



A Complete Guide to Exploring the Southern Cone



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Encompassing a truly diverse selection of flora, fauna and breath-taking natural landmarks and landscapes, the Southern Cone should really be on your travel radar. But where actually is the Southern Cone? And how can you plan a vacation to this, South America's most tourist-friendly region?

Discover the Southern Cone

Where is the Southern Cone?

Referring to the countries in South America that are **around and south of the Tropic of Capricorn**, the Southern Cone, in geographical terms, is comprised of **Argentina, Chile and Uruguay**. However, **Southern Brazil and Paraguay** are politically and socially considered to also be part of the Southern Cone, and so we refer to all five countries in this guide.

An overview of countries in the Southern Cone

Argentina

South America's second largest country doesn't disappoint when it comes to **awe-inspiring attractions and fascinating cities** for foreign visitors. Rich in culture, it blends **traditional gaucho heritage** across the central and southern grasslands with the **influences of European immigrants** in both its capital and in cities further south. And with more than its fair share of outstanding areas of natural beauty, Argentina is a country that never fails to delight.

Southern Brazil

The south of Brazil shares a number of qualities with its Argentine and Uruguayan neighbors; expect to encounter gauchos, yerba mate and a fondness for asado. But it's also defined by **nature's most important resource: water**. Travelers here should make the most of its **spectacular subtropical coastline** and record-defying waterfalls.

Chile

With the angular spine of the Andes Mountain chain passing the whole length of the country, and scorched desert plains in the north and mountainous national parks in the south, **Chile is by far the South American country with the most dramatic scenery**. Those who venture into Chilean Patagonian can expect to be among only a small handful of people each year who explore this region of untouched wilderness.

Paraguay

Less developed and more inaccessible than the other countries that make up the Southern Cone, Paraguay **requires a greater deal of pre-planning** to ensure that you can safely visit its highlights. But despite its unpolished exterior, Paraguay astonishes with its **huge expanses of semi-arid but wildlife-rich virgin forest** and crumbling monuments that tell the history of the many settlers who've arrived here across the centuries.



Uruguay

Often visited as part of a day-trip from Buenos Aires, its neighbor across Río de la Plata, Uruguay merits much more than a cursory excursion. This **treasure chest of historic buildings, relaxed, welcoming cities and miles and miles of coastline** is slowly putting itself on the map as a top South American destination. Sharing many cultural traits with nearby Argentina, the tiny nation of Uruguay is an easier place to travel than its larger cousin thanks to the short distances between its key attractions.

Planning your vacation to the Southern Cone

As one of the most prosperous macro-regions of Latin America, the Southern Cone promises a **high standard of tours agencies and a well-established tourism infrastructure**. To inspire and assist you in your plans for visiting South America, this guide includes:

- **The top highlights of the Southern Cone;**
- **Recommended two-week travel itineraries for each of the five nations in the region;**
- **An overview of country-specific travel information regarding visas, best time to visit, currency and advice about staying safe while traveling.**

12 Unmissable Highlights of the Southern Cone

Argentina

1. Buenos Aires

This huge yet elegant capital should always be your first introduction to Argentina. Its wide, tree-lined avenues comprise **elegant architecture and a population of easy-going and warm locals** – the porteños, accounting for why so many tourists fall in love with [Buenos Aires](#).

What's more, a visit to this South American capital is an excellent way of understanding Argentina's unique culture. You'll find that **life moves slowly here and across the country**; there's always time for an afternoon siesta, a **shared round of yerba mate** or a chance to watch [a tango show](#), particularly given that this dance was purportedly born on the streets of the city.



Buenos Aires also introduces to the country's favorite pastime: dining. Upmarket neighborhoods Palermo and Recoleta are the perfect spots to dine al fresco on perfectly grilled, juicy cuts of meat and liberal lashings of malbec wine.

2. Perito Moreno Glacier

1,708-miles (2,750 km) south, El Calafate is the closest city to Argentina's **most popular tourist site**: the Perito Moreno Glacier.

This huge glacier is impressive not only for its immense scale (it covers 96.5-sq.miles (250km²)), but also its accessibility. Day trips can be arranged from the city, meaning that those with the tightest of itineraries will have plenty of time to stand at the foot of this impressive slab of ice.

3. Bariloche

German-influenced and set amongst a striking landscape of huge lakes and equally enormous snow-capped mountains, Bariloche **is an outdoor lover's paradise**. Days will quickly disappear as you hike through Patagonian steppe and stretches of Valdivian temperate forests in Nahuel Huapi National Park or enjoy water sports - ranging from **kayaking to kitesurfing and even scuba diving** - in the crystal blue waters of Lake Nahuel Huapi.

What's more, Bariloche is famed for its food, craft beer and Swiss-influenced chocolate industry. Expect to dine on top quality gastronomy and sip on local brews in the city's renowned restaurants.

Brazil

4. Iguazu Falls

Larger and more spectacular than their northern cousin Niagara, [Iguazu Falls](#) is a breath-taking group of 275 individual waterfalls crashing 260 ft. (80m) into a canyon below - and splashing everything in their path. One of the most unique sights in all of South America, **it's best to spend two days here to allow you to visit both sides of the border.**

On the Brazilian side, **walkways lead to picture-perfect panoramas**, while across the border, closer access to individual falls and boat trips allow a completely different perspective on this incredible landmark.

5. Brazil's most magical islands: Ilhabela and Ilha Grande

As the country with the 16th longest coastline in the world, it's no wonder that visitors to Brazil are spoiled by the country's range of stunning, palm-laced islands. And those situated in the south, a short distance from Rio de Janeiro and Sao Paulo, hold their own.

One of the best, **Ilhabela, or "Beautiful Island", lives up to its name.** Christened to reflect its verdant stretches of UNESCO protected coastal rainforest, exotic flora and fauna, 400 crashing waterfalls and 22-miles (35km) of luxurious, sandy beaches, Ilhabela is the ideal destination for nature lovers and sun-seekers.

Further south along the Brazilian coast, Ilha Grande is a paradise of white, **palm-lined sands and virgin rainforest** that has been protected from human development thanks, in part, to its turbulent yet intriguing history. Once a pirate hideout, it has since been the location of a leper colony and a jail for Brazil's political prisoners. But despite its dark heritage, these days Ilha Grande is an **island gem that remains low on settlement but high on untouched**, wildlife-filled jungle.



Chile

6. The Atacama Desert

The **world's driest non-polar desert**, Atacama makes quite an impression: it's a patchwork of sweeping desert plains that merge into crusted, **coral-like salt flats, saline lagoons** sprinkled with Andean, James and Chilean flamingoes and volcanos that look upon the point of eruption.

Tucked into the altiplano bordering Bolivia, the [Atacama Desert](#) might seem a whole world away from the rest of Chile, but this country's excellent infrastructure, including **comfortable, long-distance bus services and economical internal flights**, make this unique highlight surprisingly accessible.

7. Torres del Paine National Park

The poster child for Chilean tourism, [Torres del Paine National Park](#) is an essential stop off on an adventure vacation. Set in the far south of Patagonia on the border with Argentina, and encroached upon by **mythical, unexplored fjords** on the other side, Torres del Paine National Park symbolizes the awe-striking beauty of Chile.

[The 'W'](#), a four-day trek visiting the park's most celebrated sights, is Torres del Paine's most accessible and most popular hike. If you've got the time, consider instead the [10-day Circuit](#), a route that loops **around the Paine Massif, the iconic granite towers** after which the park is named, and grants a full panoramic vista of the Southern Patagonian Ice Field.

8. The Chilean Fjords

Few visitors to Chile have the chance to explore what is an ultimate highlight of Patagonia: the southern fjords. Reached either from Punta Arenas in Chile or from [Ushuaia](#) on the Argentine side, **these fjords mark the final frontier** - the last parts of this country that are devoid of human settlement.

This pristine wilderness is covered with stretches of Magellanic subpolar forests and huge tidewater glaciers, but is visited by fewer than 1,000 people per year, making it the **most unique and untrodden destination** on this list.



Paraguay

9. The Chaco

Find parks brimming with native species in Paraguay's most sensational spot for wildlife, the Chaco. Covering sixty percent of the country, the Chaco is a **semi-arid floodplain** where saline soils provide the ideal conditions for an **abundance of plants**, animals and interesting land formations. Some of the most visited are the Central Chaco Lagoons - saline lakes home to flocks of **Chilean flamingoes** during winter or sandpipers and plovers between September and December.

Mostly uninhabited, the Chaco is one of the best destinations in South America for spotting large mammals. Follow the tracks of jaguar and puma or encounter tapir and armadillo shuffling through the undergrowth. You're might also chance upon **resident bird species**, such as the black-bodied woodpecker and the Chaco owl.

10. Jesuit Route

The Catholic missionaries of the Jesuit order arrived in South America in the early 1600s and established thirty towns or "missions" across Brazil, Argentina, Bolivia and Paraguay. **These self-contained and independent communities** sought to spread the word of Christianity to the native Guarani and resulted in societies that mixed traditional and Christian beliefs and were known for their remarkable artistry.



Seven of the missions were built in modern-day Paraguay and those that have survived are the best-preserved of all in South America. Now, they form the **Jesuit Route**, an imaginary trail that passes from Encarnación in the far south of the country to the Paraguayan capital, Asunción and where **visitors can stop at each set of ruins** to learn more about this incredible culture.

Uruguay

11. Montevideo

Founded in 1724, Uruguay's capital is a delightfully relaxed, and delightfully tiny, place to begin your travels in the country. The portside Old Town has museums to **guide visitors through the country's history**, while the main city has an interesting mishmash of colonial buildings and neoclassical and neo gothic architecture.

As vibrant as it is varied, Montevideo abounds with **culture and excellent dining options**. The marvellous 18th-century Solís Theatre is the place to watch a performance, while a penchant for a good steak is as alive here as in neighboring Buenos Aires, so eat lunch with the locals in one of the restaurants in Mercado del Puerto, the old covered market situated right on the port.



12. The Uruguayan Coast

Known in South American circles as the playground of the Brazilian and Argentine rich and famous, **the Uruguayan coast has started to attract foreign tourists as well.** While Punta del Este is the most developed, and expensive beach resort, for those wanting to see more of Uruguay, instead, head north to Rocha.

This Uruguayan state contains some of the **least developed beach towns**, but its pristine sands and sleepy fishing villages provide a real sense of the relaxed Uruguayan way of life. Miles of sandy beaches and coastal forests, including Cabo Polonio, a sand-dune reserve where sea lion colonies laze on its banks, make this part of Uruguay feel like an unspoiled corner of paradise.

Two-Week Travel Itineraries in the Southern Cone

Itinerary One: Water and ice in Argentina and Chile

Days one to two: Buenos Aires

Touch down in Ezeiza International Airport and spend your first day exploring Recoleta Cemetery, where Argentine celebrities including Evita are buried and which is often cited as one of the **most beautiful cemeteries in the world.**

Catch an afternoon match at Maradona's old stomping ground, the Boca Juniors Stadium in La Boca, followed by any afternoon perusing the museums in the Palermo neighborhood and then **learning to tango in its birthplace**, the San Telmo neighborhood.

Days three to four: Bariloche

Hop on a two and a half hour flight to arrive in Bariloche in the Argentine Lake District. Discover **one-day and multi-day treks** in densely forested Nahuel Huapi National Park or take the cable car to the top of Cerro Cathedral for impressive vistas and trekking. Later, wander through the center of this alpine-inspired city, tasting **handmade chocolate and locally brewed beer**, before watching the sun set over Nahuel Huapi Lake.

Day five: Perito Moreno Glacier

Take a two hour flight to El Calafate, from where **you can book a boat** tour to glide through the milky, glacial waters of Lake Argentina to the foot of the Perito Moreno Glacier. Sip on drinks chilled with fresh glacial ice or disembark and wander along the wooden **walkways to a viewpoint at the glacier's base**, from where you can admire this spectacle from a different perspective.

Days six to thirteen: Ushuaia and the Chilean fjords

Fly an hour and twenty minutes south to Ushuaia and board an expedition cruise ship to sail in Darwin's footsteps through the Beagle Channel and down to Cape Horn.

From here, cruise through the fjords of [Alberto de Agostini National Park](#) **to encounter some of Patagonia's least visited landscapes**. Later, land upon tiny islets inhabited by huge breeding colonies of Magellanic penguins before visiting Chile's southernmost city, Punta Arenas. Sail back to Ushuaia to complete the cruise.

Day fourteen: Buenos Aires

Fly back to Buenos Aires and spend your final day wandering through the 80-hectare Palermo Forest northeast of the centre before boarding your plane home.



Itinerary Two: Islands and waterfalls in Brazil

Days one and two: Río de Janeiro

Land in Rio de Janeiro International Airport to discover Brazil's most vibrant city. Begin with a train journey up to the top of Corcovado Mountain, where you'll find the Art Deco statue of Christ the Redeemer and panoramic views of the "Cidade Maravilhosa" (Marvelous City) as Rio is famously known.

Spend a day cycling along the beaches or relaxing with a chilled caipirinha on the most famous sands of all, Copacabana Beach.

Days three to six: Ilha Grande

Take a short bus journey to Mangaratiba, from where ferries land you on tranquil Isla Grande - an island that feels a world away from the buzzing mania of Rio.

Visit Lopes Mendes, Ilha Grande's most stunning beach and stay in an oceanside pousada (guesthouse). Enjoy long, hot days relaxing on the island's pristine white sands and swimming in the clearest waters imaginable.



Days six to eight: Ilhabela

Return to Rio de Janeiro and take a short, one-hour flight to Sao Paulo, where a ferry from nearby Sao Sebastiao will bring you to paradise, or Ilhabela as it's more commonly known. Soak up the **Brazilian sunshine** on one of the island's beaches or spot capuchin monkeys and toucans perched in the jungle canopy with a tour of protected tropical rainforest.

You'll also have time to **snorkel and scuba dive** in the aquamarine waters of the Atlantic, where the island's past as a pirate hideout in the 16th- and 17th-centuries has left the sandy ocean floor riddled with shipwrecks.

Days nine to eleven: Iguazu Falls

Return to Sao Paulo and fly to Foz de Iguacu, where tours can be organized to visit both the Brazilian and Argentine sides of the mammoth Iguazu Falls waterfall system. Make a beeline for the most impressive, the **Garganta del Diablo** (the Devil's Throat); this huge, three-sided waterfall is guaranteed to leave you reeling – and soaked.

Days twelve to fourteen: Río de Janeiro

Fly directly back to Rio and spend your final two days absorbing the sights of Praça XV de Novembro, the city's main plaza and visiting the National History Museum.



Itinerary Three: Deserts and fjords in Chile

Days one and two: Santiago to the Atacama Desert

Touch down in **Comodoro Arturo Merino Benítez International Airport** and take a two-hour internal flight and short bus journey to arrive in San Pedro de Atacama, the main town in the Atacama Desert.

Experience dawn at **El Tatio Geysers**, some of the highest in the world, before descending for a lazy afternoon in the thermal springs of Puritama. Watch the pink hues of sunset at Laguna Tebinquinche and spend a day exploring two impressive lake, Miscanti and Miñiques, both of which are a short distance from the Bolivian border.

Dine on delicious steak coupled with Chilean red wine and finish with a stargazing tour in the desert to view some of the world's clearest skies.

Days three to eight: Santiago to Punta Arenas

Return to Santiago to fly three and a half hours south to Chile's southernmost city, Punta Arenas. Located on the shores of the Strait of Magellan, Punta Arenas is also close to Torres del Paine National Park and the 'W' trek.

Go hiking and camping or splash out on deluxe, **eco-domes that serve up a liberal dose of luxury and adventure** – plus excellent food and wine.



Days nine to thirteen: Punta Arenas to the Chilean fjords

Back in Punta Arenas, board your cruise ship to explore the **region's magical highlights**, stopping at colonies of Magellanic penguins based on islets in the Strait of Magellan before sailing through the silent Chilean fjords to land on otherwise inaccessible stretches of subpolar forest.

Disembark at legendary Cape Horn, the tip of South America, before venturing through the Beagle Channel to finish at the world's southernmost city, Ushuaia.

Days fourteen: Santiago

Take a bus from Ushuaia back to Punta Arenas and board a plane back to Santiago for your flight home.

Itinerary Four: Culture and coastline in Argentina and Uruguay

Days one to four: Buenos Aires

Touch down in Ezeiza International Airport and spend your first day exploring the beautiful **Recoleta Cemetery**. Learn to tango in its birthplace, the San Telmo neighborhood, and wander through the leafy parks of the elegant **Palermo district** before pausing for a leisurely coffee at one of the neighborhood's chic cafes.

Escape the city for a day to **La Plata** and stand in awe beneath the neo gothic façade of La Plata Cathedral or visit Tigre, a town where small boats slip through the channels of the Luján River to land at pretty riverside cafes.

Day five to seven: Montevideo

Back in Buenos Aires, hop on a ferry and two and a half hours later you'll find yourself in the Uruguayan capital Montevideo. This **small-but-perfectly-formed city** is ideal for a day of culture and soaking up the relaxed Uruguayan lifestyle.

Take a tour or even watch **an evening performance in the Italian-designed Solís Theatre** and while away an afternoon in one of the city's excellent art museums. Join the locals in enjoying in the Montevideo café culture or have a lazy lunch of fresh seafood at Mercado del Puerto.



Days eight to thirteen: Uruguayan Coast

Rent a car and travel up the coast, stopping in the region's **most stunning coastal communities**. Drive out to the remote, barely inhabited seaside villages of La Paloma and La Pedrera, where stunning hikes through forest and along seemingly endless stretches of untouched beaches are the star attractions.

Go birdwatching near Laguna de Rocha and Laguna de Castillos to see the large populations of Buff-breasted Sandpiper and American Golden-Plover resident there during the summer.

Day fourteen: Buenos Aires

Drive back to Montevideo and take a ferry or plane across to Buenos Aires for your return flight home.

Itinerary Five: History and nature in Brazil, Argentina and Paraguay

Days one to three: Sao Paulo to Foz de Iguacu and Puerto Iguazu

Land in São Paulo–Guarulhos International Airport and board a short domestic flight to Foz de Iguazu. Organize a tour to visit both sides of the world's largest system of waterfalls, the phenomenal **Iguazu Falls**.

Days four to seven: the Jesuit Route between Encarnación and Asunción

Cross the border into Paraguay and hop on a bus to Encarnación to start a three-day tour along the Jesuit Route, stopping at **the most impressive and best-preserved of all the missions, La Santísima Trinidad de Paraná**. Wander around the ruins, including the huge church whose inside walls are lined with exceptionally intricate stone carvings.

Days eight to thirteen: the Chaco

From Asunción, head into the Chaco for a five-day tour to find the region's large mammals, such as jaguar and puma, as well as the endemic Chacoan peccary (the largest of all the mammals in the park). Visit the **Mennonite colonies** that inhabit this remote region as well as sites from the Chaco War, a territory conflict between Paraguay and Bolivia that ended in the 1930s.

Day fourteen: Sao Paulo

From Asunción, take a plane back to Sao Paulo for your return flight home.



Country-Specific Travel Planning Information

Argentina

Currency	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Argentine peso (AR\$).• The Blue Dollar, a once favorable black market exchange rate for tourists bringing US dollars into the country, no longer exists.• ATMs are available throughout the country but often charge high withdrawal fees for foreign cards.• Avoid withdrawal fees by bringing dollars into the country and using currency exchange counters around the capital to give you the best rate.
When to visit	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Buenos Aires is sweltering during the summer, so November or March and April are best for avoiding the extreme temperatures.• Argentine Patagonia is most accessible between November and April.• Cruises in the far south can only be booked during summer as the region faces very cold and unpredictable weather conditions during the rest of the year.



Visas	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Most citizens of Europe are not required to pay for entry into Argentina and should receive a 90-day visa upon arrival. • US citizens, as of August 2016, are no longer required to pay a reciprocity fee, but citizens of Canada and Australia pay between \$90-100 USD upon arrival for a 90-day visa.
Safety advice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Argentina is a safe country, although pickpocketing, muggings and distraction theft in Buenos Aires are common. • Patagonia and rural parts of the country are generally very safe and secure.

Brazil

Currency	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Real (R\$). • ATMs are available throughout the country, however some do not operate after 10pm for security purposes.
When to visit	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Temperatures in southern parts of Brazil can be cool in winter, so visit between November and April.
Visas	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • European citizens can enter Brazil without a visa. • Canadian, US and Australian citizens must apply for a 90-day tourist visa in advance, with a fee of \$53 USD, \$100 USD and \$160 USD respectively.
Safety advice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Brazil has a reputation for being one of the more dangerous countries in which to travel in South America. • Take extreme care in the main cities at night, but otherwise act with a reasonable degree of caution and don't travel with valuables obviously on your person. • Make use of hotel safes for important items.

Chile

Currency	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Chilean peso (\$CLP). • ATMs are available throughout the country although some in the south do not work with foreign cards.
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When to visit	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Chile has a variety of different climates, with the Atacama Desert seeing hot weather all year round and Patagonia in the south experiencing very cold and often snowy conditions during winter. • To make the most of the south, visit between November and April when accommodations and tour facilities, including cruises, are operational.
Visas	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • European passport holders and US and Canadian nationals receive a 90-days visa upon arrival. • Australian citizens must pay \$116 USD for a 90-day tourist visa when entering the country.
Safety advice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Chile is one of the safest countries in the Southern Cone in which to travel. • Muggings and pickpocketing are possible in Santiago, but in more rural places, such as the Atacama Desert and Patagonia, travelers generally feel very safe.

Paraguay

Currency	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Guaraní (Gs). • ATMs are available in most large towns and cities, although some may not accept foreign cards.
When to visit	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Paraguay has an exceptionally hot climate for most of the year and a rainy season between October and April. • Visit May through September when the weather is slightly cooler.
Visas	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • European passport holders receive a 90-days visa. • If flying into the country, US citizens must pay \$160 USD, Canadian citizens \$150 USD and Australian citizens \$135 USD for a 90-day tourist visa upon arrival. • If entering by land, all must apply for a visa in advance from a Paraguayan embassy and consulate.

Safety advice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Paraguay is a far poorer country than its neighbors and has a higher crime rate. Tourists should take considerable care when traveling in this country. • Travelling with a reputable tour agency is one of the best ways of assuring your safety.
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Uruguay

Currency	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Peso Uruguayo (UR\$). • ATMs are available in large cities but beware that in the more remote, coastal parts of the country you won't find services for withdrawing cash.
When to visit	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The hottest temperatures for beach goers are between October and March. • Between January and March some of the large coastal towns and cities are very busy with visitors. • If seeking a calmer, more relaxed stay, it's recommended to visit earlier in the season.
Visas	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Citizens of the US, Europe, Canada and Australia do not need a visa to enter Uruguay and can stay for up to 90-days.
Safety advice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Uruguay is one of the safest countries to visit in South America. • Be cautious of pickpockets in Montevideo and don't leave your valuables unattended on the beach.





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