there, you can fly to Puerto Montt airport (PMC) 1,000 km to the south. From a financial perspective, it may be “highly” advisable to book each flight separately. When arriving at PMC do not try to go first to Puerto Montt and then to Puerto Varas. Actually, the airport is located the same distance from both, so you can arrange a shuttle or cab service directly to Puerto Varas. I’m very much aware, that many of us are active in the transportation field; however, don’t try to rely on public transportation: not because it is dangerous or complicated to use, but because it is almost non-existent. So, if you want to get around a bit, I advise you to rent a car (or a bike). But don’t worry, as long as you are in the city, you won’t need transportation, as the city is quite walkable (well... unless it’s raining, but even then, most of the sidewalks are covered), which is quite nice especially if you want to grab a bite or get a beer after the conference.

## **Accommodation**

The conference is in April, so it’s gonna be off-season (well, not so much, because of Easter), so finding accommodation is not going to be particularly challenging (the city offers more tourists beds than it has inhabitants). Everything is close by, so no necessity to stay in any of the hotels in which the events are being held, but I’d still advise staying in Puerto Varas itself and not in the Puerto Chico area, which is kind of 2-3 km. away.

## **In the city**

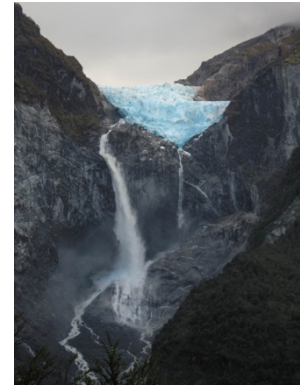
A complete list of where to eat or go for a drink in the city is forthcoming and will be uploaded after the southern summer...but please beware, as I told you before, you should drop your preconceived ideas: you won’t find any spicy food, burritos, enchiladas, or whatever kind of food you may associate with South America (well... besides steakhouses). And also, you can forget about ultra-cheap prices: the price level is quite comparable with Europe.

## **Planning a (short) vacation around the conference**

Well...the recommendation may be coming from the close, but it’s quite advisable. As I was mentioning, Puerto Varas is a touristic hotspot and rightly so...but not so much for what you can do in the city itself, but for what you can do around it and for being the northern gate to the Patagonia. As I guess, you may need some help here to decide so I’d propose some alternatives around Puerto Varas (being based in the city) and some longer trips involving some traveling. Anyways, whatever you do, I’d strongly advice to arrive in Puerto Varas first and to start traveling south from there and not to try a road trip from Santiago to Puerto Varas, because that’s just boring (believe me; I’ve done it dozens of times).

## Longer trips

- a) **Carretera Austral:** Chilean Patagonia is basically 2,000 km long and it's divided into three main areas: Northern Patagonia (around Puerto Varas), Central Patagonia (from Puerto Varas to the south) and Southern Patagonia (which is separated from the central part by the Southern Patagonian Ice Field). While Southern Patagonia may be the most internationally famous part (it includes Tierra del Fuego, Torres del Paine and even Cape Horn), it's kind of far away from Puerto Varas (ca. 2,000 km south) and it will be already too cold at that time of year. Central Patagonia, in turn, while less famous, is highly advisable, especially as it may one of the best-preserved landscapes in the entire world. It's very sparsely populated and characterized by an amazing natural environment.



The Carretera Austral, which starts in Puerto Varas after crossing the Reloncaví fjord in Ralún is a ca. 1,200 km long mountain road covering most of the Central Patagonia. The route is incredibly scenic and most of it goes through fjords, virgin forests,

glaciers, rivers, hot springs, etc. Most of the route is not even paved (but it's very well maintained) and goes up and down both sides of the Andes (which are even lower in that part of the country). If you've got 2-3 weeks to spare, I'd definitely advice to do it (either by vehicle or by bike). Due to space constrains (<- this really sounds like a response to a paper review) I won't go into details, and you'd have to do you own research, but I can mention some highlights such as the Marble caves, Parque Pumalín, Ventisquero



Colgante, Río Futaleufú, Caleta Tortel, among many others.

settlement.

As a warning: it will rain but the earlier in the year you do it, the less the rain. Also some of the ferries you have to reserve in advance (either by vehicle or by bike), and especially if you travel by bike, you have to consider that there are stretches of more than 80 km without any human

- b) **Cruce de Lagos:** It would take between 2-7 days (round trip), depending on how many things you would like to do it. It involves crossing the Andes from Puerto Varas to Bariloche (probably the most famous touristic city in Argentina). First you travel to Parque Nacional Vicente Perez Rosales (ca. 40 km away from Puerto Varas) and to the small village of Petrohue on the shores of Todos los Santos Lake. From there you take a boat to the village of Peulla, on the



other side of the lake, traveling across native forests and a lake carved by glaciers among the mountains. In Peulla, you can spend the night and do some trekking/hiking or continue directly by bus across the Andes to Lake Frias (already in Argentina) at the foot of Cerro Tronador. From there, another (short) boat trip and another bus to Puerto Blest on the shores of Nahuel Huapi Lake, where you take a final boat to Bariloche. As previously said, there is also plenty to do in Bariloche (its reputation as touristic city is not undeserved and the locally made chocolate is fantastic).

- c) **Chiloé:** This is quite different, but worth it. Some 50 kms away from Puerto Varas, there is the ferry crossing to the Chiloé archipelago. This is a unique place, as after being colonized by the Spanish some 450 years ago, it remained largely isolated from the rest of Chile (especially as the area where Puerto Varas is now located remained uninhabited up until the 1850's). Consequently, it developed its very own culture mixing Spanish and indigenous traditions. They speak a local variety of Spanish (which is considered to be an independent language group, divergent from Chilean Spanish), they have their own types of music, mythology and culinary traditions (mostly based on seafood). If you



travel to Chiloé, the “Curanto en Hoyo” is a must. Also, in Chiloé you may be interested in visiting the penguin colonies, the Churches of Chiloé (which are an UNESCO World Heritage Site), and of course: the native nature (Parque Tantauco is a great alternative on the island). The southernmost part of the island is also known to be a place for whale watching... but sorry... not the right season.

2-4 days depending on how much you'd like to do.

### Short trips

If you plan to be based on Puerto Varas, and try different things, there are also multiple options:

- a) **Visiting Peulla:** Remember Cruce de Lagos from above? Well... if you don't have time to make the full journey, you can travel to Petrohue and take the boat to Peulla in

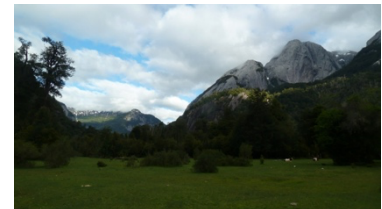
the morning and come back the same day in the evening (or you could even spend one night in Peulla itself and come back the day after). Still worth it, even if you can't make the entire crossing.

- b) **Salto del Petrohue:** Probably the most well-known and mainstream excursion in the area. Salto del Petrohue is a chute-type waterfall located in the Parque Nacional Vicente Perez Rosales. The fact that most tourists choose to visit the waterfalls is not a coincidence.



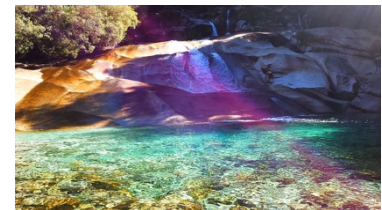
- c) **Rafting:** Interested in whitewater rafting or kayaking? the Petrohue river is the place to be (don't worry...the journey starts below the waterfalls).

- d) **Trekking/Hiking:** If you're into trekking, Puerto Varas is the right place. Almost everywhere there are interesting trekking/hiking routes, including the famous Cochamo Valley (for which you may need two days), multiple scenic routes in Parque Nacional Vicente Perez Rosales or Parque Nacional Alerce Andino or short 2-hours hikes in the



Monumento Nacional Lahuen Ñadi.

Up until 2015, I loved to go up the Calbuco volcano, but after the volcano's eruption, most routes have not been redeveloped so nowadays it's not advisable to go trekking in Reserva Nacional Llanquihue.



- e) **Osorno Volcano:** well... it will be April, so you can forget about skiing (the same goes for Bariloche or Antillanca), but driving up the volcano is still worth it, as you'll have incredible views of the entire area (and it's not every day you can see the ocean from a ski resort). The lifts will be open, as will the cafeteria.



- f) **Around the lake:** Remember I mentioned that the area was settled in the 1850s? Well, back then there were no roads and the main means of transportation was the lake itself. Thus, several picturesque towns developed on its shores, such as Frutillar, Puerto Octay, Las Cascadas.



Today all of them are well connected by road. You can travel all around the lake in one day by car or one or two by bike. If you do so, please stop in the scenic small city of **Frutillar** and plan a coffee break there. You should also visit the open-air German Colonial Museum, which recreates the life of the German settlers in the area since 1852.



- g) Into/Onto the lake:** Well, April may be already too cold, but if you get there early (let's say beginning of March), there are still chances that you catch one of the last hot waves of the season. If you feel like going into the water, most locals would advise the eastern shore (e.g. Ensenada at the foot of the Osorno volcano). Why? The prevailing wind are the westerlies, so the water warms up on the surface of the lake as it moves eastward. On the western side (where Puerto Varas is located), the eastwards moving surface water is constantly replaced by water from the depth and it can be almost 2°C colder. But let's face it: most likely in April you won't feel like going into the water, but there are multiple alternatives to go onto the water: boats offering tours around the bay, windsurfing, water skiing, etc.
- h) Fly fishing:** You like fly fishing? Or do you want to try it? There are uncountable options. Just ask anywhere in the city center.
- i) Canopy:** Same as fly-fishing: so many options.
- j) Puyehue:** not so much into sports or trekking? Why not spending the day in the hot springs? If so, Hotel Termas de Puyehue may be the preferred option (although there are other lesser known alternatives in the area). It's a little bit far away (approximately 150 km), but quite doable in a day (round trip).



This are just some of the first ideas that come to mind as I write this note, and there is certainly much more to be done. If you've got any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me for specific advice.

Best

Francisco