

SOUTH AMERICAN VOYAGE 2014

Buenos Aires to Los Angeles, OR it's more than 99 miles to L.A. Actually, it is more than 10,000 miles to LA!

We booked this cruise in 2013, but unfortunately Kathy fell and broke a bone in her foot a week before we were to leave, so we cancelled. Thank goodness for trip insurance! When we planned this trip, we were originally seduced by the fact we would not have to fly home. The first leg would be the more interesting one, with Buenos Aires, Falkland Islands, rounding the tip of South America and ending in Valparaiso (Santiago).

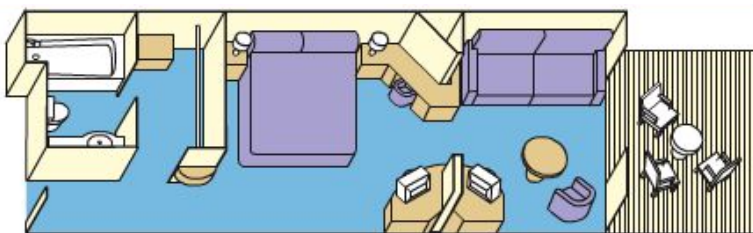
The second leg from Valparaiso to Los Angeles was the less interesting one, consisting of more sea days and less interesting ports. But, when we looked at the airfare from Santiago, it was much less expensive to stay on the ship until Los Angeles. Kathy, as usual, in her wisdom, asked if we would rather be home or be pampered for two weeks on the ship for less money when all we have is time.



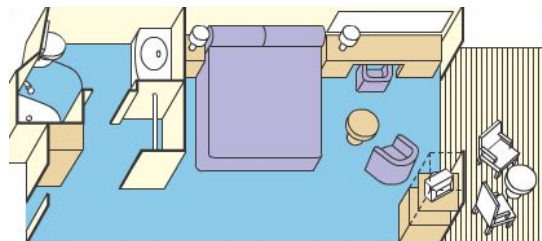
Princess came out with their 2014 schedule and I checked it to see what was offered. I found a cruise that was almost the same as the one we had to cancel, and booked it. The amazing thing was all the balcony cabins were booked, and this for a cruise a year away!!!

Our travel agent worked her magic, and found us a mini suite in a good location on the starboard of the ship. That way we would be on the land side of the ship for the entire voyage. We normally select a balcony cabin, but for a cruise this long, we felt we needed the extra space. We figured that the minisuite was about the same size as a motor home. The mini suite has a sitting area and a bathtub, plus more clothes storage.

Mini suite



Balcony cabin



Since we are now "Elite" passengers on Princess, we get free laundry service as one of the perks! This means that we can bring fewer clothes and just have them laundered. This worked out well on our New

England cruise tour last year, where we took our laundry from the land portion and had it laundered after we boarded the ship.

One thing we were worried about on a cruise this long was contracting the dreaded Noro virus. Kathy did some research on the internet, and we got on armed with wipes and a big can of Lysol spray to disinfect the room before we touched anything!

The other problem we had was the extreme of temperatures. Packing clothing for the extremes of penguins and the equator posed a real challenge.

GETTING THERE

The first task again was to get a flight to Buenos Aires. I kept going down to the British Airways website every day until they opened up a flight for us. On the website, they offered a flight from LA to Lima, then to Buenos Aires on LAN Airlines. This routing is shorter by many hours compared to an America Airlines flight which would have been routed through Miami. Thankfully, we had enough miles to upgrade to Business Class, and we opted for that. The good news was the flight this year left LAX later than last year's, so we did not have a long layover in the Lima Airport. I also found there was a business class lounge at the Lima Airport, so we can relax there the same as we did at LAX.

The picture at the right is the Business Class seat on LAN Chile airlines. The seats recline and become 100% horizontal, turning into beds that are 23 inches wide and 73 inches long. This means we can sleep on our sides!



BUENOS AIRES, ARGENTINA

Our flight to Lima left at 11:30 PM, so we left for the airport about 7 PM, and had a light dinner at the Business Class lounge. We were able to sleep on the plane, as opposed to the flight to Russia which left at 3 PM! When we arrived in Lima, we went to the lounge there to await our flight to Buenos Aires.

We arrived in Buenos Aires, and took a remise (private car) to our hotel. By the time we got there it was late in the evening, but we already had dinner on the flight from Lima to Buenos Aires.

Kathy loved Buenos Aires, so we planned to stay there a few days there before our cruise. We had made reservations at the Marriott, which is right off Florida Street, a long pedestrian street. Our room was a large corner room, with window views on two sides. We could look down on Florida Street, as well as the beautiful San Martin Park.



The next morning we walked up Florida Street to do some shopping and people watching. We stopped at a little café to have coffee and dessert.

We then took our Nook and Kindle readers to the San Martin Park, which was right next to our hotel. It is a beautiful park, and had a large enclosure where dogs could run free; we think it was a dog day care center. We sat on a bench reading, and just enjoyed the tranquility of the park.



Next to the park was a clock tower called the English tower. It was a gift from the local English community to the city in 1910 celebrating Argentina's independence from Spain.

We wanted to see a Tango show again while in Buenos Aires, and had the hotel concierge book us this time to the show at La Ventana, which was supposed to have one of the best dinner tango shows. Our minibus picked up late, but finally delivered us to La Ventana. We got there just as the show started, and thoroughly enjoyed it. We had great seats down in front of the stage. Unlike many venues, dinner was served after the show instead of before. This made sense, as dinner is eaten late in many Latin countries. The dinner was delicious Argentine beef with all the trimmings.



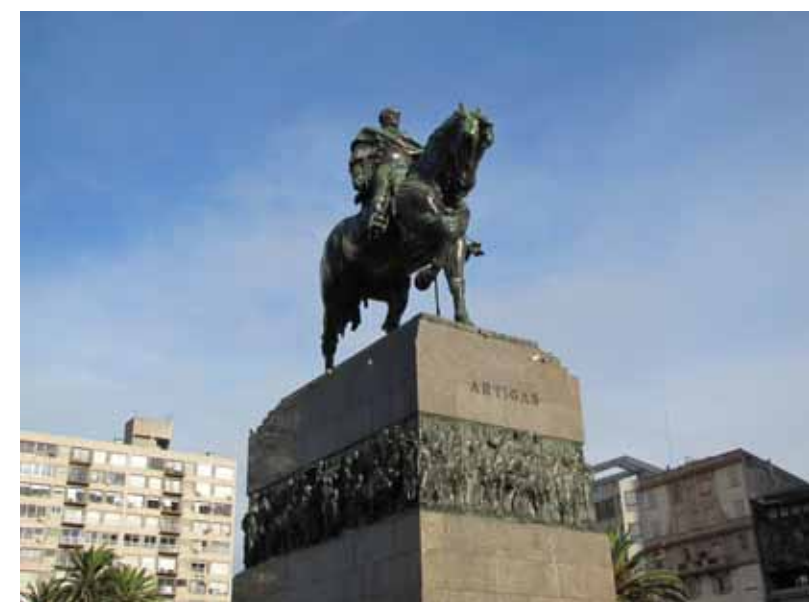


After the show, we took a taxi back to the hotel rather than waiting for the minibus. On the way back to the hotel, the taxi suddenly stopped in a deserted part of town, and we wondered what was going on! We were afraid we were going to be dropped off in the middle of nowhere, but it turned out that the driver had missed a turn, and had to back up. We got back to our hotel without further incident. The next day we had lunch at the hotel, and took a taxi to the ship. Check in went relatively smoothly, we boarded the ship and we were directed to our minisuite. The first thing we did was to break out the Lysol spray and spray everything in the room. That included the phone and the TV remote control as well as every knob and handle in the room! Some may think us nuts, but the last thing you want to do at the start of a 31 day cruise is come down with Noro virus and be confined to your cabin. However, both Kathy and I came down with colds. Whether due to the exposure to others at airports or the recirculated air on planes, we seem to catch a cold on every trip. As a result we now have cold medications from France, Germany, Russia, Argentina, and Chile along with the medications we brought from home.

MONTevideo, URUGUAY

We boarded a motor coach at the pier, then sat back and relaxed as we took in the sights of the city. We stopped at Batlle y Ordóñez Park, named in honor of a former president of Uruguay. We saw the palm tree-lined Plaza Independencia, the oldest city square in Montevideo. Designed in 1836, it is the site of a massive equestrian monument and mausoleum of the country's national hero Jose Artigas, known as "the father of Uruguayan independence."

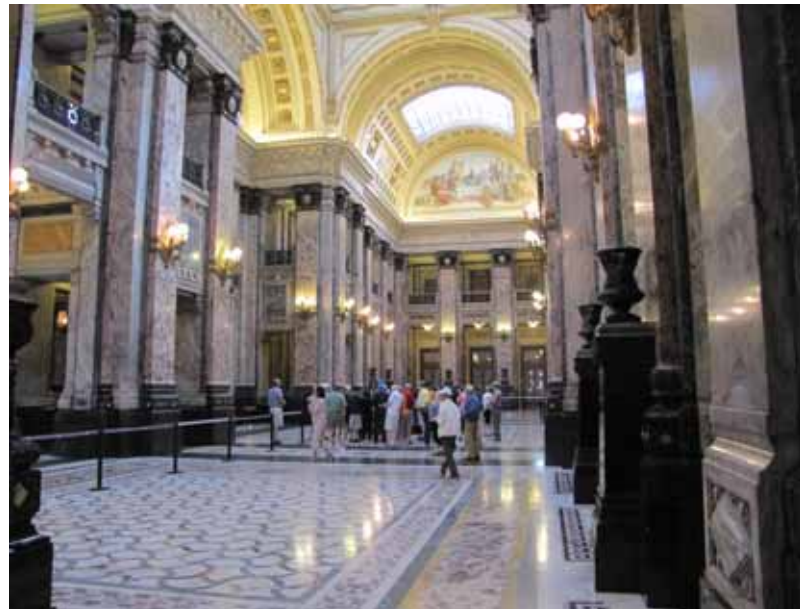
Near the square was a huge art deco building, which is the tallest building in Montevideo. There is a law now that does not allow any new building to be any higher than this one.



We then stopped at a park that had huge sculptures of a stagecoach and wagon pulled by horses and oxen. I bought a miniature covered wagon for my curio cabinet.



We then stopped at the Legislative Palace, considered one of the three most beautiful legislative buildings in the world. Designed by Italian architect Gaetano Moretti, it was built between 1908 and 1925 and inaugurated on 25th of August, 1925 in celebration of the Centennial of the Declaration of Independence.



There were beautiful murals overhead, and there was a copy of the constitution in a case with 2 ceremonial guards.



On our return drive to the pier we traveled along La Rambla, the city's bustling waterfront promenade. From this point we could see the fort on the highest hill in Montevideo. This route also offered a view of the Graff Spee Monument, made from the anchor of a Nazi battleship scuttled off the coast during WWII.



PUERTO MADRYN, ARGENTINA

We opted not to go to the penguin colony, as it was a 120 mile drive each way and a 1 mile walk, much of it in penguin poop. We just sat at an outdoor café and watched people. On the way back to the ship, we found a wine store and chatted with a fellow passenger there. He recommended a certain Argentinean wine, and we bought a bottle to take back to the ship. When we got to our cabin, we were surprised to discover I had bought a bottle of the identical wine in Buenos Aires. This was also the day to recharge all our electronics, so this is what the desk looked like!



STANLEY, FALKLAND ISLANDS

We had to take a tender to the port, and were very fortunate that the weather was calm. The trip into the pier can be rather bumpy if the wind is blowing.

We had read numerous recommendations for tours arranged with Patrick Watts in Stanley, and booked our tour through him. Also, the tour was half the price of the ship's tour going to the same place.

The tour took us to Volunteer Point at the other end of the island, and the last part was an unbelievable ride across open country. The rather lengthy ride to the Point was a "good 'n bumpy" fun ride. I was in the back seat in the middle, which sounds bad, but the men on both sides of me were wearing puffy down jackets. It was like being between two Pillsbury doughboys which help smooth out the bumpy ride.



On the way to the penguin colony, we got all four seasons-rain, hail, wind and sun! We were amazed at the vast number of penguins there were in the different colonies, and the large area they covered. There were penguins of all ages & sizes: youngsters with all of their brown fuzz (they looked like overgrown Kiwi fruit), some looking a little raggedy, partly feathered out and part still covered with fuzz that looked like it was about to fall off. The pictures below are of King Penguins



A ranger told us that they were expecting a good hatching within the next couple of weeks. I was busy taking countless pictures, and Kathy enjoyed just watching & listening to these delightful little creatures. But, she also got some great pictures. The picture on the left is of a baby in a burrow, and the one on the right is of a Gentoo penguin, the other species at Volunteer Point. It truly was a wonderful day that we will remember, and a tour we greatly recommend to all.



USHUAIA, ARGENTINA

We sailed into Ushuaia through the Beagle channel. This waterway was named after the HMS Beagle, the ship that carried the English naturalist, Charles Darwin, on a five-year voyage around the tip of Southern America.

Darwin's voyage established him as an eminent naturalist and his journal of the voyage made him a famous and popular author. It was his 1859 book, *On the Origin of Species*, however, that rocked the world with his theory of evolution and natural selection.

We landed in Ushuaia on a Sunday at the end of the world. Unfortunately, most shops and restaurants were closed. I wanted to buy some cough medicine, and remembered that on the pharmacies windows there was a list of the store that would be open on Sunday. It was a little place about 10 blocks down the main street, but they did have what we needed.

I then headed to a restaurant named Mustachio, but they were also closed. I ended up doing a little souvenir shopping before heading back to the ship.

We had booked a cruise of the Beagle channel through the ship, and were supposed to meet on the pier. There was no Princess guide there to direct us, and we ended up having to hike the length of the

pier. From there we had to walk to the dock where the catamaran waited. I cannot imagine what a problem it must have been for some of the mobility limited passengers.

We sailed in Darwin's wake aboard a specially designed catamaran. The views from the spacious indoor cabin were excellent and we soaked up the scenery and the fresh sea air from our vantage point on the outer decks also.



We cruised in close to a bustling rookery of Imperial Cormorants. This large black and white bird was an impressive sight as it wheeled high in the sky, fished for its supper and then landed on rocky islands to dry its wings in the sun.



We then sailed by the Beagle Channel's famed "Les Claireurs" lighthouse. Inaugurated in December 23, 1920, it is still in operation today and is probably the most photographed lighthouse in South America. Set amidst a cluster of islands, this picturesque red-and-white sentinel emits a flash of light every 10 seconds that can be seen from 7 nautical miles out at sea. Automated, remotely controlled and uninhabited, it is known to the Argentines as the Lighthouse at the End of the World.

The sign on the lighthouse, translated, reads;

Property of Argentina

Minister of Defense,

Argentine Navy,

No Trespassing

The cormorants, however could not read!



We then sailed by Sea Lions Island, which was the perfect place to photograph the South American sea lion. Found along the coast and offshore islands of Chile and Argentina, it generally breeds in the southern part of its range including here in the Beagle Channel. With its large head, well-developed mane, and orange color, the male of the species is truly "lionesque." The female is much smaller and pups are born black. There were 2 species there, the other being the Southern fur seal, which was black.



On the way back to the port, Kathy spoke to the guide and had her call the ship to arrange for a shuttle, which Princess should have prearranged. There were about 27 people that were glad to have a ride back to the ship.

AMELIA GLACIER, CHILE

We cruised through the area of the Chilean Fjords which looked similar to Fjordland National Park in New Zealand. Both of these areas were carved out during the end of the last Ice Age. The views of the snow covered Andes were spectacular as we sat looking out of our balcony window, with a glass of wine and listening to our music. We saw a number of glaciers, but the Amelia Glacier was the largest. The ship turned around in the bay, so that both the port and starboard passengers could view the glacier.



PUNTA ARENAS, CHILE

We were supposed to take a short drive to the ferry boarding area in Punta Arenas for an approximately two-hour cruise northward in the Strait of Magellan to Magdalena Island. This is the home of the Magellanic penguins, and looked interesting.

However, the wheels came off early on, as again there was nobody from the ship directing us from the tender pier to the buses. We were told to be there by 11:30 AM, but when we finally got to the bus we were informed the bus would not leave until 12:45 PM. At 12:30 a ship's representative got on the bus to inform us of a further delay and did not have enough sense to use the mike. People at the back of the bus could not even hear about the delay. The bus had been rescheduled to leave at 1:45, which meant we would not have gotten back to the ship until 7:30 PM.

At this point a number of us said this was totally unacceptable and turned in our tour tickets for a refund. We then took the tender back to the ship, again thoroughly disgusted with the shore excursion people.

PUERTO MONTT, CHILE

Just beyond Puerto Montt's city streets lies the lush and verdant Lake District. Stretching out from the Pacific to the Andes the area encompasses dozens of lakes, volcanoes, hot springs, and rivers.

We booked a private tour through one of our fellow passengers, boarded our motor coach at the pier and meandered through Puerto Montt and out into the picturesque countryside. We drove around the largest lake, Llanquihue Lake with the magnificent snow-capped Osorno volcano as a backdrop.



When we stopped at a view site to take pictures of the mountain, there was a llama ranch there.



Our next destination was Petrohue Falls. Our private tour group walked along the roped off paths out to the viewing area. Along the way the path narrowed to about 3 feet across with a drop off on both sides. This made it a little dicey with people walking both ways!



After viewing the falls, we headed back to the visitor center. Unfortunately, all the tour buses from the ship had arrived and discharged their passengers, and we almost had to fight our way back to the parking lot. The line was 4 persons wide and extended from the falls back to the parking area! Since the approach to the falls viewing area was so narrow, it delayed all the people by at least 2 hours! Because of this delay, the ship was hours late departing as it had to wait for the tours to return. The part that annoyed our private group was this was the second time this year this ship visited these same ports. One would think the shore excursion people would have had their act together by now. I think the problem is overbooking to make more money for the ship. From there we went to Emerald Lake (Laguna Verde), which was very interesting for its color. Walking down past Laguna Verde, there was a view point with Llanquihue Lake and one of the volcanoes in the background.



We returned to Puerto Montt but before we were dropped off at the pier, we made a stop atop one of the city's many rolling hillsides for a panoramic view of the city.

VALPARAISO, CHILE

We had been to Valparaiso and Vina del Mar previously, so we just went into the passenger terminal. There was a booth selling wine, and offering wine tasting, so we tasted a few different varieties. We ended up buying a few bottles and enjoyed them on the ship.

LA SERENA, CHILE

Looking out our balcony at the city, we saw a large cross to the left. This was constructed to honor the visit of Pope John XXIII to South America. Looking straight ahead, we saw a zigzag walkway that reminded us of Lombard Street in San Francisco. It was a set of steps leading to the top of the hill. Imagine having to walk that every day!



Our tour left the pier and drove through the beach area of Coquimbo to La Serena. The beach was about 10 miles long, and was sparsely populated as it was a weekday. We stopped at a lighthouse that was erected 50 years ago as part of a return to colonial architecture. We then stopped by a school that was representative of the colonial architecture.



I had another adventure at a drug store. Kathy had run out of hair spray, and since it was again a Sunday, most drug stores were closed. I did find one that was open, and asked the druggist, “Habla Ingles?” (speak English), but he did not. So I said to him, “yo quiero” (I want), then pointed to my mostly bald head and went psst psst “por la cabeza” (for the head). He then went and handed me a can of hair spray. Success!

Our guide was a charming young man named Nicolas who was an architecture student. Since soccer is very important in these towns, he passed around soccer jerseys from both the Coquimbo and La Serena teams. He then put on a Chile national team jersey and led us in the different soccer cheers for the team. It was great fun and was enjoyed by all on the bus.

SAN MARTIN (PISCO), CHILE

We were supposed to be picked up from the San Martin Port at the Paracas Bay, but we never found our driver. We finally took a taxi to the Pisco Airport some 20 kilometers away from the port. The drive was through some of the most desolate terrain this side of the moon. We finally boarded our Cessna Caravan aircraft based at the Pisco airport. The aircraft offered leather seating; air conditioned comfort and great viewing for all passengers.



We took off and first passed over the zone known as Pozo Santo. Due to the antiquity of the images it was a bit difficult for archaeologists to identify what those figures actually represented. We climbed to 7500 feet and continued south to towards the Nazca desert, enjoying great views of the Peruvian coast from above.

After some time we reached the Nazca Lines zone and descended to about 1500 feet above the ground. Once there we marveled at huge geometrical designs, very similar to giant airstrips. According to a theory by Swiss writer Erick von Daniken these geometric forms were ancient runways for visitors from another planet. There have been many scientific theories about the meaning of the figures but nobody knows for sure. These trapezoids are over a mile long and their perfection is stunning.



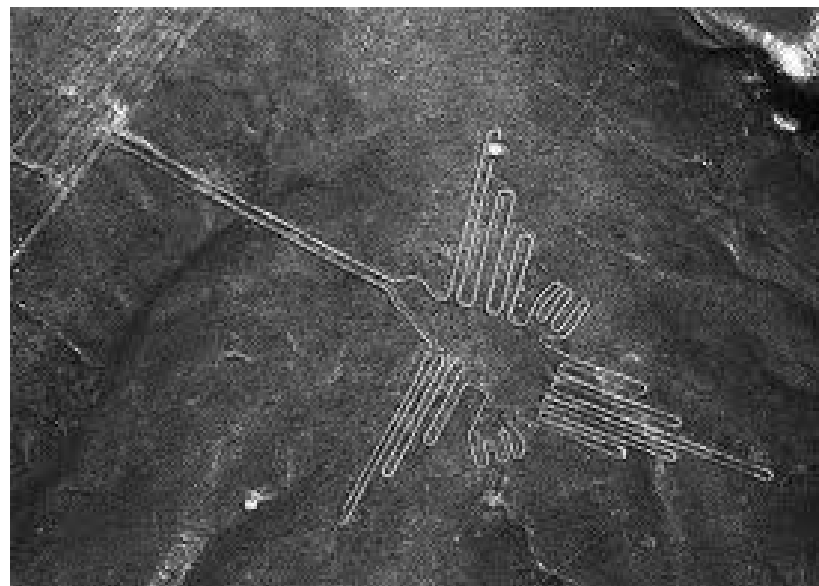
The flight was stomach churning because the pilot would bank the plane to the right so the passengers on the right side could see the figures. He then whipped the plane around and banked to the left so passengers on the other side of the plane could see the figures. It was not surprising that there were sick sacks in front of every seat. Thank goodness for Bonine!

Some kilometers further west we saw one of the strangest creatures on the Nazca desert, "The Astronaut". Unlike the other drawings, the astronaut was etched on the slope of a small hill, and not on the desert surface. His body is facing to the south and according to a theory by Maria Reiche, a German mathematician, archaeologist, and technical translator who carried out research into the Nazca Lines; it does not represent an astronaut, but a shaman or ancient Nazca priest, someone with magic powers who could predict the weather.

Later on we flew over the monkey figure, an enormous drawing that measures about 300 feet in length, and showed one hand with five fingers and on the other just four, symbolizing the 9 months of drought the Nazca people suffered every year. The monkey figure was discovered in 1954 by Maria Reiche, and according to her point of view it is associated to the big dipper constellation.



After the monkey, we flew over the dog figure, a smaller drawing that according to some scholars represented a divinity worshipped by the Nazca people. Then we came to one of the best preserved figures of the whole area, "The hummingbird", a gorgeous design perfectly made on a dark plateau located at one corner of the archaeological complex. According to Maria Reiche this figure is associated with the summer solstice, as one of the lines connected to its beak, points towards the place where the sun rises every year during the summer solstice.



Not very far from the hummingbird, we saw the spider, a figure that according the local knowledge, represents fertility and water, as this insect used to appear when it is going to rain or the water in the

rivers is about to come. Some yards away was the huge condor figure, featuring a straight line that crosses its wings and points towards the place where the sun sets every year on summer solstice.



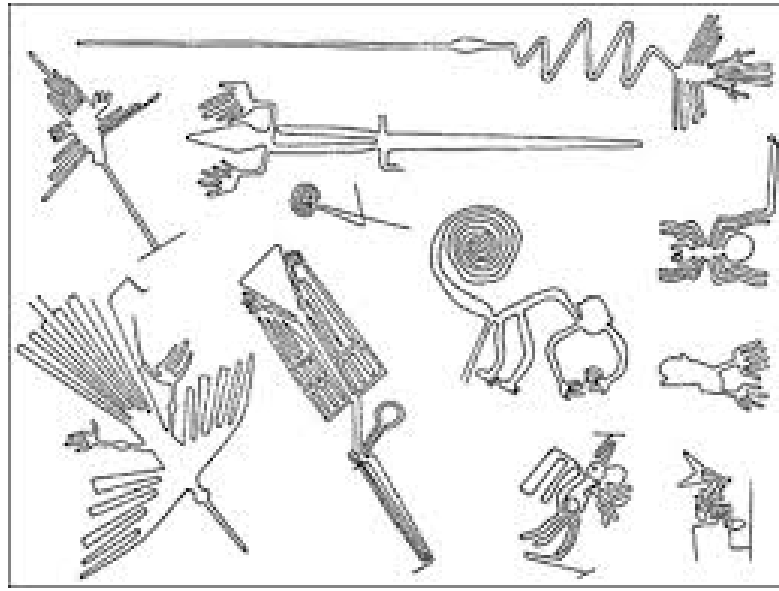
Then we flew over the parrot figure, a huge bird with about 1000 feet in length. In addition to the parrot we saw several geometric designs, including this spiral.



Later on we flew over the Pan-American Highway, and saw 2 figures; the hands and the Huarango tree.



The figure on the left is the whale, and the image on the right came from the Internet, to give a clear idea of the figures we saw.



We left the Palpa region and returned to the airport of Pisco. Upon our arrival at the airport the tour representative contacted us and apologized for missing us at the port. He refunded our taxi fare, which was a reasonable thing to do.



LIMA. PERU

Lately, Lima has become a center of culinary activity. We had scheduled a customized special gastronomic excursion last year, but cancelled it when Kathy got hurt. We were still interested in doing it on this cruise, so I posted a notice on a cruise board to see if anyone else would be interested. The excursion required a minimum of six, and we ended up with eight of us, a perfect number.

As we docked, I called the other people on the tour and left messages for those I did not speak to directly to make the final meeting arrangements. When the appointed meeting time came, I spotted someone of our group on the dock. We quickly got off the ship, and he informed us that all the others were next to the shuttle waiting. I breathed a sigh of relief as getting the group together could have been a problem.

We got to the port gate, and there waiting for us wearing his culinary tour apron, was Lucas, the owner of the tour company. Our host said previously the people in Lima were cooks, but now they are becoming chefs. He said they are opening about one restaurant a day in Lima.