

Welcome to South America

Andean peaks, Amazonian rainforest, Patagonian glaciers, Inca ruins, colonial towns, white-sand beaches and vertiginous nightlife: the wonders of South America set the stage for incredible adventures.

Captivating Landscapes

From the snow-capped peaks of the Andes to the undulating waterways of the Amazon, South America spreads a dazzling array of natural wonders. This is a continent of lush rainforests, towering volcanoes, misty cloud forests, bone-dry deserts, red-rock canyons, ice-blue glaciers and sun-kissed beaches. As landscapes go, there aren't many other places on earth that offer so much variety.

Big Adventures

You can hike past ancient temples first laid down by the Inca, contemplate the awe-inspiring power of Iguazú Falls, or spend the day watching wildlife from a dugout canoe on one of the Amazon's countless *igarapés* (narrow waterways). You can barrel down Andean roads by mountain bike, go white-water rafting on Class V rivers and surf amazing breaks off both coasts. And once you think you've experienced it all, head to the dramatic landscapes in Tierra del Fuego, go eye-to-eye with extraordinary creatures in the Galápagos, and scramble up tableland mountains in the Gran Sabana for a panorama that seems straight out of the Mesozoic era.

Cultural Treasures

South America's diversity doesn't end with geography. You'll find colonial towns where cobblestone streets lead past gilded churches and stately plazas little changed since the 18th century. You can haggle over colorful textiles at indigenous markets, share meals with traditional dwellers of the rainforest and follow the pounding rhythms of Afro-Brazilian drums corps. South America is home to an astounding variety of living and ancient cultures, and experiencing it firsthand is as easy as showing up.

La Vida Musical

Nothing compares with hearing the rhythms of Colombian salsa, Brazilian samba, Argentine tango and Andean folk music in the place where they were born. Buenos Aires' sultry *milongas* (tango clubs), Rio's simmering *garrafeiras* (dance halls), Quito's *salsotecas* (salsa clubs) – all great places to chase the heart of Saturday night. Yet this is only the beginning of a great musical odyssey that encompasses Peruvian *trovas*, soulful Ecuadorian *passillos*, fast-stepping Brazilian *farró*, whirling Venezuelan merengue, steel-pan Guyanese drumming, Paraguayan harp music and more. Simply plunge in – though you might want to take a dance class along the way!



Why I love South America

By Regis St Louis, Writer

Be mindful of what you're getting into: South America can be a lifetime addiction. I didn't realize this when I first hiked Andean trails and visited pre-Columbian sites more than 15 years ago. Like other travelers who shared the journey, I was hooked. I fell hard for the incredible wonders of this continent: its mist-covered peaks, thundering falls and vast rainforests. Add to this the human-made treasures: buzzing indigenous markets, picturesque colonial towns and vibrant cityscapes. This is just the beginning, and in South America there really is no end. It's the reason I've returned so many times, but I know there is still much more to discover.

For more about our writers, see p1104

Above: Handicrafts market between Cuzco (p844) and Machu Picchu (p860), Peru