

S W O P

Explore · Discover · Belong

Guide to Patagonia



Dear Traveller...

The name Patagonia evokes images of windswept wilderness, cloud-wrapped mountains and glistening glaciers tumbling into turquoise waters. Its vast landscapes are intoxicating, drawing travellers back again and again.

One of the biggest challenges for the visitor to Patagonia is knowing where to begin; it is so huge and diverse. That's why we've created this guide. Swoop have spent years exploring Patagonia, getting to know guides and checking out places to stay. We'll help you understand the different destinations in the region and the wide range of activities on offer, so that you can see which is the best option for you.

Whatever your interests and whatever your budget, there is an adventure for you in Patagonia.



Harriet Pike

HEAD OF SWOOP PATAGONIA

Welcome and Contents	2	Things to do in Patagonia	12
Introducing Patagonia	3	Adventure activities	13-15
What we love about Patagonia	4	Choosing the right trip for you	16
What is Patagonia?	5	When to go to Patagonia	17
Discover Patagonia	6	What's the best time to visit Patagonia?	18
Regions of Patagonia	7	About Us	19
The Lake District	8	Five reasons to choose Swoop	20
Central Patagonia	9	FAQs	21
Torres del Paine & Los Glaciares	10	Meet the Team	22
Chilean Fjords & Tierra del Fuego	11	Contact Us	23

INTRODUCING PATAGONIA

Nothing can prepare you for the scale of Patagonia, where majestic granite pinnacles tower above monumental glaciers, and vast uninhabited steppe disappear into an infinite horizon.

What we love about Patagonia

Landscapes

Patagonia's landscapes are as varied as they are vast – from gargantuan glaciers and turquoise lakes, to smoldering volcanoes, lush rainforests and the wind-whipped steppe. Make sure you pack your camera.

Adventure

Innumerable spectacular hiking trails could keep you busy for years, but beyond the world-class trekking, the glacier fields, mountains, volcanoes, lakes and fjords make for a vast playground for adventure activities.

People

From indigenous people clinging to life at the end of the world for centuries, to settlers who came in search of a better life, the people of Patagonia are proud of their homeland, and a warm welcome awaits all visitors.

Wildlife

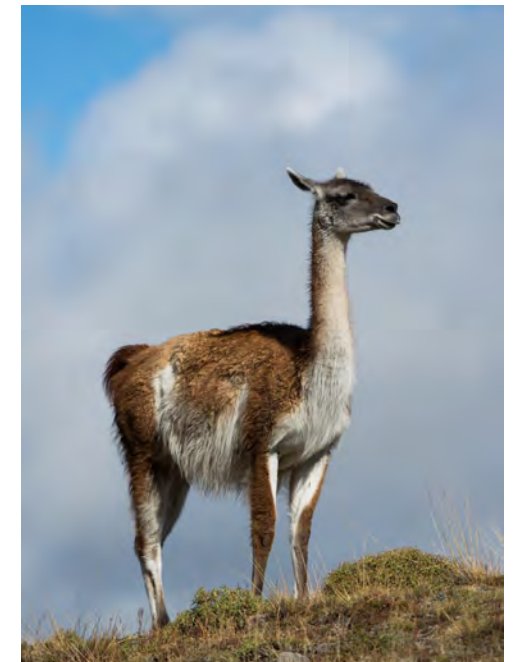
Patagonia's rich and diverse wildlife never disappoints, with many species classified as endangered. You might see penguins, armadillos, guanaco, whales, deer and even, if you're lucky, the elusive puma.

Wilderness

Nowhere does remote quite like Patagonia. It is one of the few places on Earth where you can be completely isolated, whether that's cradled in the luxury of a lakeside lodge or trekking for days without seeing a soul.

Food

Patagonia's food is as diverse as its landscapes – fish and seafood from the Chilean fjords, mushrooms from the forests, king crab in the far south, trout from the rivers, sharing an a lamb *asado* BBQ at one of the *estancias*.



What is Patagonia?

Patagonia straddles Chile and Argentina at the southern end of the Andes. It is not a political region, but simply a name that was marked on maps prior to the 1800s before the creation of the two nation states. It is bounded east and west by the Atlantic and Pacific oceans, and Cape Horn marks its southern tip. To the north, the boundary is less clearly defined, fizzling out in the Chilean Lake District, and marked by the Colorado river on the Argentinian side. It is a vast area, covering over one million km².

The majority of Argentine Patagonia is dry windswept *steppe* or plain, dotted with the odd *estancia* (ranch) and grazed by *guanacos*, a native llama-like animal. Towards Chilean Patagonia the land rises up to the glacial sculptures of the Andes, the best known of which are the Torres del Paine, Mount Fitz Roy and Cerro Torre. The highest mountain in Patagonia is San Valentín (4,058m).

A line of active volcanoes runs down the Andes into Northern Patagonia, their smoking, snowcapped peaks rising above the temperate rainforest. Further south, the high Patagonian Andes are home to the Patagonian Ice Fields, the largest mass of ice outside the Polar regions. The ice field forms at high elevation and is drained by smaller outlet glaciers flowing into the fjords on the western side and into gigantic lakes on the eastern side. The constant advance and retreat of these glaciers has torn apart the landscape, forming steep valleys and deep fjords.

The weather in Patagonia can be ferocious – it is one of the wettest and windiest places on earth. However, there are marked regional contrasts, with 7,500mm of rain falling annually on the west coast compared with just 1,500mm east of the ice fields. The strong westerly winds keep the weather moving in an ever-changing dance from sunshine to cloud to rain. Expect four seasons in one day!

Swoop Says

The spectrum of the Patagonian landscape runs from the crystal blue ice sheets in Los Glaciares National Park, to the red stone of Los Cuernos in Torres del Paine and the deep greens of the southern fjords. Varied regions offer a wide range of adventure.



DISCOVER PATAGONIA

The vast scale of Patagonia is matched by the diversity of its regions. The traveller is spoiled for choice, from smouldering volcanoes and rainforests, to the wide expanses of the steppe, from towering granite peaks to the glaciers of the Patagonian Ice Cap.



Regions of Patagonia

Chilean Lakes & Chiloé Island

The Chilean Lake District offers verdant rainforest, snowcapped volcanoes, alpine lakes and turquoise rivers.

Aysen & Carretera Austral

This undiscovered area has it all: the northern ice cap with little-visited glaciers, temperate rainforest and herds of *guanacos* roaming the drier plains.

Torres del Paine

Patagonia's premier attraction never disappoints, with its fabled mile-high granite towers, dark *cuernos* peaks, turquoise lakes and the startling blues of Glacier Grey.

Chilean Fjords

This huge network of fjords, channels and islands is brimming with glaciers descending from the ice cap to the sea. Thick rainforest skirts the shore and waterfalls dot the cliffs of this rugged coastline.

Argentinian Lakes

Bamboo and beech forests surround shimmering lakes, with rugged snowcapped ridges rising above them, offering views across the endless pampa.

Welsh Patagonia & Valdes

Empty, windswept pampas running from the Andes to the Atlantic are for lovers of 'Big Sky'. Expect whales, penguins and sea lions in Peninsula Valdes.

Los Glaciares

Argentina's most famous national park. Perito Moreno is the largest and most accessible glacier – the crashing calving ice makes for a spectacular experience.

Tierra del Fuego & Cape Horn

This is Patagonia at its most extreme, rugged and remote with a blend of coastal and mountain environments – the wilderness at the end of the world.

Swoop Says

It can be tempting to visit as many regions as possible, but with a day's travel between them and so much to do in each place, we'd normally suggest a week per region.



The Lake District

Chilean Lakes & Chiloé Island



- Base yourself in Pucón and climb Villarica volcano, raft the Trancura river or mountain bike through monkey puzzle trees.
- Our favourite town in the region, Puerto Varas, nestles at the foot of Osorno Volcano. Enjoy day hikes or explore deeper into the region on a multi-day trek or a kayak trip into the fjords.
- Chiloé Island is a true cultural melting pot, with a tradition of myths and legends blending indigenous and Catholic beliefs. Expect picturesque fishing villages with quaint churches and wooden buildings.

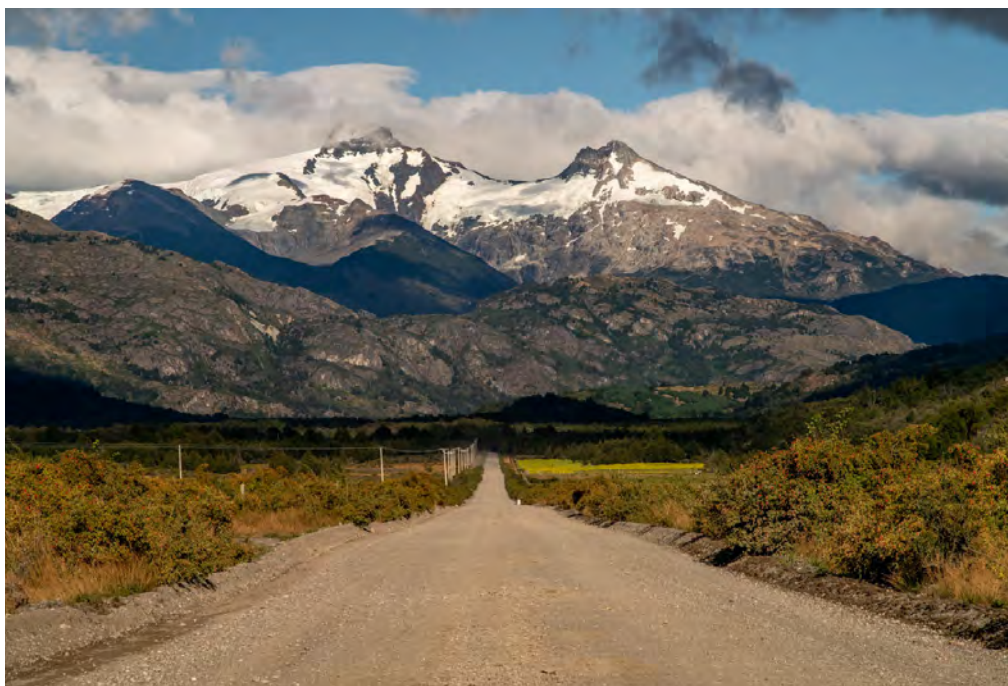
Argentinian Lakes



- The region offers an eclectic mix of places to stay, from rustic mountainside *refugios* with their own microbreweries, to idyllic lakeside lodges and *estancias* (ranches), where you can join the *gauchos* in their work.
- Drive the Siete Lagos route or the Circuito Chico between Bariloche and San Martín, stopping to enjoy a paddle in a lake.
- Trek for days along rocky ridges from *refugio* to *refugio* or enjoy expansive views on a day hike; paddle around on the lakes or horse ride across the border to Chile.

Central Patagonia

Aysen & the Carretera Austral



- The Carretera Austral, forging its way down through Central Patagonia, makes for an adventurous road trip, whether guided or independent.
- Not many people live here, but those that do are very warm-hearted and proud of their roots. Share a *yerba mate* around the stove with locals and get an insight into *gaucho* culture and traditional warm hospitality.
- The Ruta de Los Parques is a corridor of parks that runs through Patagonia. Witness rewilding in action in Patagonia NP, hear the crashing and creaking of glaciers in San Rafael NP, or hike to glacial lakes through thick beech forests in Cerro Castillo NP.

Welsh Patagonia & Peninsula Valdes



- On Peninsula Valdes marine wildlife is the star attraction, with orcas, sea lions, southern right whales, elephant seals, dolphins and penguins.
- The ultimate rugged road trip, Ruta 40 runs the length of Argentine Patagonia. Frequently remote and challenging, the drive takes you close to the dramatic rock formations of Piedra Parada and the Tehuelche cave paintings at Cueva de Los Manos.
- Welsh Patagonia is an area of the Chubut Valley colonised by Welsh settlers in 1865. Towns and villages with Welsh names are marked by windmills and chapels. Immerse yourself in the culture in a Welsh tea house, or even catch a game of rugby.

Torres del Paine & Los Glaciares

Torres del Paine



- Home to a rich menagerie of wildlife, Paine's beech forests reveal magellanic woodpeckers, waving pampa grasses are full of *guanacos* and ubiquitous puma can be tracked over several days.
- The W trek is ideal for first-time hikers trekking between cosy *refugios* (bunkhouses) to the most picturesque sights. Experienced trekkers can extend this, taking in quieter trails and crossing the John Gardiner pass with its expansive ice field views.
- One of the best ways to get away from the crowds is to stay at a high end hotel, glamping camps or *estancias*, with guides to show you little-visited viewpoints.

Los Glaciares



- El Chaltén in the heart of the mountains has the best day hiking in the world. Spend the daytime gazing up at impossibly sheer granite pinnacles shouldered with glaciers and relax at night in a comfy hotel, fuelling up on pizza and locally-made craft beer.
- Adventurers are well catered for – there are peaks for both experienced trekkers looking to try out crampons and an ice axe for the first time and for experienced mountaineers prepared to battle the winds on more challenging summits.
- Soak up authentic Patagonian life in one of the many *estancias*. Horse riders will love the opportunity to gallop across the rugged pampa to hidden glaciers.

Chilean Fjords & Tierra del Fuego

Chilean Fjords



- Few people live in the fjords – the region’s main inhabitants are humpback whales, sea lions and magellanic penguins. The area’s inaccessibility means that visitors get enormous calving glaciers largely to themselves.
- Follow in Darwin’s footsteps – trace the coast of Patagonia on an adventure cruise. Led by knowledgeable expedition leaders and enjoying great remote hiking, the focus is on adventure while offering the most comfortable way to discover this region.
- If cruises aren’t your thing, then help crew a sailing boat or brace yourself for the headwinds and paddle your way around in a sea kayak, camping out on beaches.

Tierra del Fuego & Cape Horn



- Ushuaia is the most southerly city in the world and it has a frontier feel to it. Base yourself here and enjoy day excursions on the Beagle channel, day hikes into the rugged mountains and bird watching in the National Park.
- The Dientes de Navarino trek rarely fails to impress: multi-day backpacking with wonderful wild camps, bog-wading, bushwhacking and views of the spiky ridgeline.
- Get off the grid in Karukinka, Yendegaia or the Cordillera Darwin – little-visited and remote corners where you can sit and immerse yourself in the landscape, watch for wildlife or backpack for a week without seeing a soul.

THINGS TO DO IN PATAGONIA

Whether you are drawn here by the wilderness or the wildlife, if it's adventure you are after or immersion in a unique culture, you'll find all this and more in Patagonia. Few places offer the traveller as many opportunities.





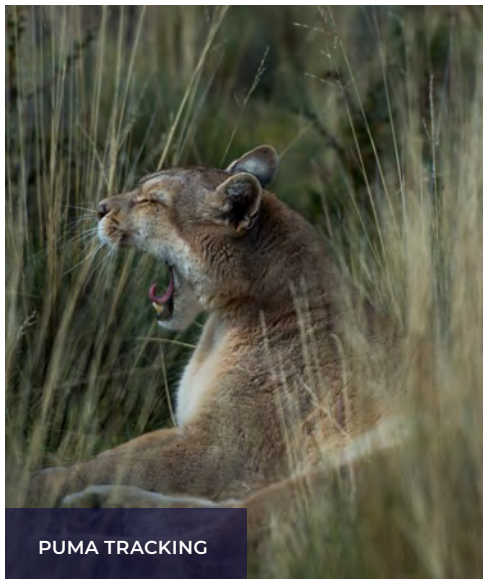
HORSE RIDING



BIRD WATCHING



FISHING



PUMA TRACKING

Swoop Says

Patagonia is home to some incredibly unusual and diverse wildlife, from clumsy penguins to enormous whales and elusive big cats. Our expert naturalist guides and trackers responsibly and respectfully help you get up close and personal with these amazing animals.



HIKING



MOUNTAINEERING



RAFTING

Swoop Says
So many people travel to Patagonia to hike the W trek. It is a fantastic trek, but delve a little deeper and you'll discover so many other truly extraordinary trails.



BIKING



ADVENTURE CRUISE



ROAD TRIP



KAYAKING



WHALE WATCHING

“The trip rated 12 out of 10. Its hard to pick a highlight - but the walk in French Valley in Torres del Paine. Or the day we drove into Perito Moreno, or sea kayaking in Chiloe or walking the Aviles trail in Park Patagonia or visiting the Marble Caves...”

Jane, Australia, Dec 2017



PENGUIN SPOTTING

Choosing the right trip for you

Trekking

Experience world class trekking in unique and diverse landscapes – backpack through some of the world’s last wilderness or take day hikes from the comfort of a hotel or mountain hut.

Groups

If you would like the benefit of a knowledgeable tour leader throughout your trip and want to share the cost of travel, then a small group tour makes for a great way to see Patagonia. There are trekking, sightseeing or overland tours so you can explore with like-minded companions, while we take care of the logistics.

Special interests

Pursue your passion in Patagonia – shape your trip to focus on your special interests, such as wildlife, bird watching, horse riding, kayaking, mountaineering or fishing. There are specialist guides for all activities, who know every corner of Patagonia.

Luxury

Base yourself in one of Patagonia’s staggeringly beautiful luxury hotels, *estancias* or lodges to combine days spent outdoors hiking or getting up close to the local flora and fauna with evenings spent soaking in a hot tub, sipping cocktails and sleeping in a king size bed. There is nothing like a luxury adventure cruise for getting up close to glaciers and pristine forest without having to walk for hours or relinquishing comfort.

Independent adventure

For independent folk who want to travel at their own pace, hike without a guide on the more popular trails such as the W trek. Take advantage of the great network of comfortable buses for getting around, or alternatively hire a car and take a road trip along one of Patagonia’s infamous dirt roads, stopping off at out-of-the-way *estancias*.



“Swoop helped me to develop an itinerary that hit all my bucket list items. They connected me with expert guides. I usually arrange my travel independently, yet Patagonia is so remote, it’s hard to coordinate. Working with Swoop felt like I was still picking what I wanted to do, but using a trusted resource to piece it all together.”

Connie, US, January 2020

WHEN TO GO TO PATAGONIA

Patagonia's seasons offer distinctive weather and wildlife, so choosing when to visit is both a fun and crucial part of the planning process.



What's the best time to visit Patagonia?

October–November

Snowcapped peaks line the horizons and spring flowers bring life to the valleys. Cooler temperatures mean that camping is only for the hardy and some of the trails are not open due to snow. November is often very windy.

December–February

Long days with warmer temperatures make this the most popular time to visit Patagonia. All the trails are open and it is warm enough to camp, although this is when the wind is at its strongest. Consider booking a year in advance to secure your first choice accommodation.

March

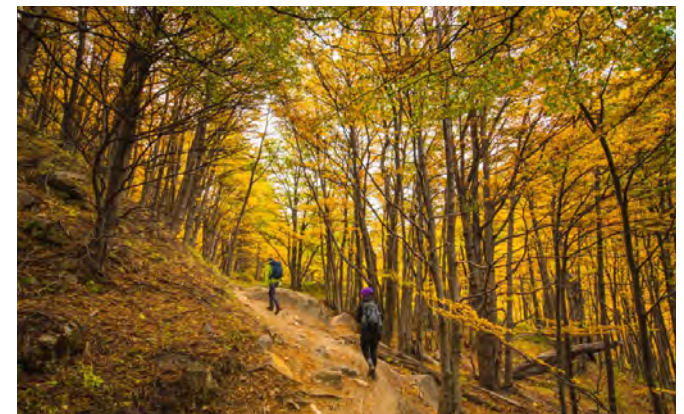
We love to visit in March, when the crowds have gone home and the weather is more stable. The temperatures start dropping, the winds die down and the whisper of autumn is in the trees.

April

Many of the more adventurous trips are no longer possible due to cold and snow, but April is a fantastic time to visit for the patchwork of autumn colours, quieter trails and better deals on accommodation.

May–September

Most hotels and restaurants are closed and the more adventurous trips are not possible. However, clear weather is more common in the Patagonian winter than in summer, and winter temperatures seldom drop far below 0°C. If you want Patagonia to yourself, then this is a great time to do the W trek, visit Mount Fitz Roy or have a guided road trip on the Carretera Austral.

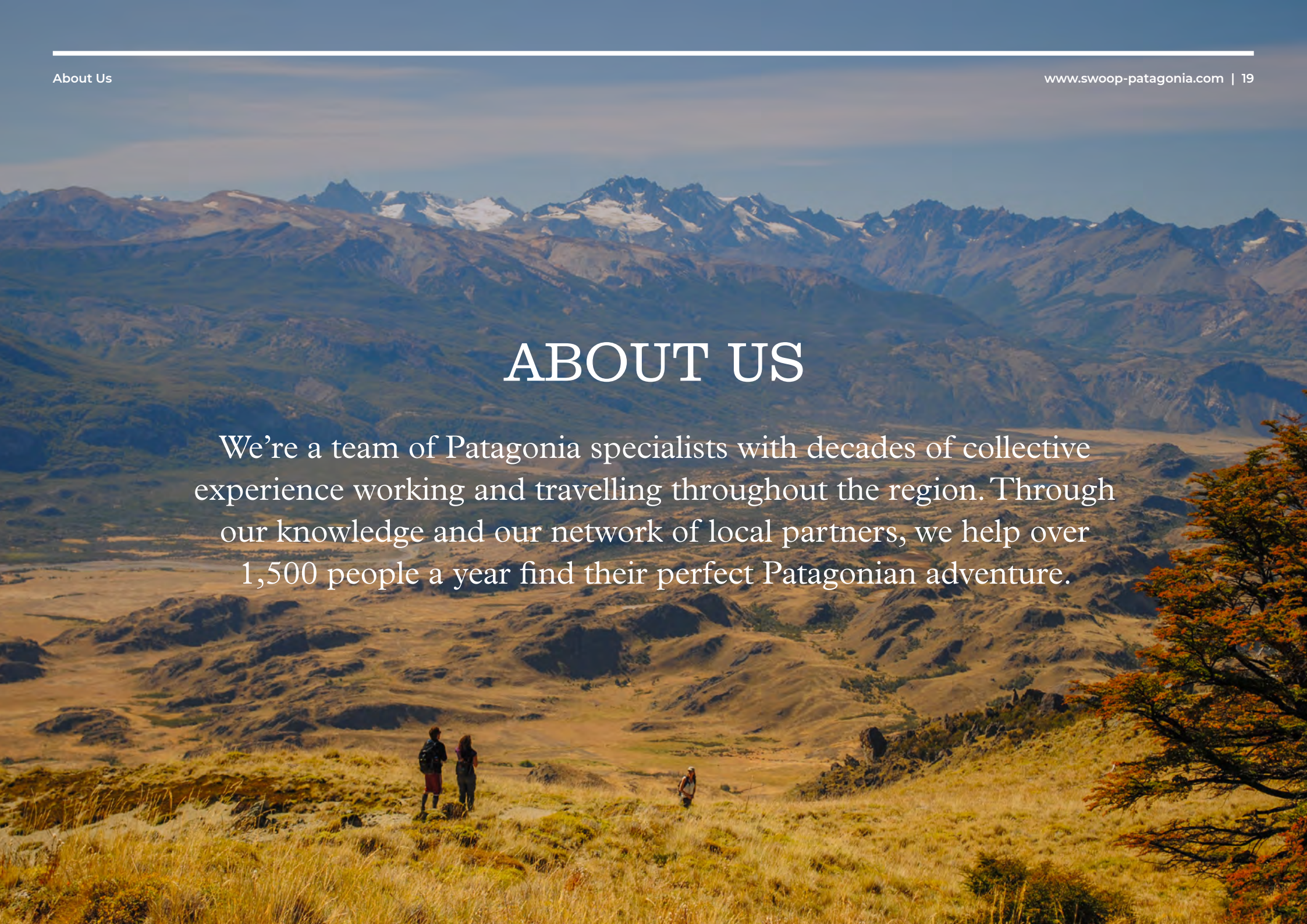


Swoop Says

The best time to visit Patagonia is in the austral Spring and Summer, between September and March. Days are longer and warmer and there's less rainfall than other times of the year. However, the few who are lucky enough to visit in winter tend to experience less wind and more blue sky days.

ABOUT US

We're a team of Patagonia specialists with decades of collective experience working and travelling throughout the region. Through our knowledge and our network of local partners, we help over 1,500 people a year find their perfect Patagonian adventure.



Five reasons to choose Swoop

1. We know Patagonia.

Make the most of every precious day of your trip – benefit from our combined 50 years’ experience exploring, living and working in the region. We know the unmissable highlights of every region and the best partners to support our customers on the ground.

What this means for you:

We can help guide you through the maze of options, and enhance your itinerary with first-hand recommendations for where to go, when to travel and how to get there.

2. We offer you incredible choice.

We work with over 100 partners across Patagonia, offering over 300 trips. This means that we can arrange the best trip for you based on what you want to experience.

What this means for you:

For every traveller that comes to us, we find the very best trip from the trusted local guides and operators that we work with. Whatever kind of adventure you’re looking for, we know the specialist people to bring your trip to life and plan your perfect itinerary – one that suits both your budget and appetite for adventure.

3. We’re not biased towards any partner, region or trip.

We are 100% independent and have no commitment to anyone but you.

What this means for you:

We’ll listen to what you want from your trip and suggest carefully selected ideas based on your exact requirements.

4. We offer free, impartial and expert advice.

We don’t charge for our advice and you won’t pay extra booking through us. We help Patagonia operators to market themselves and their trips to the international market – when you book with us they will pay us a small commission.

What this means for you:

You’ll pay no more or less with us than if you booked directly with the operator and you benefit from our team’s extensive knowledge of Patagonia.

5. We can arrange any and every part of your trip.

No matter how you like to travel, independently or supported, we’ve got you covered. We can arrange anything from a two-day hike in the middle of an independently arranged trip to a full 30-day itinerary with flights included.

What this means for you:

You can benefit from our advice and experience for your itinerary in Patagonia, while being as supported or as independent as you want.



FAQs

How much will it cost?

There are many variables that determine the cost, but generally we say that \$350 per person, per day is an average cost for a mix of guided and self-guided experiences, with 3* accommodation, breakfast plus some other meals included and all transport. You'll need to budget \$200 per domestic flight (most people need two to three domestic flights) and \$1,500 for economy return flights.

When do I need to book?

Torres del Paine is the most popular region and you'll need to book some accommodation 12 months or more in advance if you want to visit at Christmas. For other regions it is advisable to book six to nine months in advance to secure your first choice of accommodation and guide.

How do I get to Patagonia?

You'll need to fly to Buenos Aires or Santiago and from there it is a 2- to 4-hour flight to Patagonia, depending on which region you fly to. There are no flights across the border, so you can only fly to Argentinean Patagonia from Buenos Aires and to Chilean Patagonia from Santiago. For more details see our [How to get to Patagonia](#) webpage.

Can I travel to Patagonia alone?

Patagonia is a safe place to travel and Patagonian people take great care of solo travellers. Travelling alone can work out being more expensive, so if you would like to share the cost then you can join a small group tour or join a group for trekking, kayaking or horse riding and travel by public bus.

Do I need experience to do the activities?

There are trips for all activities where you need no prior experience. For some trips you simply need to have outdoor experience so that you are prepared for the elements, and there are also more demanding kayaking, mountaineering, trekking or riding trips where we would check that you have enough experience.

How will I get around?

Once down in Patagonia you can get around by private transfers, public buses (pre-booked by us) and hire cars. Public buses are a really good standard, safe, run on time, luggage is ticketed etc - not chicken buses. Most people fly to get from Northern Patagonia (Puerto Montt or Bariloche to Southern Patagonia (Punta Arenas, El Calafate or Ushuaia).

How long should I go for?

You could spend years in Patagonia and only skim the surface, so this is a hard question to answer. As a general rule, spend one week in each region and as much time as your budget and boss will allow. Getting to Patagonia can take a long time, so we would suggest spending at least ten days there to make the travel time worthwhile.

Can I arrange my flights and hotels myself and just book a 5-day trek with Swoop?

All Swoop's trips are tailor made, so we provide the level of support you need and advise you on any parts of your trip that you aren't booking with us. If you would like everything taken care of from the moment you close your front door until your return home, we can book flights, transfers and city tours, or you can take care of most of the arrangements yourself and we will support one section such as a trek or a lodge stay.

Where will I sleep?

Patagonia has it all, not just one style of accommodation, from camping, huts, hostels and B&Bs, to comfy hotels, estancias, right up to 5* luxury! To get a feel for different types of lodging, have a look through [our hotels guide](#).

Meet the Team

Together we've explored every corner of Patagonia!



Harriet discovered a passion for the outdoors working and hiking in Patagonia as a teenager. She spent 3 years cycling and trekking in the Andes and climbed 26 6,000m Andean peaks. Since joining Swoop she has bushwhacked Paine and Fitz Roy in search of new trails and immersed herself in Aysen, forging partnerships and friendships along the way.



David started out working in tropical tourism in Ecuador, and then made his way south, staying with friends and family in Argentina. He worked as a guide all over the region, eventually spending his summers guiding in Antarctica. David has close family ties with Argentina and his wife is also Patagonian!



Iain first visited Patagonia in winter and was bewitched by the surreal nature of the ever-changing weather, the enthusiasm of the local guides and the remoteness. He returned to hike the W trek and explore on and off the beaten track in El Chalten. Iain has a passion for wildlife and loves to design itineraries around people's interests and desires: no two trips are ever the same!



Sydney was still in Patagonia when she began plotting her return. Despite growing up with a mountain in her backyard, she had to venture to the end of the earth to realise her love of hiking. Since her first visit to Torres del Paine, she's trekked all over the globe, but always finds her way back to this otherworldly place that started it all.



Peter loves stepping off the plane in Patagonia, instantly feeling like an explorer surrounded by wilderness. He has travelled to the remotest corners of Tierra de Fuego, cruised through the straits of Magellan, pursued his love of fly fishing in the Lakes and tramped the trails of Paine and Fitzroy. Peter specialises in tailor-made hiking holidays, fishing, sailing and road trips.



Kate combines her love for adventurous pursuits with a passion for the natural wonders of Patagonia. She is an ocean wildlife fanatic and has travelled the world in search of the weird and wonderful creatures of the sea. She has been nibbled by a cormorant, surfed with a grey whale calf and been sneezed on by a humpback whale!



Explore · Discover · Belong

It's time to begin your journey

Contact us

www.swoop-patagonia.com

International +44 117 369 0196

US toll free +1 855 369 7866

Australasia toll free 1800 019 075

