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Reliving an Abandoned Town on the Patagonian Coast — Page 2

Story and photos by Madelaine Triebe



"Welcome," she says. "We have *dormis*" and sweeps her right hand towards the brick houses to our right, more bed and breakfast styled rooms", looking at the house with tin walls behind her. "You can camp, it's just behind those shrubs over there," she says and points to one of two naturally wind protected spots within kilometers. "And we have *bondis*. Have a look around to see if you like the place and let me know."

"Did I hear right?" I think. "*Bondis*, as in buses in Buenos Aires?"

"I really like the idea of sleeping in a bus," Max says and confirms I understood her correctly.

We drive up to the bus that's going to be our home for the night and it feels like I'm a kid again.

A Bus to Nowhere

"Do you accept *sube*"?

Mauro gets on the bus whilst Gonzalez is driving and Max is sitting in the passenger seat on the front row of the parked vehicle that's driving along the streets of Buenos

Aires in our imagination. The clock above the window shows 4pm, but it's actually more like 7pm.

"Why are you getting on while the vehicle is moving?" Gonzalez says with a straight face to Mauro and announces that the inspector is getting on the bus and that everyone should have their tickets ready for inspection.

"*Puedo bajar acá?*" Can I get off here? I ask. We have reached our final destination and wander off to different places. Gonzalez and Mauro go off trying to find a shipwreck that's supposed to be somewhere along the coast and Max and I set our eyes on the bunker.

Our bus is parked next to the military bunker that was used to test launch missiles under Operation Condor-a project which Argentina's right-wing military regime undertook to fight communism during the 1960s and 1970s. As we enter the flies cluster on the stained windows. There's a chandelier hanging from the ceiling without light bulbs and in the corner ashes from a fire rest on the concrete floor.

"It's post-apocalyptic," says Max. "When we arrived and this woman with these massive sun shades stepped out and no one was around, it felt like the world had come to an end."



I nod. It's like we have stepped into a feature film on the end of the world and our party of four has already started to plot script, but I soon realize we are extras rather than writers.

"But they have come to re-build it," Max adds optimistically.

[Bringing a Ghost Town to Life](#)

Eduardo González, the man with a scar on his face and his partner, his *mujer* as he calls her, Elaine, are both from Trelew 155 km away. They have worked on Cabo Raso since 2007 when the town had already been deserted for decades and the houses gasped empty.

"Nació de nuestros sueños-it was born from our dreams", they explain poetically. You have the sea, the sun here. Everything you need, you know", Eduardo says with the intensity and enthusiasm that's his normal tone of voice.

I think of the hardship Patagonian settlers that came in the end of the mid 1800s faced, only to leave a hundred years later. And of these two who returned.

"A dream of what?" I think.

I imagine the school and the post office and the fishermen mooring their boats in the bay that left more than fifty years ago, walking past the old stone houses that made up the town and which are lined up to the left of me as I head towards the old swing in front of the ocean. Some houses are intact while a couple only have two of their four walls left.



The swing faces the ocean and as I move my body back and forth I can feel the swing set rise up and down. I hear a creaking sound from the two loose screws holding it together and the sound of the low waves washing the sand smooth from footsteps.

"If this was the eight-year-old me, this is what I would do.", Max says.

We stand next to the toilet shack looking out over the sea. It's quieter than I'd expected. I can see Eduardo's white pickup truck coming towards us, but it is the sound of the dirt road and the dust that reveals itself before anything else. Eduardo gets out of the Toyota.

"Is there anything you need? I'm heading off to town now and my woman is away. I'll probably be back by 11pm. Do you have food? I have everything up at the house, there's meat. There's pasta..."

"No thanks, we have food. We have everything we need."

There's a moment of silence. I look at the sky with streaks of purple, pink and orange and I feel the Patagonian wind in my hair.

"Do you like it?" he asks and looks at us with a smile and adds: "Just feel like home."

While dividing her time between London, Argentina and Sweden, Madelaine Triebe works as a freelance travel journalist. She has a passion for horses, Patagonia and wild places and is and author of the upcoming Rough Guide to Argentina. Follow her on Twitter at @mymaddytravel or read more on her blog: MyMaddyTravel.com.

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