



Patagonia: 'Uttermost Part of the Earth'

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

16 Nov.–2 December 2026 (MM 233)

17 days

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

Day 1: Travelling day, arrive in Buenos Aires. You may check in to the hotel from 3.00pm today. Flights from London are not included. We recommend Iberia Airlines from London Heathrow, via Madrid at 7.05pm, arriving in Buenos Aires at 8.40am tomorrow morning. The tour begins on day 2 with a lecture in the hotel at 12.30pm.

Day 2: Buenos Aires. After an introductory lecture and lunch in the hotel, visit the Museo de Bellas Artes, home to a vast collection of works by Argentine, Latin American and International artists. Overnight in Buenos Aires.

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. 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

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continued

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 clifftop 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 possibly some early chicks. Overnight Puerto Madryn.

Day 6: Trelew, Ushuaia. Visit the paleontological 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. Fly 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: Beagle Channel, 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: El Calafate. Late morning flight to El Calafate, gateway to the glacier district. It is located beside Lago Argentina, the largest lake in the country. Visit the Glaciarium '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. 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. Afternoon walk. Overnight Torres del Paine.

Day 13: Torres del Paine. A full day of gentle walking to take in the thrilling landscapes of the park – mountain, valley and water – and fauna, including guanacos up close, condors, caracara, black-necked swans and pink flamingos. Overnight Torres del Paine.

Day 14: Puerto Natales, Punta Arenas. Drive south to the Strait of Magellan, the passage to the Pacific discovered by the eponymous explorer in 1520. Stop for lunch in Puerto Natales. Now a backwater, Punta Arenas was a major port in the pre-Panama days of shipping. We clamber over full-size replicas of significant ships – Magellan's Victoria, Fitzroy's Beagle, Shackleton's James Caird. Overnight in Punta Arenas.

Day 15: 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 its cemetery has the graves of notable figures discussed throughout the tour. Early evening flight to Santiago (LATAM) for the first of two nights.

Day 16: 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.

Day 17: Santiago. The tour finishes after breakfast. We recommend the 1.05pm Iberia flight to Heathrow, via Madrid, which arrives tomorrow (3rd December) at 9.15am.

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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

Included: travel by private coach; 4 domestic flights - Aérolíneas Argentinas within Argentina (Boeing 737-800) and LATAM (Airbus 321) within Chile; hotel accommodation as described below; breakfasts; 11 lunches (including 3 picnic lunches) and 10 dinners with wine, water, coffee; all admissions; all tips; all taxes; the services of the lecturer, tour manager and local 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 an Economy class seat with Iberia at the time of going to press is c. £1,100. Transfers are only provided around the flights that we recommend.

Accommodation. **Hotel Palladio, Buenos Aires** (accorhotels.com): centrally located 5-star hotel, well designed rooms (size varies), good restaurant. **Rayentray Grand Hotel, Puerto Madryn** (rayentray.com): a functional 4-star hotel on the edge of the town. **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. **Rio Serrano Hotel, Torres del Paine** (rioserrano.com): a comfortable 4-star in the heart of the park with impressive views of the Paine Massif from the restaurant. **Cabo de Hornos Hotel, Punta Arenas** (hotelcabodehornos.com): centrally located modern, 4-star hotel. **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. 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.