



# Tierra del Fuego

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## Why Go?

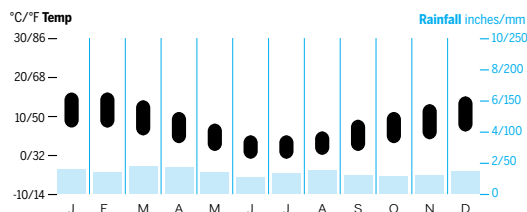
At the southern extreme of the Americas, the immense Fuegian wilderness, with its slate-gray seascapes, murky crimson bogs and wind-worn forests, endures as awesome and irritable as in the era of exploration. Shared by Chile and Argentina, this area is also lovely and wild. The remote Chilean side consists of hardscrabble outposts, lonely sheep ranches, and a roadless expanse of woods, lakes of undisturbed trout and nameless mountains.

In contrast, the Argentine side lives abuzz. Antarctica-bound cruisers arriving in Ushuaia find a lively dining scene and dozens of outfitters poised at the ready. Take a dogsled ride, boat the Beagle Channel or carve turns at the world's southernmost resort. When you tire of the hubbub, cross the Beagle Channel to the solitary Isla Navarino.

Uninhabited groups of islands peter out at Cabo de Hornos (Cape Horn). And if Tierra del Fuego is not remote enough, Antarctica remains just a boat ride away.

## When to Go

### Porvenir



**Nov–Mar** Warm but windy, best for hiking, penguin-watching and *estancia* visits.

**Mid-Nov–mid-Apr** Fishing season on the Atlantic coast and Chile's remote Lago Blanco.

**Jul–Sep** Optimal for skiing, snowboarding or dog sledding in Ushuaia.

## History

In 1520, when Magellan passed through the strait that now bears his name, neither he nor any other European explorer had any immediate interest in the land and its people. Seeking a passage to the Spice Islands of Asia, early navigators feared and detested the stiff westerlies, hazardous currents and violent seas that impeded their progress. Consequently, the Selk'nam, Haush, Yaghan and Alacalufes people who populated the area faced no immediate competition for their lands and resources.

These groups were hunters and gatherers. The Selk'nam, also known as Ona, and the Haush subsisted primarily on hunting guanaco and dressing in its skins, while the Yaghan and Alacalufes, known as 'Canoe Indians,' lived on fish, shellfish and marine mammals. The Yaghan (also known as the Yamaná) consumed the fungus dubbed Indian bread which feeds off southern beech. Despite inclement weather, they wore little clothing, but constant fires kept them warm. European sailors termed the region 'Land of Fire' for the Yaghan campfires they spotted along the shoreline.

European settlement brought the rapid demise of the indigenous Fuegians. Darwin, visiting the area in 1834, wrote that the difference between the Fuegians and Europeans was greater than that between wild and domestic animals (as a result, he has few fans here). On an earlier voyage, Captain Robert Fitzroy of the *Beagle* had abducted a few Yaghan, whom he returned after several years of missionary education in England.

No European power took any real interest in settling the region until Britain occupied the Falkland Islands (Islas Malvinas) in the 1770s. However, the successor governments of Chile and Argentina felt differently. The Chilean presence on the Strait of Magellan beginning in 1843, along with increasing British evangelism, spurred Argentina to formalize its authority at Ushuaia in 1884. In 1978 Chile and Argentina nearly went to war over claims to three small disputed islands in the Beagle Channel. International border issues in the area were not resolved until 1984 and are still the subject of some discussion.

## National Parks, Reserves & Private Parks

On Isla Grande, Parque Nacional Yendegaia became Chile's newest park in 2014, though it's still virtually inaccessible. Isla Grande

is also home to Parque Nacional Tierra del Fuego, Argentina's first shoreline national park. Parque Nacional Cabo de Hornos is usually reached by air tours or cruises.

## i Getting There & Away

The most common overland route is the Chilean ferry crossing at Punta Delgada. Roads within Chilean Tierra del Fuego are largely rough and unpaved. Chile is in the process of building a road to the southern end of the island. So far, it links with Lago Fagnano, on the Argentine side, but a 4WD vehicle is required. Those renting a car will need special documents and extra insurance to cross into Argentina; most rental agencies can arrange this paperwork given advance notice.

Visitors can hop on a short flight from Punta Arenas to Porvenir. Most travelers enter the region at Ushuaia (Argentina), a major transportation hub with planes, ferries and buses that access many regional destinations, including Punta Arenas, and Chile's Isla Navarino.

## i Getting Around

Half the island is Argentine; have your passport ready for border crossings. Those traveling by bus can make connections through Punta Arenas or cities in southern Argentina.

## CHILEAN TIERRA DEL FUEGO

Foggy, windy and wet, Chile's slice of Tierra del Fuego includes half of the main island of Isla Grande, the far-flung Isla Navarino and a group of smaller islands, many of them uninhabited. Home to only 7000 Chileans, this is the least-populated region in Chile. Porvenir is considered the main city, though even that status could be considered an overstatement. These parts can't help but exude a rough and rugged charm and those willing to venture this far can relish its end-of-the-world emptiness. Increasingly, anglers are lured to the little-known inland lakes, and adventurers to the wild backcountry of Parque Nacional Yendegaia.

Chile's long-standing plans to develop the region are finally under way. Tourism will eventually ramp up as the road from Estancia Vicuña to PN Yendegaia nears completion (slated for 2021) and a public airport is added. In future years, a direct crossing to Isla Navarino from nearby Chilean Tierra del Fuego is expected.