



PATAGONIA HIGHLIGHTS

Patagonia is a region without fixed frontiers at the southern end of South America. It is characterised by dramatic and diverse landscapes.

The awesome Patagonian Andes, straddling the Argentine-Chilean border, change as you travel south. In the north you find snow-capped volcanoes, lakes and evergreen forests, while in the south soaring granite peaks, vast glaciers and deciduous forests predominate.

The South Patagonian Ice Field is the largest ice cap outside Antarctica and Greenland. It and the North Patagonian Ice Field generate huge glaciers which feed the Chilean fjords to the west and the Argentine lakes to the east.

Patagonia is fauna-rich too, boasting condors, guanacos and rheas inland, as well as colonies of sea lions and penguins along its coasts.

The Patagonian climate is more extreme the further south you go. October to March provide long daylight hours and are overall the best months to visit. However Patagonian's westerly winds are also strongest during this period, increasing the further south you go. For cold, crisp, relatively windless winter days, with few people about (and more chance of spotting the elusive puma), try our August departure.

Andean Trails' Patagonian programmes get you to the heart of some magnificent and pristine wilderness.

Below we outline some of the top places to go and things to do, in no particular order.

Paine National Park

Torres del Paine is one of South America's most spectacular national parks, and famed for its Paine W hike.

A wonder of natural sculpture, it boasts many of the natural features so characteristic of southern Patagonia, sharp, soaring peaks, huge glaciers, turquoise lakes and dense Magellanic forest. As for wildlife, Paine harbours colonies of many native and endemic bird and mammal species, including guanaco, rhea, condor and the elusive puma.

The Paine massif is the centre piece of the park. Its collection of frost-polished towers and spires averaging 3000m (9843ft), surges dramatically skyward from a low-lying plateau, and is encircled by a hydrological system linking together lakes of various hues of blue.

The massif is the hub of the great Paine trekking circuit, a demanding but breathtaking nine day loop which takes in the French Valley with its spectacular granite amphitheatre, the Torres (Towers) and a bird's eye view of the Grey Glacier and the ice cap beyond.



Torres del Paine

The alternative five day 'W' trek is also beautiful, as is our four day kayaking trip via fjord, river and lake to the park's Tyndall Glacier.

You can choose to stay at cosy hotels and estancias and take day walks, stay in hiker's refugios, try our Paine eco-camp or even sleep in yurts.

With a guide or self-guided, we are as flexible as your holiday needs.



Welcome to Patagonia



El Chaltén & Fitzroy

The soaring granite spires and fissured glaciers of the Fitzroy and Torre groups offer some of the most awesome scenery and magnificent hiking and trekking in southern Patagonia.

Located in the Los Glaciares National Park immediately east of the southern Ice Field, the region is accessed via El Chaltén, Argentina. A network of trails allows day hikes to spectacular viewpoints, including those for the Cerro Torre and Cerro Fitzroy peaks.



Sunrise over the Ice Field

Here the classic route is the Fitzroy M, and we have menu of treks to choose from.

We offer the classic M taking in Cerro Torre Glacier and Laguna de Los Tres at the base of Mount Fitzroy, and there is also an extended eight or nine day hike including all the M highlights plus the remote Pasa del Viento (Windy Pass).

Independent trekkers may wish to choose our self-guided trekking option, or we can help to design an individual tour combining walks, camping, eco-camps and hotels or estancias.

The South Patagonian Ice Field

The southern Ice Field is the beating heart of southern Patagonia, generating the vast glaciers and extreme climatic conditions so characteristic of the region.

At 300km x 60km it is the third largest expanse of ice on earth and is exceeded only by Antarctica and Greenland. It lies around 1,500m above sea level and is punctuated by a dozen mountain massifs.

Access is usually via the Marconi Glacier, starting from El Chaltén, Argentina. Our stunning snow-shoeing and skiing circuits take you onto the ice field for up to two weeks. Our 10-day circuit passes the ice-clad west face of Cerro Torre and exits via the Paso del Viento.

Extreme weather conditions can make the going tough so previous winter experience is beneficial. Participants are required to carry their own back pack, so a good level of physical fitness is essential.

The Perito Moreno Glacier

The Perito Moreno Glacier is one of the natural wonders of Patagonia and is reached by road from El Calafate. It is a must-see for any visitor to Patagonia with its almost constant display of huge icebergs calving from the glacier face into Lago Argentina.

Vast in scale (four miles wide and 60m high at its snout), it is set amid a labyrinthine system of iceberg channels in the south of the Los Glaciares National Park, and is backed by deciduous beech forests and snow peaks.



Perito Moreno Glacier

Unlike the region's other glaciers, the Perito Moreno is still growing; every few years, its advancing edge reaches the near shore, damming up the southern iceberg channel until the ice is breached and a huge volume of water surges through to Lake Argentina.

The awesome northern iceberg channels of Lake Argentina, where the Uppsala (South America's largest glacier), Spegazzini and Oneli Glaciers calve, can be reached by boat on a day-trip from El Calafate via Puerto Banderas.



The Carretera Austral & San Rafael Glacier

Chile's southern Araucaria and Aysen regions make up a vast, sparsely-inhabited backcountry between the Lake District and southern Patagonia, as well as taking in much of the Archipelago. The so-called Carretera Austral is characterised by mountainous forests, fjords and lakes. At the heart of this region is the North Patagonian Ice Field, whose spectacular San Raphael Glacier is probably its best-known landmark.



Shipwrecked, Tierra del Fuego

This is the road less travelled, off-the-beaten track - and spectacularly beautiful.

San Raphael can be reached by sea or by air, as a day trip from Puerto Montt.

The approach by light aircraft from Coyhaique overflies the North Patagonian Ice Field. In clear weather, Cerro San Valentin (4,080m) can be seen - the highest mountain in Patagonia. On landing, we board a launch on the San Rafael Lagoon and weave between giant icebergs to the glacier's snout.

The region offers much spectacular wilderness trekking, from the Aysen itinerary in the Cerro Castillo National Park which lies south of Coyhaique, to the San Rafael Glacier and Puyehue National Park.

Tierra del Fuego

Like the rest of Patagonia, the Tierra del Fuego archipelago is divided between Chile and Argentina. You are now at the uttermost end of the Earth.

The south is wild and mountainous; Ushuaia, the southernmost city in the world, is dramatically set overlooking the Beagle Channel and surrounded by awesome mountain landscapes. The Beagle Channel's inlets and islets host colonies of marine birds and mammals, which can be visited on boat trips from Ushuaia.

Following the Channel west and into Chile, the landscapes get wilder and the mountains higher as we enter the awesome Darwin Range. Among our Tierra del Fuego programmes are trekking and non-trekking itineraries. Trekking options include snow-shoeing in the Darwin mountains, or a three day trek above Ushuaia and to the summit of Mount Esfinge. Views over the Beagle Channel and to the Cape Horn islands are majestic.

Most Antarctic cruises embark and disembark in Ushuaia and we offer a variety of South Pole sailings to cap off your Patagonia experience.

The Valdes Peninsula

Peninsula Valdes is a wildlife paradise and World Heritage site. This vast nature reserve sticks out into Argentina's South Atlantic, flanked to north and south by two large gulfs.

Among the marine mammals found here are sea lions, elephant seals, killer whales and southern right whales. The whales can be seen in the Gulf of San Juan from June to December by taking a whale watching trip from Puerto Piramide.



Valdes Peninsula

Valdes also boasts with an abundance of seabirds.

Nearby Punta Tombo, the continent's biggest Magellanic penguin breeding ground, has approximately 600,000 penguins. Native land animals seen at Valdes include rhea (South American ostrich) and guanaco (wild llama).

The area is also famous for its historic Welsh influences, settled by Welsh immigrants in the 1860s. Enjoy a cup of Welsh tea after a good day out.



The Chilean Lake District

Chile's Lake District is replete with snow capped conical volcanoes, emerald coloured lakes, fast flowing rivers and National Parks. The fine infrastructure and a whole host of outdoor activities make this area a firm holiday favourite.

Pucon and Lake Villarrica are the main draws in the northern lakes. Pucon itself lies on the Villarrica Lake shore and boasts a spectacular setting with many hotels and restaurants. Nearby one can visit volcanic caves, climb to the crater of Villarrica Volcano, white water raft on the Trancura river, bathe in the natural hot springs at the Termas de Huife or Termas Geometricas or take a hike in one of the surrounding national parks and marvel at the Araucarias (Monkey Puzzle Trees) in their natural setting.



Lake District, Chile

Further south on the coast is Valdivia. This is Chile's only city with navigable rivers. It is a great place to explore with nearby forts built as defence from the Spanish during the wars of independence.

Puerto Varas on Lake Llanquihue and Puerto Montt are the gateways at the southern end of the district. The Osorno Volcano dominates this area and hidden gems such as the Cochamo Valley are close. Outdoor activities include white water rafting, kayak, trekking, canyoning, canopy, horse riding, fly fishing and mountain biking.

This area is also a good staging point to cross the Andes into Argentina. Pucon links across to San Martin de Los Andes and Puerto Montt/Puerto Varas across to San Carlos de Bariloche.

There are strong Germanic influences in the architecture and cuisine (not to mention the beer!) as the area was colonized by German immigrants from Bavaria in the mid 19th Century.

Bariloche

San Carlos de Bariloche lies on the shores of Lake Nahuel Huapi and is surrounded by mountains and forests, making for a stunning location.

It is a year-round destination, with skiing in the winter (May-Sept), and a whole range of activities in the summer months (Oct-April).

You can use your time to hike or go river rafting along dozens of waterways that bisect the ancient forests that surround. There are also tours on mountain bike or horseback to enjoy, and the city also has a lively nightlife with excellent restaurants and pubs.

Cruises

Much of Patagonia is linked by water and there are a variety of boats to help link your Patagonia journeys.

You can sail the Beagle Channel in Charles Darwin's footsteps, linking Ushuaia in Argentina and Punta Arenas in Chile from September to April.



Excursion from Crucero Australis

On board a Cruceros Australis ship you spend time viewing spectacular glaciers, fascinating wildlife and imposing scenery and - weather permitting - stop at Cape Horn National Park.

There are more ferries linking Puerto Montt with Puerto Natales, as well as numerous day ferries. From Puerto Montt sail to view the San Rafael glacier. From Puerto Natales there are day sailings to Balmaceda and Serrano glaciers; and from Punta Arenas there is a ferry to Porvenir and day trips to Magdalena Island to see penguins.



In northern Chile you can sail to some of the country's most remote areas. Our four- and six-day cruises aboard the *Cahuella* in the northern Chilean Archipelago take us in style away from civilisation to a land that time forgot. We sail through stunning Araucarian fjords, where waterfalls cascade from the steep forested walls and glaciated volcanoes pierce the sky, and navigate the channels of the Chiloé archipelago.

There are landings and we go ashore by zodiac launch to explore virgin Alerce forests, visit remote sea lion colonies and bathe in thermal pools.



Kayaking in magical scenery

Mountain Biking

The Chilean Lake District lends itself to some great mountain biking. We have a variety of guided itineraries out of Puerto Varas (near Puerto Montt), taking us through the southern Lake District and around Reloncavi Fjord, in the northern Archipelago. Biking days range from 20 to 70 kms per day, with a support vehicle in attendance at all times.

Sea Kayaking and rafting

Our adventures in sea kayaks take in some of the most amazing and remote areas of Chilean Patagonia, many of these only accessible by water. We cater for all levels of kayakers, from beginners to advanced. Consider an amazing four day kayaking trip to the heart of Paine national park via the iceberg-filled Serrano lagoon and Serrano River. Your destination is the remote Tyndall Glacier, with overnights at stunningly-located wild camps.

Some of the continent's most rewarding sea kayaking is found in the sheltered fjords and channels of the northern Archipelago - ideal waters for those with no previous experience. There are 2-9 day expeditions that see you paddling between islands and through fjords, where forested and snow-capped volcanoes plunge into the sea. These trips take you to the Pumalín National Park with its deep fjords, hot springs, sea lions, dolphins and penguins. The Quintupeu, Cahuelmó and Comau Fjords that make up Pumalín are covered in lush temperate rainforest, with hundreds of cascading waterfalls.

For rafters the Rio Futaleufu in Chile combines clear waters and great rapids which rush through deep canyons and pristine wilderness. This is an explosive and untamed white water adventure unparalleled anywhere in the world.

With so much to choose from, where in Patagonia will your adventure be?

