

CENTRAL SOUTH AMERICA



THE WIDE, SANDY BEACH OF MARDEL COMPLEMENTS AN EXTENSIVE RANGE OF ACTIVITIES.



ARGENTINA

WWW.TURISMO.GOV.AR

An obsession with soccer, succulent steaks and the sultry tango. Miles of golden sand beaches, endless pampas, cactus-dotted deserts and one of the most accessible glacier fields in the world.

And El Calafate, nearby Lake Argentino's vast spread of emerald-green, glacier-fed waters, is the perfect stepping off point to check out Glaciar Perito Moreno. There are few more awesome sights and sounds than house-sized chunks of ice sheering away and hitting water.

San Carlos de Bariloche has one of the best ski fields in the world, Cerro Catedral. Hike, mountain bike or cable car it to the top of Cerro Campanario, Cerro Otto's revolving restaurant and Cerro López for spectacular mountain and lake views.

The white waters of the Limay or Manso rivers are thrilling; Colonia Suiza is like being in Switzerland; and the outdoor flea market in the hippie town of El Bolson is well worth it ... so is the scenery along the way!

Cruise the glacial Lake Nahuel Huapi and wander the Andean rainforest of the National Park; get close to Tronador, the snow-covered volcano, by crossing the milky-jade waters of Lago Frias.

You'll get some of the best steak in Argentina at El Bolice de Alberto; the food at La Parrilla de Julian rivals the view; and you'll love the fondues, raclettes and pierrades at Casita Suiza. Look for tea, gourds, leather goods, smoked meats and cheese, trout pâté and mouth-watering chocolate on the main street, Mitre.

The Peninsula Valdés, on the arid Patagonian coast, is rich with wildlife, especially at the Reserva Faunística (ever seen an orca?). Puerto Madrin has some great beaches, diving and fishing. Many enjoy the paleontological safaris and an estancias (ranch) visit. Definitely try the fish and local Patagonian lamb.

Las Grutas is right nearby, with its beautiful white sand beaches; warm, deep blue water; and casino, myriad restaurants and bars. Playas Doradas is a firm favorite for sunbathing and watersports; the 9 miles (15km) between Saco Viejo and picturesque San Antonio Esteis are great for diving, snorkeling and fishing; restaurants are quaint and the seafood excellent.

The area from Mar del Plata north to San Bernardo is filled with beautiful beaches. The wide, sandy beach of Mar del complements an extensive

range of activities, theme parks and a pulsing nightlife. When shopping look for wool sweaters, pulls and jackets, as well as sweet alfajores.

There are five good golf courses; the windswept dunes are great for 4x4 rides; the cruise to Isla de Los Lobos passes dramatic cliff-lined coastline; and Laguna Sierra's marshland is great for bird watching.

The tree-covered dunes of Villa Gesell line some of the best beaches on the coast and create a playground for adventure – day and night. If you're not sunbaking or enjoying the watersports, you'll be on a quad ride to the Querandí lighthouse, visiting the Zoo, or playing a game of golf.

The tiny center, exclusive Cariló, is nestled within a leafy forest and the main attraction is the beautiful beach. Then there's 4x4 fun, horseriding, cycling, hiking, golf or sport fishing in the Big Salty Lagoon.

If you want a bit of nightlife, go to nearby Pinamar, popular with Argentinean celebrities and filled with galleries, restaurants, cafes and a casino. Once again, the large dunes are wooded, the beaches beautiful and there are plenty of watersport activities. Go on a photo safari to the surrounding estancias to observe stags, capybaras and otters.

The 295 yard (270 meter) fishing pier at Mar de Ajó is a firm favorite with anglers, the beaches are beautiful and offer all the activities you could wish for. So does San Bernardo. Go shopping on JC Chiozza Street for great buys.

Buenos Aires sprawls out commandingly, as only major cities can. Much of its architecture echoes cosmopolitan Europe and its nightlife and shopping are superb. Make time for the necropolis of Cementerio de la Recoleta; the AD1000 Andean fortress of Quilmes; and Caminito in La Boca.

Colonial Córdoba is perfect for exploring the Andes and the myriad rivers, lakes and valleys of the pampas. Shoppers, go to Obispo Trejo, Deán Funes and 9 de Julio streets, as well as the huge weekend craft fair, Feria Artesanal.

Architecture buffs, don't miss the breathtaking 17th century Jesuit Block, underground crypts, cathedral and historic town hall on Plaza San Martín in town. Your drive around the World Heritage Jesuit Estancias circles through picturesque mountain scenery.

Good daytrips are Ischigualasto Provincial Park, home to Mesozoic fossils 180 million years old, dinosaur footprints and other awesome remains; Talampaya National Park, with its steep, brick-red cliffs, condors and archaeological remains; and the granite monoliths of Parque Los Menhires near Santa Cruz.

The remote World Heritage areas of Quebrada de Humahuaca, Jesuit Missions of Guarani Indians and Iguazu National Park on the north-eastern border of Brazil and Paraguay are well worth the effort for those who can.



GET INDIAN FEATHERED ART AND TRIBAL POTTERY AT THE VER-O-PESO MARKET IN BELÉM; TAKE A FLYER BOAT ALONG ONE OF THE RIVERS, KEEPING YOUR EYE OUT FOR FLOCKS OF MACAWS.



BRAZIL

WWW.BRAZILTOURISM.ORG

Whether you're drawn to this huge country by the promise of fun, dance and Carnival, a jungle escapade or lovely tropical beaches, you're bound to get more than you expect.

Novo Airao, deep in the steamy Amazon jungle and on the edge of the world's largest National Park is for those seeking ecological adventure. The dark water of the Rio Negro Basin, incredibly beautiful waterfalls, vast tracts of submerged forest, mammoth rivers, unique wildlife and archeological finds ... this place is incredible.

Rainy Manaus, where the 'dark violet Rio Negro meets the café-au-lait Rio Solimões', is the place to go for duty free electronics. While there, grab a cupuaçu juice and tucumã sandwich from a Mercado Municipal stall on your way to the exquisite 19th century Amazon Theater.

Get Indian feathered art and tribal pottery at the Ver-o-Peso market in Belém; take a flyer boat along one of the rivers, keeping your eye out

for flocks of macaws; go turtle spotting on the Rio Negro beaches; glide past the Mariuá Archipelago, the world's largest fluvial group of islands.

The spectacular beaches, warm, protected water and fantastic climate of Sao Luis makes it a firm favorite. Its lovely, old Portuguese architecture has earned it a World Heritage title. And the exotic Maranhão cuisine is equally memorable.

The Sao Marcos beach is both great for surfing and exploring the ruins of the 18th century fort; the historical Mother Church of the See's high altar is pure gold; and the pulsating beat of root reggae and the Lambada permeate the streets, and your blood!

Coastal Meruoca and Fortaleza have a beautiful mountain and forest backdrop; and South America's largest water playground. There are so many great beaches it will be hard to choose.

Good markets are Beira-Mar at night, the Old Public Jail for local cearense craft (look for hammocks and lace), art and semi-precious stones and there's a huge open-air shopping center at Monsenhor Tabosa Street.

Barra do Ceará is both historically significant and a great place for flora and fauna; the baroque Mucuripe Lighthouse, neoclassic Luz Palace and Maracatu Museum are worth a visit; and the beautiful, marine-life rich Fernando de Noronha archipelago is a must-do. ▶

The beaches of Maragogi and Maceió, on the Brazilian 'Gold Coast', are long and golden and lined with swaying coconut trees. Fringed with lovely coral reefs, the ocean is clear, tranquil and perfect for swimming ... especially in the huge natural pools called Galés.

In Maragogi, go to San Jose do Coroa Grand and Tamandare beaches; Santo Antônio Bar and Croa Island; and the high sea cliffs between Vila de Japaratinga and Pontal. Maceió's Jatiúca Beach is filled with surfers, restaurants and shops; Ponta Verde, with its lush palms, restaurants and bars is extremely popular; and Pajuçara is great for families. Try the floating bars offshore!

There's also a good arts and crafts fair there and at Pontal do Cururipe; get lace on the banks of the Mandau lagoon in Pontal da Barra; and crafts, plus sugar cane rum, at Sebrae Warehouse.

Nearby Olinda, an historic and picturesque hilltop city, is filled with charming galleries, museums and artisan's workshops. Typical of Brazil, it's also filled with music – particularly the Gregorian chants during Mass at the ancient Mosteiro de São Bento. Get some delectable homemade liqueur while there.

Sensual and beautiful Salvador is also a beachgoer's delight. This is where you'll feel the soul of African slave heritage. Carnaval or no, its drumbeat pulses throughout the city, Candomblé followers in a trance are an everyday occurrence; and the cuisine is fragrant with spices.

Walk past the colonial forts on the Barra waterfront early in the morning to reserve your spot on the beach; wander the Pelô or Mercado Modelo for souvenirs before your afternoon siesta; and catch the sunset from the pier at Solar de Unhão on your way to a beach bar.

Have manioc and coconut porridge for breakfast; sip a refreshing green coconut drink in the sun; snack on fried bean and shrimp dumplings; and try the fiery national drink, caipirinha.

Don't miss a folkloric show in the steep, cobblestoned Pelourinho; the view from the amazing Art Deco Elevador Lacerda; and dinner in one of Rio Vermelho's many incredible restaurants.

The white sand, coconut palms and coral of Ilhéus' beautiful beaches make it a favorite on the Cocoa Coast. The nearby lush Atlantic forest is filled with clear, cool rivers, lakes and waterfalls, as well as many rare species of wildlife.

The journey to Una's Ecopark takes you past the stunning southern beaches and offers a tree canopy walk through the forest and, perhaps, the Golden Lion Tamarin. Or see the friendly sloth at the Centro de Recuperação do Bicho-Preguiça, as well as other wildlife on the journey there.

Porto Seguro, where the Portuguese first set foot, is another Brazilian city with beautiful beaches and weather. If you like to party, go to Rio dos Mangues, Taperapuã and Itacimirim beaches. Divers should frequent Parracho, Coroa Vermelha Coral Reef off Mutá Beach and Mundaí, Coqueiros and Nativos. Families love the calm waters of Caraíva, Juacema, Satu, Curuípe and Mucagê. Espelho Beach has been voted Brazil's third most beautiful.

Also go to Passarela do Álcool Passageway for a Capeta with dinner or to get souvenirs; and the National Heritage first settlement Cidade Alta area is beautiful at night. Monte Pascoal National Park is not to be missed; and Jaqueira Indigenous Protection Reservation shows how Pataxó families lived 500 years ago.

Rio Quente in the Caldas mountains, has hot therapeutic waters and 18 rock fountains that spew forth 150 million liters daily. Also visit the boiling lake of Lago de Piratininga and the Aeroporto de UFOs near New Age Alto Paraíso



SENSUAL AND BEAUTIFUL
SALVADOR IS ALSO A
BEACHGOER'S DELIGHT. THIS IS
WHERE YOU'LL FEEL THE SOUL OF
AFRICAN SLAVE HERITAGE.



de Goiás. The vast Pantanal, where you'll find the greatest concentration of bird and wildlife in South America, isn't too far west either.

If you want to taste authentic Brazilian cuisine, go to the Central Market in Sao Paulo. Otherwise, the best thing to do in this huge, extremely cosmopolitan city is the cultural thing at museums and art galleries, shop till you drop or party all night. And party you will, as the nightlife is as intense as London or New York.

When you wake up, head to Rua 25 de Marco for discounted goods from across the world; Jardins district for high fashion; the huge retail emporium, Daslu; or meander through the historic district's cobbled streets.

Visit Rio, another incredible city. Take the cog train (sit on the right hand side on the way up) to Cristo Redentor, which embraces the city from atop Corcovado. Sugarloaf Mountain is also best done on a clear day and is even better at sunset. Or simply wander the streets and be amazed.

Make the effort to go to Iguazu Falls on the Argentinean border. Try view the 275 magnificent falls of water from both countries ... and from a boat, kayak or raft!

Brazil is a country you could spend a lifetime visiting; and wish you had another few in hand. But even if you can only go once, you'll carry some of the Brazilian exuberance and love of dance back home with you ... to brighten up a gloomy day.

CHILE

WWW.VISIT-CHILE.ORG

This thin sliver of a country is breathtaking. Small as it is, you'll find the most arid desert in the world; vast, ancient forests; sun-drenched beaches; glorious skiing; steaming volcanoes; and monumental glaciers.

Explore the ancient civilizations, World Heritage reserves and incredible scenery of the Sere Atacama Desert from the seaside town of Arica. Scuba dive the warm, clear water, bask in brilliant sunshine on great beaches (Chinchorro, Cavancha, Mejillones, Hornitos and Inglesa Bay are the best ones) and play all night.

Pop across the border for a day in Peru; ride the switchback roads to the Lauca National Park high in the Andes - past dramatic oasis of tamarugos forest, to volcanoes, and plentiful wildlife; go back to the past with the Chinchorro mummies and Lluta Valley geoglyphs; and scoop up amazing handicrafts.

Coquimbo has clear skies and a lovely Mediterranean climate. Go to the southern beaches of La Herradura, Las Tacas and Guanaqueros. In town, walk the Plaza Prat esplanade; people-watch at Plaza de Armas; check out the San Pedro church and Las Animas museum; and visit the metallic Guayacan Church.

Pass fog-enshrouded hills and orchards on your way to the open-air museum, Enchantment Valley; sip delectable wine at vineyards in the Limari Valley; or visit the Tololo Observatory, the largest in the southern hemisphere.

Nearby La Serena has superb restaurants, long golden beaches and notable architecture. It's a city full of churches, museums and, even, an original Moai from Easter Island. The La Recova handicraft market is the place for lapis lazuli, Alpaca wool articles and other beautiful Chilean handiwork.

Santiago is perfectly positioned to enjoy the best of all worlds - the ski fields, beaches and wineries are all only about an hour away. And there's plenty to do. Its restaurants rival the world's best, especially at Bellavista Patio; the Palacio Cousiño is spectacular; and the Cementerio General filled with all sorts of interesting tombs.

Shopaholics, go to the 11 floors of Almacenes Paris; Centro Artesanal Santa Lucía is good for gifts (lapis, jewelry, tie-dye T-shirts, panpipes, handmade books); La Vega Central is a bargain-hunter's delight; and Peublito Los Dominicos is jam packed with beautiful craftwork. ▶





The seaside resorts of Marbella, Renaca, Ritoque, Algarobbo and Con-Con are all clustered near the historic town of Valparaiso. The beaches are beautiful, climate warm, and restaurants serve excellent fresh seafood.

Renaca and Vina del Mar are the places for night-time fun; the best Pablo Nerada house to explore is in Isla Negra; and no visit is complete without a ride in Valpo's funicular elevators. There are vineyards, where you can taste wine over a lunch of olives and crumbly cheese; rodeos in native cowboy country; hiking, horseriding, waterfalls, lush forest and more in the incredibly beautiful national reserves like Radal Siete Tazas. Stay in the beautiful Curacavi valley for incomparable tranquility.

Linares, on the edge of the Los Andes Mountains, is all about adventure. Hiking in the Los Bellotos National Reserve; riding the white waters of Rio Nuble and Achibueno; horseback or mountain bike trails through the forest and slopes; or sports and swimming at Colbun Lake.

Afterwards, soak your muscles in the therapeutic waters and mud baths of Quinamavida hot springs; explore the quaint town of Yervas Buenas; and get the unique Rari handicrafts and miniatures made from horse's mane, as well as ethnic blankets, shawls and loom-woven knits.

Even further south, in the lovely Lakes District and right next to the Villarrica Volcano, you'll find Pucón – families and the adventure tourist will be ecstatic.

Mountains and volcanic caves; coastal beaches, swift rivers and calm lagoons; waterfalls, wildlife (including pumas) and scenery to match; archaeology, anthropology and national parks; lava, hot springs and lakes; folklore and beautiful handicraft. It's all here.

But it's not only about natural wonders and wonderful souvenirs. The restaurants are renowned for their excellent fare – try conger eel – and the Casino rivals the glow from the perfectly conical volcano.

All in all, this is a country that you rarely hear people talk about ... unless they've been there. And then, it's hard to stop them telling you just how fantastic it is.

COSTA RICA

WWW.VISITCOSTARICA.COM

You can, of course, go to Costa Rica for the sun, sea and surf. Many, however, know that this tiny country is packed with other delights ... really close together.

Ecotourism is very big. It has more bird species than America and Canada combined; the wildlife including macaws, howler monkeys, toucans and quetzels, is both prolific and, often, easy to spot; the rivers rage, jungles beg to be explored and volcanoes rumble and steam.

San José, the capital, is chaotic, friendly and a colorful mix of old colonial, modern metropolis and South American grunge. The markets are packed with handicrafts; the museums and galleries worth going to (check out artefacts from the lost city of Guayabo); and the nightlife vibrantly exciting.

Barrio Amón has some beautifully restored old coffee baron mansions; the Teatro Nacional is a must-see; and night-time Plaza de la Democracia showcases the illuminated hills of the Central Valley.

Because of the country's small size, there are an enormous number of daytrips. Ride the white waters of the Reventazón and Pacuare rivers; hang out in the famous Monteverde Cloud Forest Reserve; get a guide to show you the fantastic flora and fauna in the rainforest at Braulio Carrillo National Park; and La Selva Biological Station offers lots of wildlife.

Walk right to the edge of steaming craters at Irazú; Poás is similar, but also has a beautiful crater lake; glimpse the Pacific from Turrialba; Arenal's perfect cone is further away, but the view of the lava flows at night can be impressive.

Sit back in the Tabacón Hot Springs; admire the forest canopy from hanging bridges 20 stories high or riding a zip-line; spend the day admiring the lowland forest and plentiful waterfowl or the Caño Negro Wildlife Refuge.

Costa Rica's beaches are more exotic than the regular tropical paradise - long and strikingly beautiful, great for sunbaking and depending where you are, lined with food and drink stalls. The difference is that the soft sand is dark and volcanic and the waves are every surfer's dream.

Take Jaco Beach, one of the closest to San José and as famous for its parties as it is for its waves. Its warm water has consistently great year-round surf breaks, with nearby Playa Hermosa taking top honors.

The deep-sea sport fishing is also superb; those who like to swim or just laze around usually just head to the beaches north and south of town; and eco-tourists go hiking or horseriding through the jungle; kayaking or white water rafting; on wildlife canopy and volcano tours; or to the Carara Biological Reserve, where stunning scarlet macaws nest.

Puerto Quepos offers the greatest variety of fish in the country. The jungle is also lush and the best beach borders the country's famed National Park, Manuel Antonio.



ALL IN ALL, THIS IS A COUNTRY THAT YOU RARELY HEAR PEOPLE TALK ABOUT ... UNLESS THEY'VE BEEN THERE. AND THEN, IT'S HARD TO STOP THEM TELLING YOU JUST HOW FANTASTIC IT IS.



Idle away all your time on its beautiful white sand beaches; float in its rocky coves, eye the abundant marine life through your goggles; meander along rainforest paths, check out the sloths, capuchin and rare squirrel monkeys, agoutis and 200 bird species; or putter through its mangrove swamps.

Quepos is also reputed to have the best beach seafood restaurants. Try it with the national dish of gallo pinto (rice and beans) or yucca chips. Also go to the Saturday Farmer's Market, dolphin watching, colorful coral reefs or out diving Punta Gorda.

Spanish colonial Heredia perches amongst verdant coffee plantations in the mountains northeast of the capital. There are myriad national parks filled with dense tropical forest, cascading waterfalls and rivers that make white-water rafters salivate.

The best of the magnificent colonial buildings is the majestic church, Inmaculada Concepcion; Monte de la Cruz has the most spectacular views; the closest volcanoes are Poás and Barva; the huge, marshy expanse of Río Frío is spectacular at its peak.

Wherever you end up, Costa Rica deserves to be enjoyed to the max. Hire a car, hire your own driver or go on arranged tours. Just make sure you get out there and explore this breathtaking and, still, relatively untouched part of the world.

COSTA RICA'S BEACHES ARE MORE EXOTIC THAN THE REGULAR TROPICAL PARADISE - LONG AND STRIKINGLY BEAUTIFUL, GREAT FOR SUNBAKING AND DEPENDING WHERE YOU ARE, LINED WITH FOOD AND DRINK STALLS. THE DIFFERENCE IS THAT THE SOFT SAND IS DARK AND VOLCANIC AND THE WAVES ARE EVERY SURFER'S DREAM.