



Tierra del Fuego

HIGHLIGHTS

- Navigating the naked wilderness of the **Dientes Circuit** (p217), the world's most southerly trek
- Condor-spotting under the **Cordón Vinciguerra** (p209) on Paso de la Oveja
- Tramping through reddish moors and finding wild strawberries on the way to **Lago Windhond** (p222) on the remote Isla Navarino
- Gazing out on the Fuegian Andes on the high windy gap of **Paso Mariposa** (p207) on the Sierra Valdivieso Circuit
- Trading yarns with the sailors at **Club de Yates Micalvi** (p224), a long-grounded German cargo-boat-turned-bar

Cruel weather may make it a less than welcoming host; nevertheless, Tierra del Fuego is a wild prize for hale explorers. Its appeal is singular. At this latitude, the sun sets so late in summer that each day practically counts for two. Drawn by landlocked glaciers, chilled forests, talus (rock-scrée) scrambles and burnt orange bogs, trekkers court the challenge of this mad geography at the end of the world.

The largest of South America's islands, politically Tierra del Fuego (73,753 sq km) is split between Argentina and Chile. On Isla Grande, the barren northern steppe transitions to peat bogs and moss-draped lenga forests that rise into the snow-covered Darwin Range in the south. The Argentine Fuegian Andes dip toward the city of Ushuaia, before the island ends in a sea of lapping currents.

Isla Grande's remote west side of Chile is mostly lonely sheep ranches and a roadless expanse of forest, lakes and nameless mountains. In contrast, the Argentine half practically pulses with activity – namely tourism, commerce and industry. The Beagle Channel separates Ushuaia from Chile's Isla Navarino and uninhabited groups of glacier-bound islands that peter out at Cabo de Hornos, the southern terminus of the Americas.

From the off-the-map feel of Isla Navarino to the well-worn trails around Ushuaia, trekking options are diverse. Yet for all the wonderful, rugged terrain, trekkers often find the defining feature of their visit is actually the weather. Come fully prepared, or when it howls you'll howl back.



ARGENTINE FUEGIAN ANDES

Forming an arc of rugged wilderness around the regional capital of Ushuaia, the Argentine Fuegian Andes resemble scaled-down versions of far higher mountain massifs. Deeply carved glacial valleys and passes separate jagged peaks ringed with glaciers. The upper limit of alpine vegetation reaches around 600m, with the permanent snowline only several hundred meters above this. Numerous excellent off-track routes make exciting possibilities for experienced trekkers.

This range is sandwiched between Lago Fagnano (also known by its indigenous Ona

name, Lago Kami) to the north and the Beagle Channel to the south. Sunsets at this austral extreme are simply sublime.

ENVIRONMENT

The moist Fuegian forests tend to be less dense than those further north, with numerous kinds of low herblike plants but little real underbrush. The southern beech species *lenga* is dominant higher up, where soils tend to be shallower, but *coigüe de Magallanes*, known locally as *guindo*, is more common lower down.

A typical herblike plant of these subantarctic forests is the devil's strawberry (*frutilla del diablo*), which grows close to the ground and produces miniature, but inedible, bright-red berries on tiny brushlike branchlets. The

