



Expedition

PATAGONIA: FULL CIRCLE



This information should answer some of your questions about the trip and give you a better idea of what we do day-to-day. It doesn't hope to answer everything. If you have any questions please get in touch.



The Towers of Paine

Patagonia

Southern Patagonia is still for many, the uttermost part of the earth. It can be desolate and hard but also mystical and dramatic. Travel in Patagonia is arduous, but always exhilarating. Although it consists of the southern parts of both Chile and Argentina it is sometimes easier to consider Patagonia as a separate country altogether. Patagonians have a regional identity that transcends national boundaries.

The trip

This is a 'southern summer' expedition in Chilean Patagonia which offers two classic hiking challenges.

The Paine Circuit: 7 days

In Las Torres del Paine National Park we hike around the Paine Massif, past Lago Paine and Lago Dickson, cross the famous John Gardner Pass and drop down to the immense Glaciar Grey to complete the Paine Circuit. On the first full day in the Park we hike up to Laguna Torres for the most inspiring close-up views of the 'Towers.'

Los Dientes (teeth) del Navarino: 5 days

The southernmost hike in the world! Flying south over Tierra del Fuego and across the Beagle Channel to the Isla del Navarino where the last vestiges of the Andes form a serrated ridge across the island before finally sliding beneath the waves at Cape Horn less than 30kms further

away. From the world's southernmost town, Puerto Williams, we hike the 55kms rocky trail through a pristine wilderness of tundra, scree, glacial lakes and mountain ridges.

The most important requirements on both hikes are mountain fitness, good gear and experience of mountains in all weather conditions ie. rain, wind and possibly snow. Both are purposely authentic backpacking trips where you need to carry your own gear plus a share of the group kit. (We could have used horse support for the first 4 days of the Paine Circuit but felt that misses the point and increases the cost). While this trip is 'Expedition' grade on account of the backpacking and terrain/weather factor, none of the hiking days are excessive and seldom exceed 6 hours.

Accommodation

In Santiago, Punta Arenas and Puerto Natales we stay in middle-range pleasant hotels with private facilities. In Puerto Williams we stay in a clean and comfortable hostel. On camp we use modern lightweight tents with two people sharing.

Transport

For the journeys from Punta Arenas to and from the Paine National Park we use our own minibus with the luggage going on the roof.

Food

In Santiago, Punta Arenas, Puerto Natales and Puerto Williams we provide bed and breakfast only, and on the driving days you will usually buy your own al fresco lunch wherever we stop (see daily itinerary below for details of meals provided). This allows you the option of trying the local foods and restaurants, very much part of the adventure. Our guides will advise on eating in towns and may know the places of character where there are few tourists. Often the group decides to eat together. A good two course dinner may cost around US\$25 approx. and lunch, US\$12 approx. On the trails although we will be carrying lightweight rations they will be varied, appetising and in good quantity. Everyone will need to help with the camping, cooking etc.

Health and hygiene

There are not many bugs in Patagonia and stomach illnesses have been happily absent on our trips here. The rivers are clean and unless advised by the local leader/guide there is no need to treat the water.

Climate

They say that if you stand still in Patagonia "all four seasons will blow past you in a day - sometimes in an hour." Literally expect anything! It can be hot and the sun really burns here, but equally we are likely to experience rain and possibly snow on both trails and often the wind - sometimes very strong. There can also be windows of glorious weather and in the southern summer months of December to February daylight hours approach 18 hours this far south.

Language

Castellano (Spanish!) is spoken throughout Chile. Although it is a different dialect to that spoken in Spain, it is still rewarding to take time to learn some numbers and colloquial phrases, greetings etc. both before and during your visit. Our Chilean guides will speak good English of course but generally it is often not understood.

DAY BY DAY ITINERARY

This itinerary is flexible and should be seen as a guide only. Local conditions, weather or fitness could lead to changes in our daily plans. All times and distances are approximate. Flight times may change slightly with revised schedules. 'B,L,D' refers to meals included in the trip cost, i.e. Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner.

This trip is 19 days ex SANTIAGO The first and last days here refer to the days of arrival and departure from SANTIAGO and may not be the days you depart from or arrive back home.

- DAY 1 Arrive Santiago. Transfer to domestic flight to Punta Arenas. If arriving on the flight with the main group we will try and call in at the Otway penguin colony during the transfer into town. Group come together in Punta Arenas. Hotel.
- DAY 2 The first stage of our journey is towards Las Torres del Paine approx.250kms. We overnight in Puerto Natales, a pleasant town on the shores of Seño Ultima Esperanza and the gateway to the Paine National Park. (B)
- DAY 3 A further 3 hours to the Torres del Paine National Park. The mountains appear suddenly on the horizon after miles of flat, dry and windswept plain and are always a absolutely breathtaking sight. We enter the park at the Laguna Amarga gate and cross the Rio Paine to Las Torres campsite where there are fabulous views of Las Torres. We camp here for the next two nights and begin with a short walk to get rid of the stiffness after the long journeys. (B,L,D)
- DAY 4 Today we get even closer to the peaks, walking up towards the glacier beneath the Torres. An easy start but finishing with a steep climb up to Lago Torres where, in snow or sunshine, the view is magnificent, 8-9 hours. (B,L,D)
- DAY 5 **Circuit of Paine.** We are ready to set off on the first easy day of the circuit. The track meanders along the banks of the Rio Paine and passes through flower filled meadows where you can watch herds of guanaco, the antecedents of the domestic llama, on the surrounding hillsides. 5 hours. Seron Camp. (B,L,D)
- DAY 6 Leaving the river we cross a shallow pass to reach Lago Paine and follow the left shore to the more sheltered Coiron campsite at its western end. We are progressing around the back of the range and there a great views here of Cerro Stokes, Paine Medio and Paine Grande. Continuing on, the track is low lying and poorly drained, until we reach the eastern end of Lago Dickson, which may be dotted with icebergs as they calve from the massive Glaciar Dickson at the far end of the lake. 7 hours. Camp or Refuge. (B,L,D)



Paine Circuit

- DAY 7 A shorter day as we trek along the side of Lago Dickson crossing several small rivers and passing through an area of forest, home of the flame-crested Magellanic woodpecker. Emerging

from the forest we reach Lago Los Perros again likely to have floating icebergs. 4 hours. Camp. (B,L,D)

DAY 8 The valley is left behind and the track climbs above the tree line, becoming more rocky and broken. We reach our objective often over snow patches, the key to the Circuit, John Gardner Pass (1241m). Our reward – Glaciar Grey appears beyond as a glistening sea of ice stretching away to the horizon – the Patagonian ice-field. Consider also the reality that strong wind and even a snow blizzard may at this point be trying to blow us away. But it will always remain the highlight of the hike. The descent is awkward with gulleys, fallen trees, and slippery conditions underfoot. Finally the steepness lessens and we reach a good campsite. 7 hours. (B,L,D)

DAY 9 There is time to take in the magnificence of the location and enjoy fantastic views of the enormous glacier. The track continues along the left bank of the Grey Glacier, sometimes skirting buttresses and crossing awkward scree gullies as we traverse above the ice. We camp near to the point where the glacier reaches the lake. There is a dramatic viewpoint near our camp where we can watch for icebergs calving and crashing into the lake. 5 hours.(B,L,D)

DAY 10 The track is easier along by the lake, occasionally climbing higher through the forest for final views of Glaciar Grey. After several days in the wilderness our campsite near to Refugio Pehoe will feel busy but it is reputed one can buy a celebration drink here. 4 hours. Camp. (B,L,D)

DAY 11 We board the catamaran down the lake and the circuit is complete. Time to relax as we drive away to Punta Arenas with a lunch stop in Puerto Natales. Clean sheets, hot showers and good food to enjoy. Hotel.(B)



Horns (Cuernos) of Paine from Pehoe Lake.
Photo Antje Henning

DAY 12 A flight south to Puerto Williams, in clear weather amazing views of the Chilean archipelago, Tierra del Fuego and the Beagle Channel. Flight time - one hour. Hostel (B)

DAY 13 **Los Dientes Trail.** The first section of the walk takes a cleared track from the town up to Cerro Bandera. a popular day walk for the locals. From its broad summit magnificent views stretch out along the Beagle channel towards the main Argentinian town of Ushuaia and beyond. Carrying on, the first scree is encountered on the steep descent to our campsite on the shore of Laguna del Salto. 5 hours. Camp. (B,L,D)

DAY 14 Today we are definitely in 'teeth' country and while not a long day, expect some rugged and rocky terrain. We reach two passes both by circuitous trails – the second one and also the highest is Paso de los Dientes (870m). From here we have our first views south and on a clear day, the low lying islands of Cape Horn are visible. We drop down to Laguna de los Dientes before scrambling up to a higher cirque and an awesome campsite at Laguna Escondida. 4 hours. (B,L,D)

DAY 15 We cross two passes at the start and end of today's trail. In between, on the lower parts of the route we should come across several beaver dams. Introduced principally in the '50's, by neighbouring Argentina (as the Chileans here are quick to point out) the plans to develop a fur trade never eventuated, the beavers have spread dramatically and thrive on the peaty, lightly wooded areas of inland Navarino. Most mud and poorly drained parts of the tundra basins are the result of beaver activity. The descent from our second pass leads to a good campsite at Laguna Martillo. 4 hours. (B,L,D)

DAY 16 Hiking around the lake we follow the outflow valley, quite boggy and heavy going in places as we meander past several small tarns.

Finally we begin to ascend quite steeply to reach one of the highest points on the whole trail, Paso Virginia (830m) with great views of the Beagle Channel. Directly ahead the land falls away abruptly into Laguna Los Guanacos, a classic glacial lake in a deep, spectacular trough. We drop down and camp near the outlet of the lake. 4-5 hours. (B,L,D)



Los Dientes Massif

DAY 17 Out of the mountains and a mainly downhill trail (if we can find it) follows the valley down to the roadhead from where we walk back into town for a long awaited shower, a huge meal and maybe a beer or two! 5 hours. (B,L)

DAY 18 A flight back to Punta Arenas and Santiago. Hotel. (B)

DAY 19 Depart Santiago or continue with your own arrangements. If flight times suit or enough of the group are keen we can arrange a city tour. Santiago sometimes referred to as the 'Paris of the South' is stylish and attractive. The museums and parks are superb, the Spanish colonial buildings in the historic centre and the modern skyscrapers in the new business centre to the east juxtapose nicely and the central market is always interesting and lively. (B)

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