

INSPIRING SOUTH AMERICA

WHERE TO GO, WHAT TO DO & MORE



Paul Ryan
CEO, Inspiring Vacations



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WHY TRAVEL WITH INSPIRING VACATIONS?



GLOBAL EXPERTS

When you travel with Inspiring Vacations, you can expect thoughtfully curated tours to iconic destinations across the globe. Our authentic and culturally-rich tours are packed with must-see sights, lesser-known locations and enriching local experience, all at an unbeatable price.



INSPIRING COMMUNITY

Our travel articles, digital magazine, destination videos and member-only Facebook community groups will inspire your wanderlust or if you prefer, have a phone chat with one of our travel specialists for their recommendations.



ONLINE ADVANTAGES

Browsing and shopping for your next Inspiring Vacations tour couldn't be easier. We are an online company which means you can shop at your own convenience — anytime, anywhere, even while on tour. Our award-winning website is user-friendly and easy to navigate. We want our customers to be empowered to be able to access and manage their booking at any time — manage upgrades, book optional tours, and more.



Torres del Paine National Park

(Image: Sofia Cristina Córdova
Valladares/Pixabay)

WHY VISIT SOUTH AMERICA NOW?



Kate Witton

PRODUCT MANAGER,
SOUTH AMERICA
Inspiring Vacations



RICH IN CULTURE

South America is a vast continent with a mix of cultures to experience. Visiting iconic cities such as Buenos Aires and Rio, you cannot help but be swept up by the music and dance you will witness in local bars, street markets and dedicated performances. In contrast, the traditional cultures of the Andean people are still very much alive. These shy but curious people will delight you in their colourful clothing as they go about their daily life in both quaint colonial towns and stunning rural landscapes.



TOURS TO SUIT ALL INTERESTS

There are plenty of South America tours to choose from. My hint is to go for as long as you can as there is so much variety in what you can experience. From visiting the main iconic destinations on our Inspiring South America tour, or focusing on a particular interest with one of our tour extensions. For lovers of natural beauty, it is hard to go past a trip to Patagonia, or further off the beaten track by exploring Bolivia or Colombia.



A CONTINENT OF ICONS

No trip to South America is complete without exploring the incredible remains of the Inca city of Machu Picchu. For waterfall lovers Iguazu Falls is an absolute highlight as you see, hear and feel the power of these spectacular falls nestled in lush rainforest. The Galapagos Islands feature unique wildlife such as its namesake tortoises, iguanas and an incredible array of birdlife. It is possible to have up close experiences both in and out of the water.

(Image: JosephUR / Pixabay)

WHEN IS THE BEST TIME TO GO?

South America is a magnet for travellers who visit to feel its energy, charm, culture and, of course, its natural wonders. But, when is the best time to go?

WHETHER YOU ARE looking for some of the most beautiful remote wilderness on the planet or exciting, cosmopolitan cities there is something for everyone in this region.

In Argentina, the capital Buenos Aires is a lively, cultural hub, with hot, humid summers (December-February) ideal to learn to tango! In El Calafate, Patagonia, **summer** is the peak travel period and Ushuaia, the southernmost city in the world, is popular in summer, with temperatures around 18 and 14 degrees celsius, respectively. Chile's Santiago is quieter, with warm 30 degree January days, while coastal Valparaiso stays a cooler 23 degrees. Peru's summer (November-March) brings hot, humid conditions along the coast, while the Andes remain dry from April-November.

In Peru, November to March are the summer months. The capital of Lima is hot and humid while further along the coast it's warm and sunny, perfect for ocean swimming and relaxing.



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Argentina
weather video.
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(Image: Nicolas Perez/Unsplash)



Opposite: Aconcagua Park, Argentina

The Andes highlands have two seasons: wet and dry. In April to November, it rarely rains and the days of endless sunshine offer an even better view of the rugged mountain peaks against a clear blue sky. Mid-December to March sees showers and temperatures can drop quickly at higher altitudes.

From March to May, **autumn** cools Argentina, ideal for trekking conditions in Patagonia. The national parks stay open and landscapes turn crimson. Buenos Aires cools a little, averaging 22 degrees, and very pleasant for exploring or watching a *juego de fútbol* (soccer game)! Southern Ushuaia quietens in autumn, as the Antarctic travel period closes for winter. Buenos Aires averages a temperate 22 degrees celsius, El Calafate drops to around 12 degrees and Ushuaia to 10 degrees.

In Chile, autumn brings milder weather. Santiago averages 23 degrees, and Valparaiso 19 degrees, perfect

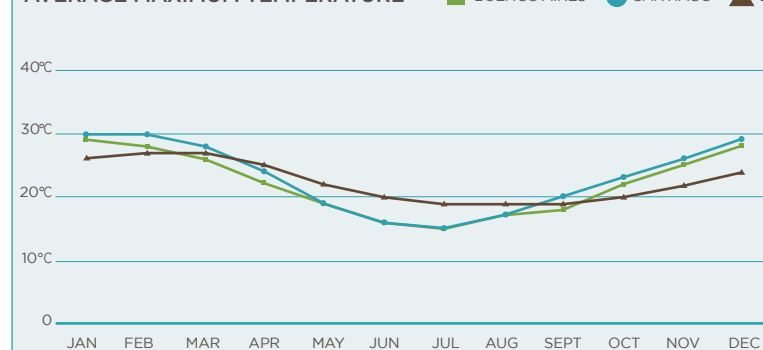
THE SPECTACULAR CASABLANCA VALLEY... IS WARM AND SUNNY AT AROUND 22 DEGREES, PERFECT FOR A COOL GLASS OF LOCAL CHARDONNAY “

for exploring museums, and the wine regions come to life with vendimias – local wine harvest events that feature grape stomping and wine tasting. Temperatures in Santiago average 23 degrees celsius and in Valparaiso, 19 degrees.

Autumn in Peru rains begin to slow down from March to May in the highlands and trails and bridges to Machu Picchu are reopened in preparation for the peak season. ►

AVERAGE MAXIMUM TEMPERATURE

■ BUENOS AIRES ● SANTIAGO ▲ LIMA



While there is still a chance of rain, you can enjoy a more accessible Inca Trail. In the Amazon, warm weather, humidity, and daily showers can be expected. On the coastline, there is very little rain from March to May. Peru's highland rains ease, reopening Machu Picchu trails. The Amazon remains warm and humid with showers, while the coast experiences little rain.

Winter can be one of the best times to explore Argentina; July and August experience cooler evenings and beautiful mornings. Buenos

rich red wines of the surrounding Casablanca Valley.

A winter escapade in Peru is ideal for travellers seeking pleasant climates and less crowds. In the Amazon, there will be more rainfall but it's an excellent time for birdwatching. Coastal cities experience mild temperatures, making it a perfect time to explore the country's diverse regions.

With spring comes millions of magnificent wildflowers in Argentina, which brightens and banishes the winter blues. Towards the end of the



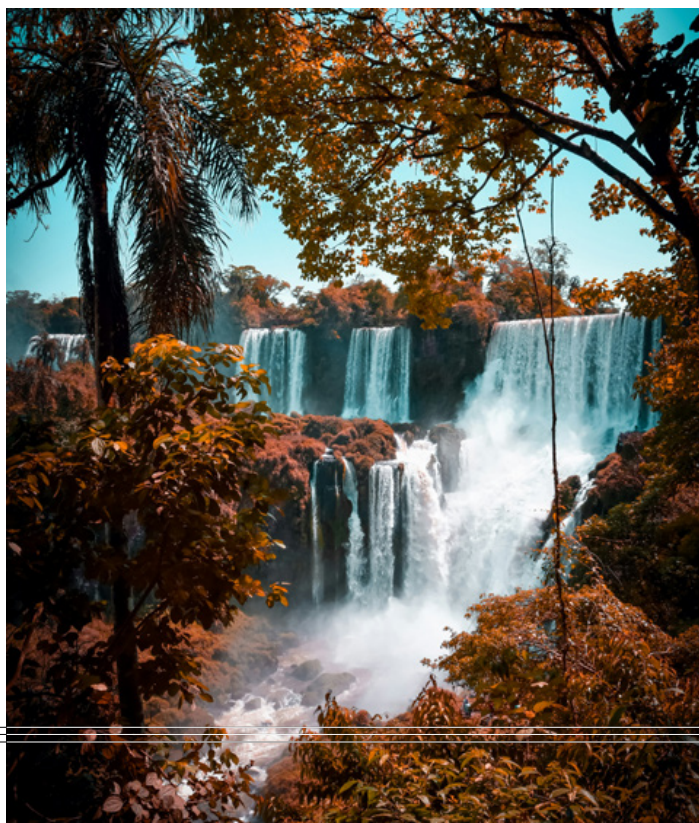
IN CHILE, THINK WARM, SUNNY DAYS, SUPERB FLOWERS AND FOLIAGE IN THE WINE REGIONS, AND MILD WEATHER FOR WANDERING VALPARAISO'S WORLD HERITAGE LISTED HISTORIC QUARTER

Aires averages a lovely 15 degrees celsius, while Ushuaia averages just 5 degrees but often dips below zero. If you're eager to head south, keep in mind that winter does impact Patagonia.

Winter is very mild in the Central Valley where Santiago is located, and likewise in nearby Valparaiso. There will be more rain but it shouldn't stop you from getting out and about; both Santiago and Valparaiso average around 15 degrees in the middle of winter – ideal for sampling the

season, Los Glaciares and Torres Del Paine National Park—two Patagonian gems—will amaze you with their vibrancy. In Buenos Aires, spring brings lovely warm days, perfect for exploring the neighbourhoods.

In Chile, think warm, sunny days, superb flowers and foliage in the wine regions, and mild weather for wandering Valparaiso's World Heritage Listed historic quarter. Santiago averages a lovely 22 degrees celsius in October, and Valparaiso 18 degrees.



Peru's spring runs from September to November and is when the dry season ends, rain begins, and temperatures start to rise. With the dry season ending, the peak season also ends. Expect variable weather conditions while hiking in the Andean highlands or exploring the Amazon rainforest, and you can expect to experience Peru with fewer crowds during this time.

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Chile weather
video.
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INTRODUCING →

ARGENTINA

SNAPSHOT ON →

IGUAZÚ FALLS

The largest
waterfall system
in the world sits
on the border
between Brazil
and Argentina

LOCATED IN THE northern Misiones province of Argentina, Iguazú Falls is one of UNESCO's Seven Natural Wonders of the World, surrounded by 67,000 hectares of protected national park. This entire area encompasses the remaining portion of the Atlantic Forest, which is home to several types of ecoregions and a vast, biodiverse community of plants and animals that cannot be found anywhere else in the world. Park residents include the jaguar, coati, caimans, ocelots, opossums, anteaters, jaguarundi, tapirs, and countless species of birds, butterflies, and other insects.

The Iguazú Falls system is made up of 275 individual waterfalls, with the biggest and most famous being the Garganta del Diablo, or Devil's Throat waterfall. Both Argentina and Brazil play an important role in managing the conservation of the area, which includes research efforts on the subtropical rainforest and its enormous range of unique plants and animals. Most of the falls lie on the Argentinian side of the border, where a well-maintained system of catwalks—engineered to have minimal impact on the landscape and the environment—allows visitors to get as close as possible to the water. ►

(Image: Gábor Sz/Unsplash)

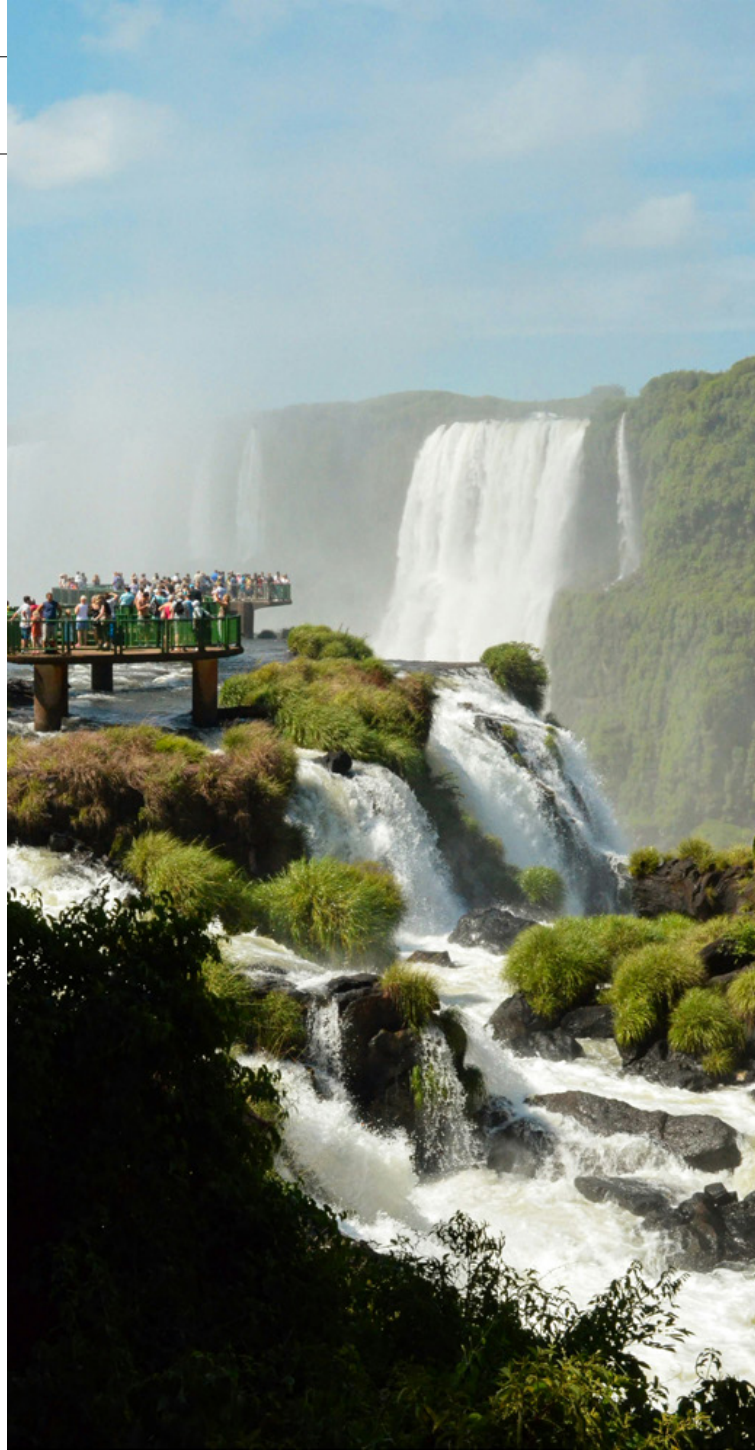
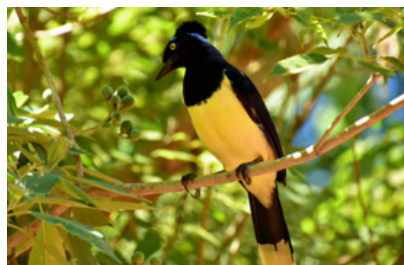


Clockwise from opposite: Visitors admiring Iguazú Falls; Iguazú Falls translates from the native Guarani for 'big water'; over a million people visit the Falls every year; the Jungle Ecological Train

► According to local Guarani legends, Iguazú Falls was created when the Serpent God, M'Boi, jealousy cursed a pair of lovers, Naipi and Taruba, to be separated by a huge waterfall. The Serpent God was so furious that he couldn't have the beautiful Naipi that his rage created a huge chasm in the earth, which formed a mighty river. Naipi and Taruba were turned into a rock and a palm tree. Legends say that the lovers are responsible for creating the frequent rainbows over Iguazú Falls, despite M'Boi's best efforts to keep them apart.

The town of Puerto Iguazú serves the steady stream of visitors who come to see the Falls and boasts a range of fine restaurants, charming hotels, and indigenous community projects to highlight conservation efforts in the area.

There's a point at the western end of Puerto Iguazú, Las Tres Fronteras—the Three Frontiers Landmark—where you can see Argentina, Brazil, and Paraguay at the same time. In the evenings, the landmark lights up with a rather vibrant audiovisual laser show that takes advantage of the evening mist.



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... THERE'S ALSO A TRAIN TO THE DEVIL'S THROAT, WHICH IS OTHERWISE ABOUT A 1.2 KM WALK “”

During your free afternoon, pop by the tiny Jardín de los Picaflores, or Garden of the Hummingbirds, which is an amazing, intimate spot for nature photographers and birdwatchers.

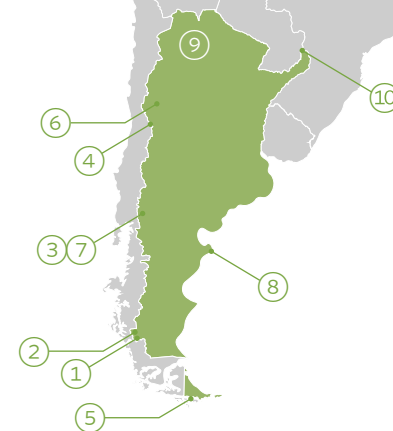
On the Argentine side of the Falls is the Parque Nacional Iguazú, which has maps of the park, walking trail guides, souvenirs, and historical information about the area. The park features a Jungle Ecological Train to minimise the human impact of tourism, which takes you from the Visitors' Center to the Falls Station, where the Upper and Lower walking trails begin. There's also a train to the Devil's Throat, which is otherwise about a 1.2 km walk. There are also a few basic convenience stores located by the train stations to grab water and snacks. When preparing to visit, check out the official park site for more information on food, rental lockers, and accessibility. ●

10

BEST ESCAPES OUTDOOR ARGENTINA

Wild Argentina
is a no-brainer
for anyone who
loves the great
outdoors

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HOME TO SOME of the most striking landscapes in the world, here, Argentina's 10 unmissable nature spots.

1 PERITO MORENO GLACIER

For those already planning to visit Los Glaciares National Park, be sure to swing by the Southern Patagonian Ice Field for breathtaking glacier-scapes bathed in dramatic, moody light. This enormous freshwater ice field is home to the icy-blue Perito Moreno Glacier, which is unusual in that unlike most other glaciers in the world, it is growing, not shrinking. Visitors can trek across the ice, and if they're lucky, watch the glacier 'calve' new icebergs. ►

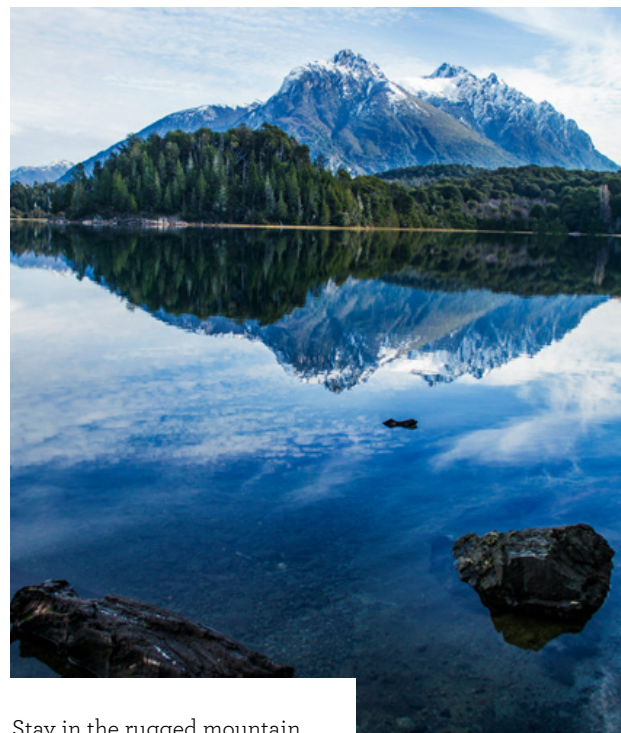
(Image: Hans Jürgen Weinhardt/Unsplash)

Perito Moreno Glacier



2 LOS GLACIARES NATIONAL PARK (Parque Nacional Los Glaciares)

Spanning 600,000 hectares, Los Glaciares National Park is the third largest glacier park in the world and was declared a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1981. Nestled in the Andes mountains, the park sits next to the Torres del Paine National Park in Chile and features a massive glacial ice cap, several glacial lakes and minor glaciers, and unparalleled views.



Stay in the rugged mountain town of El Chaltén (Tehuelche for 'smoking mountain') considered to be the trekking capital of Argentina because of its popularity with hikers, climbers, and adventurers. Its eponymous mountain, Cerro Chaltén, is also known as Mount Fitz Roy, named for the explorer Captain Robert FitzRoy of the HMS Beagle in the 1830s. Indigenous wildlife includes the huemul, a native species of deer that is close to extinction.

3 BARILOCHE

If you're a fan of chocolate, put Bariloche on your list of places to visit and thank us later. Once known as the honeymoon capital of Argentina, this charming mountain town looks like something out of a European alpine storybook. Its name is derived from the Mapudungun word variloche, meaning "people from behind the mountain," referring to indigenous tribes who used the mountain pass to avoid Spanish invaders. Over time, Bariloche has become a popular destination for skiing and other winter sports, and during summer, every other outdoor sport imaginable: whitewater rafting, climbing, kite surfing, paragliding, kayaking, canyoning, horseback riding, zip lining, mountain biking, fishing, and hiking; keep in mind that the lakes stay impossibly cold because of their proximity to the snowy mountains.



4 ACONCAGUA

Argentina's tallest mountain sits pretty at 6,961 metres, making it the highest point of the Andes. Its surrounding area is part of the Aconcagua Provincial Park, which is pristine and unspoiled thanks to the park entry fee. Even if you're not a keen mountain climber, Aconcagua has great hiking, camping, bountiful opportunities for nature photography, and even a base camp art gallery.



5 USHUAIA

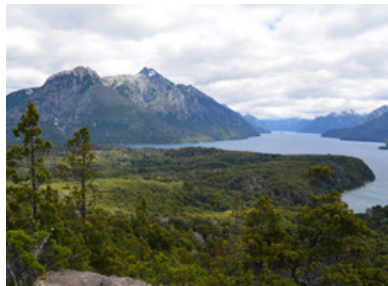
The capital of Tierra del Fuego is full of hidden delights, including animal-watching along the Beagle channel and the easily-accessible Martial glacier. Ushuaia is also home to the historic End of the World Train, Les Eclaireurs Lighthouse, year-round ice hockey, and some excellent skiing options, including the Martial mountains and Cerro Castor. Nearby is the Tierra del Fuego National Park. ➤

6 ISCHIGUALASTO-TALAMPAYA NATIONAL PARKS

Northwestern La Rioja Province is home to the adjacent Ischigualasto and Talampaya national parks. This is a dream destination for dinosaur buffs, as these contiguous parks contain 1,500-year old petroglyphs, paleontological fossils, and geological structures from the Triassic period, over 200 million years ago. Ischigualasto, also known as the ‘valley of the moon,’ is a surreal sight filled with strange geological formations, literally named by indigenous peoples as ‘dead land.’ Visitors will need to get a guide to visit the remains of Talampaya’s Lost City, which lies in an enormous crater.

7 NAHUEL HUAPI NATIONAL PARK

This is Argentina’s oldest national park and covers almost 2 million acres of different terrains and landscapes, including its eponymous lake, the Andes mountain range, and the Valdivian Rainforest. Nahuel Huapi is also home to the popular tourist destination of Bariloche, but given its enormous size, there are plenty of other sights to see, including the ice-covered Lanín volcano. Like many other Andean destinations, Nahuel Huapi is bordered by Chile to the west. Many species of otter live here, including the endangered huillín. Besides Bariloche, other scenic towns in the park include El Bolson and Villa La Angostura.



Clockwise from top: Uquía, Jujuy; Talampaya; Península Valdés; Macaús at Iguazú National Park and Nahuel Huapi Lake

8 PENÍNSULA VALDÉS

Located on the Atlantic coast of Chubut province, Península Valdés is a stunning UNESCO-protected nature reserve teeming with spectacular wildlife, including guanacos, *pichi* (dwarf armadillos), southern right whales, fur seals, elephant seals, and sea lions. As a result, the peninsula is a critical site for many marine creatures during breeding and nursing seasons, as well as opportunistic orcas that purposely beach themselves to grab an unsuspecting lunch. While the peninsula appears as a desolate landscape, Península Valdés is home to multiple rich ecological systems, spread across tidal flats, salt lakes, mudflats, rocky cliffs, sand dunes, and beaches. Most visitors base themselves in the nearby city of Puerto Madryn (originally a Welsh settlement) or Puerto Pirámides, which is the only town on the peninsula itself.

9 JUJUY PROVINCE

While many of Argentina’s biggest natural draws are in the south, an underappreciated northern destination is Jujuy province, which borders Chile and Bolivia. Dotted with the remains of ancient stone fortresses and pre-Incan structures, Jujuy’s is a stark, natural beauty that tells the stories of its many indigenous tribes, including the Aymará, Quechua, and the

ancient Incas; terrain in the area ranges from the protected sliver of Yungas jungle to the multicoloured mountain landscapes of the Quebrada de Humahuaca, a UNESCO World Heritage Site. Come for the incredible remains of pre-Columbian cultures, Cerro de los Siete Colores (Hill of Seven Colours), the Laguna Pozuelos nature reserve, and the beautiful, remote hiking around Iruya village.

10 IGUAZÚ NATIONAL PARK

It would be criminal to visit Argentina and not see one of the Seven Natural Wonders of the World. Iguazú Falls comprises 275 unique waterfalls, situated in a vast swathe of UNESCO-protected jungle that straddles the border between Argentina and Brazil; the Falls can also be reached via Ciudad del Este in Paraguay. The biggest attraction here is undoubtedly the Garganta del Diablo or Devil’s Throat, best experienced up close via a specially engineered walkway. But it’s not just about the waterfalls. The park boasts a wealth of protected jungle—the last remnants of the Atlantic Forest—featuring numerous biodiverse ecoregions, and unique flora and fauna that can only be found in this area. ●

↓
Llamas and alpacas are
synonymous with Peru,
alongside Machu Picchu

INTRODUCING →

PERU



The Amazon is also known as the 'lungs of the earth'

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Peru's slice of the Amazon Rainforest is a window into an otherwise mysterious world

THE AMAZON RAINFOREST is one of the world's most precious ecosystems. Stretching across eight South American countries and French Guiana, it's home to 10% of the world's known biodiversity and 1.4 billion acres of dense forests. This selva tropical (tropical rainforest) is bordered by the Guiana Highlands in the north, the Andes in the west, the Brazilian Highlands in the south and the Atlantic Ocean in the east. Much more than a haven for wildlife, the Amazon is also a major producer of fresh air, taking in massive amounts of carbon dioxide and releasing oxygen—thus the nickname 'lungs of the earth.' ▶

(Image: Turiano L P Neto/Pixabay)

SNAPSHOT → AMAZON RAINFOREST

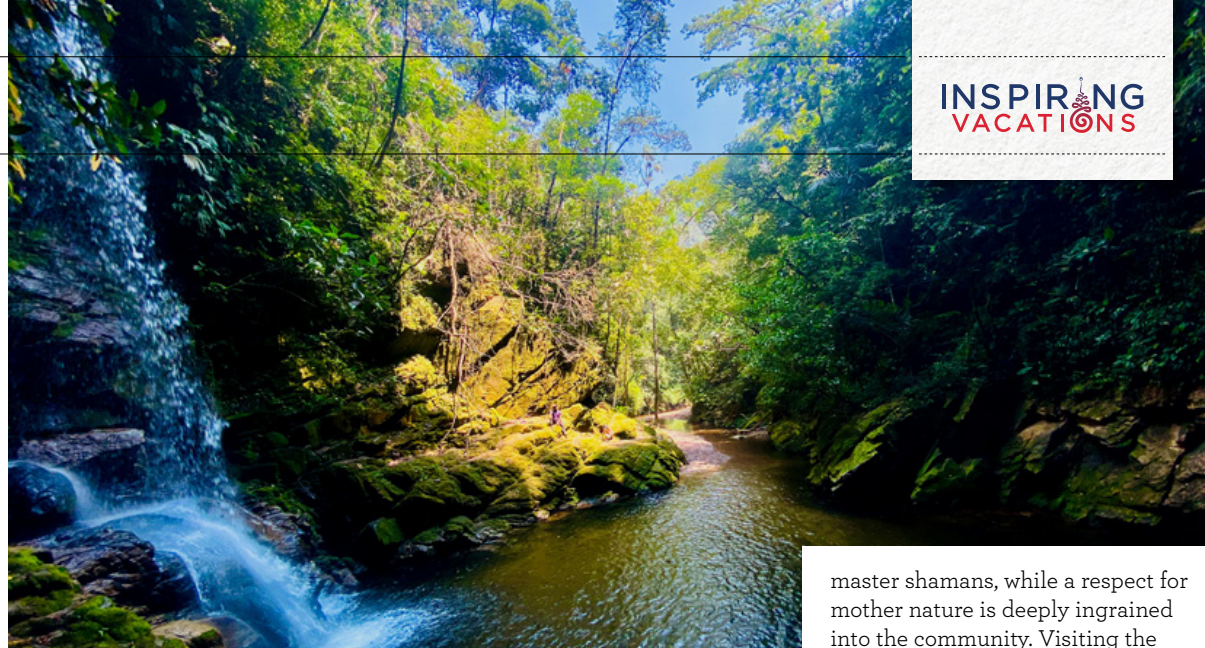
↘
Clockwise from right: San Martin, gateway to Lanín National Park;
Rufescent Tiger Heron; Spider Monkey; more brown monkeys; sloth

INSPIRING
VACATIONS



worth enduring for the sights that await. A few of the region's most famous inhabitants are: capybaras, three-toed sloths, jaguars, spider monkeys, and the formidable green anaconda.

Upon landing in Puerto Maldonado, you'll board a motorised wooden canoe and travel down the Madre de Dios river, towards your lodge. Keep your eyes peeled for wildlife, both on land and in the air,



A FEW OF THE REGION'S MOST FAMOUS INHABITANTS ARE: CAPYBARAS, THREE-TOED SLOTHS, JAGUARS, SPIDER MONKEYS, AND THE FORMIDABLE GREEN ANACONDA “”

► Among the most well-protected parts of the Amazon are those belonging to Peru. The country's two largest gateways are Iquitos and Puerto Maldonado—the former is a popular destination in itself, while the latter is almost exclusively a jump-off point into the nearby Tambopata National Reserve.

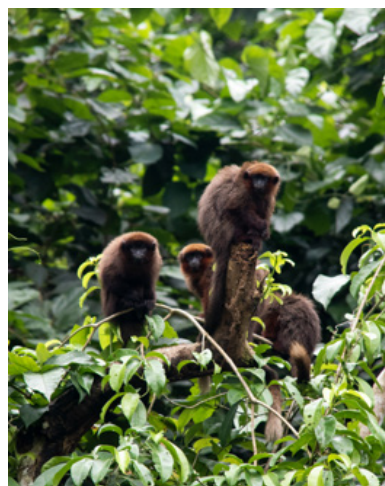
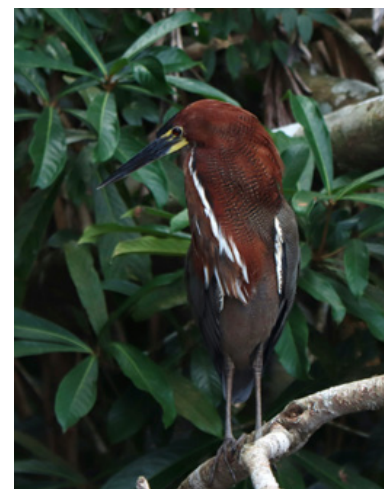
Located in the south-eastern Madre de Dios region, Tambopata National Reserve is one of the most biologically diverse and least populated parts of Peru. Just a stone's throw from the Bolivian border, this part of the world is blessed with lush landscapes and a staggering array of flora and fauna. Although humidity hovers around 75% in the dry season and can skyrocket to over 90% in the wet—ideal for mosquitoes—conditions are well

as sightings are common throughout the region. The *río* (river) is considered a headwater tributary to the Amazon River and straddles the border between Peru and Bolivia, zigzagging from one country to the other. As well as connecting remote areas to the city of Puerto Maldonado, the river also connects people.

The Madre de Dios region is home to a variety of indigenous tribes that have survived subsistently, in spite of colonisation and civil conflicts. The largest are the Ese'Eja people, a traditionally nomadic group of hunter-gatherers that believe they came to earth from a cotton thread in the sky. Their culture is rich and heavily tethered to the Amazon ecosystem; medicines are derived from the forest and administered by

master shamans, while a respect for mother nature is deeply ingrained into the community. Visiting the region allows people from across the world to interact with and learn from ancient cultures. In fact, far from negatively imposing on these communities, ecotourism is recognised by the Ese'Eja as helping to spread awareness, and preserve their customs.

For most, the highlight of their Amazon adventure is animal-spotting. Cruise through Sandoval Lake to spot giant otters, black caiman, rare birds and howler monkeys. Below the surface, you'll find piranhas and arapaima—one of the world's largest freshwater fish. If you're keen to spot wild macaws, Tambopata National Reserve is home to a huge clay lick, which attracts the vibrant birds with its nutrient-rich clay. Finally, when the sun dips below the canopy and the forest is blanketed in darkness, embark on a nighttime tour to learn about the Amazon's nocturnal residents. When you're deep in the world's largest rainforest, there's never a dull moment. ●



WHAT TO EXPECT →

A FIRST TIMER'S GUIDE TO PERU

Food, sights and
ancient attractions
await in this
magnificent
South American
nation

Virgen del Carmen Festival, Machu Picchu

PERU IS FAST BECOMING one of South America's hottest destinations. Adventurers and culture vultures are well catered for, thanks to the country's astonishing array of attractions and rich Quechua history, while foodies will relish its revered culinary scene. If you're partial to natural sights, Peru is bursting with postcard-worthy landscapes and more hiking trails than you could squeeze into one trip.

Whether you're planning your first trip or gathering inspiration, here, a first timer's guide to Peru. ▶

(Image: Mauro Lima / Unsplash)



Clockwise from right: A visitor enters Machu Picchu; market vegetables; Peru is as much about llamas and alpacas as it is about the people; Machu Picchu; corn varieties

Follow in the footsteps of ancient Peruvians

Peru's history is long and storied, with its earliest inhabitants dating back more than 13,000 years. Civilisations from the lesser-known Chavín to the sprawling Incan empire were highly advanced, recognised for developing sophisticated textile, pottery and architectural techniques. Even Quechua—a family of 46 languages native to the Andes and South American highlands—evolved long before the Incas thrived and is still an official language today.

Get familiar with Peru's ancient roots before you travel and prioritise the bucket-list sights—because there are simply too many highlights for one journey.

If you're fascinated by lost citadels, head to the ruins of Pisac or the mighty Machu Picchu, but if you love a mystery, you can't miss the Nazca Lines: a collection of giant glyphs carved into the ground by the ancient Nazca people. Located in the arid Rio Grande de Nasca river basin—one of the driest places on earth—the various motifs are unrivalled in size, complexity and significance by any other similar work around the world. For the best view, take a scenic flight above the basin.

Indulge your inner foodie

Food is a huge part of life in South and Central America, and Peru is no exception. Despite lacking the international profile of cuisines

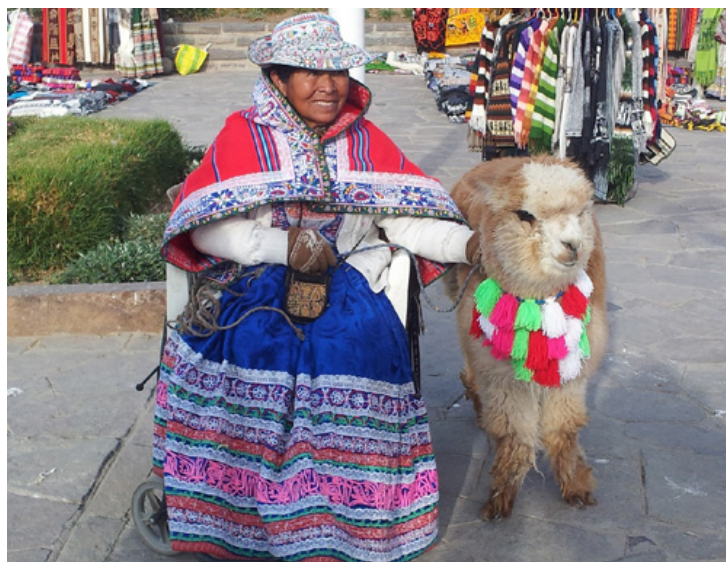


like Mexican, Peruvian *comida* (food) is rich and full of surprises, with many dishes influenced by local produce and the country's multicultural heritage. While western options are abundant in cities like Cusco and Lima, stray from your culinary comfort zone and you're guaranteed to discover many local delights.

Dip your toe in with *lomo saltado*, Chinese-influenced stir-fry beef packed with Peruvian flavours and aji chillies, before moving on to the national dish *ceviche*—raw fish cured in citrus. If you're feeling daring, order the *cuy* (guinea pig)—a local delicacy served baked or fried. For vegetarians and vegans, there's potato—4,000 varieties to be exact, served every way imaginable.

Get to know the four-legged locals

Llamas and alpacas are synonymous with Peru, alongside Machu Picchu. These furry camelids have roamed the Peruvian landscape since the pre-Columbian period, prized for their meat and fur, and used to transport goods across the rugged Andes. They also have two non-domesticated Peruvian cousins—the guanaco and the vicuña—with the former found primarily in Patagonia, and the latter living between 3,200–4,800m altitude and having some of the most coveted wool in the world. ►



(Images: Jaison Higuera; William Justen de Vasconcellos/Unsplash; Anita/Pixabay; LoggaW/ggler/Pixabay)



Clockwise from far left: Hiking the Inca Trail; Machu Picchu is a well photographed attraction; The Sacred Valley offers a unique man-made landscape

► Nowadays, llamas and alpacas are known to roam the high Andes and frequent ancient sites like the Inca Trail. Visit any souvenir shop in Cusco or the wider Sacred Valley and you'll find shelves stocked with all sorts of alpaca wool goods—the perfect souvenir to combat chilly, Andean temperatures and support local artisanry.

Strap on your hiking boots

As any nature lover will attest, there's no better way to familiarise yourself with a landscape than to traverse it on foot and Peru is bursting with spectacular sights for those who care to explore. From emerald lakes to snow-capped *cordilleras* (mountain ranges), the country is blessed with natural delights and thanks to ancient Incan innovation,

many of the most remote sites are accessible on foot.

The diverse geography of Peru means that no trek is the same. If you're looking for an alternative to the busy Inca Trail, embark on the spectacular Salkantay Trail, while those seeking picture-perfect mountain scenery and glacial waters should stock up on altitude tablets and tackle the 4,600m Laguna 69 trek in central Peru.

So, whether you're an experienced mountaineer or a hiking newbie, there's a Peruvian trail to suit every traveller.

Be altitude aware

Most people consider the climate and conditions prior to visiting Peru, but many overlook the biggest factor of all—altitude. Although the capital Lima sits just above sea level, the country's average altitude

is 1,555 metres and the city of Cusco is at a staggering 3,399 metres. This altitude comes with several caveats. Aside from general shortness of breath due to lower oxygen levels, it's common to develop acute mountain sickness (AMS) with symptoms such as headaches, fatigue or weakness, dizziness and gastrointestinal upset ranging from mild to severe. In extreme cases, people can develop high altitude cerebral edema (HACE)—a potentially life-threatening condition if untreated.

While altitude isn't to be taken lightly, there are many things you can do to mitigate your risk of illness. Gradual ascent and hydration are pivotal, while prescription medication from your GP can prevent the onset of symptoms altogether. It's recommended that you visit a travel doctor well in advance of your departure.

... THE COUNTRY IS BLESSED WITH NATURAL DELIGHTS AND THANKS TO ANCIENT INCAN INNOVATION, MANY OF THE MOST REMOTE SITES ARE ACCESSIBLE ON FOOT “

Sample all things coca

In Peru, coca leaves are never far away. Nature's remedy for altitude sickness has been chewed and brewed for millennia by Andean communities, but nowadays, you'll only find it in a handful of countries around the world. The leaf has been classed as a Schedule I narcotic with the United Nations since the 1960s but in South America, where its use has cultural and historical implications, it's legal.

The moment you land in Andean Peru, you'll find all manner of teas, lollies and assorted coca treats. While it may seem strange to nibble on a leaf or sip a brew made from illicit substances, coca is a proven method of combating altitude and a truly Peruvian experience. ●



(Images: Juan-Carlos; Michael Brawn; Pedro Lasta/Unsplash)

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Torres del Paine
National Park, Chile

INTRODUCING →

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Torres del Paine National Park

INSPIRING
VACATIONS

SNAPSHOT ON → TORRES DEL PAINE NATIONAL PARK

Be one with nature at this UNESCO-protected biosphere reserve, arguably one of the most beautiful in the world

ONE OF THE MOST awe-inspiring nature reserves in the world, Torres del Paine is a magnet for adventurers and photographers in Chilean Patagonia. Known for its incredible mountains, glaciers, blue lakes, and sweeping landscapes from forests to pampas, the park is a popular spot for hikers and campers, who make use of its numerous, well-served *refugios* (the equivalent of park hostels) and campsites. A few of its most dazzling sights are the stunning Grey Glacier—a rugged, silver-blue spectacle nourished by the Southern Patagonia Ice Field—and picturesque French Valley, which many claims is the most scenic area in the park. Torres del Paine is structured in a way that welcomes visitors of all abilities and schedules— even if you only have a day, you'll still be able to take in the best that the park has to offer. ▶

(Image: Olga Stalska / Unsplash)



► The park is named for its iconic granite mountains or towers (torres), with paine (pie-nay) meaning blue in Tehuelche. The Tehuelche language was indigenous to the statuesque nomadic hunters of Chile and parts of Patagonian Argentina, also known as the Aónikenk, who were the alleged patagones or giants seen by early Spanish explorers. Like many parts of Patagonia, Torres del Paine is subject to unpredictable weather

llamas (like llamas, they also spit when frightened, so keep your distance). A trip to the lake means a view of the famed French Valley, which is a little trickier to access without a hike. There's also Lake Pehoé, known for its cool blue hues.

If you're here for mountains, you're in the right place. The eponymous Torres del Paine are unmistakably majestic

IF YOU'RE HERE FOR MOUNTAINS, YOU'RE IN THE RIGHT PLACE. THE EPONYMOUS TORRES DEL PAINE ARE UNMISTAKABLY MAJESTIC CENTREPIECES OF THE PAINE MASSIF “ ”

and notoriously strong, chilly winds, so wrap your electronic valuables in plastic, dust off your sturdiest sneakers or hiking shoes, and bring a good windproof/waterproof jacket.

Lake Nordenskjöld (or Lago Norgenskjöld), named after Swedish explorer and scientist Otto Nordenskjöld, is an expanse of dramatic turquoise shades; depending on the day's conditions, the water may have shifting colours. It's also home to the Salto Grande waterfall and a local population of guanaco, which are similar to

centrepieces of the Paine Massif, individually known as Torres d'Agostini, Torres Central and Torres Monzino. There's also the Cuernos del Paine or the 'horns' of Paine, a series of unusually shaped granite spikes over 2,000 metres tall; some of the more colourfully named cuernos are the Aleta de Tiburón (the shark's fin), La Espada (the sword), and La Máscara (the mask).

When it comes to food, all the park's hotels have restaurants that offer standard hotel fare, but at slightly higher prices, given the



park's remote location. The park's refugios have simple hot meals available for visitors (including vegetarians), as well as small, basic convenience stores, though these are usually geared towards hikers buying cooking supplies. We recommend bringing snacks for a day trip, but avoid bringing fresh food items in from Argentina, as they'll be taken off your hands at the border. On the upside, clean, fresh water is abundant—if you're game to fill your bottles from glacier-fed streams, err on the side of caution and do it upstream or away from footpaths. ●

Experience the
culinary revival
in Santiago
de Chile

ROAST MEAT AND barbecues will always hold a special place in the hearts of Santiaguinos, but right now the Chilean capital is enjoying a new wave of gastronomic excellence. There's experimental fine dining, an ongoing trend for local produce and a flurry of vegan and vegetarian restaurants. Welcome to Santiago's food renaissance.

Market days

One of Santiago's must-visit places, Mercado Central, is so much more than a fish market—it's a historical landmark. A bustling crowd of locals and tourists makes for a buzzing atmosphere inside this neoclassical wrought-iron building, home to endless stalls selling meat, wines and every seafood you can imagine. Settle down for lunch or a snack at one of the restaurants in the centre or at the lower-key food stalls around the edge. ➤

Plazas de Bolsillo, Santiago, Chile

(Image: Plazas de Bolsillo/Facebook)

FOODIES → TASTE OF SANTIAGO

MAKE SURE YOU TRY CHUPE DE LOCOS — A SHELLFISH SIMILAR TO ABALONE WHICH IS BAKED WITH BREADCRUMBS AND GRATED CHEESE AND SERVED IN A HEATED CLAY DISH “



► Make sure you try *chupe de locos*—a shellfish similar to abalone which is baked with breadcrumbs and grated cheese and served in a heated clay dish. This is also the place for *caldillo de congrio*, the traditional Chilean fish stew made with a conger eel. And if you feel like splashing out, order a whole king crab and the waiter will shell it for you at the table.

Dining out

Chef Rodolfo Guzmán has been credited with the reinvigoration of Chilean cuisine. His fine dining restaurant Boragó in Vitacura is a hotbed of molecular gastronomy using ingredients that are always fresh and always seasonal—he and his team make trips all over the country, foraging for produce that will be used that week. The 20-dish tasting menu is a celebration of flavour and technique. Wear comfy trousers.

Elsewhere in Vitacura, Ambrosia is unpretentious but sophisticated, using Chilean ingredients with a French twist. It's comfort food with intense flavours and the restaurant—and outdoor courtyard—has a lovely laid-back vibe.

Like Ambrosia, 99 Restaurante—in the Providencia business district—is another trailblazer of the Chilean bistronomy movement. Its inventive menu complements

the cool and casual atmosphere—dishes include exquisitely presented duck with pickled onion and pear, followed by carrot sorbet with coconut foam.

Get green

There was a time when vegetarian and vegan restaurants were hard to come by in Santiago, but even in this meat-loving city, plant-based cuisine is on the up. Head to Barrio Italia and you're spoilt for choice. The delightful Verde Sazón serves dishes bursting with colour and flavour; fast food joint Vegan Bunker is the place for burgers, and at bohemian Shakti en Chile you can expect freshly-made treats like chickpea pancakes with mushrooms in a coconut sauce topped with sprouts.

Meanwhile, El Huerto on a tree-lined street in Providencia has been rated one of the top 25 vegetarian restaurants in the world by The Daily Meal. ►



(Images: Diego Marín/Unsplash)



Clockwise from below: Plazas de Bolsillo; Vegan Bunker burgers; Moriawase ceviche at Osaka Restaurant; Sushi Naoki



► It offers wholesome veggie food in an upscale environment with plenty of clearly-labelled vegan dishes on the menu.

Hit the streets

Some of the most innovative Chilean food can be found at stalls and carts pitched up on Santiago's streets. Look out for the ones with a long line of locals queuing up to be served.

We love the city's Plazas De Bolsillo—local squares turned into plant-filled picnic zones with food trucks, street art and occasionally yoga classes. Try the one on Calle Morande in the city centre.

Empanadas are everywhere in Santiago. These filled pastry pockets come with meat or cheese and can be baked or deep fried. Try them at El Rapido—the fastest fast food you'll ever eat—or head to the stalls at Cal y Canto metro stop.

For those intrepid enough to climb Cerro San Cristóbal, your reward is not just the incredible views—you can also treat yourself to a mote con huesillos from a stall at the top. This uniquely Chilean drink is made from peaches and cinnamon with husked wheat.

Sushi chic

Sushi is a big deal in Chile—not entirely surprising given its 2,600-mile coastline—and Santiago is home to the best restaurants.

Many places serve up Nikkei, the Peruvian-Japanese fusion cuisine that blends delicate sushi flavours

like miso, soy and ginger with punchy Peruvian ingredients like *aji* (hot peppers) and corn. Book ahead to get a table at Osaka in Vitacura where the current menu includes flavour combinations like white fish, chilli and sweet potato or salmon, and teriyaki sauce.

If you prefer traditional sushi, get on the waiting list for a reservation at Naoki. Widely considered the best Japanese restaurant in the city, you have the option to dine 'omakase' which means 'leave it up to the chef.' Expect cleverly-flavoured rice, market-fresh fish, maki rolls to die for and oyster shots.

Piz-za the action

There are plenty of pizza restaurants to choose from in Santiago but one of our favourites is Blueys Pizza in Barrio Brasil. A chilled out joint in this trendy neighbourhood—a cultural hub with grand architecture alongside boutiques and artists' studios—Blueys is an Aussie-Chilean-owned artisan pizzeria that takes flavours and ingredients from all over the world and makes fresh sourdough bases to a special Australian recipe. They have live music and DJs but there is also a lovely outdoor terrace and cosy areas with armchairs. And if you can still move after filling up on pizza, have a wander around Barrio Brasi—there are lots of cool bars and clubs and a friendly vibe in this part of town. ●



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Rosalind S

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Jung P

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"One of the best trips we have experienced"

★★★★★

The 19 Day Inspiring South America tour was a well-organised itinerary and all guides and drivers were punctual. The itinerary in Peru was very well planned to cater for acclimatisation to high altitude, starting at the lower height and working our way to higher levels over a number of days. A great mix of discovery and fun. One of the best trips we have experienced.

James B

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