

Duluth to Santiago, Chile

by Luke Lysen

THE ADVENTURE – PART THREE

Editor's Note: This is the final installment of the three-part series about Luke Lysen and Chase Friesen's trip ferrying two Cirrus SR20s from the factory in Duluth, Minn. to Santiago, Chile, near the southern tip of South America. Luke is sharing this adventure as he compiled it in his journal – the flying, weather, geography and people encountered on the way.

In the last issue of Cirrus Pilot, Luke and Chase had just finished their fourth day of flying over the mountains of Central America, including a low flight over the Panama Canal and a night landing in Ecuador.



Quito, Ecuador from the air on departure.

Day 5: A Very Long Day!

“What do you mean there is no fuel?” I asked Jaime, one of our handlers who called at 6:00 a.m. We had landed the night before at Quito International Airport in the capital city of Ecuador. The website stated that they had 100LL, we had called ahead and verified that they had it, yet when we landed, there wasn't any to be had.

We decided to go to the airport and investigate the situation for ourselves. The night before, we had just locked the airplanes and left without doing any paperwork, planning to make it up the next morning.

Upon arrival, they wanted to see our passport, insurance documents, registration, pilot licenses, flight plans, etc. This was the same as at many places, the difference was that we had to show these items to no less than five people and drive to various locations on the

airport to do it. We then would put the papers back in the airplane and drive back to the airport office on the other side of the field, which was located underneath the concourses of the terminal. In order to get to the office by van, we had to weave in and around various large aircraft that were parked at the gate, then walk up a narrow winding staircase to an office with no windows located in the bowels of the airport. Once we got back, they would need to see one document or another again and we would need to go back, which happened a few times. All of the people we met were friendly, but I felt like they could be better organized.

As this was happening, one of our handlers was trying to find us fuel. At about noon, some was located. There was a flight school on the field that had been grounded for five days because of the fuel problem, but several 55-gallon barrels of fuel had just arrived. The price was \$10 per gallon (Ecuador uses the U.S. dollar) and it was 100 green. It was expensive, but at this point we were willing to pay; there was no other option. We taxied the airplanes over to the flight school and parked under the wing of a broken-down old commercial aircraft. There were several people who wanted to see the Cirrus and check out what was going on. We obliged and let the flight instructors, line crew, pilots and other staff take pictures and look at the SR20s. Everyone was very excited to see them and could not believe how cool the Cirrus aircraft were up close.

Then, it was time to fuel up. A large, blue 55-gallon drum was rolled out to a spot near the wing. A hand pump with crank was inserted in the top of the barrel, while a funnel with strainer was put over the fuel tank opening on the airplane.

Fueling 100 green, out of a 55-gallon drum, in Quito, Ecuador.



I asked them to find something soft so the funnel would not scratch the wing. A large fire extinguisher was wheeled out near this setup, just in case it was needed. There were five line personnel doing the work to pump in the fuel. They cranked away at the hand pump – this was something I had never seen before in my 12 years and 6,000 hours of flying. After fueling CC-LLL they moved the equipment over to CC-LLK and started fueling.

As we were behind schedule by about four hours, I decided to finish my preflight and get ready to leave as soon as the other plane was fueled. I got the sump cup out and sumped the outboard wing tank on the right wing. The fuel was green because it was 100 leaded not 100 LL, but all was well. I then sumped the inboard tank and ... “un problemo”. The sump cup was full of a brown liquid. For about 30 seconds, I just looked at it thinking, “is this the color you get when you mix blue 100 LL and green 100 avgas?” Then it clicked, there was water in the fuel. I immediately called for Chase to come over and motioned to the guys fueling the plane to stop what they were doing.



The Andes Mountains of Peru at sunset.

I told Chase that I thought there was water in the fuel. To date, my experience with water was adding a drop or two to a fuel sample to show students what water in the fuel looked like. I have always pointed out the clear bubbles of water at the bottom of the sump cup. In my hand was something quite different; I had a full container of a brown liquid.

Chase took the sump cup, opened up the palm of his hand and poured the liquid. With his hand dripping, he turned to me and said, “That is water.” By pouring the liquid on his hand, he was testing if it would evaporate. Fuel would evaporate, water would not – it did not evaporate.

I squatted back under the wing and began taking some more samples. We checked all of the sumps on both planes, ten in all. We did have water from all four sumps, but after two samples there was only water coming out of one.

We tested several more sumps and there was still water. We were able to get a GATS jar and a five-gallon bucket; I pushed in the sump and let it run for a while filling the bucket. I then sumped it with the small sump cup; this time there was only a small amount of water in the fuel – two more sumps and we were good.

This entire process took over an hour and at this point, it was past noon. I was sweating and had done a good job of getting fuel on myself. I wanted to leave and get in the air. Since we were not full of fuel, we planned to fly about 45 minutes away to Guayaquil – the largest city in Ecuador with over 4.4 million people, sitting near sea level.

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Departing out of Quito was pushing the limits of the SR20. It sits above 9,000 feet MSL and is surrounded by higher terrain. I did a very long run-up and spent 30 minutes on the ground to confirm that the fuel was okay from both tanks. We called for our clearance and taxi instructions, and got in line on the taxiway. I was behind a 767 and in front of two large planes that did not seem to be either Boeing or Airbus products.

On the departure roll, I pushed the throttle full forward and waited for the SR20 to respond. The airspeed was inching forward 40, 50, 60 ... 68, 69, 70, rotate. I asked for a circling climb over the airport, and it was denied. I asked again and told them that I was unable to proceed as instructed because I could not make the climb out. After some back and forth, we worked out a climb solution that allowed me to have outs and avoid the mountains; I ended up going north and then west around the highest terrain.

Quito is an interesting city nestled high in the Andes Mountains; it's a mix between a Colorado mountain airport and a big city. Imagine if Denver was located in the mountains where Telluride is. The airport is in the middle of the sprawl with buildings and houses all around it. There are commercial jet liners flying barely 100 feet above buildings on takeoff and landing, similar to Lindbergh Field in San Diego. There is no room for the airport to grow, so a new one is being built outside of town.

Our destination of Guayaquil was all downhill. We quickly left the mountains and came upon the lowland jungles of Ecuador where green stretched in all directions. As we approached Guayaquil, we started to see signs of habitation – there were fields and some small buildings and shacks. The airport was on the eastern edge of town and we flew straight in to a long friendly runway. We taxied over to the transient parking and fuel areas and waiting there were our fuelers – in fuel trucks, no less.

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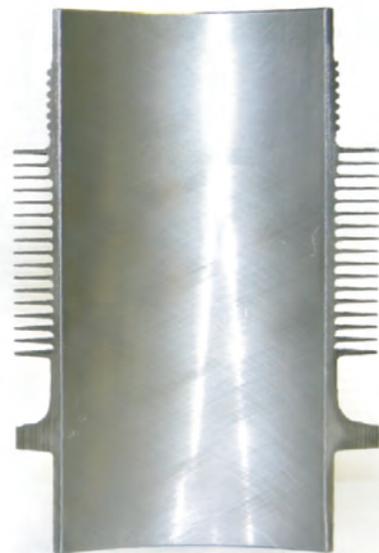
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We topped off the tanks, grabbed a sandwich, and were ready to go. This time I was ready with greenbacks to pay, as I had hit a cash machine in Quito. This place was a 180 from Quito, where they did not know what to do with a small airplane. In Guayaquil, they were experienced in dealing with us and had an FBO very similar to one you would find in the States. While we were there, an N-registered G-5 landed and dropped off some passengers.

As Guayaquil was not on the original itinerary, we had not made any arrangement to land here. The handlers in Quito told us that we were taken care of, but as we called for taxi instruction, we found that we did not have prior permission to land. The tower had cleared us, but we did not have permission from whoever we needed to get permission from. This caused about an hour delay and then we were off.

Our next leg was down the west coast of Ecuador and Peru to Lima. It would be a four-hour-plus hop and likely nighttime when we arrived, but we were feeling good and wanted to get on our way.

The departure was uneventful and we were cleared as filed. I was amazed at the size of Guayaquil – it was mile after mile of houses and buildings; I felt like I was flying over Los Angeles, one very large geographic area of densely populated houses. Until less than 24 hours ago, I had never heard of Guayaquil, Ecuador, just one more reminder there is a big wonderful world outside of the United States. After about 45 minutes, we were out of radar and back to the reporting points. We reported leaving Ecuador, were handed off to another center in Peru and reported on with them.



Luke and Chase enjoying Arica, Chile Jimmy Buffet-style.

We were flying down the coast where the Andes Mountains run into the coastal desert of Peru. With the sun getting lower in the sky, the light was a mix of orange, red and pink and the views out the left window of the Andes Mountains and the right window of the Pacific Ocean were astonishing. The radios were quiet, except for the conversations that Chase and I were having lamenting about not having some fancy cameras with the proper lenses and shutter speeds to capture the views. For the most part, the land was free from humans, at least as far as we could tell from 10,000 feet. There were some cities, but it was mostly desert and plains with mountains vaulting upward from the ground. Listening to my iPod® and watching the view out my window will be a memory I cherish forever.

The flight was proceeding without a hitch and we were making our position reports. We arrived into the busy city and airspace of Lima with radar vectors to the ILS with the approach at night coming in over the harbor. It was a beautiful site to see the lights of this large city.

When we landed, it was very similar to landing at Newark, O'Hare, or LAX; a lot of large jets, many runways and taxiways, and much going on. On our arrival, handlers were waiting for us; we parked the plane in between two Gulfstreams, and hopped in the van to go to their office.

It was obvious that small airplanes were not the norm at this airport. Things went well, but it took about an hour-and-a-half to get fuel. During that time, we went to the terminal to get some dinner. Our handler weaved us in and around large aircraft, just like at Quito, and then we were led through a maze of doors and passageways until we ended up on the passenger concourses of the airport. We found a takeout place and picked up dinner – the glamorous life of a ferry pilot.

We settled our fuel bill, as we have learned, they do not take Visa. This time I had to haggle with the handler and convince him that if he sends us an invoice, we will pay it. He took copies of my passport, and pilots license(s) (both FAA and Chile).

Chase and I departed and headed south to our next destination, Arica, Chile – the northwest-most city in Chile, located on the Pacific Ocean. When we landed in Arica, the airplanes would need a maintenance inspection and we would be grounded for a few days.

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The departure from Lima was uneventful, we were vectored for about 30 miles and then we were out of radar coverage and back to making position reports. At this point, I have become quite accustomed to making position reports and they roll off my tongue – 40 hours of flying and I have these down.



Magdalena Contardo, of Aerocardal, with Chase and Luke in Santiago, Chile.

Our course is along airways that take us beside the coastline south and then east. There are vast areas of open space, miles and miles of uninhabited dry desert with the Andes Mountains in the background and the Pacific stretching out in front. The ocean is covered with clouds that stop at the shoreline. Chase and I are discussing what we will do in Arica and how it will be good to take a break from flying seven hours a day.

At Arica, we find there is an overcast layer at 2,500 feet. I am cleared for the VOR approach and break out at 2,500 feet as forecasted; I switch over to the tower and land. Chase does the same five minutes behind me. At the airport, customs is waiting, as well as the mechanics, and all goes smooth. One hour later, we were checking into our hotel – Hotel Arica, the best hotel in town, we were told.

The hotel was very nice, but reminiscent of the 1970s – it was awash in yellow and orange, and stucco. Chase and I found our way to the beach outside of our rooms and down 200 yards to a small beachfront restaurant that serves the catch of the day fresh from the ocean directly in front of us.

Day 6 and 7: The next two days we spent exploring the town of Arica, getting to know the history, and even accidentally attend a political rally. Eating fresh fish at the beachside restaurant and spending time on a warm beach in October kind of made me feel like Jimmy Buffet.

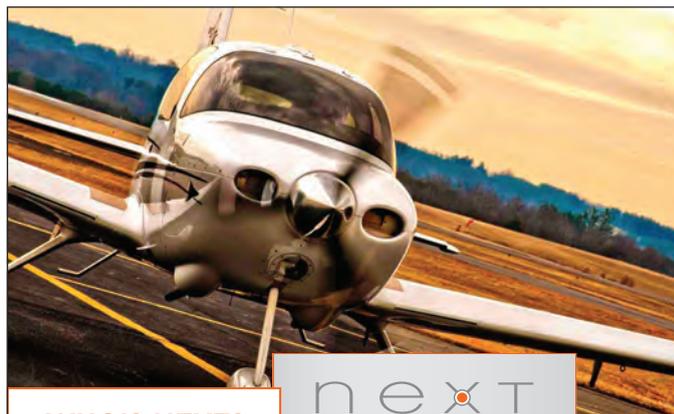
Day 8: After the two days, we departed on our last flight, heading to Santiago via Antofagasta. The landscape was beautiful, but very similar to flying from Lima to Arica – sandy desert plains, a few cities but not much going on with the Andes Mountains ever present and watching us our entire flight. The farther south we flew, the more snow there was adorning the mountains. Keep in mind, spring was just arriving and things were waking up from their winter slumber.

About 100 miles away from Santiago, we start to see the outlying areas, trees and people. The airport is inland from the coast by 20 minutes of flight time and the city is farther east. We are vectored to the ILS and can see the airport 20 miles out. Santiago is lined with snowcapped mountains on three sides and green trees fill in the city. I am excited to get on the ground and explore this city that has been around since 1541.

As we taxi in, we are met by Magdalena Contardo from Aerocardal. We exchange hugs and kisses (when in Rome) and hand off the keys to these two wonderful aircraft.

This was a flight I will never forget; it took us 49 flight hours and 10 days total time, including the airline trips to Duluth and back home. I grew as a pilot and it was a wonderful way to experience South America for the first time. I look forward to my next flight to this part of the world. **COPA**

About the Author: Luke Lysen has over 5,500 hours flying and teaching in Cirri and is a CFI, CFII, MEI and CSIP. He has flown to Europe, South America, and all over North America. Luke would like to remind you to look outside.



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