

# Route Descriptions

This book contains 32 route descriptions ranging from day trips to multiday treks, plus suggestions for more treks, side trips and alternative routes. Each trek description has a brief introduction outlining the natural features you may encounter, plus information to help you plan your walk – transport options, level of difficulty, time frame and any permits required.

Day treks highlight areas of uncommon beauty. Multiday treks include information on campsites, *refugios* (mountain huts), hostels or other accommodation, and places to get water and supplies.

## TIMES & DISTANCES

These are provided only as a guide. Times are based on actual walking time and do not include breaks for snacks, taking photographs, rest or side trips. Be sure to factor these in when planning. Distances are provided but should be read in conjunction with altitude gain. Significant elevation changes can make a greater difference to your walking time than lateral distance.

In most cases, the daily stages are flexible and can be varied. It is important to recognize that short stages are sometimes recommended in order to acclimatize in mountain areas or because there are interesting features to explore en route.

## LEVEL OF DIFFICULTY

Grading systems are always arbitrary. However, having an indication of the grade may help you choose between walks. Our authors use the following grading guidelines:

**Easy** – a walk on flat terrain or with minor elevation changes usually over short distances on well-travelled routes with no navigational difficulties.

**Moderate** – a walk with challenging terrain, often involving longer distances and steep climbs.

**Demanding** – a walk with long daily distances and difficult terrain with significant elevation changes; may involve challenging route-finding and high-altitude or glacier travel.

## TRUE LEFT & TRUE RIGHT

The terms ‘true left’ and ‘true right’, used to describe the bank of a stream or river, sometimes throw readers. The ‘true left bank’ simply means the left bank as you look downstream.

# Planning

It's the stuff of legend: a million square kilometers of iconic peaks fast rivers and hurling winds. Let's face it, even clothing catalogues wax poetic about this place. And rightly so. A trip to Patagonia is a dream for most trekkers. It is strangely marvelous, low key, and even easy to organize, but hard to do without a hitch, particularly the first time around. Given Patagonia's remoteness and seasonality, it is important to plan your trip here carefully.

While the luxury travel market has transformed Patagonia into a gold card destination, with careful planning budget travelers can still do well. For small budgets, think camping, family lodgings and self-catering, with the luxury of the occasional bottle of red. Those seeking guided trips will find package tours priced to international standards, though local services may not meet the same lofty rates. Food quality and price particularly suffers; remember that hard pink tomato traveled nearly as far as you did to get here.

There are challenges: weather can be unstable, Patagonian transport is unreliable and the distances are tedious and large. If you're doing it all on your own, remember your happiness will increase in direct proportion to your patience and flexibility. Logistics are most challenging in Central Patagonia, where transport connections are infrequent and subject to change. With the great exception of Parque Nacional Torres del Paine, trekking infrastructure is more developed in Argentina, where trails tend to be well-marked and accessible by public transport.

For general travel information, consult Lonely Planet's *Chile & Easter Island* and *Argentina* guides.

## WHEN TO TREK

Trekking in the Patagonian Andes is possible from early November until late April. In colder years, snowfalls may close trails a month earlier or later. Although each month has its own charms and drawbacks, for peak season services and better weather, February and March are the best months to trek.

The Patagonian summer lasts from early December to late February. Trekkers should be prepared for variable conditions, though hot

## DON'T LEAVE HOME WITHOUT...

- Warm waterproof gear
- Sunblock, lip block and sun hat
- Polarized dark sunglasses for glaciers
- A cozy sleeping bag
- Camping gear – it's available but expensive, so best bring it from home
- A pocket knife with corkscrew
- Extra memory cards for digital snaps – they're hard to find outside cities
- An adapter to plug in battery chargers
- Zoom lens or binoculars to capture Chile's more bashful wildlife
- Medical items – see p254