

Condor Patagonia



Multi-day 'W' trek in Torres del Paine National Park • Sea kayak Eberhard Fjord
Visit Otway Sound penguin colony • Hike to the base of Monte Fitz Roy and Cerro Torre • Boat cruise to Grey
Glacier Perito Moreno Glacier • Hike Los Glaciares National Park • Bike Rio de las Vueltas and Lago Argentino

14 days: Punta Arenas–Punta Arenas

Fare: US\$4499

Season: November–March

Patagonia, put simply, is the hiking capital of the world... Immense craggy mountain ranges erupt straight up from colossal boulder fields, vast rivers of ice calve into deep blue lakes, and its intricate coastline is strewn with uncharted fjords and inlets. It's the type of scenery that leaves an indelible impression in your memory – one that photos will never quite manage to replicate. On the Condor you'll visit some of the most amazing places on Earth, by foot, kayak, bike and boat. You'll enjoy incredible views as you hike in the Fitzroy area of Argentina, trek in Chile's Torres del Paine National Park, cycle by a sinuous river outside charming El Chalten and sea kayak a breathtaking fjord. You'll need to be in reasonable shape for this trip, but there's no need to be a super athlete. This is a trip for real people with a passion for the outdoors. If you enjoy hiking through amazing scenery, the Condor is the trip for you!

DAY-TO-DAY ITINERARY

SUNDAY

Arrive Patagonia

Welcome to Chilean Patagonia! The windswept plains of this southern region stretch on for miles, joining Chile's rugged coastline and majestic mountain peaks into one of the world's most awe-inspiring mountain environments, perched on the edges of the icy isthmus and fjords of the southern Pacific Ocean. Your trip starts in Punta Arenas where we'll pick you up and head directly to Puerto Natales located near the edge of Torres Del Paine National Park. In order to get into the most spectacular places right away, we drive to Puerto Natales this afternoon.

ACCOMMODATION: Character hotel, Puerto Natales (D)

MONDAY

Sea kayak Eberhard Fjord

We're straight into it today with an amazing sea kayaking trip on Eberhard Fjord. This area was colonised in the late 19th century by Captain Eberhard as a cattle raising region, and historical buildings and *estancias* (traditional Chilean farms) still dot the shoreline. After a full safety briefing, we'll paddle out along the world's most southern continental peninsula, enjoying views of the rolling farmland and snowy peaks that line the fjord before stopping at a local shearing house for lunch and a chat with the locals. After lunch we'll head back to Puerto Bories, or if the weather allows we can paddle further along the coastline towards Puerto Natales. This region is known for its marine birdlife and native black neck swans, so we'll keep our eyes peeled for them as we paddle back to shore.

ACCOMMODATION: Family-run hostel, Puerto Natales (B,L,D)

TUESDAY

Start 'W' hike, Torres del Paine National Park

Today we'll begin the legendary four-day 'W' hike, an amazing trek past sheer granite peaks, snow-clad mountains, glacial lakes and thick

Magellanic forest. We'll follow the Rio Acensio Valley as it winds its way up to the crown jewel of the national park – Torres del Paine itself – one of the most famous mountain landscapes in the world. As we reach the top of the boulder field near the end of our hike, we'll come face to face with Cerro Grande – believed to be the tallest mountain in this range – rising 3,000 vertical feet and casting an immense reflection on the beautiful green alpine lake at its base. Tonight we'll stay in a cosy *refugio* (mountain lodge) with beds and mattresses supplied.

ACCOMMODATION: Refugio Chileno, Torres del Paine National Park (B,L,D)

"We have gone on two trips with ACTIVE, New Zealand and South America – and had fabulous, incredible experiences both times. Their attention to detail is unbelievable and every guide has been warm, patient, compassionate, knowledgeable and FUN. They turn great trips into phenomenal ones. I can't recommend them highly enough."

Karen Geney (Georgia, USA) December 2008

WEDNESDAY

Hike to Los Cuernos, Torres del Paine National Park

It's an easier hike today, as we contour around the northern shore of Lake Nordenskjold, a glacial lake in the heart of the national park. As we head around the lake, we'll start to see glimpses of Los Cuernos – Spanish for 'the Horns' – three fantastically sculpted grey and white sedimentary peaks rising 800 vertical feet. The intense turquoise hue of the lake and starkness of the mountains make for spectacular photo opportunities. This evening we'll stay in the shadow of the mountains in Los Cuernos refugio.

ACCOMMODATION: Refugio Los Cuernos, Torres del Paine (B,L,D)

THURSDAY

Hike French Valley, Torres del Paine National Park

We'll rise with the sun this morning to begin our hike up French Valley for a closer look at Los Cuernos. This ravine is probably one of the most beautiful places you'll ever see – over 4,000 feet deep with multiple glaciers cascading down its steep sides, creating a patchwork of ice and rock. The track steepens as we ascend a ridgeline to the upper French Valley past waterfalls and mountain tarns. At the top, we'll have incredible views of a massive natural amphitheatre, filled

Phil: "Torres del Paine is one of my absolute favourite places in the world. It has a fantastic mountain lodge system where you'll have the chance to share your night's stay with people from all over the globe, and enjoy the best views in the world – hands down. These refugios aren't the Ritz – but they're the real deal, Chilean style"

with the awesome French Glacier, the Paine Massif and Cuernos granite towers. This afternoon after an unforgettable day's hiking we'll walk to comfortable Paine Grande lodge for our last evening on the track.

ACCOMMODATION: *Refugio Paine Grande, Torres Del Paine (B,L,D)*

FRIDAY

Hike to Grey Lake, scenic boat ride to Grey Glacier

We'll hike along Grey Lake to Grey Glacier, a 650 foot (200m) high wall of ice that forms the northern end of the lake. This is one of the largest calving glaciers in the world, sending huge shards of ice – some as big as houses – plummeting into the lake's murky depths. We'll be met by a boat on the edge of the lake that will take us even closer to the glacier to explore the icebergs at its base. When we return from our boat trip, we'll head back to Puerto Natales, where we started our hike four days ago, for a well earned rest and another tasty meal!

ACCOMMODATION: *Character hotel, Puerto Natales (B,L,D)*

SATURDAY

Travel to El Calafate

Welcome to Argentina! Today we'll head over the border to the home of Tango, Evita Peron and Maradona. We'll journey north to El Calafate and Los Glaciares National Park, the greatest single remaining tract of wilderness in South America. It's also one of the most diverse – in addition to the vast mountain ranges and glaciers, it's home to forests of *guindo*, *lenga* (a type of beech tree) and *ñirre* scrub, as well as a multitude of lakes and rivers. We'll arrive in El Calafate in the afternoon, so you'll have the rest of the day to chill out on the shores of Lago Argentino, South America's third largest lake, with a surface area of over 1600 square kms (617 square miles). You can relax and enjoy your surroundings, or you can head off on one of the many hikes in the area. A particular favourite of ours is the short walk to Laguna Nimes, a renowned bird sanctuary where geese, ducks and flamingos make their home.

ACCOMMODATION: *Glaciar Libertador, El Calafate (B,L,D)*

SUNDAY

Visit Perito Moreno Glacier

If you thought the glaciers in Chile were amazing, today will take your breath away. We'll get right up close to the base of Perito Moreno Glacier to watch blocks of ice crack off the glacier's 180-foot-high terminal face and fall into the pastel-blue waters of Lago Argentino. This icefield is part of the world's third largest reserve of fresh water and forms a natural dam to the opposite shore that separates the two halves of Lago Argentino. With no escape route, the water level on the southern side of the lake can rise by up to 90 feet above the level of the main lake. An option today, if you want to get really close to the glacier, is to strap on crampons, pick up an ice axe, and take to the ice! Led by specialist glacier guides, you'll hike through the ice formations of the glacier, checking out its crevasses, seracs, tunnels and glacial lagoons. The constant movement of the glacier means every day is different, so your guides will cut a path in the ice and make sure you make the most of the conditions. No previous experience is required – just let your trip leader know when you arrive in El Calafate if you're interested in ice hiking and they'll be happy to organise it for you. (Ice hiking additional US\$150 approx.)

ACCOMMODATION: *Glaciar Libertador, El Calafate (B,L,D)*

MONDAY

Travel to El Chalten, hike Mirador Laguna Torre

El Chalten is a charming and remote mountain village, known for its amazing hiking and mountaineering opportunities that quite literally begin on your doorstep. From the heart of this rapidly-growing outdoor enthusiast's paradise, you can see the tips of Fitz Roy and Cerro Torre peaks, as well as the lovely Rio de las Vueltas winding its way past town. We'll hike through Patagonian drylands and windswept boulder fields to Mirador Laguna Torre (Spanish for 'Tower Lagoon Lookout') for heart-stopping views up the Fitz Roy valley to Cerro Torre, a spectacular granite spire looming over a sprawling mass of ice. Today is a relatively relaxing day, in preparation for tomorrow's big hike into the heart of Los Glaciares National Park!

ACCOMMODATION: *Posada del Barranco, El Chalten (B,L,D)*

TUESDAY

Hike to Laguna de los Tres

We have a long day's hike today, but the scenery is well worth the effort. A steady climb from El Chalten quickly rewards us with gorgeous birds-eye views of Rio de las Vueltas. Further on we'll take a short side trip to Laguna Capri, a charming alpine lake, before continuing to Campamento Poincenot. From here we can look directly up to the towering Monte Fitz Roy. You'll find it hard to imagine that the views of the brooding Fitz Roy massif could get any better, and many choose to wait here while keener hikers make the steep climb up to Laguna de los Tres, at the very foot of the glacier itself. All of a sudden, if you've chosen to go on ahead, you'll reach the crest and be greeted by stunning close-up views of Monte Fitz Roy looming a staggering 2000 metres above a glacial lake. Today is a real highlight and the views are amazing, no matter how far you get!

ACCOMMODATION: *Posada del Barranco, El Chalten (B,L,D)*

WEDNESDAY

Hike Lomo del Pliegue Tumbado

Today's hike will give us a new appreciation of how incredibly huge and beautiful the steep peaks of Southern Patagonia are. We'll begin our hike on the Lomo del Pliegue trail bright and early, embarking on a 3000-foot hike to the top of the rounded Lomo (hill!), passing first

"The Condor trip was everything it promised – fun, fantastic activities surrounded by beautiful scenery and wildlife. It was a great way to see different areas of Chile in a relatively short span of time. Highly recommended."

Jennifer Barnes (Auckland, New Zealand)
December 2007

through the quiet Patagonian beech forest before ascending onto the wide plateau where the views start to become seriously beautiful. Upon reaching the summit, we'll be greeted by one of the most incredible sights you're ever likely to see – the towering peak of the Cerro Fitz Roy rising straight up above the Torre Glacier and Laguna Torre. There's no need for a zoom lense to capture the finer features of this site as we're up as close as you can get! Later, we'll descend the trail back down to El Chalten and head onwards to El Calafate where over dinner, we'll celebrate one of the best hikes you can do anywhere in the world.

ACCOMMODATION: *Glaciar Libertador, El Calafate (B,L,D)*

THURSDAY

Free time in El Calafate, Cycling Lago Argentino

This morning we'll have the morning free to relax in El Calafate, with its cosmopolitan atmosphere, gorgeous sidewalk cafes and

homemade chocolate shops in their own log cabins in the middle of town! If you'd prefer, we'll have the chance to take to our bikes today for a ride along the shores of Lago and explore more of El Calafate's scenic back roads. Set behind Lago Argentino is a stunning background of rust-coloured mountains against an often cloudless sky. It's cycling at its most sublime, but we'll have to keep our eyes on the road at least some of the time! This afternoon we'll head back across the border to Chile where we'll spend the night in Puerto Natales.

ACCOMMODATION: *Character hotel, Puerto Natales (B,L,D)*

FRIDAY

Hike Otway Sound penguin colony

After a short drive through the Patagonian wilderness, we'll arrive at Otway Sound and hike to the penguin colony found at the edge of the Sound. The views of Tierra del Fuego provide a perfect backdrop as we watch the crudely – but not inappropriately – named "Jackass" Penguins congregate in their masses. These curious creatures migrate to Otway Sound every year to give birth and raise their young. Later we'll continue our journey through this amazing landscape to Punta Arenas where we began our journey.

ACCOMMODATION: *Carpa Manzano, Punta Arenas (B,L,D)*

SATURDAY

Depart for home

This is the last day of your *Condor* trip. You'll go home with rosy cheeks after kayaking, biking and hiking your way around one of the most spectacular alpine regions on Earth. Your trip leader will arrange transport to the airport for you if you're flying out today and if you're staying on, we can help you arrange extra hotel accommodation. (B,L)

Hasta luego!

TRIP END: Your trip ends in Punta Arenas, Chile. You can fly out any time on the last day of the trip and we will drop you off at the airport or downtown before noon.

ACCOMMODATION: During the 4-day/3-night Torres del Paine trek we're in backcountry lodges with basic facilities; the rest of the time we stay in clean, comfortable, family-owned places in the heart of the action.

INCLUDED: Details of what's included in your trip fare are available on the General Information section on page 24. In addition, your *Condor* trip fare includes ground transportation in Chile and Argentina.

Specific Information – Condor

RECOMMENDED FLIGHTS: You can fly into Punta Arenas on the first day of the trip. Punta Arenas is the main gateway town to Chilean Patagonia and major airline LAN flies into here. On the last day of your trip you can fly out at any time. If you want to arrive earlier or leave later, we're happy to help out with extra hotel accommodation.

TRIP START: If you arrive on the first day of the trip, an ACTIVE SOUTH AMERICA representative will meet you at the airport at 1.30pm. If you're already in Punta Arenas you'll meet your trip leader and the rest of your group in town at 2pm.

General Information

We've included trip-specific details in the Specific Information section at the end of each itinerary. This is also where you can find details on recommended flights for the start and the end of your trip.

ACCOMMODATION: Our trips focus on getting you outside for the best adventure activities in the most stunning parts of South America. The accommodation we choose is clean and comfortable, but it's not a tour of the fanciest hotels in South America! Some of the places we stay – such as Hotel Celaje in Costa Rica – are quite luxurious and other places – like the mountain lodges in Patagonia – are very basic, but truly spectacular.

From time to time, we might stay in places other than those specified in the itinerary - but we'll let you know before you go.

FITNESS: We've designed our trips to be challenging, fun and outdoor oriented – none of our trips are passive scenic tours – so you'll need a reasonable level of fitness to enjoy yourself. Age and experience are not important; you don't have to be young or extremely fit (although if you are, you won't be bored) but you should be in the habit of doing at least some regular exercise. Getting in a few short hikes with a day pack or a gym class before your trip is always a good idea.

EXPERIENCE: You don't need lots of outdoor experience to take our trips. Our trips allow you to make the most of South America's outdoor environment, culture and history regardless of your experience. Our trip leaders are highly trained and experienced outdoor guides and they'll look after you. Experience is not as important as having a 'can do' attitude and being willing to give things a go. We manage the level of commitment to suit your experience, and have an impeccable safety record.

FLEXIBILITY: South America is a developing part of the world and we won't tell you that everything runs like clockwork. What we can say is that we are experienced adventure travel leaders and we know how to keep things operating smoothly, even when conditions are challenging. That's why we're here! You'll find your trip even more enjoyable if you remember to bring flexibility, an open mind and a sense of humour with you.

INCLUDED: Our trip fares are all shown in US dollars so our guests from all over the world can more easily relate prices to their own currencies. You can join us for shorter periods of time for most trips. The fares quoted on each itinerary include taxes. The trip fare includes just about everything, specifically:

- All guiding services. We have an experienced trip leader with every trip and have a specialist local guide on many of our excursions for extra local knowledge.
- Comfortable accommodation for the entire trip. We can also organise pre- and post-trip accommodation for you if you let us know.
- Breakfast (B), lunch (L) and dinner (D), except on our *Tortuga* trip where some dinners are not included, and during your free days on our *Jaguar* and *Tucan* trips when most people like to check out the local restaurants on their own.
- All drinking water. (Alcohol and other drinks are not included.)
- All hiking, snorkelling, rafting, canoeing, sea kayaking, hiking, biking and jungle activities as described in the itinerary, excluding optional activities as noted. No activities are compulsory, and nor will your trip be less awesome if you choose to sit out any of the activities.
- Tips for local activity guides, drivers and boat captains are taken care of by ACTIVE SOUTH AMERICA, except for Inca Trail guides and porters on our *Jaguar* trip.
- Transport including buses, boats, trains and some flights.

NOT INCLUDED: This is your holiday and we are serious about not nickel-and-diming you. On a couple of the trips you'll have one or two meals to cover, drinks and the cost of extra activities if you choose them. In some destinations you may have to cover your departure tax when you leave the airport. You'll probably feel like tipping your guide at the end of a fabulous time too. Other than that, everything's taken care of – you won't be pulling out your wallet every few minutes on your ACTIVE SOUTH AMERICA trip!

ITINERARY UPDATES: We update our printed itineraries each year. Please check our website for the most up-to-date itineraries and pricing (this one is valid to April 2011).

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