

TOUR CODE

OAPT



ARGENTINA & CHILE

Buenos Aires, Santiago & Trekking in Patagonia

16 days

Updated 7/1/2010

Day 1 *Arrival in Buenos Aires*

Welcome to Buenos Aires!

Nearly 40% of the country's 33 million citizens live in Gran Buenos Aires (Greater Buenos Aires), which at first makes the city almost as imposing as New York or London. Buenos Aires is becoming a popular gay travel destination and is probably one of the most open-minded cities in Latin America. It has a very European feel, and the people are an attractive mix of Italian, some Spaniards, German, French, and English.

Your time in Buenos Aires will be managed by a local agent / guide. You will meet your mountain guide and camp staff upon arrival in Patagonia.

*** Please note that this tour is an exception to our general policies pertaining to gratuities, which are NOT included for this tour. You should put aside USD 50-60 per person for tips for local guides, camp staff, porters, and restaurant staff.

* NOTE TO 'LAND ONLY' PASSENGERS: In order to qualify for a regional air pass on which this tour is based and priced, you must be ticketed on LAN Argentina or LAN Chile, or any 'One World' carrier. If your international air does not conform to the above, a surcharge (approx \$200) may apply.

Overnight in Buenos Aires. Meal plan: Dinner, if required.

Day 2 *Buenos Aires: City Tour*

Today we see the sights of this cosmopolitan city. In the early part of the 20th century, Argentina was one of the richest countries in the world. The grand public buildings of Buenos Aires reflect this opulent era. The city is known as the "Paris of South America" because of its wide boulevards and European-style architecture. Buenos Aires was founded for the second time in 1580 by Juan de Garay, just north of Mendoza's encampment. In accordance with Spanish law, he laid out the large Plaza del Fuerte (Fortress Plaza). It acquired its present name of Plaza de Mayo after the month of revolution in 1810. Our tour focuses on the major public buildings.

Catedral Metropolitana, built on the site of the original colonial church was not completed until 1827. Not only is it considered a major religious landmark, but also a historic site of great importance. Here lies the tomb of Jose de San Martin, the man who (along with Simon Bolivar) liberated South America from Spanish rule in the early 1800's. The Plaza de Mayo is also home to Museo del Cabildo, the Presidential Palace (Casa Rosada), and the National Congress (Palacio del Congreso).

We also visit the Recoleta Cemetery where Buenos Aires' richest citizens are buried in magnificent marble tombs elaborately decorated with statues. The most internationally-famous person buried here is "Evita" Peron. Later this afternoon you may choose to visit in the artists' quarter of San Telmo. This evening, after our group dinner, we'll have a look at some of BA's exciting nightlife!

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Overnight in Buenos Aires. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 3 *Buenos Aires - El Calafate*

Today we fly south to El Calafate, a resort town on Lake Argentino situated at the entrance to the Glacier National Park. At 7 pm the group meets in the lobby of our hotel to meet your guide, discuss details of your program and enjoy your welcome dinner together with your fellow travellers.

Overnight in El Calafate. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 4 *Calafate - Chalten - Laguna Capri*

After breakfast we take our bus for the 220 km long drive to El Chalten, a small and picturesque village at the foot of Fitz Roy and Cerro Torre massif. We make a stop half way to enjoy local pastries and hot coffee. We carry in our packs only the necessary items for this 3 nights and 4 days in which we'll overnight in our Full Camps inside the National Park (the camp is already set up for you. Excess baggage is stored in Chalten).

We hike up a gentle slope on Fitz Roy trail to gain height over the River de las Vueltas up to the first viewpoints over Fitz Roy massif. Our hike to Laguna Capri will take us no more than 2 hours and a half, on a clear and easy trail. Once at our Laguna Capri Full Camp, we leave our things in our tent and enjoy an afternoon walk to the sightseeing points around the lagoon.

Full Camps are pitched early in the season so we find the camp ready upon arrival. It offers comfortable 3 people-sized "igloo" tents (2 hikers each), with mattress pads and sleeping bags. A personal cotton sheet liner is provided for the sleeping bag. The camp also features a spacious dining tent, a kitchen tent, tables, benches or chairs and a full set of table service and kitchenware. The sanitary services are latrine-type.

NOTE: All walks on this programme are at lower altitudes (below 1200m / 3,960 feet) and will not negatively affect reasonably fit hikers. Our itinerary is flexible to accommodate group desires, abilities, and weather conditions. Different hikes may be substituted to take advantage of appropriate conditions.

Overnight at Laguna Capri Full Camp. Breakfast, box lunch, Meal plan: Breakfast, lunch and dinner.

Day 5 *Laguna Capri - Laguna de los Tres - Laguna Capri*

This is the best close-up view of the Fitz Roy group than one can have, a 6-8 hour round trip from Capri Camp. The first 2 hours are mainly flat, through forest and open glade and bog areas (with diverse bird life) to Fitz Roy base camp. From here it is a one hour / 400 m (1,320 foot) climb to the lagoon on a steep trail. This walk is one of the highlights in the National Park Los Glaciares; the views of Cerro Poincenot, Monte Fitz Roy and the other peaks surrounding these are superb. Fitz Roy is considered the "King of Patagonia" and one of the three most beautiful mountains on Earth (together with Alpamayo in Peru and K2 in the Karakoram). Elevations reached on this day are the second highest on the tour, approx 1100 m / 3,630 feet. Be prepared with layers today as the elevation change means considerable temperature ranges can be encountered.

We return to camp with time to read, chat, sunbathe, and relax lakeside before dinner.

Overnight at Laguna Capri Camp. Meal plan: Breakfast, lunch and dinner.

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Day 6 ***Laguna Capri - Laguna Torre***

This morning we hike down to Rio (River) Fitz Roy and follow it to glacier-fed Laguna Torre at 656 m (2,164 feet) at the base of Cerro Torre, one of the most difficult mountains in the world to climb because of its overhanging mushroom icecap. With some luck it will be clear; the Cerro Torre spire is truly dramatic, featuring a 1500 m (4,950 ft) high vertical wall looming high above Glaciar Torre. Walking time 3 to 4 hrs.

Overnight at Cerro Torre Full Camp. Meal plan: Breakfast, lunch and dinner.

Day 7 ***Laguna Torre - El Chalten***

This morning we visit Laguna Torre again to reach the old Maestri basecamp, located in a high site up along the north moraine of the lagoon.

For keen hikers, we offer an optional excursion, the so called "Holiday on Ice" (approx additional cost, 73 USD per person, payable locally). The approach to the glacier involves an exciting river crossing by rope and pulley, and then a STRENUOUS, very steep walk up the valley's lateral moraine and a steep descent onto the glacier itself. Here we don our crampons (provided) and scramble over the contorted and broken surface of the glacier. While we break for lunch, our expert mountain guide will rig up a rope with which we can test our ice climbing skills (harness and ice axes provided).

Late in the afternoon we walk back to Chalten along Fitz Roy River valley. Total estimated time of the standard day: 4 to 5 hs. If you go on the "Holiday on Ice", it is 7 hours plus the trail back to Chalten which is 2 and a half hours more.

Overnight in an El Chalten hotel. Meal plan: Breakfast, lunch and dinner.

Day 8 ***El Chalten - El Calafate***

We have a leisurely morning to explore the small town of El Chalten and / or do a short walk to a nearby waterfall.

This afternoon we return by road to El Calafate where we check in our hotel.

Overnight in El Calafate. Meal plan: Breakfast.

Day 9 ***El Calafate - Perito Moreno Glacier - El Calafate***

We leave the shores of Lake Argentino, travel across the lowlands and begin ascending to the sub-Antarctic forest which marks the gateway to Parque Nacional Los Glaciares. Its centrepiece is the Perito Moreno Glacier which, because of unusually favourable local conditions, is one of the world's few advancing glaciers. Huge icebergs on the glacier's 60m (180 foot) high face calve and collapse into the Canal de los Tempanos as it advances about 100 m (300 feet) a year. The roar of the gigantic ice wall as it crashes into the surrounding channel is an unforgettable experience.

We disembark our bus just before the glacier and approach on foot, along the shore of the lake, and then climbing a rise to the main viewing area directly opposite the massive wall of ice. After about 2 hours to explore and view the glacier from the various viewpoints, we return to El Calafate.

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Overnight in El Calafate. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 10 ***El Calafate, Argentina - Torres del Paine National Park, Chile***

We have an early start for a 6 hour drive to our camp in Paine. We drive across the steppe, following parts the legendary Route 40, to get around Sierra de los Baguales, an impressive range in between Calafate and Paine. We cross the Argentinean Chilean border at Cancha Carrera/ Cerro Castillo.

Once in Chile, we will drive to Torres del Paine National Park. The Torres del Paine (Towers of Paine) are spectacular granite pillars which soar almost vertically more than 2000 m (6,560 feet) above the Patagonian landscape. The park in which the high peaks sit may be considered the finest national park in all of South America. With turquoise lakes, roaring waterfalls, rivers and creeks, dense forests and sprawling glaciers this is an unequalled destination.

We'll stop in the Lake Nordenskjold and in Salto Grande viewpoints for short walks.

Lake Pehoe Full Camp mimics the style of Laguna Capri and Cerro Torre Full Camps, but feature good, clean bathrooms and hot water showers, water and electricity in each camping site.

Overnight at Pehoe Full Camp (with sanitary services). Breakfast, box lunch, Meal plan: Breakfast, lunch and dinner.

Day 11 ***Paine Towers***

We drive an hour to get to Estancia Cerro Paine, trailhead for the world famous Paine Towers (Los Torres). We "warm up" hiking a steep one hour slope, to get inside the Ascensio River valley, a narrow "V" shape alpine valley coming from inside the Paine massif. A gentle downhill leads us to Refugio Chileno, a cozy and comfortable mountain lodge that can act as a turnaround point for those not willing to make a full day hike.

We then walk in a gentle slope along the river side and inside beech forest. A final steep climb on moraine and boulders (similar to our hike up to Laguna de los Tres in Argentina) takes us to Las Torres viewpoint: a glacier origin lagoon and the three towers rising vertically 1000 m from the glacier (weather permitting). The famous Torres del Paine (2900 m / 9,400 feet) consist of three gigantic granite monoliths, remains of a great cirque that has been sheared away by the forces of glacial ice.

Total 10 km / 6 miles, 8 hrs round-trip (full hike).

Overnight at Pehoe Full Camp (with sanitary services). Breakfast, box lunch, Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 12 ***Lago Grey Hike***

This morning we drive to the bank of the River Pingo, where we cross a suspended bridge that leads us to a path through Magellanic forest, descending onto a tombolo of glacial moraine material that forms a gravel bank across the southern end of Lago Grey. Here, in front of this tombolo, many icebergs are stranded in the shallows. They have drifted down the lake from the Grey Glaciar that is visible at the northern end. We cross the tombolo to a little, windswept island and walk its circumference, pausing to look at myriad species of Patagonian plants. Recrossing the tombolo, we make our way back to the place where we left the bus. This walk will take us about two and a half hours round trip.

We drive on to the park's administrative centre, where there is a very good little information centre, with maps and statistics about this, Chile's most famous national park, that was first gazetted in 1959.

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Later on, we drive to another part of the park, where we walk to the Salto Grande waterfall, and then on to a viewpoint across Lago Nordenskjold from the series of lacolithic peaks know as the Horns. This walk will last for about two hours round trip.

We also have time along the road to stop and see wildlife at close range. There are many herds of wild guanaco in the park that will allow one to approach quite near them. Also, there are several small lakes where there are a number of interesting and endemic waterfowl species, such as the Black-necked and Coscoroba swan species. Drive back to camp.

Overnight at Pehoe Full Camp (with sanitary services). Breakfast, box lunch, Meal plan: Breakfast, lunch and dinner.

Day 13 *Torres del Paine - Punta Arenas*

This morning we leave the Torres del Paine National Park and continue our road journey to Punta Arenas at the foot of the Andes, on the western side of the Straits of Magellan and facing the island of Tierra del Fuego. This port attracts commerce and shipping from all over the South Atlantic. Founded in 1848, the city was originally a military garrison and a penal settlement. Port facilities soon became established as a stop over for shipping en route to California during the Gold Rush. The population increased and the town developed as a result of the wool boom of the late 19th and early 20th centuries. During the last quarter of the 19th century, 300 pure-bred sheep were imported from the Falkland Islands.

Overnight in Punta Arenas. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 14 *Punta Arenas - Santiago*

Today we fly to Santiago, the capital of Chile, where we meet our local guide / leader who will be with us for the next couple of days.

From inauspicious beginnings, Santiago has become one of South America's most important cities. Founded in 1541 by Pedro de Valdivia, it was attacked and overrun by Mapuche Indians just six months later. Spanish troops fortified the summit of Cerro Santa Lucia, and made immediate plans to rebuild the settlement. For almost 2 years, Santiago remained all but a settlement under siege. By the end of the 16th century, the settlement was made up of just 200 houses, with a population of no more than 2,000.

Depending on flight timing, we may do a little orientation sightseeing today, or have the balance of the day at leisure. This evening, we'll enjoy dinner out in the fashionable and gay friendly district of Bellavista and have the chance to sample some of Santiago after dark. Santiago has a developing gay scene.

Overnight in Santiago. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 15 *Santiago - Maipo River Valley*

Today's excursion takes us south of Santiago to visit the scenic Maipo Valley and some of the area's most important wineries. Our day is somewhat freeform, depending on Tour Leader preference and group interest. Wineries of note that we may visit: Santa Rita, Santa Carolina and Cousin o Macul. Our sightseeing program also includes the Maipo Canyon, Las Vertientes, from where we can admire the Andes in all their splendor

Our preferred accommodation is a wine estate in foothills of the Andes.

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Overnight in the Maipo River Valley. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 16 *Maipo - Valparaiso & Santiago - Depart*

This morning we travel to Vina del Mar and Valparaiso, founded in the XVI century. Valparaiso (literally in Spanish: Paradise Valley) is one of Chile's most important seaports and an increasingly vital cultural center. The city is located in central Chile, where it is capital of the Region of Valparaiso. Although Santiago is Chile's official capital, Valparaiso houses the National Congress. Built upon dozens of steep hillsides overlooking the Pacific Ocean, Valparaiso boasts a labyrinth of streets and cobblestone alleyways, embodying a rich architectural and cultural legacy. Valparaiso is protected as a UNESCO World Heritage Site and is often considered to be one of Latin America's most intriguing urban areas.

We return to Santiago for some independent shopping / exploration time before transferring to the airport for our evening flights homeward.

BUEN VIAJE! Meal plan: Breakfast.

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