

Argentina Update – January

Journey

I arrived in Argentina about 2 weeks ago – and although it may not seem like long, from the moment the plane touched down in Buenos Aires, it certainly has been an adventure. Walking into arrivals knowing that someone is going to meet you, but having no idea who they are or what they look like is a daunting experience, especially when you have to spend 12 hours with them in a strange city. But I soon found Nelson – a friend of Cecilia’s, holding a sign reading “Fiona Honey” instead of “Fiona Heaney”- I couldn’t have asked for a better welcome! Nelson looked after me for the day and made sure I made it to the bus, and with his limited English and my limited Spanish, we managed to communicate alright. Thankfully, the whole time I was travelling, everything went really smoothly – no problems with my luggage or getting through airport security (the scissors that I’d accidentally put in my hand luggage were discovered before I’d said my goodbyes!), and I got plenty of sleep on both the bus and plane – a real answer to prayer! I didn’t see much of Buenos Aires, but what I did see was beautiful – at this stage I was overwhelmed by the heat and tiredness of the journey and was more than happy to have a nap! Later that evening I got on the bus and after a full night’s sleep, I woke up on Friday morning not even half way there. Although flying would have been quicker, I am so glad I took a bus as I got to see so much of this beautiful country.

Salta

When I finally arrived in Salta, I was met from the bus by Cecilia, and taken to her home, where I was able to have a much needed shower and rest, and the pleasure of finally meeting her and her family. The following morning I was taken to Rachel and Inan’s home, which is where I will be living for the next few weeks. Inan is the youth pastor, and he and Rachel have 2 young kids, Nahuel (4), and Joshua (2), and they are expecting their third child in May. Rachel is originally from London, and has been living in Salta for the last 5 years. Inan is a native of Salta and has spent some time in the UK before he and Rachel moved back to Argentina. I am really enjoying staying with this wonderful family and have had some really good conversations about the differences and similarities between life here and life back home. It is also nice to be staying with a family who speak English, and understand how strange those little cultural differences can be at first.



I have been to church twice here now, and am really enjoying it! It is still quite difficult for me to follow what’s happening but every day I understand more and more – and my dictionary is never too far away.

On my first Sunday I was invited up to the front and was given a proper welcome, which was really nice. Church is quite similar to Redcross, with a similar style of worship, although the service is a lot longer. The pastor here has 3 churches, which are all in different areas of the city. The church which I have been to meets on a Sunday evening and the other two churches meet on Sunday morning and Saturday night. The pastor is the same age as Dad, and also has 3 children about the same ages as us. The church has quite a wide age range, and from what I can tell, there would be about 60-80 people there on a Sunday evening.



Summer Camp.

A week long summer camp for young people started last Monday and I had the great pleasure of being involved in this. The age range for the camp was about 14 to people in their early twenties , so it was a great opportunity to meet some people my own age. The camp has young people from all 3 of the churches, and is one of the few opportunities in the year to have everyone in the same place. Accommodation was somewhat basic, a far cry from Ovoca Manor, but a really great location to have a camp. We stayed in a school, using the classrooms as bedrooms and the main hall as a dining room and meeting room, and plenty of outdoor space for games and football, and the resident horses! The school was about 45 minutes out of the city, in the countryside, and water was limited, with no showers, so it was either a bucket of cold water, or off to the river.



We were put into 4 teams for the week, and the rivalry between them was something else! I was put on the blue team, which thankfully had a good English speaker on it, so I had my own personal translator when needed! It was a week of late nights and early mornings, intense sunshine and very heavy rain, times of laughter and times of reflection, and times of sheer hilarity, encounters with each other, and encounters with God – all the makings of a great camp!

The theme of the camp was “Dios Nuestra Identidad”, or “God Our Identity”. There were morning and evening sessions with worship and a talk, exploring what it means to have our identity in Christ, as well covering topics like relationships, body image and self confidence from a Christian perspective. There were also morning devotionals and time to spend praying in our teams. Due to the language barrier, a lot of the talks were difficult for me to follow – but I was amazed and privileged to see so many young people responding to God’s love and allowing him to change their lives.



The rest of the time was spent having a lot of fun – with messy games to rival Alan Breen’s, team building activities and challenges, and spending time with each other and getting to know one another. I was blown away at how accepting and inclusive everyone was of me – a stranger who was a challenge to communicate with - but I barely got a moment on my own the whole week, and was constantly surrounded by people practicing their English on my or trying to teach me more Spanish – with lots of laughter in the moments of miscommunication and confusion. In typical camp fashion, on the last night we had a bonfire – but instead of marshmallows, we cooked sausages in the fire. On Saturday we packed up and cleaned, and rather reluctantly headed home, disappointed that the week was over already.



Prayer

I know some of you are probably praying for me at the moment, and I really want to thank you all for your continued support and encouragement. If you could keep praying for me that I would continue to integrate into life here, get to know people better, and that learning and speaking Spanish would become easier and easier, then that would be much appreciated. Also, if you could remember the young people from the camp in your prayers, that the commitments they have made, and the teaching they have heard will not fade now that they have left the environment of the camp.

That's all my news for now – and to finish off, I'd just like to say that a month ago I could never have imagined how happy I am to be here, and this only comes from God having me in the right place with the right people.

Thanks again for all your friendship, support and prayers,

With love,

Fiona