

Tierra Patagonia

Luxury At The End Of The Earth

By David Beebe

If one was to be limited to just one adjective to describe Torres del Paine National Park in Chile's Patagonia, it would have to be "extreme". It works equally well for the latitude, the beauty of the landscape, the wildlife and the friendliness of the people that live here. It definitely works for the weather and the wind.

Our adventure's luxe base camp was at the five star Tierra Patagonia which is the very manifestation of "organic elegance". Designed by Chilean architect Cazu Zegers, it is built of smooth and rough hewn Lenga wood and glass. The hotel curves and flows with the wind along the top of a small hill that overlooks Lake Sarmiento and the world famous Towers of the Paine massif, those craggy mountain peaks that give the park its name. Every room, from the 3 standard to the 34 superior (10 of which can be interconnected to create family apartments) and the 3 loft suites, have the same magnificent view through their large picture window. This view continues through the expansive common seating area, library, bar and open dining room.

The hotel offers a wide variety of outdoor adventures to fill your days including half day walks, full day hikes, horseback rides and scenic tours within the national park and to nearby estancias. Full day outings include a box lunch prepared to your needs.

To maximize our time in the field, we've come here with Terra Incognita Ecotours in search of exotic wildlife. Specifically, we are looking for pumas, condors, guanacos, endangered huemuls, foxes and rheas in this Patagonian wilderness that was declared a UNESCO Biosphere Reserve in 1978. We owe our expedition's success to the skill and local knowledge of our dedicated Ecotours guides and trekkers.





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A typical spring day at Tierra Patagonia starts with an early sunrise lighting up the Towers. With over 16 hours of sunshine, days are already long. Breakfast is served buffet style starting at 7:30 AM until 10:00 AM. Eggs are made to order starting at 8:00 AM. Then it is time to get out and see what can be seen. For those that prefer to relax and be pampered, the indoor pool and Uma Spa can be found just beyond the last rooms sharing that famous view.

Back at the dining room, lunch is served from noon until 2:00 PM. As with dinner, which starts at 8:00 PM, the menu changes each day. You will always have a choice from 3 different starters, entrees and deserts. One of those options is always vegetarian. The choices are customizable to accommodate preferences and allergies. The hotel's commitment to a sustainable presence extends beyond asking if guests would mind reusing their towels. The kitchen prepares locally caught seafood, meats from nearby ranches and fresh produce from surrounding farms.

Late afternoon finds most everyone sitting in the common area downloading and sharing photos, swapping stories, checking emails and toasting the day around the circular fireplace. Time spent here is all the more enjoyable thanks to the excellent selection of wonderful Chilean wines and the ever changing view of the weather over the Towers. Start your exploration of Chilean wines with the

Carmeneres, a grape similar to Merlot that is now extinct in France but thrives here. Cocktails, including the Pisco Sour, Chile's national drink and artisan beers from local breweries are also served. Because of the long days in Spring and Summer, the setting sun provides the floor show during a late evening meal.

While the architecture of Tierra Patagonia is as much of a feature as the landscape it inhabits, the level of service and attention to detail completes the luxury experience. You will be delighted when you arrive and happy for the time spent here when it is time to leave.

The wind is always a factor here, so the key to packing for Patagonia is layers. The weather can change quickly throughout the day and it is important to be prepared while in the field. Start with a good base layer of silk or polyester. Add a middle layer for warmth and an outer layer that is rain and wind proof. Proper socks and gloves are important and a balaclava is nice to have when the wind is howling. The ozone layer is thin over Antarctica so bring sunglasses and an adequate sunblock. Our guide observed, “There is no such thing as bad weather, only bad clothing.” Come prepared for the extremes and you will be comfortably rewarded with time spent exploring some of the most stunning landscape on Earth.



To get here, the port of entry for international air travelers is Chile's capital city of Santiago. Located about half way down this long, thin country, it takes a bit over 3 hours to fly further south with LAN Chile to the Patagonian gateway city of Punta Arenas. We chose to split up the 5-hour drive to the park with an overnight stay at the five star Singular Hotel in Puerto Natales and complete the drive to Torres del Paine the next morning. Tierra Patagonia is open in the spring and summer months of the southern hemisphere from September through April each year. ■

