

# YOUR GUIDE TO SOUTH AMERICA

*Central America & Mexico*





*South America is a huge continent with so much to explore: from the cultural highlights of Peru and Bolivia to the Latin vibes of Brazil and Argentina and the rugged beauty of Patagonia. Whether you visit the lush Amazon, the enchanting Galapagos or trek the Inca Trail to Machu Picchu - South America will leave you wanting more!*

## PERU | BOLIVIA | ECUADOR

We love this region of South America for the dramatic Andean Highlands and ancient Inca sites. Combined with the incredible wildlife of the Amazon and Galapagos Islands – this part of South America has so much to offer.

## BRAZIL

Brazil's African and Portuguese influences are reflected in wonderful food, music and dance. You will also find great beaches and festivals (such as Rio's famous Carnival!) along with colourful locals who have a true zest for life.

## ARGENTINA | CHILE

Chile runs down the Pacific Coast, alongside its neighbour Argentina. From the beautiful Atacama desert in the north, to the scenic Lake District in the south, and the wild rugged landscape of Patagonia. Perfect for lovers of the outdoors and an ideal extension before or after an Antarctic cruise.

## MEXICO | CENTRAL AMERICA

This region offers a kaleidoscope of colourful charm, breathtaking sights and spectacular Maya and Aztec ruins.





# CHILE

*Chile is a land of extremes with the Atacama Desert in the north and the spectacular mountainous region of Patagonia in the south. It is also home to sophisticated cities and charming wine regions.*

## **Santiago**

Santiago is the cosmopolitan capital city set against the stunning Andes mountains. Home to some excellent museums, it also has great wineries close by.

## **Valparaiso & Vina del Mar**

Combine the historic coastal charm of Valparaiso with the seaside atmosphere of Vina del Mar. Explore lively streets, gardens and beaches as part of a day trip from Santiago.

## **Atacama Desert**

With its lunar-like landscape, thermal areas and salt lakes, the Atacama Desert is a photographer's dream. Additionally, enjoy horseback riding, hiking or scenic biking experiences.

## **Colchagua**

Home to many of Chile's boutique wineries, producing a variety of world-class red wines, this valley is ideal for a tasting tour!

## **Lake District**

Experience the magical scenery of southern Chile with its lakes, mountains and volcanoes. Visit the charming island of Chiloe and then cross the Andean lakes and mountains by coach and boat to Bariloche, Argentina.

## **Chilean Patagonia**

This incredible region is home to towering peaks, huge glaciers and pristine lakes, making it a fabulous area for hiking and the great outdoors. Join a small ship cruise around the southern most point of South America from Punta Arenas to Ushuaia in Argentina.

## **Easter Island/Rapa Nui**

The island is a mix of Polynesian and South American cultures, endowed with "moai" or stone statues, thought to be a representation of past ancestors. Direct flights from Santiago to Rapa Nui take just over 5 hours.



## **When to go**

Northern and central Chile have a temperate climate, with the north (including Atacama) enjoying sunny days virtually every day of the year. Travel to Patagonia is best between mid-September and April. The winter low season (May–August), being significantly colder, is not recommended for travel.

## **Travel Tip**

For the ultimate star-gazing location, we suggest heading to the Atacama Desert, famous for its clear skies.





*Peru offers travellers incredible culture and diversity. From the ancient site of Machu Picchu to the vibrant city of Lima and wildlife paradise of the Amazon rainforest – there is so much packed into this magical country.*

### **Lima**

We love Lima for its culinary experiences and fine restaurants, many which are booked months in advance. A three night stay is perfect to explore the museums – the Larco Museum is a favourite, and enjoy a walking tour of the historic old city.

### **Cuzco & the Sacred Valley**

On arrival in Cuzco we recommend going directly to the Sacred Valley of the Incas where the altitude is lower and the air easier to breathe. This makes for an ideal base from which to explore the Inca sites of Maras, Moray, and Ollantaytambo. Finish your journey with a few nights in picturesque Cuzco, a city rich in history and character.

### **Machu Picchu**

Set high above the Urubamba Valley, the ancient citadel of Machu Picchu is not to be missed! Travel by train from the Sacred Valley or Cuzco to Machu Picchu Town then take a short bus ride to the ruins. It is essential you purchase your Machu Picchu entry tickets well in advance of travel, to secure your chosen date, time and route! If travelling between April and November, we suggest purchasing the tickets at least 6 months in advance.

### **Peruvian Amazon**

Immerse yourself in the lush rainforest and winding rivers of Peru's Amazon. Enjoy guided jungle walks viewing monkeys, colourful birds, flora and fauna, all from the comfort of a luxury small ship cruise or lodge stay.

### **Arequipa & Colca Canyon**

Surrounded by three volcanoes, the charming white city of Arequipa is filled with Mestizo Baroque buildings – a fusion of Spanish colonial, Baroque and indigenous styles. Visit the nearby Colca Canyon, one of the deepest canyons in the world and home to the magnificent Andean condor.

### **Nazca Lines**

Located in southern Peru these mysterious glyphs etched into desert sands cover an area of nearly 1,000km<sup>2</sup>. There are about 300 different figures, including animals and plants.



### **When to go**

While Peru is suitable year-round, the ideal months to visit are April – November. A moderate wet season occurs during the summer months December – March, otherwise for most of the remainder of the year you can expect clear skies and a temperate climate. Keep in mind when at altitude temperatures are cooler. Please note the “Classic Inca Trail” does not operate in February.

### **Travel Tip**

Book early for Inca Trail treks as permits are strictly limited and sell out quickly, as do tickets for entry to Machu Picchu. We can also recommend other great hikes in this region.





# BOLIVIA

*This land-locked country has the most preserved indigenous culture in all of South America. Bolivia is also home to stunning landscapes including the famous Uyuni Salt Flats.*

## **La Paz**

Set high in the Andes, La Paz will literally take your breath away! Wander vibrant streets teeming with local bowler-hatted ladies selling handicrafts. Ride the city's gondolas for panoramic views and visit the sculpted clay formations of Moon Valley.

## **Lake Titicaca**

Bordering Peru and Bolivia, this pristine high altitude lake is a must-see – around 16 times the size of Lake Taupo in New Zealand! Visit colourful communities on floating islands set beneath snow-capped peaks before crossing the lake by boat.

## **Potosi**

A historic city home to extensive colonial heritage and architecture. Explore a working silver mine and view the workers and the mining process as it was in colonial times.

## **Sucre**

Sucre's beautiful whitewash buildings and museums make it a cultural centre, best explored on foot. The surrounding area also offers great hiking.

## **Uyuni Salt Flats**

Enjoy the serenity of the largest salt flats in the world. During the summer months the salt flats flood, creating an incredible mirror effect and a photographer's dream!

## **Altiplano**

Extend your journey from the Uyuni Salt Flats across the Altiplano where you will eventually arrive at the Atacama desert in Northern Chile. An area of contrasts with incredible rock formations, bright red volcanoes and turquoise lakes – the journey here is all part of the adventure!



## **When to go**

Due to the altitude, climatic conditions range from cool to tropical depending where you are in the country. Winter months (June – August) in La Paz, Lake Titicaca and Uyuni can be very cold at night, but days tend to be sunny. There is no wrong time to visit, however clothing layers are necessary as the difference between day and night temperatures can be dramatic at higher altitude.

## **Travel Tip**

Bolivia offers a great combination with Peru. We suggest starting your journey in Peru and finishing in Bolivia, which will help ease you into Bolivia's higher altitudes.





*Ecuador and the Galapagos Islands are among our favourites! From the spectacular wildlife in the Galapagos Islands and the Cloud Forest to the quaint villages and dramatic volcanoes – Ecuador is unlike anywhere else on earth!*

### **Quito**

One of our favourite cities in South America, Quito has a wonderfully preserved old town with colonial architecture making it a fabulous place to explore on foot. Take a trip on the “teleferico” cable car for incredible views looking down the Avenue of Volcanoes.

### **The Galapagos Islands**

Located 1000km off the coast of Ecuador, the Galapagos Islands are one of the world’s most prolific wildlife destinations. Come face to face with untouched and endemic flora and fauna, often differing from island to island. We recommend a minimum of four-night small ship cruise to truly appreciate it all. Lodge stays and island-hopping are other options.

### **Ecuadorian Amazon**

Explore pristine rainforest while staying in an eco-lodge. Enjoy canopy walks, birdlife aplenty and even piranha fishing. Getting to these lodges is part of the adventure! You can also experience the Amazon aboard a luxury small ship cruise.

### **Ecuadorian Cloud Forest**

Renowned as one of the best places on earth for bird watching, with more than 600 species of birds. This rich biodiverse region just over 3 hour’s drive from Quito can be enjoyed with an immersive stay in a small luxury lodge.

### **Cuenca**

A quaint and laid back city set in southern Ecuador’s Andes mountains. We love Cuenca for its charming cobblestone streets, flowery filled plazas and interesting museums. The city is also known for its elegant Spanish colonial architecture and as home to the iconic Panama hat.

### **The Avenue of the Volcanoes**

Stay in a centuries-old hacienda and discover the local traditions and legends of this picturesque valley, dotted with impressive volcanic peaks, running through the Andes from Quito down towards Cuenca.



### **When to go**

Ecuador is pleasant to travel year-round, however there are several different climates and if you are planning to visit the Amazon, the Galapagos and other areas you will need to pack layers. The Galapagos has exciting wildlife happenings in all seasons. Snorkelling is great year-round, with wetsuits available. The Amazon is rainy and humid between November – April, but the lodges kindly provide good old-fashioned gumboots for your comfort!

### **Travel Tip**

For the ultimate wildlife experience, we recommend visiting the Amazon or Cloud Forest, followed by a small ship cruise around the Galapagos Islands.





*Argentina is the second largest country in South America and is home to the famous tango, gauchos, wineries, glaciers and one of the most impressive sights on the planet – Iguazu Falls.*

### **Buenos Aires**

Fondly known as the “Paris of the Americas”. Highlights include the elegant historic city centre, colourful La Boca and experiencing the tango at one of the local restaurants. For those interested in gaucho culture we recommend a stay at a traditional hacienda for added charm and comfort.

### **Iguazu Falls**

The Argentine side of the falls offers an up-close experience allowing visitors to view the falls from the upper and lower levels.

### **Pampas region**

Characterised by vast grasslands and traditional estancias (ranches), this region is the heart of Argentine culture. Learn about the gaucho heritage and make sure to try traditional barbecue and chimichurri, a fresh herb sauce.

### **Northwest Argentina**

For those looking for adventure, consider Argentina’s north, with its many archaeological sites, colourful desert mountains, salt flats as well as the famous “Train to the Clouds”.

### **Mendoza**

Dominated by the Andes and surrounded by world class Malbec grape vineyards and olive groves, Mendoza is a delight, and a must for wine lovers.

### **Bariloche (Lake District)**

Known as the “Swiss Alps of South America” with mountains, lakes and volcanoes, the town of Bariloche is the gateway to the Lakes Crossing into Chile.

### **Ushuaia**

The southernmost city in the world, Ushuaia is a base for travellers heading to Antarctica or starting a cruise through Patagonia.



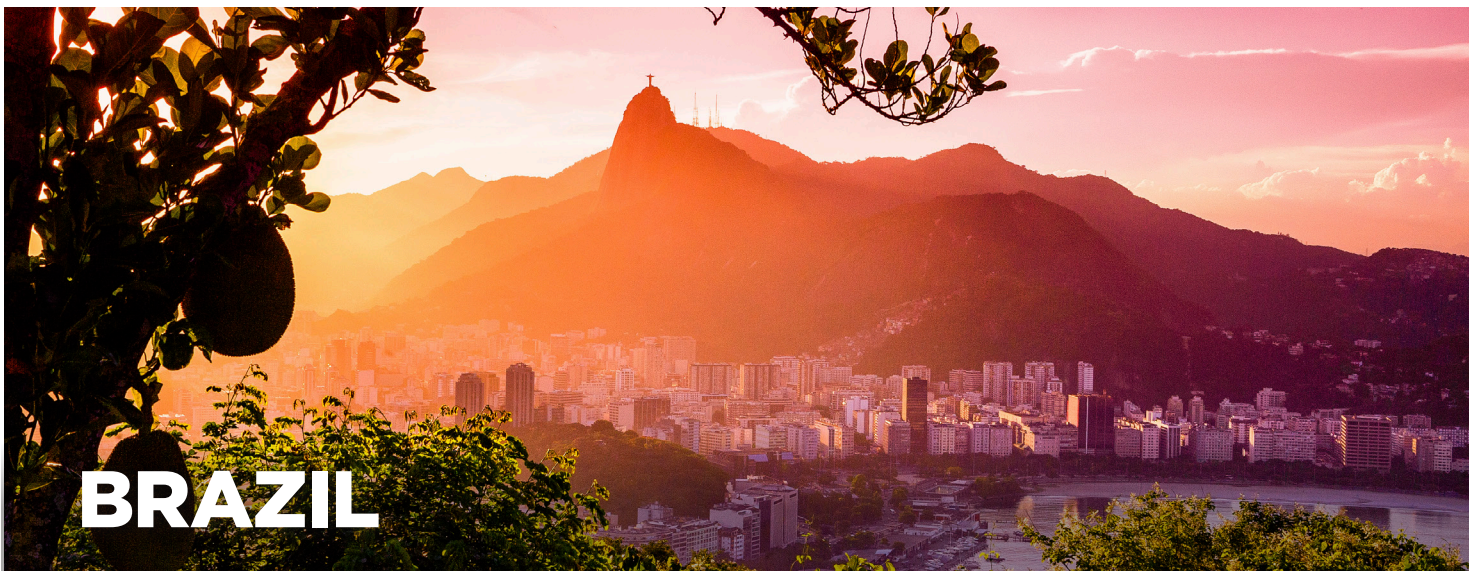
### **When to go**

Argentina’s climate varies from the hot dry north to the sub-Antarctic south. Buenos Aires is a year-round destination with mild winters (May – September) and hot summers (November – March). Iguazu Falls is spectacular year-round. Patagonia is best visited in the spring and summer months from October to April, as some areas are closed in the winter.

### **Travel Tip**

To get the best out of your visit to Iguazu Falls make sure you visit both sides!





# BRAZIL

*Brazil has its own flavour stemming from Portuguese and African heritage. Add to that vibrant cities, colourful culture, the Amazon and a stunning coastline – it is sure to bring your senses alive!*

## **Brasilia**

Located in the heart of the Brazilian savannah (Cerrado), the capital is renowned for its modernist architecture designed by Oscar Niemeyer and Lucio Costa, giving the city the feel of an open-air museum. In spring (late September to November), the stunning architecture is complemented by blooming jacaranda and *ipe* trees throughout the city.

## **Rio de Janeiro**

You will never feel more alive than when you are in Rio de Janeiro! Famous for its long stretches of white sand beaches, lush-green mountains, and of course, Carnival. A three night stay is ideal to immerse yourself in this vibrant city.

## **Buzios**

A few hours from Rio de Janeiro, this beautiful seaside resort dotted with fine restaurants and boutique hotels is a laid-back paradise with cobblestone streets and a picturesque waterfront.

## **Brazilian Amazon**

Base yourself in an eco-lodge to explore the Amazon, or take a small ship cruise, venturing along remote waterways deep into the jungle. Take time in Manaus to experience its exquisite cuisine, local traditions and opulent Opera House.

## **Iguazu Falls**

One of the most spectacular and panoramic falls in the world, bordering Argentina and Brazil. We recommend visiting both sides of the falls for the full experience!

## **Salvador**

This unique city with African and Portuguese heritage is one of Brazil's great historical destinations. We love Salvador for its baroque churches, colourful homes, historic forts, distinct cuisine and the lively music which fills the streets.

## **The Pantanal Wetlands**

Brazil's premier wildlife destination is the largest continuous wetland on the planet, containing elements of the Amazon forest, the Brazilian Savannah (Cerrado), the Atlantic Rainforest and the Paraguayan Chaco. Open marshes make it ideal for wildlife observation – from jaguars to jabiru storks – there is immense variety.



## **When to go**

Brazil, being almost the size of the United States, has varying climate regions. The Amazon and the Pantanal Wetlands have a summer rainy season December – April, so are best travelled outside of these months. The North East region and Rio de Janeiro offer good temperatures year-round with the hottest and most crowded months being December – February.

## **Travel Tip**

The iconic Carnival in Rio is held annually in February/March. Make sure to book well in advance as availability is tight! An equally vibrant carnival is that held in Salvador, Bahia.





*Mexico is a kaleidoscope of colour and breathtaking sights! Ancient civilizations such as the Aztec and Maya, beautiful beaches, delicious food and incredibly friendly people make Mexico a must-visit destination.*

### **Mexico City**

For travellers who love history, Mexico City is a great place to start your journey with fantastic archaeological and art museums. It is also home to magnificent architecture, and a thriving culinary scene.

### **Oaxaca**

Famous for its archaeological sites and pyramids, Oaxaca (pronounced wah-hah-kah) is one of Mexico's true gems. Stay in quaint hotels oozing with charm, before eating your way around this fabulous city enjoying seven varieties of "mole" – traditional sauce.

### **Palenque**

Located in Southern Mexico, Palenque is perched on a plateau above a flat tropical savannah. Famous for its Maya ruins set in lush tropical jungle, here you will find fine architecture with beautifully painted murals and sculpted stone – a must-visit!

### **San Cristobal de las Casas**

A highland town in southern Mexico known for its well preserved colonial architecture, such as the centuries-old, yellow San Cristobal Cathedral on the Parque Central. Wander the lovely well-preserved colonial streets which are a great place to get locally made handicrafts.

### **Merida**

The economic centre of the Yucatan, this beautiful city features large town squares, tree-lined boulevards and European style mansions. Merida is an ideal base from which to explore the Yucatan Peninsula.

### **Chichen Itza**

Undeniably the 'jewel in the crown' of the Yucatan, this famed complex set in the jungle includes a massive step pyramid, graphic stone carvings and observatory. The site is wonderfully preserved and also includes a sacred cenote (sink hole) where human sacrifices to the gods were once made.

### **Baja California**

The Baja peninsula offers stunning desert-meets-ocean landscapes, and incredible marine wildlife, best experienced on a small ship cruise.



### **When to go**

While there is no wrong time to visit Mexico, the hottest time of year is May–September (particularly on the coast) and it gets cooler and dry from October–April. The famed Day of the Dead Festival takes place from 31 October to 2 November each year. Easter, and the Virgin of Guadalupe Day (12 December) are also colourful events.

### **Travel Tip**

We recommend visiting Mexico City's exceptional Archaeological Museum which is the perfect primer for learning about the country's Aztec and Maya history.





# CENTRAL AMERICA

*This region offers diverse landscapes, colourful cultures, and relics of ancient civilizations. Fans of wildlife will be delighted by Belize and Costa Rica in particular.*

## Belize

Formerly British Honduras, Belize is a tiny English-speaking country on the Caribbean coast. Bordered by Mexico and Guatemala and home to some important Maya archaeological ruins, the country is 60% tropical rainforest with a rich biodiversity. Along the coast, you will find part of the second largest coral reef system in the world, a paradise for snorkelling and diving.

## Guatemala

This is the cultural heart of Central America, rich in tradition and culture. Outside of Guatemala City, you will encounter the spirit of the traditional Maya culture. Check out the gorgeous village of Antigua surrounded by volcanoes. Visit Lake Atitlan, Chichicastenango and Quetzaltenango. The jungle-enshrouded ruins of Tikal are unmissable.

## Nicaragua

Known as The Land of Lakes and Volcanoes – visitors may enjoy an array of experiences which include spectacular crater lakes and a chain of 13 beautiful volcanoes. Nature's biodiversity is amongst the highest in the world, full of exotic birds, monkeys and sloths that range through tropical vegetation found in both the highland and lowland rainforests.

## Honduras

There is so much to love about Honduras, and while it may be the lesser explored Central American destination, this small country packs a punch! Think active volcanoes, lush tropical forests, lakes and jungles filled with incredible bird life. Explore stunning coastlines from the Caribbean to the Pacific and pristine coral reefs. We love Honduras for its authenticity and excellent value for money.

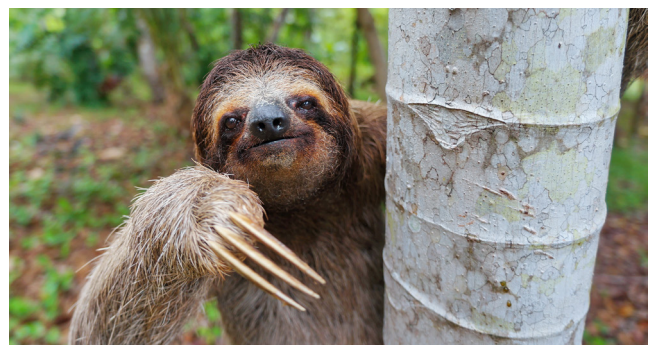
## Costa Rica

Costa Rica has coastlines on the Caribbean Sea and Pacific Ocean. Tropical coastal plains rise to mountains, active volcanoes, and a temperate central plateau where you'll find the capital city of San José. Experience exotic flora and fauna in Monteverde Cloud Forest, where you can enjoy night walks and forest canopy tours, or tour the beautiful botanic and butterfly gardens.



## Panama

There is so much more to the tiny country of Panama than its famous canal. Its fascinating history includes 350 years of Spanish rule which attracted pirates looking for treasure. Nature lovers will enjoy Parque Nacional Coiba, a marine park home to dolphins, along with humpback, killer and sperm whales. In the lush rainforests you'll find howler monkeys, toucans and sloths.





# OTHER JOURNEYS

*There are many ways to experience South America, from luxury rail journeys, to hiking, small ship cruising and incredible wildlife encounters – all of which can be included on a tailor-made holiday.*



## RAIL JOURNEYS

Belmond offer luxury rail journeys in Peru between Cuzco, Lake Titicaca and Arequipa, along with the Hiram Bingham train to Machu Picchu. More unique options include Argentina's Train to the Clouds and the Titicaca Train between Cuzco and Puno.



## CRUISE JOURNEYS

Explore some of South America's most enticing destinations on board a small ship cruise, which offers access to inlets and secluded bays larger ships can't reach, with expert guides for shore excursions, and a more relaxed and personal atmosphere. For wildlife lovers you can't go past the incredible ecosystems, bird and plant life of the Amazon and the Galapagos Islands. For those in search of wild rugged scenery, a small ship cruise in Patagonia will take you there.



## SMALL GROUP HOSTED JOURNEYS

### *Grand Tour of South America, 36 days, six countries*

With no more than 18 guests and a host accompanying the group throughout the journey, this is the easy way to explore South America. Airfares and gratuities are included!

This annual (August/September) favourite tour covers all the highlights. Stay in an eco-lodge in the Amazon jungle and embark on a 5-day cruise in the Galapagos Islands for incredible wildlife encounters. Visit the "Lost City of the Incas" at Machu Picchu, cruise Lake Titicaca, and marvel at the mighty waterfalls of Iguazu Falls. Discover colonial heritage in the beautiful cities of Quito, Lima and Cuzco, and embrace the remarkable cities of Buenos Aires and Rio de Janeiro. We love the rich history, the colourful traditions and the incredibly diverse range of cultures.

## ACTIVE JOURNEYS

Keep active on holiday in South America by enjoying a stunning walk! The famed Inca Trail trek takes in ancient ruins and beautiful mountain vistas, culminating in the first sight of Machu Picchu as you pass through the Sun Gate. There are luxury options, and other accommodated treks in the Sacred Valley including the Lares and Salkantay Treks. Patagonia also offers a range of fabulous treks, perfect for those with a love of the great outdoors.



## PLANNING YOUR *South American Journey*

*South America is a vast continent and unless you have plenty of time, we suggest visiting one area and exploring it well. While some regions may look like a short distance on a map, getting between places often requires more than one flight.*

Take into consideration the following when planning your journey:

- How much time do you have? Have you allowed time to acclimatise to high Andean altitudes?
- What are you expecting to experience? History and archaeology, cuisine, wildlife, landscapes, culture...and more?
- What is your preferred style of travel, and budget?

Let us tailor-make the perfect itinerary for you.

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**PLEASE CONTACT YOUR TRAVEL PROFESSIONAL**