



RON & CARYL'S ADVENTURE IN PATAGONIA

In February 2020, Ron and Caryl traveled to Patagonia, Chile and the Antarctic. We flew from Seattle to Houston to Santiago, Chile and then on to Punta Arenas, at the southern tip of South America. From there we drove five hours north to Torres del Paine National park, where we spent five days. This slide show is the Chile part of our journey. The Antarctic will be in a separate slide show.

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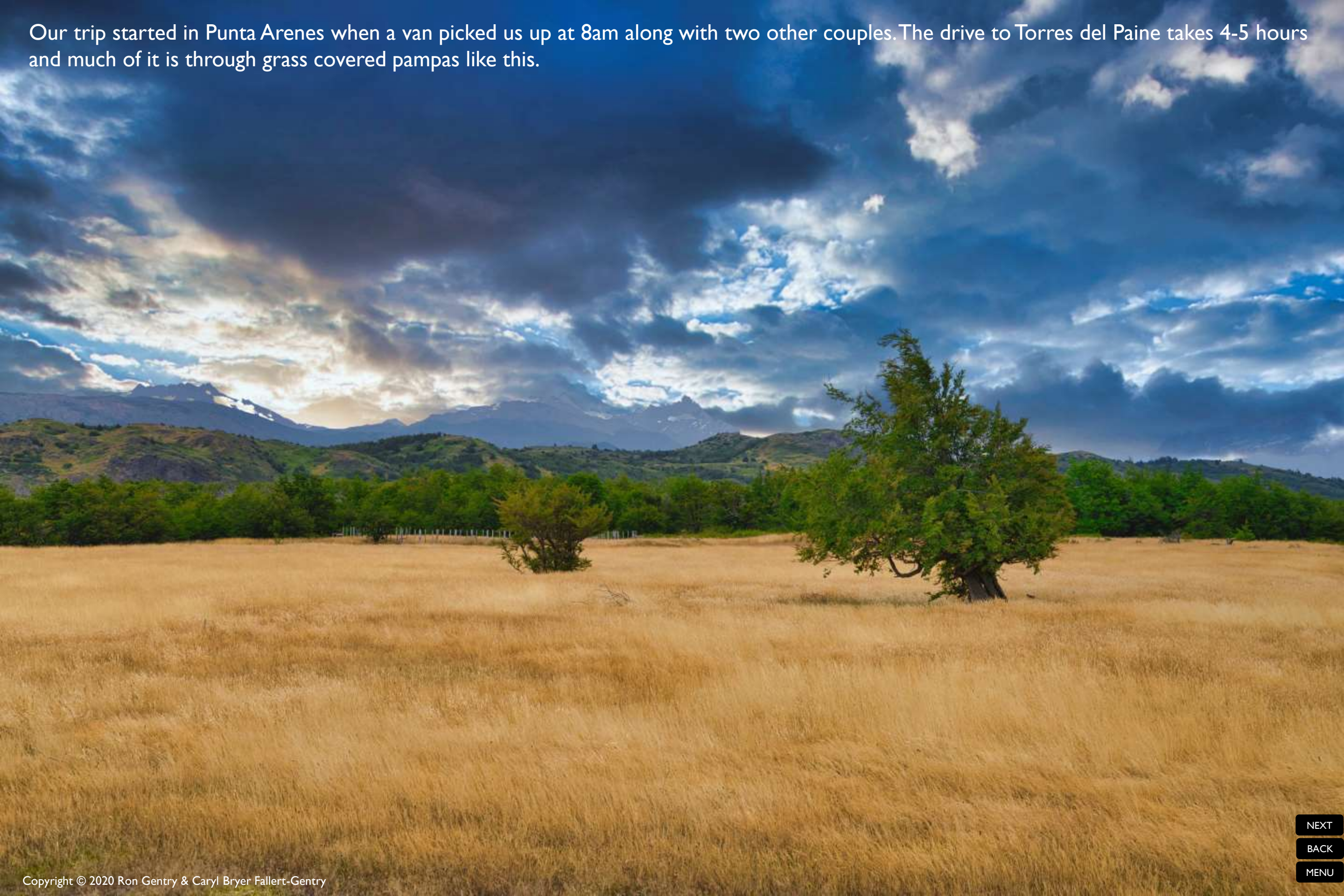
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Trees & Plants

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Our trip started in Punta Arenes when a van picked us up at 8am along with two other couples. The drive to Torres del Paine takes 4-5 hours and much of it is through grass covered pampas like this.









Torres del Paine

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The park visitors' center is housed in the former home of ranchers who deeded their land to the park.



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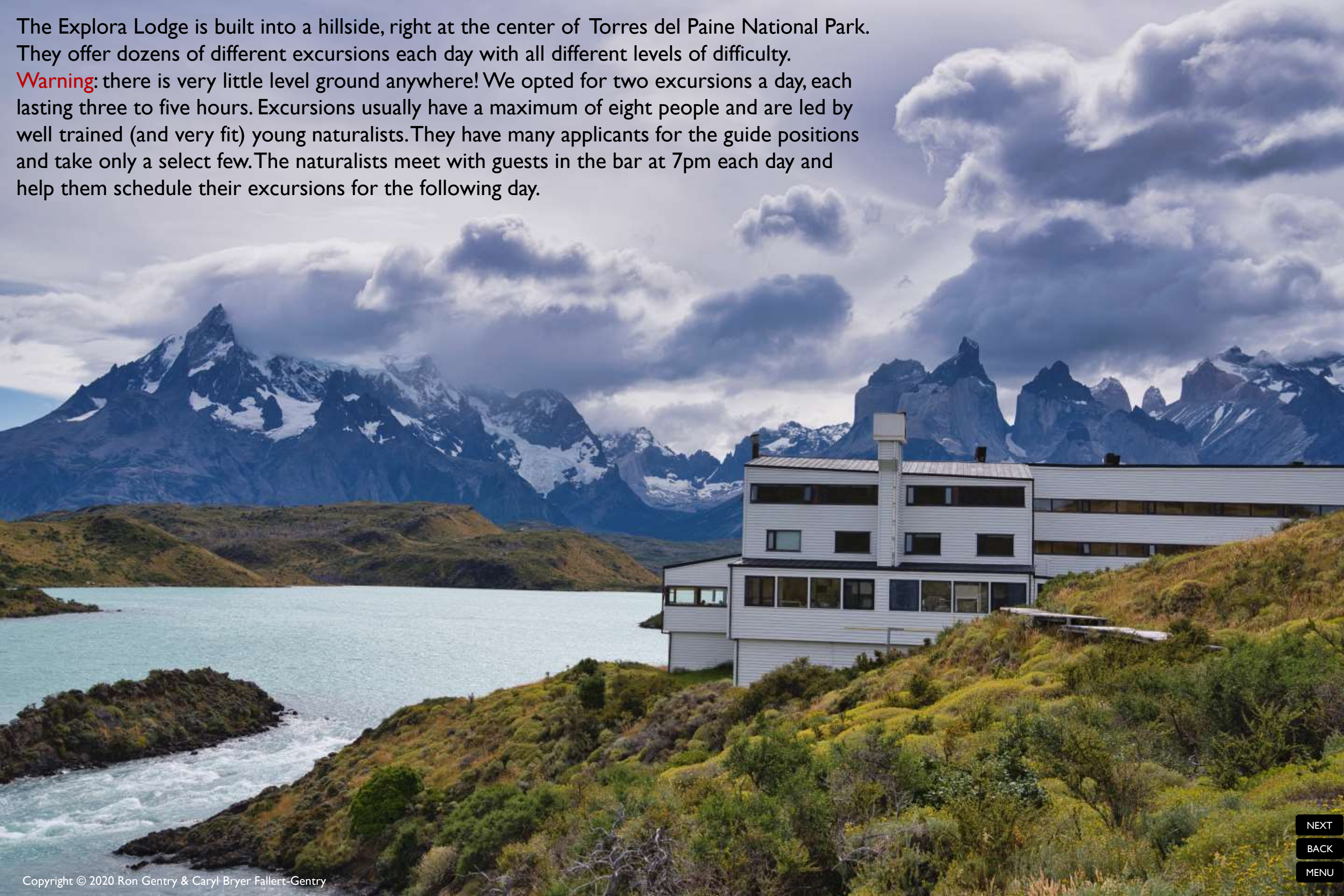
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Explora Lodge

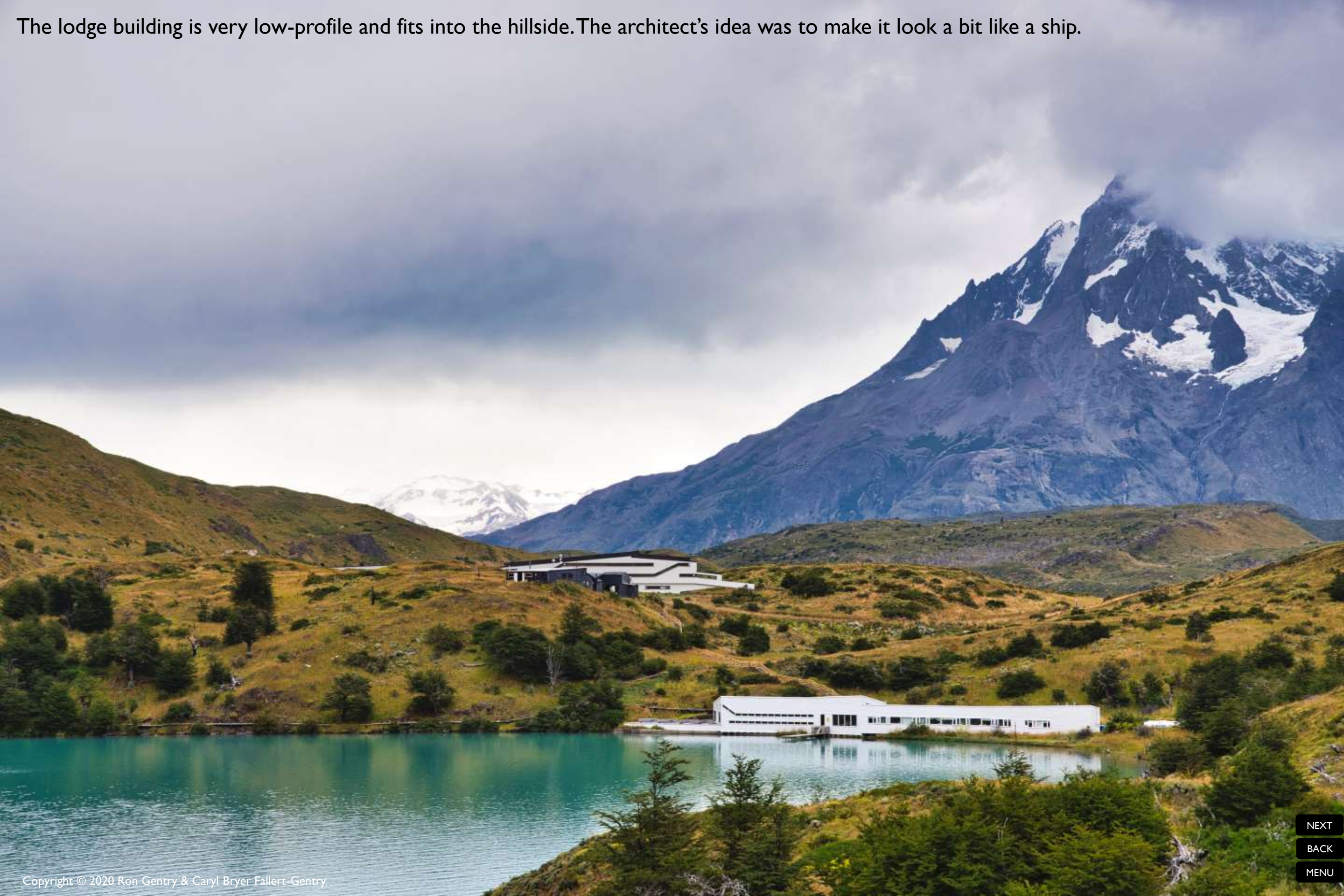
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The Explora Lodge is built into a hillside, right at the center of Torres del Paine National Park. They offer dozens of different excursions each day with all different levels of difficulty.

Warning: there is very little level ground anywhere! We opted for two excursions a day, each lasting three to five hours. Excursions usually have a maximum of eight people and are led by well trained (and very fit) young naturalists. They have many applicants for the guide positions and take only a select few. The naturalists meet with guests in the bar at 7pm each day and help them schedule their excursions for the following day.



The lodge building is very low-profile and fits into the hillside. The architect's idea was to make it look a bit like a ship.





Torres del Paine National Park, Chile: Picture taken from our room at the Explora Lodge.



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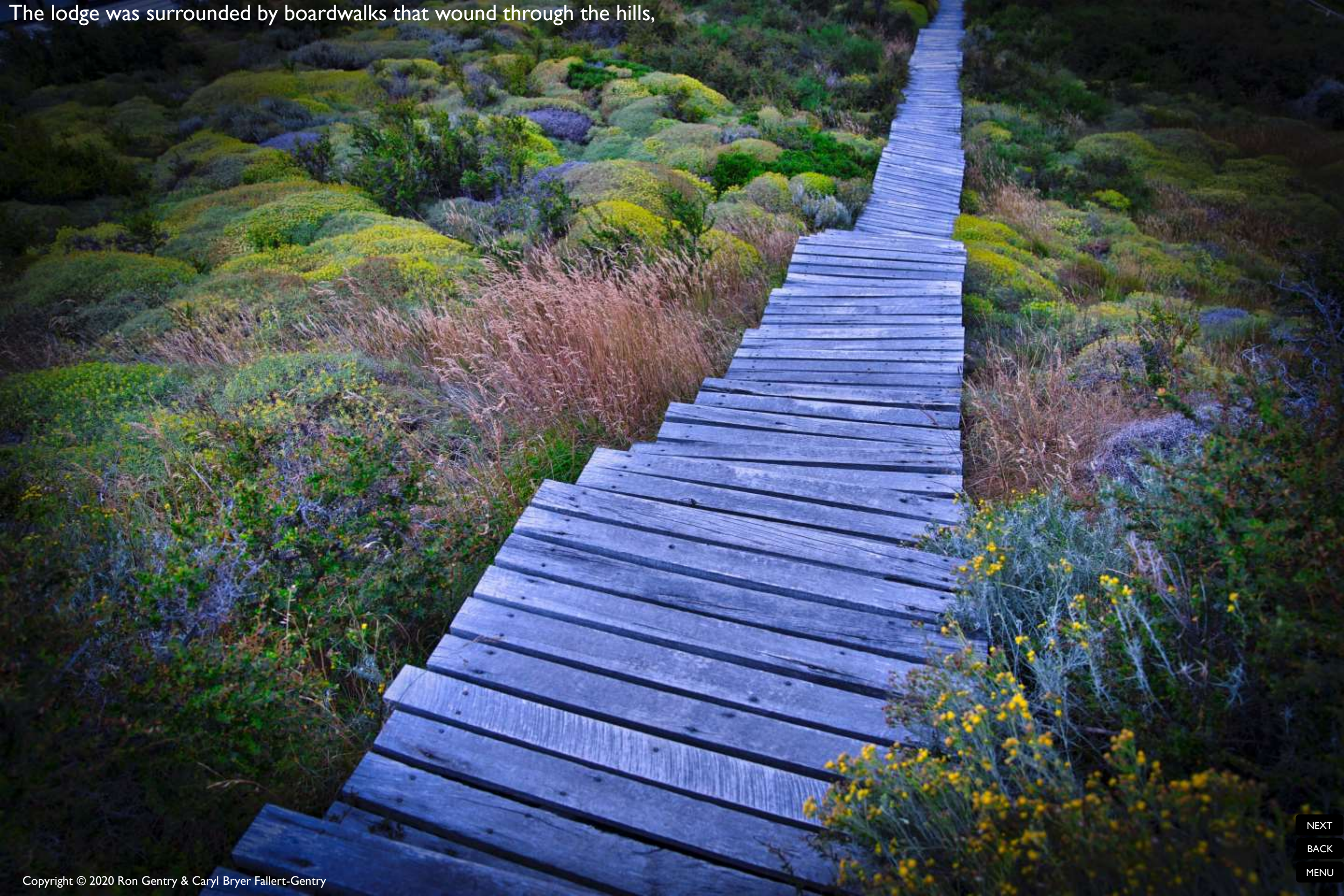
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View from the dining room



The lodge was surrounded by boardwalks that wound through the hills,



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Did we mention, it rains a lot? The excursions go on, rain or shine, snow or wind. Don't go without Gore-Tex.



Boat dock at the Explora Lodge at dusk with a full moon.







On one of our excursions, we took a boat trip to the other end of the lake. This is a view of the lodge from the boat.

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On one of our hikes, we came across a large heard of guanacos, who didn't seem to mind if we walked among them.



Unlike the llamas found further north in the Andes, the guanacos cannot be domesticated.







































The big cat in Patagonia is the puma, the same cat that wanders through our neighborhood at Kala Point occasionally. Our neighbors reported that one killed a deer right at our intersection while we were on this trip.





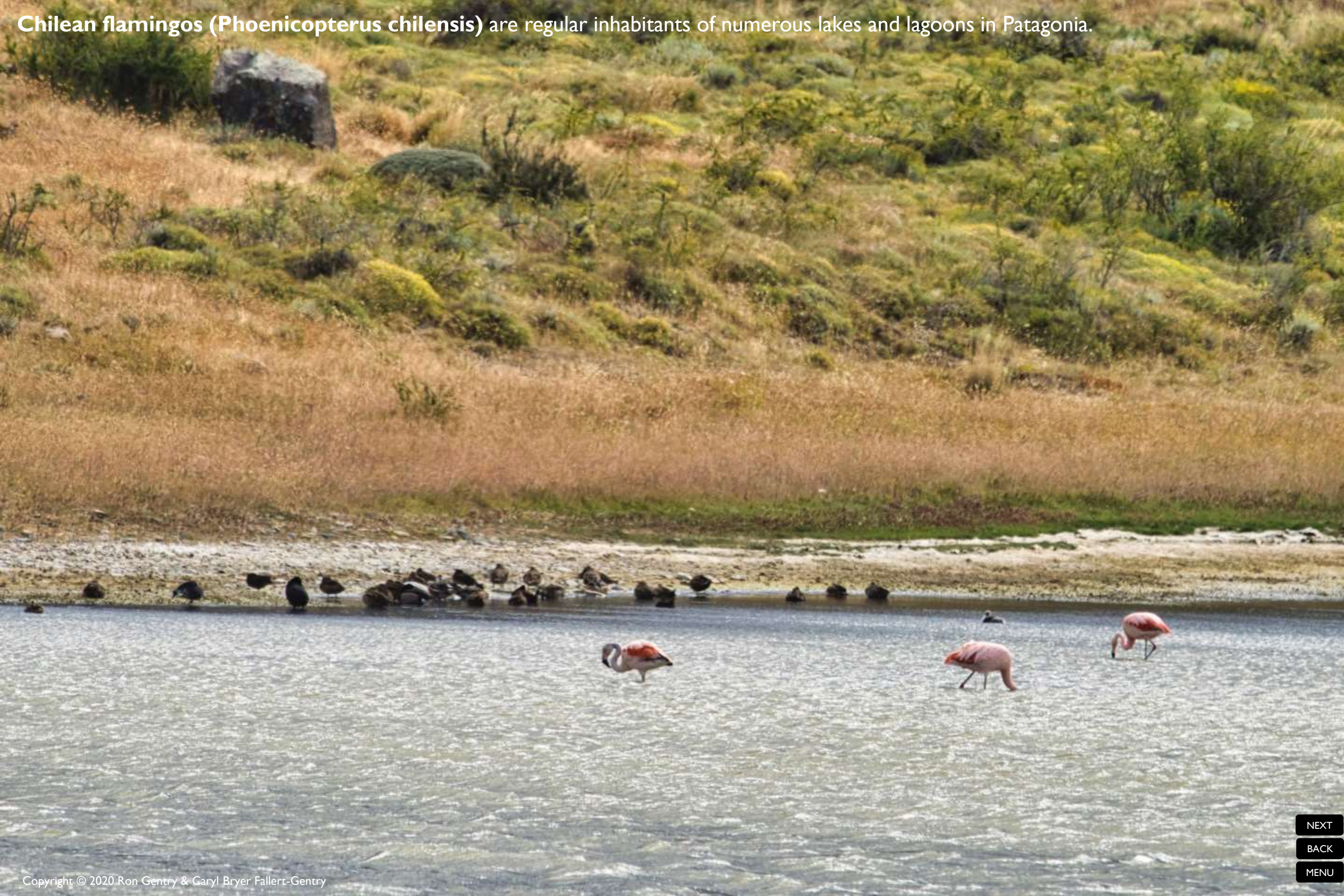
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Chilean flamingos (*Phoenicopterus chilensis*) are regular inhabitants of numerous lakes and lagoons in Patagonia.



The **black-necked swan** (*Cygnus melancoryphus*) is the largest waterfowl native to South America.





We spotted this rhea on our drive north through the pampas.



We saw many of these large hawks while we were out hiking.





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This is the classic view of the Andes in Patagonia, although you can seldom see the tops of all the peaks. The lighter colored rock is granite, sculpted over eons by the glaciers. The darker rock at the top is sedimentary and very flaky, making it challenging for climbers to reach the top.





































Water

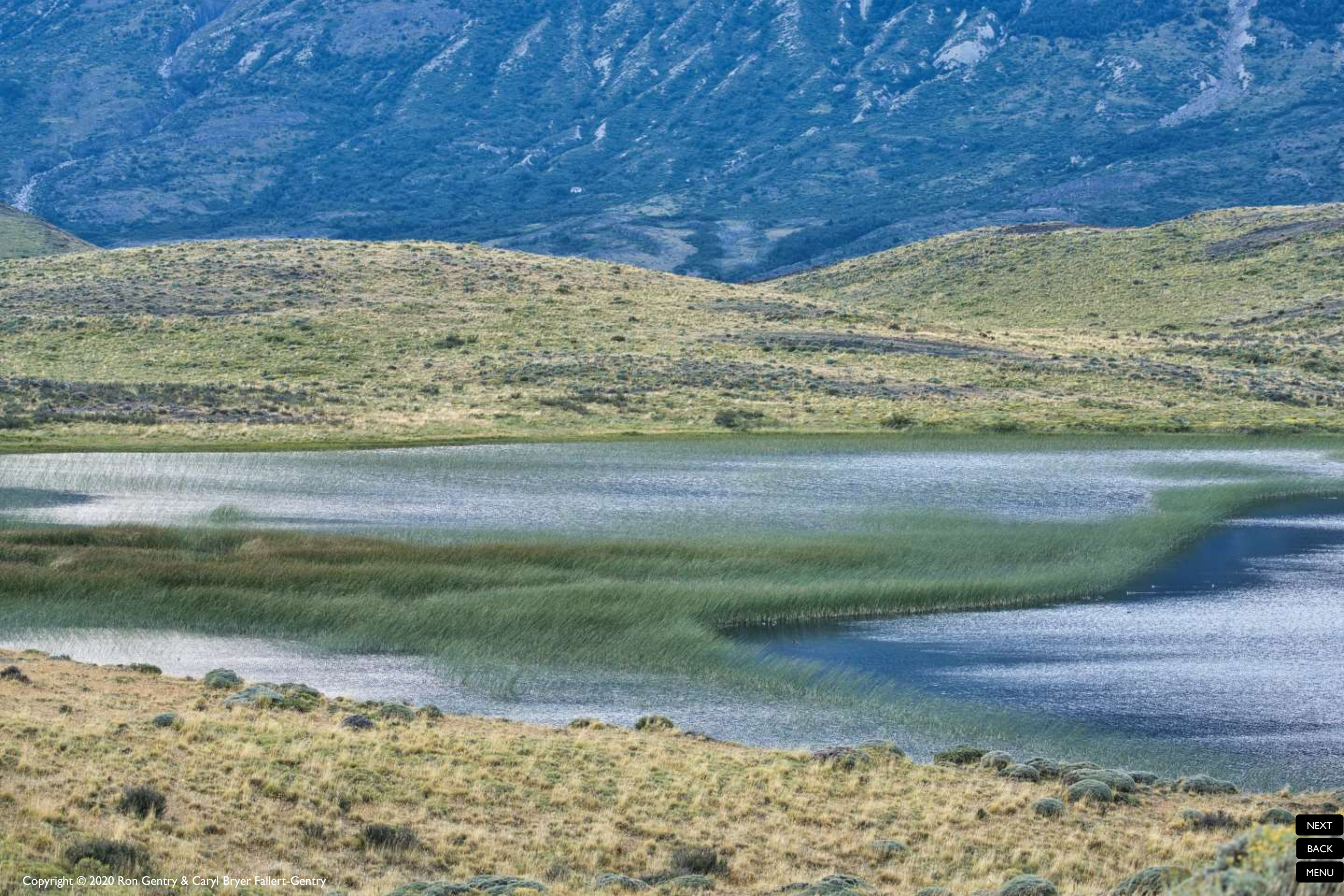
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The blue things are icebergs that have broken off from the glaciers flowing down the mountains.





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In December of 2011, a forest fire destroyed more than 17,606 hectares (43,505 acres) in Torres del Paine National Park

The native forest that was destroyed comprised trees that grow very slowly, taking 200 years to reach maturity. They also need to be protected from the cold and wind during the winter and dryness during the summer.

Revitalizing the scorched areas, unfortunately, is not just a matter of replanting small trees, but also of providing them with the required growing conditions. Fire also burns underground where it damages the soil. Wildlife living in the park returned to damaged areas only to find them completely barren, forcing them move elsewhere in search of food and shelter.

While we saw some active reforestation efforts in a few areas, in most areas it's left up to mother nature and many of the new (very small) trees are living in the shadows of their ancestors' skeletons.

The dead snags do make for some dramatic photography.



Starry night in Torres del Paine. No air pollution here!!!















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Five-mile hike through the rain.
At least there was no wind that day.
Our guide said he had never seen
anyone use an umbrella before.
It's usually too windy, I guess.



At dusk, Ron chats, outside our room at the lodge, with a couple of fellow photographers from Chicago





Wow...
you made it all the way to the end with us.
Thanks for joining us.

If you want to see more slide shows of our
adventures, go to Caryl's NEWS page

<http://www.bryerpatch.com/news/news.htm>

If you would like to see more of Ron's
photography,
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