



Lakes District

HIGHLIGHTS

- Getting high on the craggy **Nahuel Huapi Traverse** (p103)
- Crunching over scoria dunes amidst geysers and bubbling mud pools on the **Baños de Caulle** trek (p89)
- A remote farmland trek to a thermal soaking in the hardwood tubs at **Termas de Callao** (p97)
- Summiting the snow-covered **Volcán Lanín** (p81) for a gaping Lakes District panorama
- Worshipping the natural cathedral of alerces on the trek to **Laguna Fría** (p118)

This is the south at its greenest. Rain rears grasses and temperate rainforest into a palette of emerald, olive, lime and sage. This lush, mud-spattered backdrop sets the stage for the star attractions: the undulating hills, craggy peaks and snowcapped volcanoes.

Water, taking the form of huge glacial lakes, hot springs and clear streams, is another defining feature. And where there's water, there is life. In the Lakes District, hikers will find the greatest diversity of plants and animals found anywhere in Patagonia. Even if you travel to the end of the continent, it is more likely that in these dense forests you'll spot a miniature pudu (deer), marvel over an ancient alerce (one of the world's oldest trees) or trace the shape of a fresh puma track.

From volcanic plateaus to wild mountain passes there's a diversity of landscapes that makes this area a real delight to explore. Trekkers may be drawn to the well-structured refugio treks around Bariloche or the wilder, overgrown trails on the Chilean side. Given the ready accessibility of this region, it's not hard to understand why the Lakes District has become the premier trekking region of Chile and Argentina.

GATEWAYS

See Bariloche (p124), Osorno (p126), Puerto Montt (p127).

PARQUE NACIONAL LANÍN

A skyscraper over the Andean wilderness, the snowcapped cone of Volcán Lanín (3776m) is the centerpiece of Parque Nacional Lanín, a 3790-sq-km park that stretches 150km from Parque Nacional Nahuel Huapi in the south to Lago Norquín in the north. The volcano effectively splits the park into northern and southern zones.

The northern zone – theoretically in the Araucanía – covers about one-third of the park's area. It centers around the elongated, fjord-like Lago Quillén. To the south, a much larger and broader zone forms a band of rugged mountains dispersed with the major glacial lakes of Lago Huechulafquén, Lago Lolog and Lago Lácar splayed eastward almost as far as the Patagonian steppes.

Until the late 19th century this vast area of the park was inhabited by the Pehuenche people. The lifestyle of this large Mapuche tribe was integrally linked with the annual harvest of nuts from the region's extensive montane forests of coniferous araucaria trees. The Mapuche reservations of Curruhuinca and Rucachoroi are located within the park, fittingly called *reducciones*.

ENVIRONMENT

Argentina's richest southern beech forests grow in the park. The evergreen *coigüe* (spelt *coihue* in Argentina), is present mainly at the lowest elevations. Two deciduous species of southern beech dominate these subalpine forests: *raulí* and *roble* (or *pellín*). *Raulí* has long leathery, almost oval-shaped leaves, while its close relative *roble* has oaklike leaves with deep serrations.

The alpine zone (roughly above 1000m) features two other deciduous southern beech species, *ñirre* (spelt *ñire* in Argentina) and *lenga*. The two trees are easily distinguishable: *lenga* leaves have rounded double notches, while those of the *ñirre* have irregularly crinkled edges. *Lenga* grows right up to the tree line in low, weather-beaten scrub. In

fall the mountainsides are aflame with color as these forests turn golden red.

Various parasitic plants attack the southern beech. Common parasites are the *liga*, native mistletoes, the *quintral*, whose red nectar-filled flowers attract hummingbirds, and the *llao-llao*, a fungus that deforms the wood into a large, knotted growth on which round spongy balls form.

Extensive forests of umbrella-like araucaria cloak the northern zone of Parque Nacional Lanín. Particularly in the park's southern zone, forests of Cordilleran cypress, with occasional stands of *maitén* (a native willowlike species), spread across the less watered Andean foothills.

Numerous species of native wildflowers can be identified. The bright spots of yellow scattered around the floor of montane forests could be the delicate *violeta amarilla*, or perhaps the yellow *topa topa*, which resembles a large pea flower. Two pretty white species are the *centella*, a native anemone, and the *cuye eldorado*, an oxalis species that has long been a favorite of gardeners in the British Isles.

Parque Nacional Lanín is one of the last habitats of the *tunduco*, an extremely rare species of native rat. A member of an ancient rodent family (the so-called octodontids), the *tunduco* typically inhabits *quila* and *colihue* thickets, feeding on the roots and shoots. Other mammals found in the park include the *monito del monte* (or mouse opossum), *pudu*, *coipo*, *viscacha* and the rare Andean deer known as the *huemul*. These animals are variously preyed on by the puma, the Patagonian red fox, the *huillín* and *huiña*.

There are many small ground-dwelling birds, including the *chucaco*, the *huet-huet* and the *churrín*, or Andean *tapaculo*, which all find shelter in bamboo thickets, forest underbrush or alpine heathland. Unmistakable because of its absurdly long tail – about double the length of the bird's body – is *Des Murs' wiretail*, or *colilarga*.

CLIMATE

Parque Nacional Lanín has a continental climate ranging from subalpine to alpine, with a relatively low proportion of rainfall outside the spring-to-fall period. Summers are warm to hot, particularly in the park's northern (Araucanía) sector, while winters are crisp and white, particularly on the higher ranges. The areas immediately east

