



Expedition

# ATACAMA 6000



*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.*



*Base Camp San Pedro*

- **Snow-capped volcanoes & shimmering salt pans**
- **Vivid blue lagoons & rich red terracotta rock**
- **TWO VOLCANOES:**
- **Volcan Lascar (5600m)**
- **Volcan San Pedro (6145m, 20,155ft)!**

## **Chile**

Chile is that long thin country stretching from Peru southwards to Cape Horn along the western side of South America, between the Andes and the Pacific. It is over 4300 km long but averages only 180km in width. Its 760,000 square km area encompasses more climates, landscapes and ways of life than any other country of its size. The terrain ranges from the high arid deserts of the north; the Mediterranean scenery of the heartland; lakes and volcanoes; amazingly dense temperate rainforest; a roadless area of glaciers and fiords and finally ending up with the sub-Antarctic tundra of Cape Horn.

After the Pinochet dictatorship from 1974 to 1990, Chile has made a relatively easy transition to a stable democracy. Chile displays a style and elegance in its culture which is more European than anywhere else in Latin America.

### **The 'Volcanoes of the Atacama' trip**

We spend the whole time in one of the most surreal landscapes on earth - the Atacama desert. Snow-capped volcanoes guard the horizon and frame a landscape of shimmering salt pans, vivid blue lagoons and rich red terracotta rock formations (and pink flamingos!). In the clear high-altitude air, the colours especially at sunset are simply phenomenal.

This trip sat on our shelves for a couple of years. Despite the enthusiasm of our Chilean colleagues for the far north of their country, we felt that a volcano of 6000m plus, was needed to reward our efforts and the obvious volcano, Licancabur at 5916m, just fell short. In 2006 we found Volcan San Pedro at 6145m (20,155ft) and we climbed it successfully. It is quite remote with only a few ascents and provides a great adventure.

The ascent of these peaks (or peak) especially, will involve a journey to the very heart of the Atacama desert, with immense views over the surrounding salt flats and lava flows and a palpable sensation of solitude.

The volcanoes will provide a tough challenge and although climbing laboriously up volcanic shingle slopes may give the impression of being on a treadmill – the views and vistas will be staggering and unreal and with a 6000m (20,000ft) height objective always in mind the hard work hopefully will be worthwhile. The acclimatisation build-up should be really effective.

Some snow and ice is possible on the upper slopes but never in alpine quantities – more like patches with a thin, hard veneer. We will carry and supply crampons and axes if needed and with sufficient instruction the experience should be a satisfying one.



*Summit ridge on Lascar*

### **Weather**

Rainfall will of course be at a premium and is unlikely! Warm days and cold nights will be the order of the day and above 3500m 'cold' at night may be below freezing while daytime temperatures will enjoy a wider range from 12°C up to 25°C. The wind will be the moderating factor.

### **Accommodation**

We stay in hotels in Santiago and Calama. In San Pedro de Atacama we stay in an attractive hostel with twin rooms.

### **Meals**

Whilst on the volcano expeditions all meals are provided. They are varied and appetising and we are happy to cater for vegetarians. In Santiago, Calama and San Pedro we provide breakfast only. This allows you the option of trying the local foods and restaurants, very much part of the adventure. Your leader will advise on eating in towns and may know the places of character. Often the group decides to eat together. A good three-course dinner may cost around US\$25 and lunch, US\$12 approx. (See day by day itinerary for details of which meals you will need to buy.)

### **Transport**

We use private buses and/or 4WD vehicles throughout.

### **Altitude**

The volcanoes are high enough to demand some caution but with the gradual build-up to the altitude, acclimatisation should be a natural process for most people. Especially above 3500m, the air is thinner, the pressure is lower and there is less oxygen available in the atmosphere. The key to the volcano ascents is walking at a slow and steady pace, and increasing fluid intake – drinking at least 4 litres a day is advisable. Some people have some minor side effects from altitude, such as headache, nausea or general lassitude. The optional use of ‘Diamox’ has proved useful as this drug can reduce these symptoms. You will be given more information on ‘Diamox’ with your Final Information, between 8 and 10 weeks before departure.

### **Health and hygiene**

Generally standards are high in Chile and water is mainly safe to drink but caution whilst in the outdoors is always advisable and it is best to carry water purifying agents. Boiled drinking water whilst camping will be available. For much of the time on expedition there will be a limited supply of water for general use but there will always be enough for daily washing and personal needs.

### **Safety**

Crime is not a major problem in Chile but care and common sense should always be exercised in major cities, towns and airports.

### **Language**

A few words of Spanish will make your trip far more enjoyable, as everyone appreciates the effort made in trying to speak their language. Those working in the tourist trade and many younger people are likely to speak some English



*Campamento*

## 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. 'B,L,D' refers to meals included in the trip cost, i.e. Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner.*

**This trip is 17 days ex SANTIAGO. The first and last days refer to the days of arrival in and departure from SANTIAGO, and may not be the days you leave or return home.**

DAY 1 Join Santiago airport either direct from an international flight or after having stayed overnight in the city. A two hour flight to the northern city of Calama and a 95kms drive on a good road completes the transition arriving in San Pedro de Atacama deep in the dry altiplanic Atacama desert for a welcome rest and a meal before crawling into a hotel bed! 2430m. Hostel

DAY 2 San Pedro de Atacama is an attractive, white town built in a Spanish colonial style and we recover with a relaxed morning around town. In the afternoon we drive to the

Valle de la Luna (Valley of the Moon) only 15kms from town. Sculptured rock formations and a glistening covering of salt has produced an eerie lunar-type landscape. We stay for sunset when the colours change dramatically and the scenery glows with a deep reddish hue to take on an almost unreal and startling appearance. (B)



*A welcome dip*

DAY 3 Our first hiking day. A short drive from San Pedro is the small settlement of Machuca perched on a plateau at nearly 3800m. We follow an attractive traditional trail down to the small town of Rio Grande, a town of narrow alleyways and old stone houses almost 1000m lower and tucked into a ravine. An ideal hike for acclimatisation in this dry and high desert atmosphere. (B,L)

DAY 4 Today we drive north to visit the geysers at El Tatio. Located at a height of 4300m the geyser visit is also an excellent acclimatisation day. They cover a wide area and are considered to be the 3<sup>rd</sup> largest in the world after Yellowstone and Kamchatka. The steam from the many fumaroles and small geysers condense in the early morning air and create a surreal effect. Bathing should be possible but double check that you choose the right pool!!! (B,L)

DAY 5 We set off for our first volcano challenge but only after first stopping at the Lagunas Salar de Atacama and Chaxas. These enormous salt lagoons are one of the main features of the Atacama and Chaxas should provide a first sighting of the colonies of pink flamingos which inhabit the area. We carry on to the Leija lagoon, a vividly surreal location surrounded by snow streaked mountains/volcanoes and our base camp (4350m) for Lascar Volcano. (B,L,D)

DAY 6-7 **VOLCAN LASCAR (5600m):** We benefit with a day to acclimatise at this higher altitude with a rest day and some easy walking – perhaps we drive higher and walk back to camp. On the ascent day we drive up to around 4500m and a steady hike takes us up to the crater and summit. Great views. The crater is spectacular, around 600m wide and 200m deep – the volcano erupted violently in 1993 and there are still signs of activity. A good day to measure performance and fitness for bigger things ahead! 5-7 hours return. We drop down easily to camp. (B,L,D)

DAY 8 Return to San Pedro and some relaxation before the big expedition. (B,L)

DAY 9-10 **VOLCÁN SAN PEDRO (6145m – 20,155ft):** More remote and climbed less often, this ascent to the magic 6000m and 20,000ft will be a stunning climax to the trip – and maybe with bodies more attuned to the altitude, not the toughest climb. A longer approach, first we return to Calama before heading northwest on increasingly smaller roads until a 4WD track climbs towards the pass separating San Pablo from its close neighbour, the slightly higher Volcan San Pedro. We establish base camp as high as possible for the vehicle to reach at around 4500m. (B,L,D)



*San Pedro and San Pablo*

DAY 11-12 Over 2 days we need to establish a high ‘advanced’ camp, (ABC) at around 5100m. The guides will carry the biggest loads but we will take our share. Much of the timing of these 2 days will depend on fitness and weather conditions but we hope to be in our tents at ABC by DAY 12 evening. (B,L,D)

DAY 13 Ascend San Pedro. We leave our high camp approaching dawn soon after 5am in the clear cold morning air. There are no great difficulties above us but it is a steady and a long, haul to the summit. Tremendous views and in the words of the Chilean guide radioing base camp from the summit - “...*estan cansados pero muy contentos*” they are tired but very happy! Approximately 9-10 hours ascent and returning to base camp. (B,L,D)

DAY 14 A spare day to be kept in reserve as needed.

DAY 15 After breakfast we strike our base camp and return to Calama. With re-oxygenated bodies it should be a freewheeling day right through to our celebration dinner in a good restaurant in town. Hotel. (B,L)

DAY 16 Flight from Calama to Santiago. If flight times suit or enough of the group are keen we can arrange an afternoon or early evening city tour. Santiago sometimes referred to as the ‘Paris of the South’ is stylish and attractive. The museums and parks are impressive, 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. Hotel. (B)

DAY 17 Depart Santiago or continue with own arrangements. (B)

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