



Patagonia: 'Uttermost Part of the Earth'

History, legends, landscapes and wildlife in southern Argentina & Chile

10–25 November 2022 (MI 569)

16 days • £8,380

Lecturer: Chris Moss

The extraordinary history and legends of the southernmost region of the world, the last corner of the New World to be colonised.

Sublime landscapes, mountains and glaciers, lakes, coasts and seas, hauntingly limitless steppe and scrubland.

Close encounters with penguins, sea lions and guanaco, and sightings of a variety of other animals, birds, native trees and shrubs.

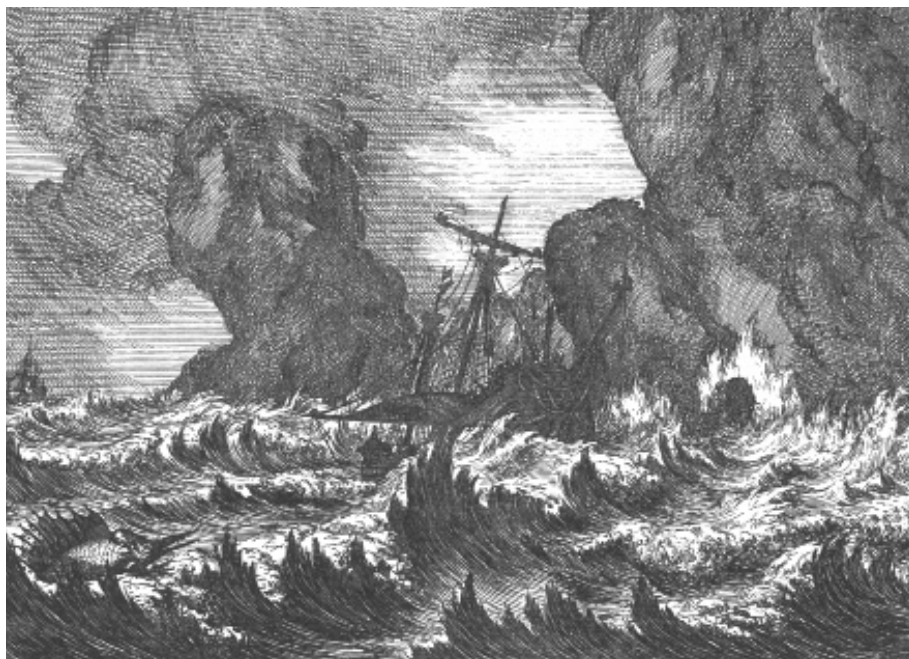
A search for stories as well as some of the best sightseeing in South America.

Patagonia is the archetypal landscape of the imagination. For many people, it exists as much in myths, in fiction and in travellers' tales as it does in reality.

The first Europeans to visit the coast of Patagonia, in 1520, were Ferdinand Magellan and his crew – during the first stage of his landmark Voyage of Circumnavigation. When they made landfall, they met a native Aonikenk man who, according to the on-board diarist Antonio Pigafetta, was of "gigantic stature". They called him a "patagon", after a monster that featured in a chivalric romance.

Thus was born Patagonia, in homage to a race of giants. Drake followed a few decades later, then Thomas Cavendish, and also John Davis. During the 17th and 18th centuries, Argentina's Patagonian coast and the interior drew conquistadores looking for a southern El Dorado, for passages to the Pacific, for new lands in which to build cities. Early settlers perished on lonely capes. Wanderers got lost in the bleak wastes. Shipwrecks were common, not least in the tortuous strait that bears Magellan's name. John Byron – the poet's grandfather – was marooned off the coast of Chile. In the 1830s, Robert Fitzroy was tasked to sound the treacherous waters; he was joined by the young Charles Darwin.

Much of Patagonia's history is a tale of explorers, mariners and outcasts. The region has British connections not found elsewhere in South America; English pirates and pastors, Welsh colonists and Scottish sheep farmers all played a role in defining and describing the faraway land. As cartographers, scientists, merchants, financiers and manufacturers, Anglo-Saxon names keep cropping up. The



The Magellan Strait, early 17th-century copper engraving.

history of the Falklands/Malvinas is bound up with that of the mainland.

The last corner of the New World to be colonised – and only partially, following bloody wars and massacres – Patagonia remains thinly populated, with swathes of the steppe dotted with little more than sheep-rearing *estancias*. Its roads are long and lonely. Hotels cluster around ports and lakeside resorts.

History and culture are the foci of this tour, but other major threads are animal, ornithological and topographical. A region of sublime landscapes, Patagonia has some of the best sightseeing in South America. Mountain ranges are a constant accompaniment to our journeys, sometimes forbidding, frequently snow-capped, often eliciting the highest delight which nature is capable of providing. Here the world's third largest ice field, and the great glaciers are an unparalleled wonder.

Equally characteristic is the limitless steppe and scrubland, sometimes like an old green sweater, much of it melancholic khaki. Here the calculation is hectares per sheep, but wildlife is abundant. When we descend to the wind-swept coastline, you'll get close to penguins and sealions. The tour embraces both the sublime and the strange.

Itinerary

Flights to Buenos Aires are not included, though we are happy to assist. We recommend the British Airways flight from London Heathrow (via São Paulo) on 9th November at c. 9.15pm, which arrives at c. 10.00am on 10th November.

Rooms are ready for occupation from 3.00pm on 9th November, allowing those arriving from London early on the 10th to check in immediately, and those arriving from elsewhere the opportunity to settle in the night before.

Day 1: Buenos Aires. The tour begins at 12.30 on 10th November with a talk and lunch at the hotel. Afternoon walk in Recoleta cemetery with its architecturally diverse and ornate tombs, burial place of many of the country's leaders and cultural figures, including Eva Perón and Julio A. Roca, "conqueror" of Patagonia. Overnight Buenos Aires.

Day 2: Buenos Aires, La Plata. Excursion to La Plata, home to Argentina's most important natural history museum. The Museo La Plata an old-school institution with atmospheric rooms displaying fossils, rocks, taxidermy and skeletons that anticipate some of the sites visited in Patagonia. While in the city - the capital of Buenos Aires province - we'll also pay

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continued

a visit to the Gothic Revival cathedral and visit a local grill restaurant for lunch.

Day 3: Trelew. Fly south to Trelew (Aérolíneas Argentinas); grid plan, low rise, frontier town feel, all standard in Patagonia. The first wave of settlers from Wales came to this valley in 1865; many traces remain, and Welsh has been revived in schools. Visit the palaeological museum and research centre, which displays the remains of two of the world's largest dinosaurs yet discovered and of the legendary mylodon, now also extinct, which inspired Bruce Chatwin's journey. Drive to Puerto Madryn for the first of three nights.

Day 4: Trelew, Gaiman, Dolavon. Barren when the Welsh arrived, the broad valley of the River Chubut is now graced with abundant poplars, willows and tamarisk which shelter small fields nurturing a variety of crops and livestock. In addition to irrigation, the Welsh legacy includes red-brick cottages – still a living vernacular – and little chapels with corrugated iron roofs, moving in their simplicity and evocation of a far off land. Special performance of a Welsh choir. Overnight Puerto Madryn.

Day 5: Punta Ninfas, El Pedral. To watch wildlife where few others venture, we take a rutted grit road across a treeless plateau to the Punta Ninfas promontory. From the cliff top we have a view of sea lions and elephant seals, and maybe orcas and whales. Descend to a French-built mansion in a sylvan oasis for lunch, and spend the afternoon on a private beach. There may be no other humans here; just 6,000 Magellanic penguins and their chicks. Overnight Puerto Madryn.

Day 6: Ushuaia, Beagle Channel. Afternoon flight direct to Ushuaia in Tierra del Fuego, the southernmost city in the world. First of three nights in Ushuaia.

Day 7: Harberton. Spreading across windswept islands and foothills which fringe the Beagle Channel, Estancia Harberton was established in 1886 by Thomas Bridges, the first white man to settle in Tierra del Fuego; his descendants live here still, with their Herefords. Many of the buildings of the farmstead date from the early years, a time of struggle and fortitude, and the story movingly unfolds during a walk to places described in *Uttermost Part of the Earth* by Lucas Bridges. Overnight Ushuaia.

Day 8: Ushuaia and hinterland. In 1831 the Beagle was the first ship to navigate this channel between Atlantic and Pacific; when it returned a couple of years later Charles Darwin

was on board, making observations which would revolutionise the history of thought. A boat trip passes between jagged mountains – the tail end of the Andes – with a skirt of southern beech to see plentiful seabirds and, at close quarters, sealions. In the afternoon, visit the Tierra del Fuego National Park for short walks amidst some of the finest landscapes in the region. Overnight Ushuaia.

Day 9: Calafate. Midday flight to El Calafate, gateway to the glacier district. It is located beside Lago Argentina, the largest lake in the country. Visit the Glaciario 'Museum of Ice', a very good introduction to the next two days. First of three nights in Calafate.

Day 10: Upsala Glacier. A day amid some of the grandest landscapes you are ever likely to see. Begin with a boat ride (2 hours) on Lago Argentino, here squeezed between rugged mountains, and drift among icebergs calved by the Upsala Glacier. A thrilling off-road ride (45 mins) rises through varied terrain before a walk (20 mins) to see the glacier from above. Visit Estancia Cristina, formed in 1914 as a 20,000-hectare sheep farm by the Masters family from Lymington.

Day 11: Perito Moreno Glacier. Drive along a little used road which passes the Estancia Anita, once one of the largest landholdings and scene of an anarchist uprising in 1922. Then comes one of the most dramatic and beautiful of natural phenomena, the Perito Moreno Glacier, its surface pitted with obelisk-like seracs, its faces (higher than Nelson's Column) striated with blue and frequently giving birth to icebergs. Close-up views from walkways on the neighbouring slopes (200–500 steps) or from a boat.

Day 12: from Argentina to Chile, Torres del Paine. An early start to drive 270 km across the Patagonian steppe, empty except for dwarf shrubs, occasional guanacos and lesser rhea. Cross the border midway. Continue to Torres del Paine National park, the centrepiece of which is the Paine Massif; high mountains are rarely so beautiful, so capriciously sculpted and so accessible. They rise abruptly to 2,600m from roiling scrubland and are reflected in many lakes. Gentle walk and picnic lunch. Overnight in a hotel in a former factory outside Puerto Natales.

Day 13: Puerto Natales, Punta Arenas. A morning walk around Puerto Natales before driving yet further south to the Strait of Magellan, the passage to the Pacific discovered

by the eponymous explorer in 1520. Now a backwater, Punta Arenas was a major port in the pre-Panama days of shipping. Overnight in Punta Arenas.

Day 14: Punta Arenas. Take the coast road to Fort Bulnes, replica of an outpost constructed in 1841 with far reaching views across the Strait and beyond. Below is the site of a failed 16th-century settlement, later called Port Famine. Punta Arenas retains buildings from its heyday at the turn of the 19th century, and we visit a patrician's mansion. We also clamber over full-size replicas of significant ships – Magellan's Victoria, Fitzroy's Beagle, Shackleton's James Caird. Fly to Santiago (LATAM) for the first of two nights.

Day 15: Santiago. Chile's capital has much of interest and beauty – grand Beaux-Arts architecture, 18th and 19th-century government buildings, lush parks and a good Museum of Fine Arts. The highlight, however, is the beautifully displayed Museum of Pre-Columbian Art, the finest such collection in South America. Otherwise the day is free.

Days 16: Santiago. The tour finishes after breakfast. *We recommend the 1.00pm British Airways flight to Heathrow, which arrives tomorrow (26th November) at c. 6.15am.*

Lecturer

Chris Moss. Journalist and writer specialising in the cultural history of Argentina. He studied theology, English literature and education, before moving to Argentina in 1991. After returning to the UK he wrote for *BBC History*, the *Daily Telegraph*, *Time Out* and others. He has written and edited several guidebooks, as well as a cultural history of Patagonia and a literary compendium for London commuters. He writes on South American music for *Songlines* and compiles tango albums.

Practicalities

Price, per person. Two sharing: £8,380.
Single occupancy: £9,780.

Included: travel by private coach; domestic flights with Aerolíneas Argentinas within Argentina (Boeing 737-800) and LATAM (Airbus 321) within Chile; hotel accommodation as described below; breakfasts; 8 lunches and 11 dinners with wine, water, coffee; all admissions; all tips; all taxes; the services of the lecturer, tour manager and local

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guides.

Flights: flights from London to Buenos Aires and Santiago to London are not included in the price of the tour. We ask that you make your own flight reservation. The cost of a World Traveller (economy) seat with British Airways at the time of going to press is c. £1,250.

Accommodation. Hotel Palladio, Buenos Aires (accorhotels.com): centrally located 5-star hotel, well designed rooms (size varies), good restaurant. **Hotel Pirén, Puerto Madryn** a good, centrally-located 3-star. **Las Hayas Resort Hotel, Ushuaia** (lashayas.com.ar): comfortable resort on a hill overlooking Ushuaia and the Beagle Channel. Rated locally as 5-star. **Mirador del Lago, El Calafate** (miradordellago.com.ar): 4-star, overlooking the lake and within walking distance of the centre. **The Singular, Puerto Natales** (thesingular.com): a 5-star, 8 km outside the town, an imaginative conversion of a vast meat processing factory. **Dreams del Estrecho, Punta Arenas** (mundodreams.com): centrally located modern glass tower overlooking the Magellan Strait, externally regrettable but internally comfortable. **Magnolia Hotel, Santiago** (hotelmagnolia.cl): 5-star, a 1920s patrician mansion with uncompromisingly contemporary interiors. *Single rooms throughout are doubles for sole use.*

How strenuous? Close encounters with nature are an integral feature of this tour, which necessitate a lot of walking. While the walking is not difficult, much of the ground is uneven, loose, rocky and muddy. You must have a good level of fitness, good balance and be footsure. (Hospitals are sometimes many hours away.) There is also a great deal of travelling by road, many of which are unpaved. Average distance by coach per day: 70 miles.

Group size: between 10 and 22 participants.