



The Hospedaje publication date: Mar 3, 2009

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author/source: Ross Cormack

[Previous](#) | [Next](#)

Our Hospedaje in Puyuhaupi was cheap, and I would love to have said cheerful but in reality was pretty grim. The walls were made of plywood, the gas cooker dropped in by plane, the patchy linoleum floor (at one time a flower patterned design now indecipherable) was almost level and the ceiling and door lintel was low as my forehead will testify. The smell was unpleasant, the pots and pans dated from WW2, and everything was held in place by wire (quite ingenious actually) including the taps, cupboards and doors. The freezing stone clad bathroom was attached to the side of the sinking ship by prit-stick, but it did have a sink, attached by wire to another heavy object to counter balance the weight (not the wall) and a toilet bowl with the seat still attached.

I gingerly descended the creaking stairs, each makeshift plank a different colour and shape, to the bathroom, which I was surprised to still find attached to the main structure. In the dim morning light and with my breath crystallising before me, I attempted the rather lengthy process of preparing myself for a shower.

I have been travelling on the Carratera for the best part of a month and have stayed in some pretty backward areas without services and basic infrastructure, so one would think that I would have learned to search for the gas cylinder, flick the gas feeder to open the supply of gas to the water heater, to have a lighter handy to light the pilot, to turn the knob to maximum after holding it in for 15 seconds, to turn the hot water tap and wait a few seconds for the water to heat, to remember to take a towel and to leave it strategically placed as close to the shower cubicle as possible thereby reducing serious, uncomfortable wet skin, cold air exposure time, and then, only then disrobe and enter the shower, secure in the knowledge I will be entering steaming hot water. I did not.

The hot air hit the cold air and an explosion of steam engulfed the tiny cubicle. Every part of my body fought to be under the hot water at the same time to avoid freezing; a modern ballet / break-dance ensued. And when to get out – I sent out a test limb but it snapped back in as if electrocuted by the freezing air. Each part of my body refused to move out with the hot jet spray as I pirouetted around and around trying to even out the heat distribution, and then the worse fear of all struck me, what if the gas runs out, the cylinder was tiny – they don't even have kitchen utensils why would they have a spare cylinder - I had to get out immediately! The following minutes are unclear; I have a foggy recollection of frantically towelling myself dry and trying to put on all my clothing at the same time.

 [Back to top](#)

 [Previous](#) | [Next](#)