

# **ARGENTINA & CHILE**

# HIKING THE PATAGONIAN ANDES

An upscale low elevation walking adventure through the national parks of Patagonia







DURATION: 12 days / 11 nights
SEASON: October through March

DEPARTURES: Guaranteed with a minimum of 4 participants

TRIP RATING: Moderate/Strenuous Walking Adventure, Grade (III) - This is an active trip, featuring a

variety of hikes, based from charming hotels or local lodges. Hiking days average 8.5 miles at elevations below 5,000 ft on established trails in both Fitz Roy and Torres del Paine areas.

Also included are long but scenic overland drives on mostly unpaved roads.

2025/26 DATES: On request any week throughout the season.

## INTRODUCTION:

Southern Argentina and Chile share an immense, sparsely populated, and mostly flat expanse divided by the Andes Mountains, commonly known as Patagonia. Here, some of the most dramatic granite spires on earth are constantly being transformed by the movement of immense glaciers. These peaks tower over the surrounding plains, creating the most impressive mountain vistas in South America. To the west of the Continental Divide, the mountains are surrounded by dense forests and lush meadows, dotted with wildflowers. To the east of the Andes are the typical, windswept plains of Patagonia. In the magnificent wilderness areas of Torres del Paine and Los Glaciares National Parks (regions whose spectacular beauty rivals that of Yellowstone and Yosemite), nature rules supreme with wildlife such as the guanaco, ñandú, condor, fox and dozens of bird species. Further south, Tierra del Fuego ("Land of Fire"), the beautiful landscapes are reminiscent of the Alaskan wildlands.

This exciting itinerary is designed for hikers and nature enthusiasts to experience the full range of the Patagonian Andes in comfort, with active days and relaxing nights at cozy lodges and hotels. We begin with a tour of the Argentine capital, but the focus of the trip is in wilderness areas. We explore Argentina's Glaciers National Park, from El Calafate overland to El Chaltén for 2 days of hiking at the foot of Mt Fitz Roy and Cerro Torre. Returning to El Calafate, we visit the spectacular Perito Moreno Glacier and stop in at the Glaciarum Museum to learn about the vast Patagonian ice field. An international drive brings us across the Argentine steppe to the highlight of our adventure - Torres del Paine National Park in Chile. The final 4 days are spent hiking to view the scenic Lake Nordenskjold and Lake Grey. The French River Valley presents close-up views of impressive peaks with vertical granite walls. After a shorter drive to Puerto Natales, we fly north to Santiago before returning home. Pre or post extensions are available to experience Tierra del Fuego National Park or to cruise the fiords of the Beagle Channel.

## **DAY-BY-DAY ITINERARY:**

#### DAY 01: TO ARGENTINA

Depart home on an overnight flight to Argentina's cosmopolitan capital, **Buenos Aires**.

#### DAY 02: BUENOS AIRES

A Southwind representative greets you this morning at the Ezeiza International Airport and brings you to the elegant <a href="Emperador Hotel">Emperador Hotel</a>. Centrally located in the exclusive Recoleta neighborhood, the Emperador is near shopping centers, art galleries, and is a few blocks from the city's landmark, the Obelisk. After lunch on your own, join your private guide for a tour of this active, European-style city. We'll visit Plaza de Mayo (where the city was founded), Metropolitan Cathedral and the neighborhoods of San Telmo and Montserrat. We drive along 9 de Julio (the world's widest avenue at 22 lanes wide) to see the Obelisk landmark, the splendid Colón Theater, National Congress, Casa Rosada (Government house), and other historical buildings in the city. We walk by the the Parque de las Rosas and stop at the distinctive Floralis Generica flower sculpture. Our visit of the renowned Recoleta Cemetery rounds out our tour. This evening, enjoy an Argentine welcome dinner and sultry tango show at one of the best venues in the city, Gala Tango.

(D)

## DAY 03: BUENOS AIRES / EL CALAFATE / EL CHALTEN

After breakfast we transfer to the airport for a local flight from **Buenos Aires (AEP or EZE) to El Calafate (FTE)** (3 hr 15 min). On arrival in Patagonia (610 ft), meet your mountain guide and drive across the windy steppe, expansive terrain typical of Argentine Patagonia, to the base of **Mount Fitz Roy**. Our route takes us around the southeastern shores of Lago Argentino, and then past the sizeable Lago Viedma. On the drive we watch the granite spires of Mount Fitz Roy rise up behind the turquoise waters of the lakes and will likely spot guanacos (a wild relative of the llama) or ñandú (a flightless bird similar to an ostrich). En route, we'll stop at the Los Glaciares National Park visitor's center (time permitting) to learn about the natural history of Patagonia and enjoy an optional short hike to *Mirador de los Cóndores*. Afterwards, we arrive to the small outdoorsy community of **El Chaltén** in the foothills at the base of the massif. Check-in to the <u>Hotel Destino Sur</u>, dinner is on your own to dine out in town. If skies are clear this evening, ponder the Southern Hemisphere constellations such as the *Cruz del Sur* (Southern Cross), the *Corona Australis* (Southern Crown), and look for distant galaxies like Andromeda and the Clouds of Magellan.

**Driving distance:** 130 miles or 3 hours; **Hotel elevation:** 1,315 ft

### DAY 04: FITZ ROY

After a hearty breakfast, we set off on a scenic drive, winding 11 miles up the picturesque **Las Vueltas River Valley** along a leveled dirt road to our trailhead near Hosteria El Pilar. From here, we embark on an unforgettable hike toward the towering **Mt. Fitz Roy**. Following the Río Eléctrico to its confluence with the Río Blanco, we gradually approach the base of the dramatic peaks. Along the way, we meander through enchanting forests of lenga and ñirre trees, pausing to admire vibrant wildflowers and spot native bird species. A highlight of the journey is our stop at a viewpoint overlooking the Piedras Blancas Glacier and its shimmering lagoon. As the valley opens into a wide, sweeping field, we catch our first glimpse of the awe-inspiring Cerro Fitz Roy, rising to an impressive **11,290 feet**. Continuing our ascent and after gaining **980 feet** in elevation, we make our way to the climbers' basecamp—where daring mountaineers prepare for their ambitious summit attempts. Here, we pause to enjoy a well-earned lunch, surrounded by the raw beauty of Patagonia. Our return trek retraces the same path through the Río Blanco Valley, leading us back to the trail's end. A short drive brings us to <u>Hotel Destino Sur</u>, where we unwind in the cozy lounge, savoring a glass of wine by the warmth of a crackling fireplace—reflecting on the day's exhilarating adventure. **Hiking distance:** 9.5 miles or 6.5 hours.

### DAY 05: CERRO TORRE / EL CALAFATE

This morning we depart from the outskirts of town, where our trail takes us toward the southwest as we hike along the **Fitz Roy River** valley. The trail is fairly easy as we cross ancient terminal moraines left behind when the glaciers of the last ice age receded. We arrive at the *Mirador* lookout after 1.5 hours of gentle uphill hiking to enjoy inspiring views of **Cerro Torre, Fitz Roy** and nearby peaks. With sheer walls topped by a mushroom-shaped ice cap, Cerro Torre's 10,265 ft summit is one of mountaineering's most sought-after prizes. Once in the valley, we follow a scenic trail through patches of Lenga trees, forest and flat terrain, passing through a *mallín* (wet meadow) until we reach a lovely spot in the valley to enjoy a relaxing picnic lunch. Afterwards, we start making our way back to El Chaltén.

Hiking down the main well-marked trail along the course of the Fitz Roy river valley, look for nice views and photo opportunities. The Cerro Torre summit (one of the most challenging climbs in the world) and its Ventisquero Grande glacier loom over the valley. This afternoon, we drive back to **El Calafate** to overnight at the <u>Xelena Hotel & Spa</u>, located outside town on the banks of Lago Argentino, the largest lake in the country. For a pleasant dinner on your own this evening, try the delicious cuisine of the Hotel's Mora Restaurant.

**Hiking Distance:** 8 miles or 5.5 hours; **Driving distance:** 145 miles or 3.5 hours. (B,BL)

#### DAY 06: PERITO MORENO GLACIER

We drive early this morning into **Los Glaciares National Park**, which was created in 1937 and declared a World Heritage Site by UNESCO in 1981. We embark on a catamaran ride on the Brazo Rico section of Lago Argentino to enjoy close-up views of the spectacular **Perito Moreno Glacier**, one of three Patagonian glaciers that are not retreating, with a surface area of 97 square miles (three miles wide, 19 miles in length and 195 ft high). Perito Moreno is one of South America's natural wonders. Later, we drive to the narrowest point on this arm of the lake, stop at a lookout where we observe and photograph the massive sheet of ice from various angles, and walk along the network of paths that wind along the lake bank, directly in front of the glacier and across from its snout. It's possible that we'll witness the detachment of ice blocks from a safe distance, hear the roaring they produce, and see how they turn into floating icebergs. Lunch is at the Nativos Restaurant in the park. Afterwards, we drive back to El Calafate, if time allows, we may stop at the **Glaciarium Museum**, a modern center devoted to the Patagonian ice field, its glaciers and conservation. It's one of few glaciological interpretative centers in the world. We continue to the comfortable and relaxing <u>Xelena Hotel & Spa</u> for the night. Dinner is on your own to explore town or enjoy the gourmet food and excellent selection of Argentine wines at the hotel's restaurant. **Driving distance:** 100 miles or 3 hours.

(B,L)

## DAY 07: EL CALAFATE / PAINE NATIONAL PARK (CHILE)

Leaving the hotel early after breakfast, we drive towards **El Calafate** and through this small desert oasis named for the abundant bushes that dot the countryside. We continue overland across the Patagonian plains to **Paine National Park**, established in 1970 and declared **Biosphere reserve by UNESCO** in 1978. Its name (pronounced pie-knee) translates to "blue" in the Mapuche Indian language. After passing through Cerro Castillo, a small village near the Chilean border, we get our first views of the Paine massif, towering above the plains in the distance. Drawing closer to the deep blue waters of Sarmiento Lake, the impressive granite towers come into view. Entering the park, we may be greeted by small herds of guanacos. After a short break from driving we continue to the **Sarmiento Park Station** and begin to hike. Our route follows a trail up and over the steppe-covered foothills, gaining about 650 ft in elevation, past small ponds and meadows down to the Laguna Amarga ranger station. Along the way we can photograph noisy bandurrias, buff-necked ibis, red foxes, hares, flamingos and upland geese, which are always seen in pairs. From this point we have a short drive along a dirt road to the comfortable Hotel Las Torres Patagonia, located beneath the Paine Towers near the Ascencio River. A highlight of the lodge is its boutique spa, featuring treatments that are perfect for unwinding after a day of hiking, such as hydro-massages, reflexology and a sauna. **Driving distance:** 230 miles or 5.5 hours; **Hiking distance:** 4.5 miles or 2.5 hours; **Hotel elevation:** 650 ft

#### DAY 08: NORDENSKJOLD LAKE HIKE

Our route today takes us past a few small lakes, including Laguna Inge. We skirt the foot of **Mount Almirante Nieto** (8,755 ft), then continue along the base of the Paine peaks, following a rolling trail along the northern shores of turquoise-colored **Lake Nordenskjold**. We pass through brushy areas, negotiate boggy sections and tackle stream crossings, stepping from boulder to boulder, as we make our way through the foothills up and down to a lookout point where we can get a glimpse of the impressive **Paine Horns**. There are 25 species of mammals recorded in the park including huemul, a type of deer found only in Chile, and puma, both of which are seen on occasion. Following our lunch break we can cool off in the clear waters of the nearby babbling creek, then return to our hotel on the same trail. In December and January, fields of daisies and other wildflowers fill the meadows. Time permitting, this afternoon we might look for flocks of *cachanas*, or Austral parakeets, or simply watch the afternoon light and clouds play across the mountains. Dinner will be served in the exquisite Coiron restaurant at Hotel Las Torres Patagonia featuring produce grown in their own organic orchard and greenhouse.

**Hiking distance:** 9 miles or 6.5 hours; **Hotel elevation:** 650 ft (B,BL,D)

### DAY 09: GREY LAKE

This morning we drive to Laguna Amarga for a brief walk on the lakeshore where we may be able to photograph the Towers reflected on the lake. We continue driving along the scenic dirt road south of the Paine massif and pass by lakes Nordenskjold and Pehoé. We may stop at the park's Administration Center for an overview of the region and the geological forces that created the dramatic Paine formations. Then, we cross the Paine River and arrive to the ranger station at **Lago Grey**. We walk along the lakeshore looking for the best views and some small icebergs. At noon the Grey III catamaran takes us on an hour-long trip around this lovely lake surrounded by peaks. As we get closer to our destination, we view from a distance, the spectacular 4-mile-wide glacier, one of three that originate at the Continental Ice Cap. We may observe the drift of turquoise-colored icebergs, blown to the opposite end of the lake by the unrelenting winds. We disembark at the Refugio Grey and enjoy a picnic lunch in this forested area. In the afternoon we hike to Pehoé Lake, contouring the lower slopes of Cerro Paine Grande (the highest peak in the park at 10,007 ft). Views of Cerro Zapata (5,020 ft) and several waterfalls cascading down the mountainsides make this an impressive hike. This area is also excellent for photography and watching for condors, which sometimes pass within 100 ft of us as they soar across the ridges. The trail passes a small, secluded lake before reaching a final ridge with fabulous views of Pehoé Lake. We catch one of the last catamarans for the picturesque ride to Pudeto. Once at the other side of the lake we visit Salto Grande Falls, formed where Lake Nordenskjold flows into Lake Pehoé, and then drive to the Hotel Rio Serrano. This comfortable lodge has a modern design with rustic features, a superb restaurant, and a wine bar featuring the work of local vintners.

**Hiking distance:** 7 miles or 4 hours; **Hotel elevation:** 435 ft (B,BL,D)

### DAY 10: PEHOE LAKE / FRENCH VALLEY

Rising early, as this is a longer day of activities, we drive through the park to the Pudeto boat docks on **Pehoé Lake**. Here we board the first catamaran at 9:30am for the 20 min ride across the lake. The vessel is covered, but with clear weather most passengers stand outside to take in the views of the impressive peaks above the Caribbean-turquoise waters. From the docks we follow a trail leading through the rolling foothills at the base of **Paine Grande** peak. Dotted with scattered scrub forests, in November and December these hillsides are a brilliant red, covered with the blossoms of the fire brush. There are 200 species of plants found in Paine, including Calafate bushes and the lovely yellow Lady's Slippers, or *Calceolaria*. We cross the **French River** on a foot bridge to reach the Italian Camp area. From here we marvel at the geology of these incredible rock formations as we watch patches of snow break loose and thunder down Cerro Paine Grande's rock and ice face in the distance. We continue a steeper uphill trail section through forests to a first lookout point. With luck we can witness condors floating up and down along the dramatic granite mountain faces. With 105 species of birds in the park, birdwatchers also have an opportunity to see the grebe, coot, upland goose, torrent duck, and oyster catcher, among others. Returning along the same trail to the **Pehoé Lake** area, we catch the one of the last catamaran for the return trip across the lake, then drive to the familiar Hotel Rio Serrano. **Hiking distance:** 9.5 miles or 6.5 hours.

### DAY 11: PAINE NATIONAL PARK / PUERTO NATALES / DEPART SANTIAGO

We drive this morning for 1.5 hours following the newer dirt road directly to **Puerto Natales**, enjoying some final views of **Lago del Toro Lake**, the horns and towers. Small herds of guanaco roam freely in this area, providing nice photo ops with their young, or *chulengos*. We drive back across the Patagonian steppe and stop to stretch our legs with a short visit to the Milodón Cave, named for the mythic prehistoric mammal thought to have lived here. Continuing to the Julio Gallardo airport to check-in for an afternoon local flight from **Puerto Natales (PNT) to Santiago (SCL)** (3 hr 25 min). Upon arrival in Santiago, walk a short distance on your own to the International Terminal and check-in for an overnight flight back home. **Driving distance:** 55 miles or 1.5 hours (B,L)

### DAY 12: ARRIVE HOME

Arrive back in your gateway city this morning and make onward connections home.

**NOTES ON THE ITINERARY:** Although we do our best to follow the schedule listed above, due to the extremely changeable and unpredictable nature of the weather in Patagonia, as well as other factors beyond our control, including group members' abilities, pace, interest, weather, and road/river/lake/trail conditions as well as local flight and catamaran schedule changes, any itinerary in these regions is subject to change at any time. A flexible attitude is recommended. Participants are encouraged to have prior hiking experience. This program uses a variety of hotels and lodges, and is suitable for physically fit participants accustomed to outdoor activities, age 12 and up.

The catamaran service at Paine Park has a low season when the crossing of Pehoé Lake is provided only 2 times a day, allowing us to cross at noon at the earliest, and return at 6:30pm at the latest, which limits the time we spend hiking in this area. During the high season (Nov 16-Mar 15), there is a third catamaran service at 9:30am. To coincide with the itinerary indicated above, departures should be from November 09, 2025 up to March 06, 2026. We could still operate the Hiking the Patagonian Andes with departures a bit earlier than November 09 or later than March 06, but the hike on DAY 10 will be shorter in order to follow the Pehoé Lake catamaran's seasonal schedule. Due to seasonal restrictions, instead of the Hotel Rio Serrano at Paine we may stay at the equally comfortable and nearby Lago Grey Hotel or at the cozy Patagonia Camp. Hiking distances and altitudes are approximate, and times indicated are NET. They do not include lunch breaks, rest stops, time to explore the area, photo stops, etc.

One important factor to consider when visiting Patagonia is the tremendous distances that must be covered. This is a vast region, comparable to the combined territory of western states like Texas, California and Montana. The area still has many unpaved roads and there is only sporadic local flight service, other than the flights into Puerto Natales, Punta Arenas or El Calafate. We have designed this adventure to minimize the amount of driving time, but we are still covering approx. 675 miles total during the trip.

**2025 LAND COST:** 4-5 participants: from \$9,400 p.p.d.

6-9 participants: from \$8,600 p.p.d. 10-12 participants: from \$7,900 p.p.d.

Single Supplement: from \$2,100

p.p.d= per person based on double or triple occupancy not including airfare. 2025 Land Costs are valid for departures through March 2026. Holiday travel dates could have a Land Cost surcharge of 10-20%.

### **ESTIMATED AIRFARE:**

The Land Cost DOES NOT INCLUDE ANY FLIGHTS. Southwind's ticketing specialist can assist with all your air travel – providing an airfare quote to match your itinerary, personalized support for seating, monitoring schedule changes and coordinating directly with the airlines if any adjustments are needed. Round-trip **international** air from US gateway cities is approximately \$900-\$1,100 per person. Dec 15-Jan 15 is a peak travel time so higher fares may apply. International carriers offering non-stop service from US gateways include; **American** (Dallas, Miami, JFK), **United** (Houston), **Delta** (Atlanta) and **LATAM** (LAX, JFK & Miami, Latam is a DL partner). Local **in-country** flights ARE NOT INCLUDED; budget on approx \$400-\$600 per person for the two local flights (Buenos Aires-El Calafate and Puerto Natales-Santiago) with LATAM, SKY or Aerolineas Argentinas. Airfares are subject to change at any time before tickets are issued. You have the option to arrange your own flights or redeem award travel yourself if you prefer. Tickets should only be purchased after Southwind notifies you that your trip is confirmed. The airlines request that tickets match your passport name. Upon receipt of your deposit, Southwind provides flight booking details for your travel dates.

### **SERVICES INCLUDED:**

- Comprehensive **pre-departure planning information** and expert travel advice.
- All **in-country transfers** as scheduled. Ground transportation in spacious and comfortable private vehicles with professional drivers.

Boat and Catamaran transportation where applicable on a seat-in-boat basis (other travelers will be aboard, but our group will be privately escorted).

- Local and return flight reconfirmation, in-country airport check-in and luggage assistance.
- All accommodations in Superior-class (4 star) hotels and the best available lodges as listed (or at similar hotels or lodges) on a shared basis with private bath. Advanced bookings are recommended if you require double beds (king/queen) for couples, or plan to arrive early or extend your stay.
- Single Supplement provides single room accommodations in all hotels. Due to the small size of most hotels in Patagonia, if you require single accommodations, making reservations well in advance is recommended.
- All meals indicated on the itinerary (B=breakfast; BL=box lunch; L=lunch; D=dinner). Vegetarian diets

**accommodated** on request (advance notification required). For other diets, consult your travel specialist before making a reservation.

- All guided tours & excursions (as listed) conducted on a private basis by knowledgeable, English-speaking local
  guides in each region (includes applicable entrance fees), except the Perito Moreno catamaran excursion
  and the catamaran rides in Paine, which are operated on a seat-in-boat basis. There will be other travelers
  aboard, although our group will be privately escorted. There will be one main guide from El Calafate (Day
  03) to Puerto Natales airport (Day 11), and a different tour guide for Buenos Aires. Southwind's travel style
  is to utilize guides who are experts in each region in an effort to enhance your overall learning experience
  and support Sustainable Tourism efforts.
- First-class Hiking service including:

Experienced, knowledgeable, English-speaking, Andean guide and assistant guide (assistants, one in El Chalten and one at Paine, provided for groups with 9 or more participants).

Packed or picnic lunch.

First-aid kit.

Entrance fees.

## **NOT INCLUDED:**

- US domestic, international flights, nor local flights within Argentina or Chile.
- Tours, meals (at about \$35-50 each per person) or other services not listed on the itinerary.
- Early arrivals, dayrooms or late check-outs at hotels.
- Alcoholic beverages nor items of a personal nature; such as clothing, equipment, laundry and phone calls.
- Tips to the local staff.
- Expenses incurred in preparing for this program such as, but not limited to, non-refundable airline tickets or traveler's insurance, nor additional expenses resulting from flight delays, schedule changes, cancellations, or missed connections.

**OPTIONAL TRIP EXTENSIONS:** Those with extra days might want to extend their vacation and visit some of the region's other impressive destinations. We suggest a 3 day/2 night Tierra del Fuego pre-extension, a 5 day/4 night excursion to Easter Island, a 4 day/3 night tour of Mendoza wine region, a visit to the Atacama Desert, or a 3 day/2 night Iguazú Falls extension. These add-ons require a minimum of 2 participants. See our <u>Patagonia Trip Extensions</u> page for more details.

**WEATHER:** Santiago and Buenos Aires can be expected to be hot and humid during the months of December, January, and February with daytime temperatures of 85-95°F and up to 70-75% humidity (Buenos Aires is generally hotter than Santiago). Nighttime lows in the summer average 65-70° F. The **Patagonia** region has a reputation for changeable, windy and/or rainy weather with mild temperatures. Daytime highs during the summer in Río Gallegos, El Calafate, El Chaltén will be between 60-72°F, with nighttime temperatures ranging between 40-45°F. Paine National Park and areas on the western slope of the Andes typically have more wind and rain than destinations on the eastern side, but rain can be expected in Patagonia at any time, on any departure. The best policy for enjoying this trek is to be prepared for all possibilities ranging from intense sunshine to rain, cold, and/or wind.

**TRAVEL INSURANCE:** We strongly recommend purchasing coverage to protect your trip investment. Travel insurance is important in case of unexpected events prior to departure causing the need to cancel or change your dates. Weather, natural events, medical reason, quarantine, local strikes, personal injury/illness (for you, your traveling companion or family members at home), could require itinerary interruption or changes. Missed connections, delayed arrival, lost/delayed baggage or the need for medical attention or evacuation are also reasons why coverage is important. Southwind recommends **Travel Insured International** which offers coverage options at a good value. If you, your traveling companion or a family member has a pre-existing medical condition, you can still receive coverage if a recurrence of the condition forces you to cancel your trip, but you do need to purchase a plan **within 21 days of your deposit**. Southwind can provide eQuote for insurance to review upon receipt of your deposit and Trip Reservation eForm.

Learn more about coverage offered by Travel Insured International

**NEXT STEPS:** Please contact Southwind to speak with a personal Travel Consultant to help fine tune your travel plans and to receive a custom itinerary with a land cost quote based on your travel dates. You can reach us by filling out our <a href="mailto:Private Trip Request form">Private Trip Request form</a>, by email at <a href="mailto:info@southwindadventures.com">info@southwindadventures.com</a>, by phone at 800-377-9463 or by text to 303-972-0701.

Reservations can be made up to 60 days before departure, provided tour services and hotels are available. Due to the popularity of Patagonia, we recommend making reservations at least 4-5 months in advance for non-holiday or about 1 year prior for holiday departures. Once your trip is confirmed to operate, you will receive pre-departure planning materials, flight booking assistance and advice to help prepare for your exciting vacation in South America.

## We look forward to having you travel with us in Argentina & Chile!

**Southwind Adventures, Inc** 

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