

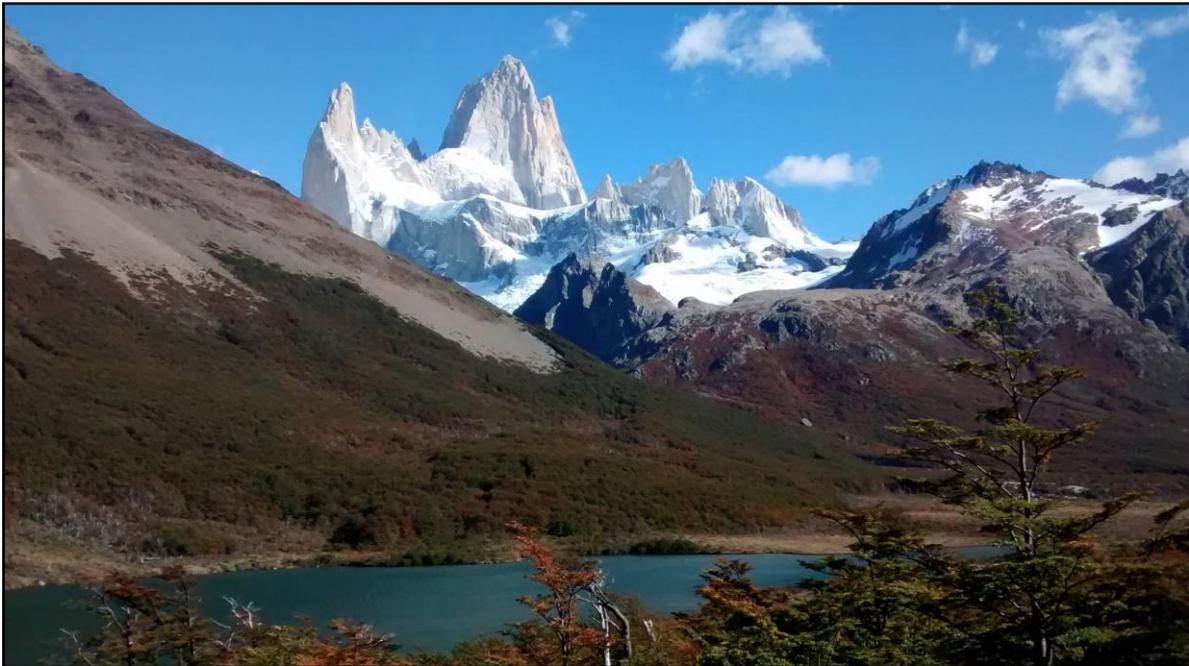


Steady Plus

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.



The Fitzroy skyline from Lago Madre – Day 5. Photo Shawntel Stapleton

- **Well proven, long running itinerary**
- **Treks and hikes in the two jewels of Patagonia, Paine and Fitzroy**
- **5 day Fitzroy trek to the Patagonian Ice Cap (exclusive to High Places!)**
- **5 day Paine 'W' trek**
- **Supported treks, carry sleeping bag and personal gear on 6 days**
- **Visit Perito Moreno glacier**
- **Option to extend and join our 'Chile: Volcanoes' trip after Paine trek**

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 in 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).

High Places in Patagonia

High Places are well established in Patagonia. We have worked with our long time colleagues based in El Chalten and Santiago since (we can hardly believe it) 1990.

Departure dates. Our trips avoid the ‘High Season’ Christmas and Jan/Feb period. Chilean Paine in particular has become very crowded during these months.

Grade

This is a marvellous trip and visits the most awesome mountain scenery. 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. On both treks it is necessary to carry sleeping bags, mats and personal gear (not tents) between camps. (see Trek Support – below)

This trip overall is graded ‘**Steady plus** although **Day 7** is arguably **Tough**. The walking is mostly on good trails and ascents are not huge - the highest pass on the Fitzroy circuit barely exceeds 1400m. It should be well within the capabilities of reasonably fit walkers. Day 7 which climbs up to Paso del Viento from our Toro campsite is the hardest day. It covers some rough ground on and around a glacier and climbs 820m in a 9-10 our day. However this can always be an optional rest day – as it is up and back to the same campsite.

Overall, the good standard of accommodation, well-equipped camping sites and excellent food tend to compensate for the hardships that may be encountered in the mountains and this remains very much a civilised holiday.



Flowers known as – ‘virgin’s shoe’

Trek Support

For 2 nights on the **Fitzroy Trek** we stay in private camps in stunning sites complete with own kitchen, cook and mess tent. Toro camp (2 nights) is not private but it is kitted out with supplies and cooking and there may be a mess tent. On 4 days we need to carry our personal gear + sleeping/mattress – not tents – but only day gear when going up to the Paso del Viento.

In Chilean ‘Paine’ on the ‘**W** route we carry the same - personal gear + sleeping/mattress – not tents on 2 days only. Three days are day walks from camp. We take our meals in the Refugios and camp close by. The option of dormitory type sleeping accommodation in the Refugios is possible if booked well in advance. Add approx US\$40 per person per night.

Weather

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 on clear nights temperatures can drop below zero. The ozone layer is badly depleted here so good sunglasses, sunhat and sunblock are required.

Accommodation

In towns we stay in mid-range comfortable hotels, 'hostals' (*small, often family run 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.

Transport

We use a combination of private and public transport. It will often depend on the size of the group. Bus services and roads are both of very good standard. 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 and Puerto Natales we provide bed and breakfast only. This allows the option of trying the local foods and restaurants, very much part of the adventure. A good '3 course' dinner may cost around US\$25 and lunch US\$12 approx. On travelling days lunch is not usually provided but elsewhere most meals are included. 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 with prior notice.

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 but caution whilst in the outdoors is always advisable and it is best to carry water-purifying agents.

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.



Los Cuernos (*the Horns*) from Lake Pehoe, Paine. Photo Shawntel Stapleton

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 **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. Flights to El Calafate should be arranged in conjunction with international flights to Buenos Aires.

DAY 1 EL CALAFATE

Arrive El Calafate. A 4 hour flight from Buenos Aires, this busy tourist town lies on the shores of Lago Argentino, close to the Perito Moreno glacier. Guesthouse.

DAY 2 FITZROY RIVERSIDE CAMP

We transfer to El Chalten (3 hours) and the most spectacular mountains of Patagonia. Wow! Until you have seen them, it is impossible to imagine Cerro Torre, Fitzroy and Cerro Poincenot - from the village, their summits tower 2600m above us. The drive continues for 17km up the valley to our own attractive riverside private camping area. There are hot showers and a fine indoor dining area where we eat beside a roaring fire and look out of the panoramic window at the enormous buttress of Cerro Fitzroy. In the afternoon, R&R with an easy walk to nearby Lago Huemul, a valley bike ride or relax by the Rio de la Vueltas river by the camp. We'll spend the next two nights here. (B,D)

DAY 3 LOMA DEL DIABLO - FITZROY RIVERSIDE CAMP

A good warm-up day. Walking from our camp we hike up to the ridge of Loma del Diablo (Devil's dome), for a stunning viewpoint of the mighty Fitzroy granite massif. 5-7 hours return dependent upon how far we continue up the ridge. (B,L,D)

DAY 4 POINCENOT CAMP & LAGUNA DE LOS TRES

Our trek begins today and we make the short drive to the trailhead where we walk easily up the tranquil Rio Blanco (White River) valley through a Patagonian beech (lenga) forest where we may see the 'Magellanic' woodpecker. Above us the glaciers of the Fitzroy massif drop almost into the Rio Blanco and we reach Poincenot (Fitzroy Base Camp) in only 2-3 hours. Our own camp with a kitchen and mess tent is nearby amid the trees with stunning views. Our afternoon walk climbs steeply up to the glacier basin for one of the best views of the trip. Laguna de los Tres, often frozen, nestles beneath snowslopes leading up to the enormous Fitzroy buttresses. We return to our camp. 3 hours return. (B,L,D)

The history of the first epic ascents of Fitzroy and the other granite spires is mountaineering literature at it's very best. 40 years ago before El Chalten even existed, reaching these mountains was an adventure in itself. Fitzroy was first climbed in 1952 by the noted French alpinist, Lionel Terray. Our Poincenot camp was named after a member of that team who drowned crossing a river on the approach.



Early morning Fitzroy skyline

DAY 5

CERRO TORRE CAMP

Sunrise on this east facing Fitzroy skyline is unforgettable and there is time to savour the moment. With a pre-breakfast start there could even be a second chance to climb up to Laguna de los Tres if the weather was bad yesterday. We rejoin the main trail where some easy walking alongside the small lakes of Lagos Madre y Hija (Mother and Daughter) leads into the valley of the Fitzroy River and our sheltered camp. 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. 4-5 hours. (B,L,D)

DAY 6

PASO DE LOS AGACHONAS – LAGO TORO CAMP

Our trek towards the Ice Cap continues as we leave the main trails and traverse up over the mountains to the next valley. We begin with a crossing of the Rio Fitzroy by an exciting 'Tyrolean' traverse before climbing out of the valley and above the treeline to the Paso de los Agachonas (1354m). We drop into the Valle del Rio Tunel and walk 4-5kms up the valley to our camp in the woods just beneath Lago Toro. 6-7 hours. (B,L,D)

DAY 7

PASO DEL VIENTO - LAGO TORO CAMP

A dramatic day as we follow the trail up the valley towards the icecap. Above Lago Toro it is necessary to cross the Rio Tunel - sometimes it is wadeable and sometimes not – in which case another in situ Tyrolean traverse (spectacular) provides the key. Some rough ground on glacier and moraine leads to a better path which ascends steadily towards the rocky 'Paso del Viento' (Pass of the Wind) at 1415m but it feels higher. 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 - The Patagonian Ice-Field – the largest ice mass outside of Antarctica and Greenland. It feeds literally dozens of glaciers into the great lakes of Chile and Argentina Patagonia. Time to absorb the scale of the surroundings before we make our descent back to camp. 9+ hours. (B,L,D)

This day stands out as the hardest of the trip and would qualify for our 'Tough' grade. While nowhere difficult, the river crossing or Tyrolean, the glacier, loose moraine slopes, a stiff pull up to the pass and then the descent all add up to a challenging and fairly demanding day. And then there is the 'x' factor – the weather! So this day can be taken as a rest day back at camp. There will be time to discuss the various options at the time.



Toward the Paso del Viento

DAY 8

EL CHALTEN

We drop down the main valley before heading up over a broad saddle on a good trail (where we saw a condor last year) leading back to El Chalten. 6 hours. With a comfortable lodge, hot showers, a great meal and maybe a few beers, we can prepare for a lively evening! Lodge. (B,L)

DAY 9

OPTIONS and EL CALAFATE

A transition day with two choices, both of which end in **El Calafate**.

1. **Guided Viedma Ice Trek.** An early start, a boat ride and a full morning spent on the Viedma Glacier (at own cost). An **Ice Climb** is also possible.
2. **El Calafate at leisure!** A relaxed start and a bus to El Calafate in time for lunch. El. Calafate with its many restaurants, hotels, shops, cafés, bars etc is the Tourist's Patagonia and maybe good fun for half a day! We recommend visiting the Glaciarium a remarkable 'state of the art' Glacier/Patagonian Ice Cap Interpretative Centre 10km out of town with free shuttles. Remember to prepare a picnic lunch for tomorrow. Hotel/Guesthouse. (B)

DAY 10

PERITO MERINO GLACIER – EL CALAFATE

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 which is stable 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. Hotel/Guesthouse. (B)

DAY 11

TO CHILE - PUERTO NATALES

We head off by bus to Chile and the Torres del Paine National Park (6-7 hours). The featureless landscape is reminder of the vastness of the Patagonia steppes. The journey is broken at the Chilean border crossing. But now it is a good road and a pleasant journey. By mid-afternoon we should arrive in the small, traditional town of Puerto Natales on the shores of Seño Ultima Esperanza (Last Hope Sound) - our gateway to 'Torres del Paine National Park. Time to check out the town, change money and prepare for the trek. Hotel. (B)



Las Torres del Paine

DAY 12

LAS TORRES DEL PAINE NATIONAL PARK – LAS TORRES CAMP

Today there is an added sense of anticipation, as a jagged skyline of mountains appear on the horizon. On a clear day we can see the famous 'Towers' as our bus approaches Laguna Amarga, the Park entrance. A good half day walk reaches a fine viewpoint of the mountain skyline as well as providing a chance to see some of the Paine wildlife, the delicate guanaco (small alpaca-type camelid), the fox, the rhea (Patagonian ostrich) and flamingos – and there are Condors here too! Camp/refugio at Las Torres. (B,L,D)

- DAY 13 LAS TORRES (THE TOWERS) – LAS TORRES CAMP
 A great day as we climb energetically up the Ascensio valley toward the famous Towers of Paine. The attractive trail rises steadily, picking its way to and fro across the river and through beech forest until a final steepening up a boulder-strewn slope to the lip of the upper basin. A spectacular place with a glacial lake nestling below the sheer granite 'Towers of Paine', rising over a kilometre above us. The first epic ascent of the central tower in 1962 by the English climbers Chris Bonington and Don Whillans was a landmark in world climbing. 7-8 hours. (B,L,D)
- DAY 14 LOS CUERNOS CAMP
 Making our way more easily along the open slopes above the shore of Lago Nordenskjöld we head for the second prong in the 'W' - the Valle Frances. There are fine views all the way as we traverse around the lake and enter beech forest in which the Refugio Los Cuernos settlement and campsite nestles bravely in a rocky and wooded mountain landscape. 4-5hours. (B,L,D)
- DAY 15 VALLE FRANCÉS – PAINE GRANDE CAMP
 A dramatic day hiking up the wild Valle Francés dominated by the hanging glaciers of the vast east face of Paine Grande and to our right, the Los Cuernos (the horns) skyline. First we continue along the main valley until we reach the peaceful Campamento Italiano, (the backpackers campsite) set among the trees at the junction with the Rio del Frances. The Valle Frances ascent scrambles up a rocky moraine ridge passing several waterfalls to the first great viewpoint – the Mirador Frances. The trail continues more easily into the upper cirque and finally the Campamento Britannico. A short way above this campsite there are great views across to Paine Grande, Los Cuernos (the Horns) and the Aleta del Tiburon (Shark's Fin). Back down we continue westward to reach after approx 2 hours, Paine Grande campsite and the new refugio. 7-8 hours. For the first time we will see the significant damage from the 2011 great fire** which not surprisingly doesn't feature highly in brochures or park publicity! (B,L,D)
- **In Dec 2011 a large area of the Park around Paine Grande and the shores of Lake Pehoe and Skottsberg was devastated by a huge fire accidentally started by a careless tourist. In the blaze, fanned by strong winds and dry conditions some 120sq miles of forest and scrub were burnt to the ground. There have been several fires in recent years but none as big as 2011 and the land will take many years to recover. It is the reason we now begin the 'W' at the east and not at this end.*
- DAY 16 GLACIER GREY – PAINE GRANDE CAMP
 A steady ascent up the Grey Valley traverses the lower slopes of Paine Grande, the highest mountain in the National Park. Glacier Grey is an offshoot of the immense Southern Patagonian Icecap and from a dramatic viewpoint, we can watch the icebergs and perhaps see them calving and crashing into the lake. We drop back down to our camp and dinner at the Paine Grande Refugio. 7 hours. (B,L,D)
- DAY 17 EL CALAFATE
 A catamaran crosses Lake Pehoe to connect with the bus transport on the far side – a great trip with a fine view of the Paine mountains (see photo page 3). Time to head back to El Calafate perhaps with energy left for a celebratory last night! Hotel/Guesthouse. (B)
- DAY 18 DEPART EL CALAFATE
 ...OR stay in Chile – see overleaf some EXCITING EXTENSION OPTIONS.....

Add on BUENOS AIRES WEEKEND!

All our 'High Andes of Patagonia' trips end on a Friday with a return flight from El Calafate. **The week-end** begins - in South America's most vibrant city – **Buenos Aires!**

Midweek in BA often gridlocks with short tempers and long delays but at 'la fin de la semana' (end of the week - w/e) everyone seems to unwind. The roads are quieter and the mood is easy going. Join a City 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, arty Palermo and bohemian San Telmo. In the evening you can 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. Sunday is the San Telmo Antiques Market or perhaps a Tigre river trip.



Tango: San Telmo market

Add-on CHILEAN VOLCANOES (9 days ex Puerto Natales)

The 'High Andes of Patagonia' trip's Paine section has been designed to link with the Paine part of our '**Chile: Volcanoes and Patagonia**' trip. After Paine, instead of returning to El Calafate you overnight in Puerto Natales then fly from Punta Arenas to Puerto Montt and spend a week walking and volcano bagging in Chile's Lake District. We stay in attractive hosterias near Volcan Osorno, Pucon and Lonquimay and finish with an ascent of Lonquimay Volcano, high above the auracaria (monkey puzzle) trees.

<http://www.highplaces.co.nz/la2.html>



On Volcan Lonquimay

Contact us for further details of the extension options.

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