



HIGH ANDES OF PATAGONIA



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.



First views of the Paine range – Los Cuernos (horns)

- **Well proven, long running itinerary**
- **Treks and hikes in the two jewels of Patagonia, Paine and FitzRoy**
- **8 day Fitzroy Circuit trek via Patagonian Ice Cap (exclusive to 'High Places')**
- **Excellent Argentinean hospitality and comforts - never 'rough and ready'**
- **Also visiting the extraordinary Perito Moreno glacier**

Patagonia

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. On the eastern (Argentinian) side of the Andes, once away from the great lakes and glaciers, the vast landscape is almost flat and sheltered from the moist westerly winds and is surprisingly dry and arid - locally called 'el desierto' – this is the Patagonian 'steppes'. On the Chilean side, the mists and rainclouds roll over an endless glaciated and forested coastline of fjords and innumerable islands and archipelagos sweeping down to Cape Horn – 'the uttermost part of the earth'.

In between these two physical extremes, the Andes mountain range sweeps down towards the southern tip of the continent but not before rearing skywards in a most awe-inspiring vertical landscape of rock and ice - the High Andes of Patagonia!

This is the area we visit - two of the most magnificent mountain areas in the world, Las Torres del Paine – the Towers of Paine (Chile) and the Fitzroy Massif in Los Glaciares National Park (Argentina). Although other companies have replicated much of our original itinerary, our complete trekking circuit in Fitzroy with its dramatic foray onto the ice cap is still, we believe, exclusive to 'High Places'.

High Places in Patagonia

High Places are well established in Patagonia. We have worked with our long time colleagues based in El Chalten since (we can hardly believe it) 1989.

The trekking

This is a marvellous trip and visits the most awesome mountain scenery. The walking is really well sustained, mostly on good trails and, despite consistent 7-8 hour days, ascents are not huge - the highest pass on the Fitzroy circuit is at 1550m. It should be well within the capabilities of reasonably fit walkers.

Be warned though that this is Patagonia and so not only stamina, but good clothing and footwear are needed as well as the ability to cope with possible bad weather.

Chile: Torres del Paine Park. Hiking for 4 full days.

Argentina: Los Glaciares Nat. Park. 8 day 'Fitzroy Circuit' trek.

The part of the trip that ventures onto the Patagonian Ice Cap and completes our 8 day 'Fitzroy Circuit' trek is the highlight.

Grade

This trip is graded '**Tough**' because of the sustained 7-9 hour walking days, the challenge of the icecap section and the possibility of harsh weather. Nevertheless the high standard of accommodation, well-equipped camping sites and excellent food tend to compensate for the hardships that may be encountered in the mountains. Given good conditions the grade could easily be 'Steady Plus'. It remains very much a civilised holiday.

Baggage and trek support

In Chilean 'Paine', our accompanying luggage travels in between the three camps by boat and bus. On the Argentinean side, the Fitzroy trek has been affected by recent National Park regulations controlling the use of packhorses. They are now only allowed on a periodic or weekly basis to stock and replenish campsites but cannot be used daily to carry bags, personal gear etc. This is to reduce erosion on the trails.

For the 6 days on the Fitzroy circuit smaller duffel type bags will be provided to hold a maximum limit of 8-9kgs rather than your trek bags. This should cover all essentials. These together with tents & food etc will be carried by a hardy group of local 'porters'. Spare gear can be left safely in town prior to the trek.

Daypacks are not affected. We only have to carry what we need for the day: raingear, spare warm layers, camera, drinks etc. and a share of the picnic lunch.



Paine Massif
Photo Julian Worker

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! Over the years we have come to expect a lengthy period of fine weather in one of the mountain areas usually tempered with less good in the other. Fitzroy receives less rainfall than Paine and bad weather here usually means high winds. Sunshine can raise temperatures well into the 20°Cs, but at night there is always a chance of snow and temperatures could drop below zero. The ozone layer is badly depleted here so good sunglasses, sunhat and sunblock are required.

Accommodation

In towns we stay in middle-range comfortable hotels or lodges, usually with en-suite facilities. At El Chalten we spend two nights at a private campsite with hot showers and an indoor area for meals also featuring a roaring fire. On camp we use roomy modern lightweight tents with two people sharing. On the Fitzroy circuit we have a mess tent for our meals, except for the 3 nights close to the icecap where a small survey hut serves as a kitchen and eating place (2 nights). On the other night there is an alfresco kitchen/shelter in the beech woods and we eat in our tents.

Transport

We use our own private transport throughout, usually a bus with luggage trailer. The two days in and out of Chile are longish road journeys, but with improved roads these become more manageable each year

Food (see daily itinerary for details of meals provided)

In El Calafate we provide bed and breakfast only. This allows you the option of trying the local foods and restaurants, very much part of the adventure. Often the group decides to eat together. A good ‘3 course’ dinner may cost around US\$25 and lunch, US\$12 approx. On the 2 longer drives we stop at cafes where you buy your own lunch. Elsewhere most meals are provided. In Chile we eat main meals in the Refugios adjoining the campsites while in Fitzroy we have our own trek cook and mess tent. Meals are good quality and vegetarians can be catered for.

Health and hygiene

Stomach illnesses have been happily absent on our trips down here. The rivers are clean and unless advised by the local leader/guide there is no need to treat the water.

Safety

The crime rate in Patagonia is generally low. However common sense and caution should be exercised in towns and airports. Patagonia is not inhabited by any dangerous animals or reptiles apart from pumas – but we’ve never seen one!

Language and people

Castellano (Spanish) is spoken throughout Argentina and 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. Our local guides usually speak excellent English.



Flowers known as – ‘virgin’s shoe’

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 18 days ex EL CALAFATE. The first and last days here refer to the days of arrival and departure from EL CALAFATE and may not be the days you depart from or arrive back home.

- DAY 1 Arrive in El Calafate. This busy tourist town on the shores of Lago Argentino and close to the Perito Moreno glacier, is approx. midway between the Paine and Fitzroy ranges (nearer to Fitzroy) and makes the best start and end point for the trip. After our long journey, this is a time to recover, walk into town and sample some of the excellent food. Lodge.
- DAY 2 Today we join the tourists! Glacier Perito Moreno, 75kms from El Calafate, justifies a whole day by itself. It is one of the few glaciers in the world currently increasing in size rather than receding. And we can stand just a few feet from the snout, 180 feet high, and watch it calving. There is also the option of a boat trip along the face of the glacier. It will be an enjoyable and relaxing start to the trip (B,L)
- DAY 3 We head off by bus to Chile and the Paine National Park (6 hours). It is a good introduction to the vastness of the Patagonia steppes and we often see animals, guanaco (a relative to the llama), foxes and birds out of the window. The journey is broken at an isolated outpost – the Chilean border crossing. The road has much improved recently and we try to we reach Puerto Natales, a colourful small town on the shores of Seño Ultima Esperanza (Last Hope Sound) in time for lunch. A good new access road completes the exciting final stretch to our campsite just inside the Park. (B,D)
- DAY 4 Our first walking day begins by helping load the baggage and camping gear onto the ferryboat across Lake Pehoe to our next camp. The wide range of flora and fauna is the first surprise and we may see guanaco (Llama family), rheas (Andean ostrich) and grey foxes. Geese, ibis, and black-necked swans are common lake birds while condors and eagles are likely overhead. Woodpeckers and parakeets can be seen in the forest. In early season the vivid, crimson 'firebush' is stunning. We follow an easy trail around the lake through Magellanic woodland and tussock grass with gradually expanding views of the mountains ahead. Our well-equipped national park campsite for the next two nights is on the lakeshore of Lake Pehoe. It is good to have finally stopped travelling and be able to stretch our legs. 5 hours walking. (B,L,D)



Las Torres del Paine

DAY 5 A pleasant rough and rocky trail follows the shore of Lago Grey through mixed woodland up to a promontory close to where Glacier Grey calves into the lake – a dramatic spectacle for our first full day. 8 hours. (B,L,D)

DAY 6 Making our way along the shores of Lago Skottsberg, our route takes us under Paine Grande and the Cuernos (Horns) del Paine to the gloomy Campamento Italiano (Italian camp) set in lakeshore woodland. The trail opens out as it traverses Lago Nordenskjold, giving spectacular views all the way. Finally we reach the Hosteria Las Torres and our grassy campsite where we stay for 2 nights. In clear weather we can look up the valley at the mighty towers themselves peeking up over the skyline. 9 hours. (B,L,D)

DAY 7 One of the great Patagonia days as we climb steadily up the Ascensio valley towards the Towers. A final clamber up through the boulder field to the lip of the basin and if we are lucky – Las Torres del Paine – the three towers – rearing skywards behind Lago Torres. In snow or sunshine, the view is magnificent. 7-8 hours. (B,L,D)

DAY 8 We retrace our steps back to Argentina. Recent road improvements mean that we can now reach El Chalten in one day instead of an enforced stopover in El Calafate. This will maintain the excitement because the small town of El Chalten is situated amidst the most spectacular mountains of Patagonia. Until you have seen them, it is impossible to imagine Cerro Torre, Chalten (Fitzroy) and Cerro Poincenot. From the village, their summits tower 2600m above us. We drive for 17km up the valley to our own attractive riverside private camping area. There are hot showers and a fine dining area where we eat beside a roaring fire and look out of the panoramic window at the enormous buttress of Cerro Fitzroy. We'll spend the next two nights here. (B,D)

DAY 9 Today we hike up to the ridge of Loma del Diablo (Devil's dome), for a stunning viewpoint of the mighty Fitzroy granite massif. In good weather we can continue towards the snowy (maybe!) summit a steady 2 hours further at approx 1620m. 5 hours return to ridge, 8-9 to summit. (B,L,D)

DAY 10 The 'Circuit' trek begins today and we make the short drive to the trailhead where we follow the wooded Rio Blanco (White River) valley up to Fitzroy base camp set pleasantly in the trees. From the camp, a side trail climbs steeply up to the glacier basin and one of the views of the trip. Laguna de los Tres, often frozen, nestles beneath snowslopes leading up to the enormous Fitzroy buttresses. Here we hope for good weather. Back down to the campsite to rejoin the main trail where some easy walking alongside Lagos Madre y Hija (Mother and Daughter) leads into the valley of the Fitzroy River and our sheltered camp in the woods for 2 nights. 8-9 hours. (B,L,D)



Cerro Torre

DAY 11 Standing on the moraine ridge a few minutes walk from our camp we hope to enjoy another of the great views of the trip. Beneath us in the foreground is the glacier fed Laguna Torre and piercing the skyline beyond rise the famous pinnacles of Cerro Torre, Torre Egger and Torre Stanhardt where some of the greatest mountaineering and rock climbing epic dramas have been played out. We commence with a safe but exhilarating Tyrolean traverse of the Rio Torre (on a fixed wire) just below the lake outlet and trek up the southern side to the Grande glacier. With the help of crampons we can easily walk up the glacier for a kilometre or more - an incredible experience. Let us hope for good weather. We return over the Tyrolean traverse back to camp. 6-7 hours. (B,L,D)

DAY 12 Our trek towards the ice cap continues and today we traverse up over the mountains to the next valley. We begin with a third crossing of the 'Tyrolean' before we climb out of the valley on a good trail to the Paso de los Agachonas. Finally we drop into the Valle del Rio Tunel and make camp in the woods just beneath Lago Toro where condors are regularly seen. 6-7 hours. (B,L,D)

DAY 13 Toward the Ice Cap. A dramatic day as we follow the trail up the valley, cross the Rio Tunel, make a quick foray onto the neck of the glacier and ascend steadily towards the 'Paso del Viento' (Pass of the wind), 1550m and the gateway to the Patagonian Ice-Field. As the view opens up, the uphill toil will be forgotten! Beyond the rocky foreground and moraine rubble an enormous river of ice can be seen extending to the horizon. Preparing ourselves for a night of hardship, it comes as great relief when we drop down through the moraine to a narrow valley and find a sheltered basin of soft grass and a bubbling stream, our home for two nights. 8 hours. (B,L,D)

DAY 14 A day on the icecap itself! Much of the icefield is fairly flat and because the ice is coarse and gritty it is easy to walk across, crampons are hardly necessary. In places however, the ice has buckled to form bizarre pressure ridges, corridors and overhangs. Small streams of meltwater dissect the glacier surface often to disappear into a network of subterranean ice caves and underground rivers. The scale is immense and it is hard to imagine the size of the icefield. Covering an area of 13,000sq km, the Southern Patagonian Icecap stretches an astonishing 350km and overflows into over 50 glaciers. The whole experience is amazing. 7 hours. (B,L,D)

DAY 15 It makes good sense to keep a contingency day in case of bad weather sometime during our Fitzroy trek. (B,L,D)

DAY 16 In past years we would retrace our steps back over the Paso del Viento to return to Toro camp and back to El Chalten. It was always a bit of an anti climax. Since 2004, and currently we may be the only company to do this, we continue to complete an exciting circuit. We traverse the broad mountainside above the ice cap and the Viedma glacier offshoot throughout the day. A final steeper climb to cross the ridge and camp amongst windswept trees just over the



Looking down to Viedma Glacier

pass with a superb almost aerial view of the Viedma Glacier entering the huge lake beneath us. 7 hours. (B,L,D)

DAY 17 A narrow trail descends tenuously through thickets of dwarf Patagonian beech sometimes steepening in and out of several rocky bluffs. There is a fixed handline down one section but there is nothing worrying. It is a great finale to the trek and with some relief we finally reach easier ground leading to the lakeshore and a welcome rendezvous with our boat. A short trip down the lake and we board our bus at the jetty for a short ride back to El Chalten. A comfortable lodge, loads of hot water, and we can prepare for a lively evening, a great meal and maybe even a few beers! 4 hours. Lodge. (B,L,D)

DAY 18 An early start to drive to El Calafate where for 'land only' clients the trip ends. (B).



Approaching Paso del Viento

A 'WEEKEND IN BUENOS AIRES'

All of our 'High Andes of Patagonia' dates give an opportunity of a City weekend – **before or after** the main trip.

A weekend (3 nights/2 days) in Buenos Aires gives enough time to get a flavour of Argentina and its vibrant capital. Midweek in BA often gridlocks with short tempers and long delays but at 'la fin de la semana' (w/e) everyone seems to be on holiday. The roads are quieter and the mood is easy going. In the afternoon we tour around some of the main locations: the Colon theatre; Plaza de Mayo and the Cathedral and also visit some of the city neighborhoods: stylish Recoleta; the refurbished waterfront at Puerto Madero; the colourful old port district of La Boca and bohemian San Telmo. Hotel. (B)

The most popular retreat for porteños (BA residents) is 30km outside the city on the wooded islands and waterways of the Parana delta which flows into the bigger River Plate. It is a great way to spend a Sunday in BA and quite easy to join a small boat cruise through the everglades. If you prefer to stay in the city consider the Sunday flea market at San Telmo or even a football match, although the latter is serious business in BA and needs advance booking and possibly an escort (contact us early). In the evening you must come closer to the soul of the city and take in a Tango show. This is usually a colourful Tango dance performance and evening meal in a floor show setting. Hotel. (B,D)

Contact us for details

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