

ARGENTINA & CHILE

'South American Treasures'

19 days

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Day 1 Arrival in Buenos Aires

Arrival in 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. However, after a brief orientation, you will find that the compact city centre is accessible and easily explored on foot, by bus, taxi and underground.

Overnight in Buenos Aires.

Included Meal(s): 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 sight 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. While in BA, we will also visit La Boca neighbourhood, so named for its position at "the mouth" of the Riachuelo, and its role as the port of call for thousands of immigrants from Italy, Spain, and other European countries. Those settlers struggled, starved, hoped, and celebrated in this rough-and-tumble barrio. Today, one of the most photogenic and colourful parts of Buenos Aires, La Boca is the domain of the working class, bohemian artists, rabid soccer fans, and tango artists.

Ask your Tour Leader about the possibility of seeing an optional Tango Show this evening.

Overnight in Buenos Aires.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 3 Buenos Aires: Continued

Today we have a half-day WALKING tour.

Our first stop is the Centro Naval, one of the city's most exquisite buildings and a masterpiece of cast stone architecture. It's not generally open to the public, but sometimes they let you into the circular lobby.

The Kavanagh Building, at the time of its construction in 1936, was the tallest building in South America, standing at about 120 m (400 ft) with over 30 stories. Designed as a residential structure, it took more than 16 years to sell the apartments in this Art Deco building.

Palacio Paz is perhaps the most beautiful of the Beaux Arts mansions in Buenos Aires; the Circulo Militar looks plucked from the Loire Valley. It was the home of the Paz family and took almost 12 years to build; the patriarch who commissioned it died waiting.

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The General Jose de San Martin Monument celebrates General Jose de San Martin, who battled against Spain in the wars of independence and is known as the founder of the Argentine nation. The Palacio San Martin is another of the grand mansions that line Plaza San Martin, this was the home of the powerful Anchorenas family whose prestige dated to colonial times in Argentina. The Islas Malvinas-Falkland Islands Memorial honors the more than 700 Argentines who died in the war over the Islas Malvinas/Falkland Islands chain in the brief war with Great Britain in early 1982.

The Torre Monumental (British Clock Tower) is a 1916 gift from the British community in Buenos Aires, along with all other things British, was renamed in response to the Islas Malvinas/Falkland Islands War and is called the Argentine Big Ben by some. Decorated with British royal imperial symbols, the base was partly destroyed by an angry mob during an Islas Malvinas-Falkland Islands memorial service. Inside the tower you'll find a small Buenos Aires City Tourism Information Office.

Retiro Station was opened in 1915 and was built with British technological assistance. Four British architects designed it, and the steel structure was made in Liverpool, England, and shipped to Argentina to be assembled.

Our tour ends in the Galerías Pacifico in time for your lunch break. This is the most famous shopping mall in Buenos Aires, opened in 1891. The building was designed to recall the Galleria Vittorio Emanuele II in Milan, with its long halls, glass cupola, and several tiers of shops.

Overnight in Buenos Aires.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 4 Buenos Aires - Fly to Bariloche

A direct flight from Buenos Aires brings us to Bariloche, located in the heart of the Lake District. The Nahuel Huapi National Park extends over 750,000 hectares, of which 330,000 is a National Reserve. Situated in the southwest of Neuquen Province and northwest of Rio Negro, it stretches from the Patagonian steppes to the high Andes. On account of abundant rainfall and summer melt from snowfields and glaciers, there is a great number of lakes and also rivers that flow either to the Atlantic or the Pacific oceans. Lake Nahuel Huapi, covering an area of 60,000 hectares, is the largest in the area.

This afternoon we visit the Francisco P. Moreno Patagonian Museum, inaugurated by National Parks in 1940. It is named after the famous explorer of the Andes and the Patagonian rivers, who donated the lands that were later transformed by the government into the first national park in Argentina. It has halls specializing in natural science, ethnography, pre-history and local and regional history. It also has a library and a bookstore.

Bariloche has a very strong Central European influence; most of the first settlers were of Swiss, German, or Northern Italian origin. These people gave the city its European style, with Swiss chalets, ceramics, chocolates, and neat shop windows. However something tells you that you are not in Europe; boats are seldom seen in the huge Nahuel Huapi Lake, the roads are swallowed up in the wilderness as soon as they leave the city and at night, there are no lights on the opposite shore of the lake.

You will have time to explore the lakeside and to visit Bariloche town with its chocolate shops and excellent visitors' centre.

Overnight in the Bariloche area.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 5 Bariloche Area: Small Circuit

Today we have the classic half-day tour of the Bariloche region. We will get a general overview of the surrounding area along a 60 Km (40 mi) partial loop excursion, all on a paved road. Our outing heads westward from Bariloche on the highway to Llao Llao along the southern shore of Lake Nahuel Huapi. At Km 8, the road passes Playa Bonita, a small harbour and popular beach. Cerro Campanario, the Belltower Hill, is at Km 18 (mile 12), where our bus may stop on the outward leg or when returning. The view from the top of this hill, reached after a seven minute chairlift ride, is the highlight of the trip. The Catedral Ski Village, at the base of the ski slopes, and part of the city of Bariloche, are visible from this spectacular 360 degree look-out.

The tour continues toward St Eduard's chapel and the Llao Llao Hotel. It is after passing the hotel's golf course, at the 100 inch yearly rainfall boundary, that the Valdivian Rain Forest begins. This is a temperate rain forest, with vines canes and lush vegetation. Our tour continues through a thick beech forest surrounding the western Moreno Lake passing by the base of Lopez Mountain, a sheer 3650 m (12,000 ft) face

of rock.

We'll have a short stop further along the road for a breathtaking view high above Moreno Lake, the Puerto Panuelo Harbour, Victoria Island and smaller islands on the lake. On the return trip, the road crosses the bridge between the Moreno lakes and then joins the main road back to Bariloche.

Overnight in the Bariloche area.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 6 Bariloche, Argentina - Lake Crossing - Puerto Varas, Chile

The Andean Lakes Crossing is the most scenic way to travel from Argentina to Chile. This spectacular crossing of the Andes takes us through lakes and mountain passes from Bariloche to Puerto Varas, and occurs in a very well-orchestrated combination of boat and bus. Our luggage is handled for us -- you just sit back and enjoy the scenery.

After breakfast we leave by bus to Puerto Panuelo, where we will board the ship to navigate to the Puerto Blest Port, where we will arrive at 11:30. From there we will travel by bus to the Puerto Alegre Port at 13:30 where we will embark to navigate further. We then board a bus that will take us across the border to Chile at an altitude of only 976 m (3,200 ft); we continue on to Peula from which we embark towards Petrohue, sailing on the Lago Todos los Santos. Weather-permitting, we will have views of the Osorno Volcano, and the mountains, Puntigudo and Tronador. Imposing views of the volcano Volcan Osorno y Calbuco dominate the landscape. A simple boxed lunch is provided today.

At +/- 19:30 we arrive in Puerto Varas, the City of Flowers (due to our late check-in, dinner on your own this evening).

Overnight in Puerto Varas.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Lunch

Day 7 Puerto Varas - Fly to Punta Arenas - Torres del Paine

Today we fly to Punta Arenas and continue by road to Torres del Paine National Park, a full day of travel.

The Torres del Paine (Towers of Paine) are spectacular granite pillars which soar almost vertically more than 2000 m (6,000 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.

Overnight at Torres del Paine.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 8 Torres del Paine National Park

Today we spend the entire day at Torres del Paine National Park.

Some say "Paine" come from the name of an early settler. Others say the name comes from an ancient Indigenous word meaning blue -- hearkening to the intense blue of the area's lakes. Whatever the name comes from or means, this is a spectacular park, comparable to Yellowstone or Yosemite in the US. Founded in 1959, Torres del Paine takes in 180,000 ha (450,000 acres). In 1978 UNESCO gave the park World Heritage status, recognizing it as a biosphere especially worthy of international recognition.

The park is part of the Paine Massif, which lies east of the high central Andean spine. These medium high mountains emerge suddenly from the plains of the Patagonian steppes. The mountains are granite, capped by crumbly sedimentary rock that used to lie on the valley floor.

Before the park was acquired by the Chilean government, it belonged to ranchers who overgrazed and also burned down forests to increase pasture area.

The park is still recovering from this devastation, but it's a chance to see what nature can do to fix itself if given a chance. The glaciers of the park are in quick retreat -- up to 17 m (56 ft) a year for the last 90 years, creating a fascinating study of plant succession and soil build-up from bare rock to forest. The flora of the park ranges from grassland to southern beech forests. Many parts of the park were too remote for the cattle ranchers and exist today in a pristine state.

The animal stars of the park are the guanacos and the rheas. Rheas are an ostrich-like bird; guanacos are wild South American cameloids, related to the domesticated llama and alpaca. Native peoples hunted both across the plains, using every part for food and sheltering hide and feathers. When the Europeans came, the guanaco were slaughtered to make way for cattle, and almost became extinct.

We will travel through the park in our coach stopping at various points of interest and scenic viewpoints. We will also have an opportunity to walk one of the many easy-going trails that afford expansive views of the mountains, glaciers, and waterfalls for which Patagonia is famous.

Overnight at Torres del Paine.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 9 Torres del Paine, Chile - Calafate, Argentina

Today we travel by road to El Calafate, a resort town on Lake Argentino situated at the entrance to Los Glaciares National Park.

Named after a berry that grows in the area, the town of El Calafate was formerly a trading post for local ranchers, but in recent years tourism has spurred rapid growth. The centre of town and the lively main street Avenida del Libertador are lined with trees and a variety of trendy shops (try the calafate berry ice cream), restaurants, and bars.

This pleasant and colourful town will be our comfortable base for our glacier viewing in the area.

Overnight in Calafate.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 10 Calafate: Lago Argentina Glacier Cruise

Today we explore the glaciers, mountains, forests and lakes of Los Glaciares National Park on board a luxury cruise boat. We spend a full day relaxing on a stylish watercraft, taking in views of the Patagonian ice field. This morning we transfer the pier to join our cruise, which offers the best opportunity to visit the Spegazzini, Upsala, and the Perito Moreno glaciers in an intimate way.

We cruise out of the Upsala Channel toward the iceberg barrier, then to the largest glacier in the park; the Spegazzini Glacier. Continue to Puesto de las Vacas, where we will disembark and take a short guided walk through the icefields. During our journey, admire dramatic views and enjoy spectacular photo ops of the natural surroundings, including forests, glaciers, icefields, bays, and steppes.

We will then navigate toward Punta Avellaneda and Boca del Diablo to reach the Canal Spegazzini to see the glacier that bears the same name. The cruise will arrive at Puesto de Las Vacas (an extremely quiet bay in the Canal Spegazzini), where we can enjoy a guided walk with stunning panoramic views of the Spegazzini Glacier.

We continue toward Herminita Peninsula; the series of ice floes of the most varied colours and shapes, anticipates the proximity of Upsala Glacier. We will stop in front of the barrier of ice floes which at present is blocking the entrance to Canal Upsala. If the weather conditions are good we will observe the glaciers at a distance.

We continue to Canal de los Tempano to finally reach Perito Moreno Glacier. Huge icebergs on the glacier's 60 m (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.

NOTE: Though weather may seem fine in Calafate, the weather on the water and near the glaciers can be completely different. You should be prepared with layered clothing and a warm hat.

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Late afternoon we return to Calafate.

Overnight in Calafate.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 11 Calafate - Fly to Ushuaia

Today we fly to Ushuaia on the island of Tierra del Fuego.

Ushuaia is considered the world's southernmost city. In 1520, Magellan passed through the strait that now bears his name, in search of a sea route to the spice islands of Asia. The Yahgan Indians built the fires that inspired Europeans to give this region its name -- "The Land of Fire". At first, very little attention was paid to this rocky and glacial shoreline, and its indigenous Indian population. It was not until the demise of Spain's colonial domination of the region in the late 1800's, that other Europeans began settling here. Since 1950, the town has played host to an important naval base, supporting Argentine claims in Antarctica. In 1870, the South American Missionary Society, a British-based organisation, made Ushuaia its first permanent outpost in the Fuego region.

You will have time to discover this interesting town. We suggest a visit to the old prison of Ushuaia located within the confines of the naval base. The penitentiary was constructed by the prisoners themselves between 1902 and 1920. Now this impressive complex houses the Antarctic Museum, the maritime museum, a modern art gallery as well as a restored wing of the prison, complete with cells inhabited by some of the infamous prisoners.

Overnight in Ushuaia.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 12 Tierra del Fuego National Park

If you are looking to connect with nature and the history of the southernmost city in the world, Tierra del Fuego National Park is the ideal place to do it.

The park protects 68,909 hectares and is the only one in Argentina that combines marine, forest and mountain environments giving shape to the sea coast, lakes, valleys, extensive peat bogs and magnificent forests dominated by trees such as lengas, guindos and ñires. All these environments form a unique scenery with the purest air you can breathe. Here you will find exuberant and diverse landscapes, inhabited by birds such as the picturesque cauquén marino, the steamer duck or the black-browed albatross. As you walk along the trails it is normal to come across grey and red foxes, and to hear the "tac, tac, tac" of a Magellanic woodpecker.

This place also features the history of the Yámanas, the first inhabitants of these lands. Paying attention, you can find mounds of mussel shells, known as "concheros" or shell middens that remind us that these lands have been inhabited for more than 10,000 years.

Our drive to the national park is short and scenic. We'll pass the world's southernmost golf course and make a stop at Escondido beach and its famous post office, where you can purchase postcards/stamps and send them on their long way homeward. At Lapatoia Bay we reach the southern end of the Pan-American Highway, which starts in Alaska and runs all the way down through Canada, the USA, Central and South America.

We'll also stop at Lago Roca (Lake Acigami), the main freshwater body of Tierra del Fuego National Park, which extends through Argentine and Chilean territory. We'll enjoy a nice easy walk along the shore, ending up at the Alakush Visitor Center, which features a restaurant, gift shop, and an interpretive room with information about the park and the first inhabitants who resided on the island.

Overnight in Ushuaia.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 13 Ushuaia: Beagle Channel Cruise

Today, weather-permitting, we include a cruise on the Beagle Channel. Running through the Tierra del Fuego archipelago, the Beagle Channel is a scenic and wonderfully calm strait named in 1830 after a charting voyage by the HMS Beagle—the ship that later became famous for carrying English evolutionary biologist Charles Darwin on his five-year journey of discovery. The island of Tierra del Fuego is divided between Argentina and Chile and the Beagle Channel forms part of the border between the two countries.

In addition to spectacular scenery, we should see many species of marine mammals and birds, including a penguin colony -- the actual presence of penguins can rely on seasonality and recent conditions -- so no promises!

Later you'll have time to discover this interesting town. We suggest a visit to the old prison of Ushuaia located within the confines of the naval base. The penitentiary was constructed by the prisoners themselves between 1902 and 1920. Now this impressive complex houses the Antarctic Museum, the maritime museum, a modern art gallery as well as a restored wing of the prison, complete with cells inhabited by some of the infamous prisoners.

Overnight in Ushuaia.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 14 Ushuaia - Fly to Mendoza

Late this afternoon we fly to Mendoza (likely via Cordoba or Buenos Aires), the provincial capital, situated in the pre-mountainous Andes, and one of the largest and most beautiful cities of Argentina. Among its highlighted characteristics it features tree-lined streets, gardens, pathways and trolleybuses. Mendoza is the heart of the viticulture activity in the country and the starting point for practicing adventure and mountain sports: skiing, mountain climbing and rafting.

Overnight in Mendoza.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 15 Mendoza: Town Tour

Mendoza is one of the most charming capitals of Argentina. It has a dry and sunny climate and a design that consists of large streets, wide sidewalks shaded by old trees, low construction, and ample green areas. Many of its streets have adjacent irrigation channels which give them a special charm; the ditches and canals remind the visitor that Mendoza has grown thanks to irrigation technology and development.

Today we have a half-day guided tour of the town, on which we'll see Government House, San Martin Park, Independence Square, Plaza Espana, and Plaza del Castillo, where there is a museum that was built on the foundations of the old Town Hall where excavations, old photographs and elements from the past can be observed. They are evidence of the earthquake that damaged the city in 1861, three hundred years after its foundation.

Balance of the day at leisure to enjoy Mendoza.

Overnight in Mendoza.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 16 Mendoza Wine Tour - Fly to Santiago, Chile

The Mendoza area is the fastest growing wine producing region in the world and it is Argentina's most popular spot to travel to for wine tours and tastings. Located in the shadow of Mt Aconcagua, the vineyards in the Mendoza wine region are at one of the highest elevations in the world. Receiving little rainfall per year, the vines are irrigated with runoff from melted glaciers in the Andes. Primarily, it is Malbec that is grown, a grape that thrives in the high altitude, arid region of Mendoza. Other varieties include Tempranillo, Cabernet Sauvignon, and

Chardonnay.

Today we will visit two wineries for which the region is famous. As quality, season, and customer feedback can vary, we do not pre-determine which properties we will be visiting far in advance. Your Tour Leader will advise on today's activities in greater detail while on tour.

Today we include lunch at a wine estate (instead of dinner). If available, we may also be able to enjoy an olive oil tasting.

Later this afternoon we transfer to the airport for our flight to Santiago, Chile's capital and largest city, located in a valley surrounded by the snow-capped Andes and the Chilean Coast Range. Because our flight is likely over the dinner hour, and due to our substantial lunch, we do not include a group dinner this evening (most travellers grab something light at the airport as we wait to board).

Overnight in Santiago.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Lunch

Day 17 Santiago & Valparaiso

Today we travel to central Chile's Pacific coast and visit the colonial city of Valparaiso, an excellent example of late 19th-century urban and architectural development in Latin America. The route to Valparaiso takes us through the coastal plain and past Casablanca Valley, Chile's fastest growing wine region. Valparaiso ('Paradise Valley') is one of Chile's most important seaports and an increasingly vital cultural center. The city was the first and most important merchant port on the sea routes of the Pacific coast of South America that linked the Atlantic and Pacific oceans via the Strait of Magellan. The importance of the vibrant seaport began to decline after the construction of the Panama Canal in the early 1900s.

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. The majority of the houses were constructed between 1880 and 1940. The neighborhood's economic and social lifeline was a system of funiculars that climbed the precipitous slopes, carrying people and goods like a series of elevators on wheels. In its heyday, the 'elevators' of Valparaiso had 31 station houses perched at points across the city's steep terrain.

We will start with a visit to La Sebastiana, one of poet Pablo Neruda's homes-turned-museums. From here we will continue to the heart of the historic quarter where we stroll the streets and enjoy a ride on one of the city's many elevators. Ascendor Artilleria, built in 1898, is one of the oldest still in operation and offers beautiful views of the coastline. The Cordillera funicular is situated on Cerro Cordillera, and was opened in the year 1887. This is the steepest and second oldest 'elevator' in Valparaiso.

Nearby along the coast we find the popular beachside resort of Vina del Mar. Vina del Mar has been nicknamed the 'Garden City' and, as Chile's premier beach destination, it stands to reason Viña del Mar would be packed full of scrumptious seafood eateries. Better yet, thanks to a burgeoning fishing industry and its proximity to the ocean, the seafood here is about as fresh as it gets. Today we include lunch here in lieu of dinner.

Return back to Santiago.

Overnight in Santiago.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Lunch

Day 18 Santiago: City Tour

Today we have a tour of central Santiago.

Founded in 1541 by Pedro de Valdivia, Santiago 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.

We will visit Santiago's Plaza de Armas (ongoing renovations and possible limited viewing / access). As the midpoint of the Spanish settlement of 1541, the square was once a military training ground -- hence its name -- but with time it became the focus of Santiago's social and commercial life with some of the nation's most accomplished architecture.

We visit the Cathedral in the plaza and see the old post office. We also visit the Centro Cultural Palacio de la Moneda, and head to Cerro Santa Lucia for a view of the city. We visit the central market to see the various types of seafood on offer, and make a stop in Bellavista neighborhood. and 1990. From here we take a stroll through the Quinta Normal Park looping back to our hotel.

On your free time, you may consider a visit to the Pre-Columbian Art Museum and/or Museum of Memories and Human Rights, dedicated to the victims of human rights violations during the civic-military regime led by Augusto Pinochet between 1973 and 1990.

Overnight in Santiago.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 19 Departure

Departure from Santiago.

BUEN VIAJE!

Included Meal(s): Breakfast