

TREKKING IN THE PATAGONIAN ANDES

Vast and varied, Patagonia is muddy rainforest, wild rivers, glaciated peaks and the windblown steppe skating to some lost horizon. You can't deny its grandeur. It whispers possibility. Shared by Chile and Argentina, this remote region sits at the tip of the continent. It has been the opiate of great adventurers, those who attempt to climb its sheer towers, traverse the continental ice cap or, like writer Bruce Chatwin, simply lose themselves wandering its great expanse. Today, a number of outstanding parks and private reserves frame this two-thousand-kilometer stretch of Andean wilderness. The maps stoke our imagination. Patagonia still has hundreds of unnamed mountains, contours inaccessible and unexplored, stories frozen in their layers.

The truth is that in Patagonia much remains to be discovered. That mere notion should put the thud in your pulse. You can start with the world-renowned treks around Torres del Paine and the Fitz Roy range, but on dozens of others you are more likely to spot a condor than another human being. Patagonian trails can take you through pristine forests to the rim of glaciers, under granite monoliths and over rickety suspension bridges, well beyond the crowds. Its remoteness doesn't make it hard to travel. Though characteristically slow-paced, Patagonia is one of the safest destinations in South America.

Yet, since the Patagonian ethos is built on deep solitude and bullying weather, the going isn't always easy. But that's probably what hooked you in the first place.



Table of Treks

ARAUCANÍA	DURATION	DIFFICULTY	TRANSPORT
LAGUNA TERMAL	6½–8¼ HOURS	MODERATE	BUS
AROUND VOLCÁN ANTUCO	3 DAYS	MODERATE	BUS, WALK
LONGUIMAY CIRCUIT	6 DAYS	MODERATE–DEMANDING	BUS
HUERQUEHUE LAKES	4 DAYS	EASY–MODERATE	BUS
VILLARRICA TRAVERSE	6 DAYS	DEMANDING	TOUR OR TAXI; BUS
LAKES DISTRICT	DURATION	DIFFICULTY	TRANSPORT
ASCENT OF VOLCÁN LANÍN	3 DAYS	DEMANDING	BUS
TERMAS DE LAHUEN CO TO LA UNIÓN	2 DAYS	EASY	TOUR OR TAXI
BAÑOS DE CAULLE	4 DAYS	MODERATE	BUS
PAMPA FRUTILLA	2 DAYS	EASY–MODERATE	BUS
TERMAS DE CALLAO	3 DAYS	EASY	BUS, BOAT
NAHUEL HUAPI TRAVERSE	5 DAYS	MODERATE–DEMANDING	BUS
PASO DE LAS NUBES	2 DAYS	MODERATE	BUS, BOAT
LAGUNA FRÍA	2 DAYS	EASY–MODERATE	BUS & WALK
CENTRAL PATAGONIA	DURATION	DIFFICULTY	TRANSPORT
LAGUNA TRONADOR	2½–3½ HOURS	EASY–MODERATE	BUS OR TOUR
SENDERO ALERCES	30–40 MINUTES	EASY	BUS OR TOUR
CASCADAS ESCONDIDAS	1½–2 HOURS	EASY	BUS OR TOUR
AROUND CERRO HIELO AZUL	3 DAYS	MODERATE	BUS OR TAXI
LAGO KRÜGGER	3 DAYS	MODERATE	BUS
AROUND CERRO CASTILLO	4–6 DAYS	MODERATE–DEMANDING	BUS
SOUTHERN PATAGONIA	DURATION	DIFFICULTY	TRANSPORT
CAMPAMENTO DE AGOSTINI	4 DAYS	EASY–MODERATE	BUS
LAGUNA TIGRE SUR	2 DAYS	MODERATE	TAXI
VALLE RÍO MOSCU	2 DAYS	EASY	BUS, PLANE
LAGUNA TORRE	2 DAYS	EASY	BUS
AROUND MONTE FITZ ROY	3 DAYS	EASY–MODERATE	BUS
TORRES DEL PAINE LOOKOUT	4½–6 HOURS	EASY–MODERATE	BUS
PAINE CIRCUIT	8 DAYS	MODERATE–DEMANDING	BUS
PINGO-ZAPATA	2 DAYS	EASY	PRIVATE
TIERRA DEL FUEGO	DURATION	DIFFICULTY	TRANSPORT
SIERRA VALDIVIESO CIRCUIT	4 DAYS	DEMANDING	VAN OR TAXI
LAGUNA ESMERALDA	3–4 HOURS	EASY	VAN OR TAXI
GLACIAR VINCIGUERRA	5–6½ HOURS RETURN	MODERATE	VAN OR TAXI
PASO DE LA OVEJA	2–3 DAYS	MODERATE	VAN, TAXI, BUS
DIENTES CIRCUIT	5 DAYS	MODERATE–DEMANDING	BOAT OR PLANE

BEST TIME	SUMMARY	PAGE
DEC-APR	Trek to a remarkable steaming volcanic lake	41
DEC-APR	Circuit over a scenic col past a large lake dammed by lava	45
DEC-APR	Circumnavigation of a dormant volcano through a fascinating post-eruption landscape	50
NOV-APR	Exploration of a subalpine lake basin to some remote hot springs	57
DEC-MAR	Scenic high-level route along the rugged complex volcanic range	61
BEST TIME	SUMMARY	PAGE
NOV-FEB	Climb to the top of an awesomely panoramic volcano cone	81
NOV-MAY	An uncomplicated trek to the scenic shores of Lago Paimún	85
DEC-APR	Popular trek to a thermal field with fumeroles, geysers and hot springs	89
NOV-APR	Gentle rise to tarns among rolling grassy alpine meadows	94
OCT-MAY	Laid back amble via hot springs with volcano views	97
DEC-APR	Classic pass-hopping route amid finest Lakes District scenery	103
DEC-APR	Link between rainforested valleys below hanging glaciers on Monte Tronador massif	111
NOV-APR	Trek to giant alerce trees among subalpine lakes	118
BEST TIME	SUMMARY	PAGE
NOV-MAY	Energetic trek to a jewel of a lake among luxuriant rainforest	133
NOV-MAY	Brief return trek to stands of glorious old alerces	134
NOV-MAY	Short rainforest trek to several 'hidden cascades'	135
NOV-APR	Route linking two lovely alpine valleys fringing the Argentine steppes	136
DEC-APR	Trek past lakeside beaches lined by graceful arrayán trees	141
NOV-MAR	Route through a raw alpine landscape with hanging glaciers, craggy peaks and tumbling waterfalls	145
BEST TIME	SUMMARY	PAGE
NOV-APRIL	Little-traveled route into a wild remote valley under Monte San Lorenzo	163
DEC-APRIL	Exploration of a wild upper valley frequented by huemul	166
NOV-APR	Simple trek to a glaciated valley drained by a spectacular roaring torrent	168
NOV-APR	Short walk to a viewpoint opposite the legendary Cerro Torre	171
NOV-APR	Exploration of valleys surrounding the one of the world's great summits	172
NOV-APR	Day trek to a lookout at the base of incredible granite towers	181
DEC-MAR	Classic rounding of the stunning Paine massif through steppes, forest and moors	182
NOV-APR	Ramble to glaciers at the head of a tranquil valley beside the southern icecap	191
BEST TIME	SUMMARY	PAGE
DEC-MAR	Pass-hopping route through rugged Fuegian-Andean wilderness	205
NOV-APR	Short overnight trek to a lovely subalpine lake below a tiny icecap	210
NOV-APR	A short jaunt to stunning glacial lakes	211
NOV-APR	Pass route linking two idyllic forested Fuegian valleys behind Ushuaia	212
DEC-MAR	World's most southerly loop across tiny passes in windswept subantarctic ranges	217