

Photo Safari on the Ice Fields of Chile

written by Pam Baker



If your closet is overflowing with an array of “Been There, Done That” souvenir tee shirts, it’s time to take “the road less traveled” on your next vacation. The world is filled with nooks and crannies of interesting experiences, even for the worldliest travelers -- and now is the perfect time in your life to explore the more intriguing aspects of creation. One such hidden pleasure is Chile’s Torres del Paine National Park.

However, this place is anything but the clichéd stroll through the expected. One of the most remote places on the planet, the Torres Del Paine offers many pristine attractions, not the least of which is a photography safari on an ice field. The wildlife includes rare animals and plants and a wide range of the unexpected from the flashy Chilean flamingo to the majestic Andean Condor with its breath-taking 10-foot wingspan. There are even spas built around natural hot springs created by volcanic activity long ago. It is the perfect getaway for nature lovers, birdwatchers and photography enthusiasts.

Although there are a variety of tour companies to choose from, be sure to read the itinerary details closely. Some of the tours are more suited for the physically fit adventurer, including long hikes and horseback rides through rugged terrain and very iffy weather, even if it has a sedate title like “Photography Tour” or “Photography Lessons.” Other tours are better suited for the less physically inclined, and include spa visits, van transportation, and cool boat rides on crystal clear lakes with towering waterfalls – but it is common for these tours to have the same or similar names of the more challenging tours.

Located about 2500 km south of Santiago, the capital city of Chile, the trip itself will take awhile. Generally speaking, it is best to fly into Santiago and spend one night there before you make the rest of the trip. You should take an early flight from Santiago to Punta Arenas which will take about four hours, but it is very preferable to the bumpy road trip alternative. If you ask for a window seat on the left aisle of the plane you will get the extra treat of some spectacular views ranging from the Andes Mountain range to the Southern Ice Fields and Patagonian fjords. Once you arrive in Punta Arenas, you’ll make another 20 minute trip by private transfer (either taxi or bus) to your hotel.

The nicest hotels closest to the park are Hostería Pehoe, Hostería Torres and Hostería Lago Grey, or the five star Hotel Explora.

TIP #1: Get your passport early.

American passports have to meet new regulations, so if your passport is more than two years old, or you don't have one at all, apply for a passport early. It can take as much as 10 weeks to get your passport although the typical turnaround is three weeks. You can speed the process some by paying a rush fee. Apply for a passport at any U.S. post office.

TIP #2: Choose a tour through the hotel or a trusted travel agent.

Most of the hotels offer tours of all types ranging from craft tours to outdoor adventures. It is generally safer to book tours through the hotel as they screen the tour companies to lessen or eliminate unwanted surprises, and the hotel then has a record of your whereabouts should something go wrong or someone from home needs to reach you in an emergency. Make sure you understand the physical requirements of any given tour before you sign up. Read the itineraries from beginning to end and make sure you understand what each event entails. Some tours are very strenuous in this rugged terrain and harsh climate. Other tours are more comfortable for those less physically inclined or with physical limitations.

TIP #3: Pack Warmth for the Unexpected

Pack comfortable clothing with shoes suitable for walking across ice and natural dirt paths. Bring layered clothing to add to your comfort so that you are warm while viewing the ice fields and roaming outdoors, but still can peel off layers to be comfortable indoors as well. Don't forget to pack swimsuits for spa activities and plenty of film or memory cards for your camera. Don't leave these items in your hotel room; instead carry them with you on tours so that you can take advantage of the diverse and unexpected pleasures along the way.

TIP #4: Plan the trip according to the season.

The tours in this area are available November through April every year. Chile's seasons are opposite from the U.S. April, for example, is in the Fall in Chile – not Spring. Keep this in mind when selecting your traveling clothes and making travel arrangements. The area's climate is far too hostile to visit during summer (Chile's winter!).

Story Link:

[http://boomster.com/learn/Adventures/Photo Safari on the Ice Fields of Chile/content](http://boomster.com/learn/Adventures/Photo_Safari_on_the_Ice_Fields_of_Chile/content)

2008 Copyright Boomster. All rights reserved.