

ARGENTINA & CHILE

'The Classic Combo'

13 days

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Day 1 Arrival in Buenos Aires

Arrival in Buenos Aires.

Nearly 40% of the country's 33 million citizens live in Gran Buenos Aires (Greater Buenos Aires), which at first makes the city almost as imposing as New York or London. However, after a brief orientation, you will find that the compact city centre is accessible and easily explored on foot, by bus, taxi and underground.

Overnight in Buenos Aires.

Included Meal(s): Dinner, if required.

Day 2 Buenos Aires: City Tour

Today we see the sights of this cosmopolitan city. In the early part of the 20th century, Argentina was one of the richest countries in the world. The grand public buildings of Buenos Aires reflect this opulent era. The city is known as the "Paris of South America" because of its wide boulevards and European-style architecture. Buenos Aires was founded for the second time in 1580 by Juan de Garay, just north of Mendoza's encampment. In accordance with Spanish law, he laid out the large Plaza del Fuerte (Fortress Plaza). It acquired its present name of Plaza de Mayo after the month of revolution in 1810. Our tour focuses on the major public buildings.

Catedral Metropolitana, built on the sight of the original colonial church was not completed until 1827. Not only is it considered a major religious landmark, but also a historic site of great importance. Here lies the tomb of Jose de San Martin, the man who (along with Simon Bolivar) liberated South America from Spanish rule in the early 1800's. The Plaza de Mayo is also home to Museo del Cabildo, the Presidential Palace (Casa Rosada), and the National Congress (Palacio del Congreso).

We also visit the Recoleta Cemetery where Buenos Aires' richest citizens are buried in magnificent marble tombs elaborately decorated with statues. The most internationally-famous person buried here is "Evita" Peron. While in BA, we will also visit La Boca neighbourhood, so named for its position at "the mouth" of the Riachuelo, and its role as the port of call for thousands of immigrants from Italy, Spain, and other European countries. Those settlers struggled, starved, hoped, and celebrated in this rough-and-tumble barrio. Today, one of the most photogenic and colourful parts of Buenos Aires, La Boca is the domain of the working class, bohemian artists, rabid soccer fans, and tango artists.

Ask your Tour Leader about the possibility of seeing an optional Tango Show this evening.

Overnight in Buenos Aires.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 3 Buenos Aires: Continued

Today we have a half-day WALKING tour.

Our first stop is the Centro Naval, one of the city's most exquisite buildings and a masterpiece of cast stone architecture. It's not generally open to the public, but sometimes they let you into the circular lobby.

The Kavanagh Building, at the time of its construction in 1936, was the tallest building in South America, standing at about 120 m (400 ft) with over 30 stories. Designed as a residential structure, it took more than 16 years to sell the apartments in this Art Deco building.

Palacio Paz is perhaps the most beautiful of the Beaux Arts mansions in Buenos Aires; the Circulo Militar looks plucked from the Loire Valley. It was the home of the Paz family and took almost 12 years to build; the patriarch who commissioned it died waiting.

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The General Jose de San Martin Monument celebrates General Jose de San Martin, who battled against Spain in the wars of independence and is known as the founder of the Argentine nation. The Palacio San Martin is another of the grand mansions that line Plaza San Martin, this was the home of the powerful Anchorenas family whose prestige dated to colonial times in Argentina. The Islas Malvinas-Falkland Islands Memorial honors the more than 700 Argentines who died in the war over the Islas Malvinas/Falkland Islands chain in the brief war with Great Britain in early 1982.

The Torre Monumental (British Clock Tower) is a 1916 gift from the British community in Buenos Aires, along with all other things British, was renamed in response to the Islas Malvinas/Falkland Islands War and is called the Argentine Big Ben by some. Decorated with British royal imperial symbols, the base was partly destroyed by an angry mob during an Islas Malvinas-Falkland Islands memorial service. Inside the tower you'll find a small Buenos Aires City Tourism Information Office.

Retiro Station was opened in 1915 and was built with British technological assistance. Four British architects designed it, and the steel structure was made in Liverpool, England, and shipped to Argentina to be assembled.

Our tour ends in the Galerías Pacífico in time for your lunch break. This is the most famous shopping mall in Buenos Aires, opened in 1891. The building was designed to recall the Galleria Vittorio Emanuele II in Milan, with its long halls, glass cupola, and several tiers of shops.

Overnight in Buenos Aires.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 4 Buenos Aires - El Calafate

Early this morning we fly south to El Calafate, a resort town on the impossibly blue Lago Argentino situated at the entrance to the Glacier National Park.

Calafate's name is derived from a little bush with yellow flowers and dark blue berries that is very common in Patagonia. Ice cream featuring the calafate berry is also very common in the many little shops that line the town's one main street. Though this is one of the most developed towns in the region, one can still appreciate its remoteness and rugged beauty.

While in the Calafate area, we will also visit the Glaciarium, a modern interpretation glaciological centre, and one of the few glacier museums in the world. The understanding of glaciers and environmental awareness are our main subjects. The exhibits include models, dioramas, photographs, screens, interactive representations, and a 3D documentary.

Overnight in El Calafate.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 5 Calafate: Perito Moreno Glacier

We leave the shores of Lago Argentino and ascend through sub-Antarctic forest which marks the gateway to Parque Nacional Los Glaciares. Its centrepiece is the Perito Moreno Glacier which, because of unusually favourable local conditions, is one of the world's few advancing glaciers. Huge icebergs on the glacier's 60 m (180 foot) high face calve and collapse into the Canal de los Tempanos as it advances about 100 m (300 feet) a year. The roar of the gigantic ice wall as it crashes into the surrounding channel is an unforgettable experience.

The geography at the nose of the glacier is also unique, in that it is possible to stand on a hill with spectacular viewpoints directly opposite the huge imposing wall of ice. The hope, of course, is to witness active calving, which results in a thunderous noise and oooo's and ahhhh's from its spectators. We will have plenty of time to stroll and enjoy fantastic views from every angle, and the unique plant and bird life.

NOTE: Though weather may seem fine in Calafate, the weather near the glacier can be completely different. Generally the nose of Perito Moreno is characterized by cold wind and highly changeable conditions. You should be prepared with layered clothing and a warm hat.

This afternoon we return to Calafate.

Overnight in Calafate.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 6 Calafate: Glaciarium & Leisure Time

This morning we visit the Glaciarium, a modern interpretation glaciological centre and one of the few glacier museums in the world. The understanding of glaciers and environmental awareness are our main subjects. The exhibits include models, dioramas, photographs, screens, interactive representations, and a 3D documentary.

We return to Calafate where you will have the balance of the day to enjoy this charming town.

Overnight in Calafate.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 7 Calafate, Argentina - Torres del Paine, Chile

Today we have a +/- 6 hour drive to Torres del Paine. We drive across the steppe following parts the legendary Route 40, to get around Sierra de los Baguales, an impressive range in between Calafate and Paine. We cross the Argentinean Chilean border at Cancha Carrera / Cerro Castillo, and soon thereafter the open steppe gives way to rolling hills stretching to the Paine massif that eventually looms above the horizon.

The Torres del Paine (Towers of Paine) are spectacular granite pillars which soar almost vertically more than 2000 m (6,000 feet) above the Patagonian landscape. The park in which the high peaks sit may be considered the finest national park in all of South America. With turquoise lakes, roaring waterfalls, rivers and creeks, dense forests and sprawling glaciers, this is an unequalled destination.

We'll stop in the Lake Nordenskjold and in Salto Grande viewpoints for short walks.

Overnight at Torres del Paine.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 8 Torres del Paine National Park

Today we spend the entire day at Torres del Paine National Park.

Some say "Paine" come from the name of an early settler. Others say the name comes from an ancient Indigenous word meaning blue -- hearkening to the intense blue of the area's lakes. Whatever the name comes from or means, this is a spectacular park, comparable to Yellowstone or Yosemite in the US. Founded in 1959, Torres del Paine takes in 180,000 ha (450,000 acres). In 1978 UNESCO gave the park World Heritage status, recognizing it as a biosphere especially worthy of international recognition.

The park is part of the Paine Massif, which lies east of the high central Andean spine. These medium high mountains emerge suddenly from the plains of the Patagonian steppes. The mountains are granite, capped by crumbly sedimentary rock that used to lie on the valley floor. Before the park was acquired by the Chilean government, it belonged to ranchers who overgrazed and also burned down forests to increase pasture area.

The park is still recovering from this devastation, but it's a chance to see what nature can do to fix itself if given a chance. The glaciers of the park are in quick retreat -- up to 17 m (56 ft) a year for the last 90 years, creating a fascinating study of plant succession and soil build-up from bare rock to forest. The flora of the park ranges from grassland to southern beech forests. Many parts of the park were too remote for the cattle ranchers and exist today in a pristine state.

The animal stars of the park are the guanacos and the rheas. Rheas are an ostrich-like bird; guanacos are wild South American cameloids, related to the domesticated llama and alpaca. Native peoples hunted both across the plains, using every part for food and sheltering hide and feathers. When the Europeans came, the guanaco were slaughtered to make way for cattle, and almost became extinct.

We will travel through the park in our coach stopping at various points of interest and scenic viewpoints. We will also have an opportunity to walk one of the many easy-going trails that afford expansive views of the mountains, glaciers, and waterfalls for which Patagonia is famous.

Overnight at Torres del Paine.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 9 Torres del Paine - Punta Arenas

Today we travel by road to Punta Arenas, located at the foot of the Andes on the western side of the Straits of Magellan, facing the island of Tierra del Fuego. This port attracts commerce and shipping from all over the South Atlantic. Founded in 1848, the city was originally a military garrison and a penal settlement; port facilities soon became established as a stop over for shipping en route to California during the Gold Rush. The population increased and the town developed as a result of the wool boom of the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Immigrants from all over Western Europe were attracted to the area, bringing with them major developments to fishing and farming.

While not the most interesting town for visitors, our drive to get here is extremely scenic, and it possesses the only airport in the area. The locals are also very friendly and welcoming.

Overnight in Punta Arenas.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 10 Punta Arenas - Santiago

Today we fly to Santiago de Chile, the capital of and largest city in Chile. Santiago basks in one of the most spectacular settings of any city in the world. A glance through the downtown blocks reveals a mighty circle of mountains -- the snowcapped Andean peaks to the east, and a smaller coastal range to the west.

Overnight in Santiago.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 11 Santiago & Valparaiso

Today we travel to central Chile's Pacific coast and visit the colonial city of Valparaiso, an excellent example of late 19th-century urban and architectural development in Latin America. The route to Valparaiso takes us through the coastal plain and past Casablanca Valley, Chile's fastest growing wine region. Valparaiso ('Paradise Valley') is one of Chile's most important seaports and an increasingly vital cultural center. The city was the first and most important merchant port on the sea routes of the Pacific coast of South America that linked the Atlantic and Pacific oceans via the Strait of Magellan. The importance of the vibrant seaport began to decline after the construction of the Panama Canal in the early 1900s.

Built upon dozens of steep hillsides overlooking the Pacific Ocean, Valparaiso boasts a labyrinth of streets and cobblestone alleyways, embodying a rich architectural and cultural legacy. Valparaiso is protected as a UNESCO World Heritage Site and is often considered to be one of Latin America's most intriguing urban areas. The majority of the houses were constructed between 1880 and 1940. The neighborhood's economic and social lifeline was a system of funiculars that climbed the precipitous slopes, carrying people and goods like a series of elevators on wheels. In its heyday, the 'elevators' of Valparaiso had 31 station houses perched at points across the city's steep terrain.

We will start with a visit to La Sebastiana, one of poet Pablo Neruda's homes-turned-museums. From here we will continue to the heart of the historic quarter where we stroll the streets and enjoy a ride on one of the city's many elevators. Ascensor Artilleria, built in 1898, is one of the oldest still in operation and offers beautiful views of the coastline. The Cordillera funicular is situated on Cerro Cordillera, and was opened in the year 1887. This is the steepest and second oldest 'elevator' in Valparaiso.

Nearby along the coast we find the popular beachside resort of Vina del Mar. Vina del Mar has been nicknamed the 'Garden City' and, as

Chile's premier beach destination, it stands to reason Viña del Mar would be packed full of scrumptious seafood eateries. Better yet, thanks to a burgeoning fishing industry and its proximity to the ocean, the seafood here is about as fresh as it gets. Today we include lunch here in lieu of dinner.

Return back to Santiago.

Overnight in Santiago.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Lunch

Day 12 Santiago: City Tour

Today we have a tour of central Santiago.

Founded in 1541 by Pedro de Valdivia, Santiago was attacked and overrun by Mapuche Indians just six months later. Spanish troops fortified the summit of Cerro Santa Lucia, and made immediate plans to rebuild the settlement. For almost 2 years, Santiago remained all but a settlement under siege. By the end of the 16th century, the settlement was made up of just 200 houses, with a population of no more than 2,000.

We will visit Santiago's Plaza de Armas (ongoing renovations and possible limited viewing / access). As the midpoint of the Spanish settlement of 1541, the square was once a military training ground -- hence its name -- but with time it became the focus of Santiago's social and commercial life with some of the nation's most accomplished architecture.

We visit the Cathedral in the plaza and see the old post office. We also visit the Centro Cultural Palacio de la Moneda, and head to Cerro Santa Lucia for a view of the city. We visit the central market to see the various types of seafood on offer, and make a stop in Bellavista neighborhood. and 1990. From here we take a stroll through the Quinta Normal Park looping back to our hotel.

On your free time, you may consider a visit to the Pre-Columbian Art Museum and/or Museum of Memories and Human Rights, dedicated to the victims of human rights violations during the civic-military regime led by Augusto Pinochet between 1973 and 1990.

Overnight in Santiago.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 13 Departure

Today is free to explore and enjoy Santiago. Departure from Santiago (most flights depart Santiago in the evening).

BUEN VIAJE!

Included Meal(s): Breakfast