



The Araucanía

HIGHLIGHTS

- Peering down into Volcán Copahue's Tolkeinesque crater lake at the steaming **Laguna Termal** (p41)
- Glissading down, down, down **Volcán Antuco** (p45) toward the green valleys below
- Navigating the misty skirts of **Volcán Lonquimay** (p50)
- Dissolving all those aches in the rustic thermal pools of the **Termas de Río Blanco** (p57) on the Huerquehue Lakes circuit
- Stargazing from the tundra under the snowcapped **Volcán Villarrica** (p61)

From jade lakes to the frozen cone of Volcán Villarrica (2847m), the Araucanía heralds the start of the great south. The region offers a fascinating brew of natural phenomena, including many hot springs and active volcanoes. The territory starts south of the Río Biobío, and shares many of the typical features of the more southerly Lakes District, but with milder temperatures and more sunshine.

In summer, this region becomes saturated with holiday-makers who come to tourist centers for their lakeside retreats, luxurious spas, casinos and nightlife. But even if you are planning your nights under starry skies, you can take advantage of the excellent outdoor infrastructure, including cheap and frequent public transport to trails, with the occasional five-star thermal pool to blow the camper's budget.

The Chilean side of the Araucanía is the stronghold of the Mapuche, now numbering around 620,000, a resilient culture known as the only ethnic group to have successfully fought off Inka invasion. Here, in the most ethnically driven region of Patagonia, visitors should take advantage of opportunities to explore Mapuche culture, whether it be through a visit to a rural farm or an *empanada* (pie) spiced with the smoked peppers known as *merquen*.

Look for the inverted umbrella shape of araucarias, a regional symbol that stamps logos and landscapes alike. Resembling something out of a Dr Seuss book, these glorious conifers, also known as monkey-puzzle trees, still grow throughout the region, protected by many national parks and reserves.

GATEWAY

See Temuco (p76).

PARQUE PROVINCIAL COPAHUE

The 105-sq-km Parque Provincial Copahue lies in the remote northwest of Argentina's Neuquén province. It takes in the eastern slopes around the Volcán Copahue (2928m), an exploded volcano cone with two new side craters. Since pre-European times, the Mapuche have trekked up to Volcán Copahue to collect its lake

water, known for its healing properties. Copahue's hot springs and mineral waters continue to be held in highest esteem, though their source has proved less than stable. In June 2000 the volcano shot a plume of smoke 600m high, sending a layer of grey ash to the nearby villages of Caviahué and Copahue. The eruption turned Lago Caviahué (also called Lago Agrio) green with sulfur-rich material.

Though light araucaria forest covers the slopes above Caviahué, the 1500m reserve is mostly above the tree line. While its summers are dry and hot, winters are cold with heavy snowfalls (about 5m in Copahue). In summer, sheep graze on the sparse, mostly unfenced highland pastures surrounding the park.

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